



Jane Austen Society of North America

Vancouver Region

NEWSLETTER NO. 53

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A SIMPLE STORY, by Mrs. Inchbald - E.Sutherland

Eighteenth century readers had too much time on their hands. By modern standards, the novels that catered to their taste are far too long. A Simple Story by Mrs. Inchbald is a typical example.

The orphaned heiress, Miss Milner, at the age of 18, becomes the ward of a Roman Catholic priest, Mr. Dorriforth. She has been brought up a Protestant, but with little or no religious principles, and a mind "without one ornament, except those which nature gave". Dorriforth is austere, serious, upright; Miss Milner is frivolous, careless and pleasure-loving, used to having her own way at all times and looking for continuous entertainment. Their characters and dispositions could not be more different. Yet gradually Dorriforth's steadfast goodness triumphs over her worldly nature, and her charms capture his heart. They become passionately in love.

When Dorriforth unexpectedly inherits a title, he is permitted to set aside his religious vows of celibacy; he becomes Lord Elmwood, and they prepare for a life of wedded bliss.

But Miss Milner's basic character has not changed: she wants to prove to herself and the world how much Lord Elmwood loves her. She obeyed him as a guardian, and she will in future obey him as a husband, but over him as her lover she was determined to show her power: he must love her in spite of all her faults.

The obstinate heroine encouraged former suitors to make him jealous; she went to parties and balls and danced until morning; she flirted; she caroused. Alas, like Mary Crawford, she found that her "saucy, playful smile" had lost its power over her lover. Lord Elmwood could bear no more, and pronounced the dreaded decree that they were to part forever.

On the day that Lord Elmwood was to leave England for indefinite travels on the Continent, and his ward was prepared to sink into an untimely death of despair and remorse, someone had the sense to say, "Enough! You still love each other, for Heaven's sake be married and stop this nonsense!" (not Mrs. Inchbald's exact words). At the end of Volume II, all the suspicion, misunderstanding, inflexible resolves and stubborn resistance come to an end - Lord Elmwood and Miss Milner are married and blissfully happy.

This is enough for any one book, but instead of seeing "in the tell-tale compression of the pages" before us that the end is near, we see with dismay that there are still two volumes to come!



ELIZABETH INCHBALD

Volume III begins 17 years later - to unbelievable change.

After a few years of wedded bliss, business called Lord Elmwood to his West Indies estates. Unlike Lady Bertram who spent the years of her husband's absence on her sofa - there is a lot to be said for lying on a sofa and keeping out of trouble - Lady Elmwood reverted to her previous giddy, frivolous and scandalous London partying. When Lord Elmwood unexpectedly returns and catches her at it, all is ended between them. She flees to a remote gloomy dwelling in the North with her young daughter and a faithful friend, and for the next ten years lives the life of a recluse, gradually dying of despair.

But this is still not the end. We now have to take up the story of the poor unfortunate daughter, her mother dead and her father unforgiving.

Through the intercession of friends, Lord Elmwood allows his daughter, Lady Matilda, to live on one of his estates, on the condition that nobody ever speaks to him about her, and that she never allows him to see her. They manage to carry on this highly improbable way of life for some time, and Lord Elmwood remains adamant.

A former suitor, however, repulsed and disdained, nerves himself to abduct Lady Matilda. A faithful retainer takes his life into his hands by speaking the forbidden name, and tells Lord Elmwood what has happened. The distraught father rushes to save his daughter. At last they are reconciled, and the story comes to an end.

The novel has a few sharp witty comments:

[Dorriforth] gave no greater marks of his resentment than calling for his hat, and walking instantly out of the house.

The charms of her mind and her fortune had been pointed out to him by his Tutor.

Sandford had been the tutor of Dorriforth as well as of his cousin Lord Elmwood, and by this double tie seemed now entailed upon the family.

This circumstance would, [Miss Fenton] believed, induce her to retire to a convent, she thought it a happy, rather than an unhappy event. - Her brother, on whom her fortune devolved if she took this resolution, was exactly of her opinion.

Humour, however, is not Mrs. Inchbald's strong point. The emphasis in the novel is on sensibility, pathos and passion, with a strong feeling for drama.

Mrs. Inchbald was a professional actress for many years, hard-working, competent, but not outstanding. She determined on a second career as a dramatist, and in this field she was successful. Her plays, many, like Lovers' Vows, adapted from the French and German, were produced in London theatres to great acclaim. Wanting to try something different from her theatrical writing, she began the novel, A Simple Story, but could not get it published. Many years later, she combined what she had written with another story. After much hard work and revision (perhaps aided by her friend William Godwin), the novel was finally accepted for publication in 1791.

Mrs. Inchbald's long association with the theatre shows in the novel. She wrote as if she saw the characters on a stage: actions and gestures are prominent and definite - characters rush out of the room, fall to their knees, faint into another's arms; they are given "lines" to declaim proudly or defiantly; and express their feelings in the ringing tones of actors in a melodrama.

It was this theatricality that gave Mrs. Inchbald her success. Her characters, especially in the first two volumes, are vibrant, her dialogue is lively and her observation is keen. Publishing a novel about the Catholic aristocracy at a time when restrictions against Catholics in England were being abolished, shows her astute timing. A Simple Story was a great success.

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NOTES FROM THE LIBRARY - Dianne Kerr.

Who among you have taken lovers' vows? I hope that you don't intend to keep them; and you don't really need to confess, but please return -- IT! - The play by Inchbald, (after Kotzebue), the play almost performed in M.P. It is a flat photocopy, 8½x14"; the borrower forgot to sign and leave the card. No reward, but then, no questions asked either.

Recommended Read: Fergus, Jan: JANE AUSTEN A Literary Life. Donated by Jean Brown. Fergus has done considerable research into the pounds, shillings and pence of being a published author in the early 1800s; she scans the Literary Life of Austen after her death. She delves further, and well, into the case originally presented by both Chapman and Southam, for Austen's conscious and imaginative apprenticeship - as opposed to the "She Just Copied What She Saw" theory.

New to our Library: Sterne, Laurence: A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY. Donated by E.Sutherland. First published in 1768, with facsimile of the title page of that first edition; and following the original text with only minor emendations in spelling and punctuation, for ease of reading. Read for the flavour of the times.

Allen, D. and A. Owen: MANSFIELD PARK. An Alternative Ending.

The Library List is available for the asking. Instructions are attached for picking up items at your convenience. Phone Dianne Kerr - 731-2301 - or tell me at a meeting what you want. MAKE SURE THAT I WRITE IT DOWN (I am short-term-memory-challenged).

GLEANINGS:

Credit Please! One of our Regions advises preparing for their next meeting by reading Bruce Stovel's conference paper, plus "Tithes and the Rural Clergyman in Jane Austen's England", plus "In Defense of George Austen", without crediting either our own EILEEN SUTHERLAND for the former, or our own JOCELYN CASS for the latter! Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble...!

Another Newsletter notes that we now have A Train Called Jane. The 6,000-horsepower "Chunnel" Train #92004 is named THE JANE AUSTEN; #92003 is THE BEETHOVEN and #92005 is THE MOZART. Pretty swell company, too.

Same Newsletter also reports that Pat Latkin, who runs Jane Austen Books, and consequently gets a lot of mail, recently rode up the elevator with the postman, who tipped his hat and said politely: "Good afternoon, Miss Austen".

We have several articles concerning the "outing" of Jane Austen by author Terry Castle. Castle... "alleges the existence of an incestuous relationship between Austen and her sister Cassandra." Another Newsletter observes that Castle follows Susan McClary, who "outed" Franz Schubert in 1991 (Schubert died in 1828), by "identifying qualities of homosexuality in the slow movement of Schubert's 'Unfinished' symphony." I wish I'd thought of that. McClary was just recently awarded a MacArthur Foundation "Genius" award! On the other hand, an Austen expert has protested: "I think it's about as likely that Jane Austen was gay as that she was found out to be a man."

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A LOUSIER STORY - Kathleen Glancy

I am constrained to point out that Mary Millard's [Newsletter #43] dismissal of the notion that Jane Austen would not possibly have had a disease transmitted by lice ain't necessarily so. Lice actually prefer clean heads to dirty ones, and it takes only the briefest of contact, or even proximity, for a louse to jump to a clean head. There are occasional infestations in schools today, and most of today's children have what Jane had not - daily hot baths or showers and frequent shampooing.

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READING BOOKS

According to a columnist in the TLS (Nov.4, 1994), a recent poll on reading habits indicated that one in ten people abandon books before reaching the end. Dr. Samuel Johnson was one of these, as Boswell recorded:

"Mr. Elphinstone talked of a new book that was much admired, and asked Dr. J. if he had read it. Johnson: 'I have looked into it.' 'What (said E.) have you not read it through?' J., offended at being thus pressed, and so obliged to own his cursory mode of reading, answered tartly, 'No, Sir; do you read books through?'

Ten years later, in 1784, faced with Capt. Cook's travelogues, he was even more emphatic: 'These Voyages (pointing to the three large volumes of Voyages to the South Sea, which were just come out), who will read them through? A man had better work his way before the mast, than read them through; they will be eaten by rats and mice, before they are read through...'

Johnson also favoured small books, as Sir John Hawkins recalled. 'He used to say, that no man read long together with a folio on his table: - Books, said he, that you may carry to the fire, and hold readily in your hand, are the most useful after all.'

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"A review of "Four Tokyo Hotels" in a recent San Francisco Chronicle reveals that the posh Park Hyatt supplies its guests with reading selections such as Janson's History of Art, Persuasion by Jane Austen, and E.M.Forster's Passage to India.

[From: Northern California Region Newsletter, March, 1995.]

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It speaks volumes for the stability of British politics that, at a critical stage in 1809, Parliament could spend two months investigating the Duke of York's relations with his mistress. One can understand Napoleon's rage and frustration. With all his power, he not only could not bring the British down, he could not even gain their full attention.

[The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848: Paul W. Schroeder (1994)]

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GRUEL - STILL GOING STRONG

According to the diary of Margaret Suckley, a close friend of FDR, his last meal just before he died suddenly in April 1945 was "a lunch of gruel and cream".

(NYT Book Review, Apr.9,1995)

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RECAPITULATION, A Journey by Sveva Caetani - (Coldstream Books, Vernon, B.C. 1995) - E.Sutherland.

Sveva Caetani (1917-1994) was the daughter of an Italian count who fled from Mussolini's Italy and settled in Vernon. When he died in 1935, her mother became a recluse, and kept her isolated from all contact with friends or neighbours. Although she had been given art instruction as a child, her mother refused to allow her to paint. But shipments of books came from all over the world, and reading became her mental salvation. Jane Austen was one of the authors who helped her to carry on.

Forced to earn a living at the death of her mother, Caetani became a teacher, and again took up her painting. In a collection of paintings and poetry and interpretive prose notes, created over a period of fifteen years late in her life, and now published as Recapitulation, Caetani makes an imaginary journey, roughly modelled on Dante's, through Hell and Purgatory to Paradise, in tribute to her father and to explore the conditions which shape our lives - from cruelty, betrayal and violence to passion, beauty and love.

Some of the paintings are deceptively simple, most are overwhelmingly complex, but all require - and repay - intense study of the meticulous detail and involved symbolism. Done in watercolour, they vary from almost monochromes to rich, vivid splashes of jewel-like colour, and show echoes of artistic traditions from all over the world.

The tribute to Jane Austen, entitled "The Nook", shows the tiny figure of the author seated, restrained and quiet, arrested at her composition, watching Dante hurrying from an inner room to greet Caetani's father. The figures are tightly controlled within classical architectural forms representing house and church, while strata of the world outside swirl by. The colours are muted, earthy tones of tan, brown and olive greens, with Jane Austen in white and Dante in a vibrant red robe. The tilt of Jane Austen's head, her bright and steady gaze, intently observing what goes on around her, epitomize what we know of Jane Austen.

[The paintings have been donated to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, in Edmonton, and the former Caetani home is now the Caetani Cultural Centre, used for the encouragement of the arts, in Vernon, B.C.]



THE NOOK

In Dante's time, small wooden shelters (nooks) were built in the draughty arcades of medieval stone buildings. There, scholars and other thoughtful folk could be screened into relative quiet and privacy, even with some comfort. These were triply havens: first, from the seethe of the outside world; then from the dispiriting chill; and most of all, into an anchorage of beloved writers. For a book is not simply the printed word - it is spirit communing with spirit via each phrase, each image, each expression of thought, and every observation of feeling.

In this sense the father, who undertook a great mind-journey himself across history, meets with his first and final hero, Dante. By now the father's kindred, once hotly condemned by the great Florentine, are all Ghibellines¹ in their passion for a united and free homeland.

For the daughter, there is her own treasured figure, Jane Austen, no less universal in her classically impeccable assessment of human behaviour. Her utter sanity of outlook offers the daughter a lifeline to survival.

"AUSTEN MANIA" IN THE MEDIA

[Here are some samples I found most interesting: E.S.]

VISITING JANE'S WORLD

If you haven't yet got around to seeing *Sense and Sensibility*, take your hankie. Take three, because your neighbours will need them too. Never has a movie theatre been so racked with sobs as when Marianne almost dies, and Elinor's prospect of marriage springs from the ashes of her hopes.

In Toronto, the movie has been such a hit that people have lined up two or three times before getting in. This week they wallowed in *Pride and Prejudice*, a series so popular that in Britain it drew up to 11 million viewers an episode. Fortunately for Janeites, there's more to come. At least three different versions of *Emma* are in the works.

If you could buy a ticket back to Jane Austen's world, it would be sold out too. It is a country idyll of rolling hills and ancient elms, perfectly placed against painterly skies. Designer sheep dot the meadows. All the houses are Georgian, all the teacups Wedgwood, and all the linens pristine and crackling with good British starch. The young women are a gorgeous wholesome mix of upthrust bosoms and sturdy shoes, all the better to romp through the dales in. The young men all wear thigh-hugging pants and form-fitting coats cut away at the waist to reveal the masculine figure at its very best.

They have remarkably good vocabularies and beautiful handwriting. They live in houses called Norland and Netherfield, dance the quadrille, ride in curricles and have oodles of faithful retainers to starch the linens, lay the fires, roast the joint and empty the chamberpots.

But it's not just eye candy that's packing people in. Jane's world evokes a set of values and manners that seems as bygone (and enviable) to us as those unspoiled landscapes. Jane's people, even the awful ones, know exactly who they are and where they fit into the world. They believe in restraint, decorum, civility, character and large, close-knit families. They marry for love, but even more for respect. They are cheerful, pragmatic optimists.

Jane's heroines are remarkably like Jane was herself: intelligent, observant, cultivated and ironic. They are never the prettiest girls in the room, but they are always the smartest. They have a horror of self-advertisement and of self-pity. They would never try to discover their inner child, work out to Jane Fonda tapes, visit Club Med or be in recovery.

Beam me back, Scotty.

IN Jane's novels, impulsive girls come to bad ends. Marianne, the passionate younger sister in *Sense and Sensibility*, falls helplessly in love with Mr. Wrong, and brings shame upon herself by becoming the subject of common gossip. (Her sin: She writes letters to him, and they're not even engaged.) He dumps her for an heiress and she nearly dies of pneumonia and a broken heart.

In the movie she is allowed to recover her looks and wind up with Col. Brandon, an older man who is rich, caring and sexy. In the book, the taming of Marianne is more severe. She still winds up with Col. Brandon, but she is not allowed to recover all her looks, and he is a plain-faced, middle-aged crock.

By contrast, girls with sense and restraint come to good ends, i.e. good husbands. The obstacles they overcome are lack of money and the folly of others, over which their virtues eventually triumph.

But Jané was a realist, and so she did not give all her admirable women happy endings. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth's best friend is the gentle, loving, intelligent Charlotte, who accepts the suit of the dreadful boob Mr. Collins. Charlotte, who is also poor and plain, has no illusions about her value in the marriage market, and, as she points out to her horrified friend, she has struck the best deal she can. As do we all.

The last scene in *Sense and Sensibility* is (naturally) a wedding, and the last image is a handful of gold coins tossed through the air by the happy groom. Although Jane Austen made it clear that marriage was not entirely about money, it was a poor woman's only way to get some and a single woman's best insurance policy.

"Single women have a dreadful propensity to be poor," Jane Austen once wrote to a friend, and so it went with her. She never married, though once, in her 20s, she seems to have got close. (The object of her affections died before he could propose.) After her father died, she, her beloved sister Cassandra and her mother lived in much-reduced circumstances. They were no longer able to keep a carriage, and their world shrank to the society available within walking distance of their modest country house.

There's no evidence, though, that Jane ever doubted her life was fulfilled. She never displayed the least shred of envy or bitterness. After she abandoned the idea of marriage she finally found a publisher, wrote many books and remained happily attached to her many brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews. She lived her whole life with her mother and sister. She died at 41 after a wasting illness, with regret, but without complaint.

Rather like one of her own heroines.

Margaret Wente

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FROM ONE NOVELIST TO ANOTHER

I suspect that she, an 18th century novelist of genius and I, a 20th century fabricator of mysteries, would agree about the principles which should govern the televising of our novels.

Don't invent dialogue if the author has already supplied it, or transfer it unnecessarily from one character to another. If you have to invent scenes and provide dialogue for them, make sure that it is appropriate to the century and social mores of the novel, and at least make an attempt to be consistent with the original style.

It may be necessary occasionally to cut out a character; it should never be necessary to introduce a new one. Don't alter the plot. If it isn't suitable for television without mutilation and drastic revision, why film it? No one has the right to affix the name of an author, particularly a dead author, to a work which she would repudiate." P.D. James.

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Jane Austen could well help Tony Blair to win the coming election.

In Britain what strikes us most is the paradoxically classless appeal of this most class-conscious writer in a country where class is normally a divisive force. But JA unites in the way the monarchy used to do before it was besmirched by the younger generation of royals.

JA unites us for many reasons, in the way that all great artists do, but the underlying one is that she makes the family seem important, central to the whole tragi-comedy of life, tiresome and maddening maybe, but also comforting, secure-making and in the last resort the only thing you can really rely on. JA had no illusions about the family, of course, — she had no illusions about anything — and she presented it in some of its least attractive guises. The gruesome meanness which a family may breed is the mechanism of *Sense and Sensibility*. She shows in *Persuasion* how the Elliot family disintegrates as a result of snobbery and vanity. The Bennet family in *Pride and Prejudice* and the Bertrams in *Mansfield Park* reel under the blows unintentionally delivered by weak or foolish or blind parents, and the evil inflicted on family life by a monster (General Tilney in *Northanger*

Abbey) or a self-indulgent nonentity (Mr Woodhouse in *Emma*) is ruthlessly exposed. But all these families heal themselves in the end and it is precisely their ability to do so which gives JA's *oeuvre* its strength and cohesion.

Her *Letters* are a striking commentary on this central truth, for amid all the inconsequential chatter there is an underlying, unspoken assertion that the family is the web and the woof of the good life. Without the family, where would Jane be — or any of the Austens? Or society as a whole? Or England?

A yearning for the stability and power of the family is the key to JA's extraordinary popularity today. And it is because Tony Blair is beginning to feel his way towards JA's position on the family that the same forces are making him popular too. What Blair is discovering — and the process is fascinating to observe — is that many of the most serious problems of modern Britain stem directly from the weakening of the family, and that our hugely expensive efforts to solve them have actually made them worse precisely because they have undermined family ties still further. We have to begin not by treating the symptoms but by getting at the real cause. If we heal the family and make it healthy and vigorous again, many of the symptoms of national sickness will automatically disappear, and the rest can be isolated and dealt with.

Blair wants to get back to the simple ideology of the family.

He is putting himself forward as the natural choice to head a nation which is no longer seen as a collection of classes but as an immense aggregation of families. He looks young to be the archetype British paterfamilias but he is growing rapidly into the role.

JA would have approved of him, I think, for one specific reason. What most attracted her in men — this comes out strongly in her letters as well as her novels — was natural good manners, reflecting an unaffected and manly but courteous and chivalrous spirit. Tony Blair has the best manners I have come across in a politician for a very long time. It is the first thing you notice when you have dealings with him. No doubt he wants to please — what politician does not? — but in his case the politeness is instinctive and habitual and genuine. And it is linked to his belief in the family, for it is good families — of all classes and income groups — which breed good manners. That would be a point JA would note in appraising Blair.

— Paul Johnson

THE SPECTATOR 14 October 1995

NEW YORK TIMES FILM REVIEW

PERSUASION - Of Lost Love and Second Chances

"Persuasion" stands in Jane Austen's career as "The Winter's Tale" does in Shakespeare's: It is a lyrical, autumnal story of lost love, with the unexpected reward of a happy ending. The heroine of "Persuasion," Anne Elliot, tossed away love at the age of 19, convinced by the sound maternal advice of her friend Lady Russell that a penniless naval officer was no match for the daughter of a baronet.

The story begins eight years later, when Anne is 27 and therefore on the verge of 19th-century spinsterhood. Perfectly portrayed by Amanda Root in Roger Michell's lovely and subtle film, Anne is a plain, thin-lipped, intelligent woman who wears a perpetual look of worried resignation. The boundless possibilities she foresaw at 19 seem to have vanished, though her love for Frederick Wentworth remains. When the newly rich Wentworth and her well-born cousin William reenter her small social circle, "Persuasion" throws Anne Elliot one, and maybe two, late chances at marriage.

Though "Persuasion" is not the most dramatic of Austen's novels, it may be the most deeply felt; written during her final illness, it was published in 1818, a year after her death. Similarly, the subdued Anne is not the most immediately endearing of her heroines, but she is the most mature and possibly the most poignant and autobiographical. Anne is the sane center around which Austen constructs the most bitter and redeeming of her social satires.

All this is brilliantly captured by Mr. Michell, with the screenwriter Nick Dear and a cast completely in sync with Austen's warm but piercing style. Their "Persuasion" is profoundly truthful in many ways: in its sense of emotional longing; in its natural, unglamorized visual beauty, ranging from drawing rooms to the sea; in its fidelity to the delicate tone of Austen's satire and romance.

Mr. Michell is a theater director who also made the sharp BBC mini-series "The Buddha of Suburbia." Mr. Dear has worked primarily in theater as well, so it is a wonderful

surprise that they have made this highly literary novel so successfully cinematic. The camera becomes the visual equivalent of Austen's rich, commenting voice, and though it cannot be a complete replacement, it is a more than serviceable one. The camera slyly glances at Mary's sisters-in-law, the infatuated Louisa and Henrietta Musgrove, when the possibility of Frederick's marriage is discussed.

And the film's visual design captures the world as Austen saw it. The women wear no makeup. The characters dine in darkness dramatically lighted by candles, or walk by the sea in translucent sunlight. On a walk in the woods, the serious Anne wears a deep green cloak while the frivolous Musgrove women all wear red. Only the pompous characters look artificial, notably the Elliots' garish rich relatives, the Dalrymples.

The film, offers the same pleasures as an Austen novel, as the audience sinks into a comforting, orderly world where life-shattering disruptions are handled with elegant ease.

— Carya James, NEW YORK TIMES

THE PRODUCTION OF "SENSE AND SENSIBILITY"

[Along with the free passes, the distributor in Toronto sent informative leaflets and other material about the casting and filming of the movie. Here are some excerpts.]

Writing the Script

Emma Thompson, who'd never written a screenplay, was immediately enthusiastic about the idea of translating one of her favorite authors to the screen. She began by dramatizing every scene in the novel, which resulted in 300 hand-written pages. 'But then I got braver and tackled the real problem of restructuring the story for the screen. I also bought a computer'.

Thompson wrote a number of drafts over the next four years, during which she also performed in seven films, shaping what would eventually become the final version of the screenplay. 'The novel is so complex and there are so many stories in it that bashing out a structure was the biggest labor', Thompson notes.

wa- Executive producer Sydney Pollack was immediately impressed... 'She pulled off an extraordinary juggling act...transforming a complex book into a strong story which never parts faith with the original. And her experience as an actress shows through in the way she instinctively knows when to let documentary truth give way to poetic reality'.

Choosing the Cast

Emma Thompson did not have herself in mind when she first began writing the screenplay. 'But eventually everyone began to see her in the part of Elinor, and Ang Lee was no exception.'

'When you are offered a script like this you just have to do it,' commented Grant [Edward Ferrars]. 'I first read it quite some time ago, then did other films, but this one never went out of my mind. Emma has managed to avoid all the reverence and piety which usually accompany adaptations of this sort. Instead, she's come up with something whizzy, sexy, electric and very funny.'

Greg Wise plays the dashing Willoughby, whom he describes as the male counterpart to Marianne, 'the absolute epitome of masculine sensibility. He is the horseman, the dancer, the lover, the reader of Scott and Shakespeare, and he has an immense appetite for life, which is exactly what we see in Marianne... Before we meet him, Willoughby is the ultimate game player: he uses his wit and charm and his looks to stay a part of the set that he wants to run with. His relationships are deliberately impermanent - that's part of the game. But Marianne is a girl who doesn't know anything about the social rules by which he plays; she doesn't realize that she is, at first, just a way for him to pass the summer'.

Only nineteen at the start of production, Kate Winslet [Marianne] garnered tremendous support from both the director, who taught her T'ai Chi to help her focus, and her fellow cast members. 'Emma and I didn't have to work at establishing the sisterly relationship that Elinor and Marianne share...we became great friends from the moment we met.'

Marianne ignores the shy, dignified Colonel Brandon, who courts her with more steadiness, if less fire. 'He accepts the relationship between Marianne and Willoughby with great grace and dignity', says Alan Rickman, who plays Brandon. 'He doesn't ever assume that Marianne will return his feelings, and he behaves like a perfect gentleman even while watching the woman he loves fall in love with another man...He is a very compassionate and feeling person. He becomes Marianne's anchor, allowing her to mature from a creature of many moods to a wise young woman. So my job, really, is to present a very steadfast image, the opposite of the more mercurial Willoughby'.

Finding a Director

The pastoral world of Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility seemed at first glance far removed from the modern Taiwan of Ang Lee's Eat Drink Man Woman, but the deep connection between the two societies struck Lee only a few pages into the script. 'Underneath

the strange customs and costumes, I began to feel a strong and immediate spiritual kinship with my own tradition: in both societies, there is a similar concern for harmony, and achieving a careful balance of opposites'. But the differences were equally striking, and proved to be a profound learning experience for Lee. 'The cast...achieved the most difficult task of all getting the details exactly right while conveying the inner life of the story. I hope that together, we've managed to convey some of the comic richness and timelessness of Jane Austen's world...Jane Austen is a wonderful painter of family rituals and social customs...Her work combines warm-hearted romance and drama with a sense of social satire, qualities which I try to achieve in my own work'. Even the title appealed to the director: 'Sense and sensibility, pride and prejudice, eat drink man woman - I like that kind of thing, getting to the bottom of life itself'.

Locations

Sense and Sensibility was filmed on location in London and in many of the West Country locales described by Jane Austen in her novels. 'The homes we found, stately and otherwise, might have been waiting for us', says production designer Luciana Arrighi. 'We did have to do some major cosmetic surgery on the house we used for Barton Cottage...on the Flete Estate at Holbeton, south Devon. The cottage, which appears modest from the front, is actually a magnificent Edwardian residence when viewed from the side, a fact the filmmakers took pains to conceal...We decided to take it back in time a little. Plaster mouldings on the façade, wood panelling in the main rooms, a Georgian portico, that sort of thing'.

One of the most striking features of the Montacute [the Palmers' house, Cleveland] ground is a strange, twisted hedge which the filmmakers nicknamed the 'Brain Hedge'. Deformed long ago by a freeze, and deliberately maintained in this shape ever since, this tall, misshapen hedge offered the perfect background for Marianne's physical and emotional deterioration.

Filming

On the morning of April 19, 1995, as the sun rose over the Georgian façade of Saltram House at Plymouth, a large, cloth-draped table was set out at the entrance to the house and covered with symbolic items, including apples (for safe, smooth shooting), oranges (for luck and happiness), a pineapple (for prosperity), and a bouquet of large red-petaled flowers (for success).

The props department handed out incense sticks, and as the smoke curled up into the morning sky, the assembled cast and crew bowed to the north, east, south and west. The camera was dollied in for a blessing, a few feet of film passed through it as part of the ceremony, and only then could Emma Thompson, Hugh Grant, Kate Winslet, and the rest of the cast step on set, and Sense and Sensibility's first day of shooting could begin. It was the traditional Buddhist rite known as the Big Luck Ceremony.

Incidentals

Every possible source was scoured to find the artifacts which filled the era. Six dozen Georgian wine glasses were specially blown by a glassworks in the Midlands. Toys, the more battered the better, were borrowed from the London Toy Museum; reams of custom-made parchment were used for the many documents used in the picture. Sabres by the armful came from a city armoury, sheet music and volumes of verse from an Oxford bookseller.

Another crucial aspect in recreating the era was costumes. 'I suppose those alert audiences out there will be asking why the Dashwood family are not all in deepest mourning at the beginning of the film', says the designer. 'They didn't have to be. Formal mourning, as we know it today, didn't come in until much later in the century. There were always the colors of bereavement of course, black, purple, even white. But the most an impoverished family like the Dashwoods could have afforded would be to trim their existing wardrobe with black shawls and black ribbons. What we did do, however, was to dress the prosperous John and Fanny in black from head to toe. Knowing the dreadful sort of people they really are, we felt this would help point up their hypocrisy'.

To aid in recreating the intricate and often confusing manners and social customs particular to the time, the filmmakers brought in Jane Gibson, resident head of movement at England's Royal National Theatre... 'When you re-enact the manners of the time', says Gibson, 'it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking every movement must be formal, stiff and unsmiling, like a clockwork doll, because that's the way it has so often been presented. In truth, it was exactly the opposite. A man would bow to a woman with the same ease he might say 'hi' today. And the woman would return the courtesy - her 'curtsy' - the same natural way. The trick is to get people to realize that as formal as their manners might appear today they were perfectly spontaneous at the time. The men and women of the 19th century weren't aware they were doing anything other than what was natural, so why should we be?'

Quotations

Emma Thompson; 'In a way, Elinor is facing backwards into an age of rigorous moral, intellectual and religious structures, which make her at once vulnerable and worldly, but also fairly well-balanced. Whereas Marianne is looking forward into a new age and saying, 'we don't need all these rules'. On the surface she seems the freer of the two sisters, but circumstances prove that codes of decent behavior can be as vital in affairs of the heart as they are in all other human dealings'.

Ang Lee: 'Elinor's sense of duty may prevent her from reaching emotional fulfillment, and Marianne's romantic sensibility makes her very vulnerable to false promises. But you can't really see them as black and white opposites. Each sister learns from the other by finding a quality that is already in herself. Elinor becomes brave enough to be seen as vulnerable and express her sensibility; while Marianne grows into sense without sacrificing her sensibility. Both find the proper balance within themselves.... Austen describes the sad feeling of growing up, and how we must go through so much hurt to learn about true love and integrity. This kind of struggle shapes all of our lives in one way or another - it's universal'.

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THE BIRTHDAY LUNCH IN DECEMBER

Like an illustration in an old cookbook, the table at our "Birthday" luncheon was lavishly burdened with delectables brought by our members:

Cold salmon soufflé (Mary Anderson), Crab casserole (Irene Howard), Salmon pye (Joan Mann), Sole in a wine sauce (Frances Wanamaker), Macaroni casserole (Ted Wing); Scalloped potatoes (Dianne Kerr), Cauliflower (Darlene Foster), Broccoli Salad (Keiko Parker), Coleslaw (Jean Oriente), Green Salad (Freda Bailey); Shrimp paté (Linda Wilkes), Shrimp ball with crackers (Jean Brown), Buttered Rolls (Esther Birney); Amish Cake (Mary Atkins), Gingerbread (Jill Sims), Trifle (Barbara Phillips & Caroline Warner), Mince Tarts (Pat Harrison & Eleanor Hill & Norah Morrow), Bread Pudding with Custard sauce (Barbara Meredith), Apple puff (Heather Artis), Meringues (Betty Stephen); Stilton in Port (Margaret Howell); Mixed candied fruits (René Goldman); Fresh grapes (Diana Bodnar); Chocolates and Mints (Eileen Willis & Lasha Roche).

Mavis Jones brought and arranged the magnificent bouquet of roses, and seasonal boughs.

There was now employment for the whole party; for though they could not all talk, they could all eat.

Our congratulations and thanks to all these talented and imaginative cooks who produced this delicious repast - not even General Tilney could have looked at the side-table for [another dish] that was not there.

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