

ANNOTATED PASSAGES FROM SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

See *Literature for Senior Students*, Chapter 8, VCE Literature Examination, p.213

Annotations and notes by Sue Sherman

This document shows you how to develop an exam response to a given set of three passages from Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. The passages from the 2005 VCE Literature exam are reproduced with detailed annotations, which indicate some of the thinking and planning that should accompany your careful reading of the passages. This is not simply a cursory re-read to remind yourself of the novel's characters and plot!

Following the second passage, a number of comments and questions show how a coherent response starts to come together, arising from close attention to the passages *and* from a deep knowledge of the wider text, including the main ideas and attitudes it presents.

See pp.222–5 of *Literature for Senior Students* (Insight, 2006) for a sample response based on these passages, including notes on each paragraph and assessor comments. Chapter 8 of this text also contains many general strategies to help you prepare for and perform well in the final VCE Literature exam.

Acknowledgment

Insight Publications thanks Penguin Books for permission to publish extracts from the 2003 Penguin Classics edition of *Sense and Sensibility*.

Passage 1

The annotations to the first passage show a close focus on language.

1.

“Well, then, *let* something be done for them; but *that* something need not be three thousand pounds. Consider,” she added, “that when the money is once parted with, it can never return. Your sisters will marry, and it will be gone for ever. If, indeed, it could ever be restored to our poor little boy—”

“Why, to be sure,” said her husband, very gravely, “that would make a great difference. The time may come when Harry will regret that so large a sum was parted with. If he should have a numerous family, for instance, it would be a very convenient addition.”

“To be sure it would.”

“Perhaps, then, it would be better for all parties if the sum were diminished one half.—Five hundred pounds would be a prodigious increase to their fortunes!”

“Oh! beyond any thing great! What brother on earth would do half so much for his sisters, even if *really* his sisters! And as it is—only half blood!—But you have such a generous spirit!”

“I would not wish to do any thing mean,” he replied. “One had rather, on such occasions, do too much than too little. No one, at least, can think I have not done enough for them: even themselves, they can hardly expect more.”

“There is no knowing what *they* may expect,” said the Lady, “but we are not to think of their expectations: the question is, what you can afford to do.”

“Certainly—and I think I may afford to give them five hundred pounds a-piece. As it is, without any addition of mine, they will each have above three thousand pounds on their mother’s death—a very comfortable fortune for any young woman.”

“To be sure it is: and indeed, it strikes me that they can want no addition at all. They will have ten thousand pounds divided amongst them. If they marry, they will be sure of doing well, and if they do not, they may all live very comfortably together on the interest of ten thousand pounds.”

“That is very true, and, therefore, I do not know whether, upon the whole, it would not be more adviseable to do something for their mother while she lives rather than for them—something of the annuity kind I mean. My sisters would feel the good effects of it as well as herself. A hundred a year would make them all perfectly comfortable.”

Fanny’s assertive tone (emphasised by Austen’s use of italics) shows her tendency to dominate her husband.

Disguises her greed as concern for her child: the need for concealment is one of the central ideas in the text.

Fanny’s gullible (and equally selfish) husband is easily persuaded; she subsequently adds further justification for his meanness.

Fanny tends to use hyperbole – a sign of insincerity? Shallowness?

Flattery – appeal to his vanity. Highly ironic, as quite the opposite is true.

More irony – and a recognition of the kind of intense public scrutiny that people’s actions attract in the confined and gossipy social sphere inhabited by the characters.

Italicised ‘they’ emphasises Fanny’s opinion that they are beneath her – and unworthy of her concern – suggesting that she is a snob.

Readily agrees with Fanny – as he usually does.

Continues to decrease the sum he will give them – at Fanny’s subtle prompting – and continues to justify himself by pretending to think of his sisters’ welfare.

Blatantly untrue, as Fanny is well aware: the relative poverty of the Dashwood sisters is a considerable disadvantage in the ‘marriage market’.

Continual references to specific sums of money – financial matters are of central importance to these characters, and the role that money plays in one’s life is a central concern of the text.

The repeated affirmations ‘certainly’, ‘to be sure’, ‘that is very true’, show their capacity for self-delusion and self-justification.

The overall impression we gain is of these two characters’ vanity and selfishness, revealed through their dialogue. Austen’s irony throughout the passage makes us aware of a comic disjunction between what is *said* by the characters (about their concern for the Dashwood sisters) and what is *revealed* about the real motives of John and Fanny.

Passage 2

The annotations for passage 2 focus on aspects of character, language features and the writer's views and values.

2.

Narrative perspective with Elinor: she is Austen's 'voice' in the novel. Shows Elinor's insight into the personalities and motivations of both Mrs Ferrars and Lucy.

Note the length of this sentence, which shows Elinor's thoughtful mind is examining the situation carefully. Characteristically, Elinor resorts to inner reflection rather than outward expression. Contrast the relative silence of Elinor in this passage with the thoughtless chattering of Lucy.

Heavy irony here – it is not 'lucky' for poor Elinor, and it almost seems as if there's a conspiracy against her.

Evidence of Lucy's hypocrisy – Elinor is her rival, not her friend, as Elinor and Lucy both well know.

Elinor is restrained – replying honestly but qualifying her agreement: 'to you'.

The fact that Lucy also thinks that the dreadful Fanny is sweet and affable shows how determined she is to be liked by Edward's family – and how ill-equipped she is to judge genuine 'sweetness and affability'.

Lucy is relentless in making Elinor feel uncomfortable – again showing her ruthless and unfeeling nature. It is no surprise that she later switches her 'affections' from Edward to his wealthier and very unpleasant brother.

Draws attention to Elinor's apparent discomfort – an unkind comment from a disagreeable character, disguised as a concern for Elinor's welfare. Elinor's blunt response signals her refusal to play Lucy's game.

She wondered that Lucy's spirits could be so very much elevated by the civility of Mrs. Ferrars;—that her interest and her vanity should so very much blind her, as to make the attention which seemed only paid her because she was *not* Elinor, appear a compliment to herself—or to allow her to derive encouragement from a preference only given her because her real situation was unknown. But that it was so, had not only been declared by Lucy's eyes at the time, but was declared over again the next morning more openly, for at her particular desire, Lady Middleton set her down in Berkeley-street on the chance of seeing Elinor alone, to tell her how happy she was.

The chance proved a lucky one, for a message from Mrs. Palmer soon after she arrived, carried Mrs. Jennings away.

"My dear friend," cried Lucy as soon as they were by themselves, "I come to talk to you of my happiness. Could any thing be so flattering as Mrs. Ferrars's way of treating me yesterday? So exceeding affable as she was!—You know how I dreaded the thoughts of seeing her;—but the very moment I was introduced, there was such an affability in her behaviour as I really should seem to say, she had quite took a fancy to me. Now was not it so?—You saw it all; and was not you quite struck with it?"

"She was certainly very civil to you."

"Civil!—Did you see nothing but only civility?—I saw a vast deal more. Such kindness as fell to the share of nobody but me!—No pride, no hauteur, and your sister just the same—All sweetness and affability!"

Elinor wished to talk of something else, but Lucy still pressed her to own that she had reason for her happiness; and Elinor was obliged to go on.—

"Undoubtedly, if they had known your engagement," said she, "nothing could be more flattering than their treatment of you;—but as that was not the case"—

"I guessed you would say so"—replied Lucy quickly—"but there was no reason in the world why Mrs. Ferrars should seem to like me, if she did not, and her liking me is every thing. You shan't talk me out of my satisfaction. I am sure it will all end well, and there will be no difficulties at all, to what I used to think. Mrs. Ferrars is a charming woman, and so is your sister. They are both delightful women indeed!—I wonder I should never hear you say how agreeable Mrs. Dashwood was!"

To this, Elinor had no answer to make, and did not attempt any.

"Are you ill, Miss Dashwood?—you seem low—you don't speak;—sure, you an't well."

"I never was in better health."

Lucy's (deliberate?) blindness here shows how determined she is to be accepted by Edward's family – and to triumph over her rival for his affections. The idea of concealment is relevant here: what is Lucy (deliberately?) concealing from herself (and why)?

Readers are also aware of Mrs Ferrars's real motives as we are acquainted with her snobbish, disagreeable ways. Irony here is effective in making Lucy vulnerable – despite the power she seems to hold over Elinor at this moment.

Lucy is not only obstinate in her refusal to see through Mrs Ferrars – she is calculating in her unkindness to Elinor, whose fondness for Edward she is well aware of.

Lucy's occasional grammatical errors betray a lack of education. This in itself is not a major flaw, but it suggests a more serious lack of refinement and sensitivity. This is also evident in her selfish lack of consideration for Elinor, whose discomfort Lucy enjoys as she dwells on the details of Mrs Ferrars's 'affability'. In Austen's eyes, Lucy is an unsuitable wife for Edward – but not for his shallow, self-seeking brother.

This shows how calculating Lucy is – she has planned her unkind attack on Elinor very carefully – anticipating Elinor's doubts (which she herself must share).

Shows Lucy's determination to achieve her ends. Links to wider text here – to her marriage to Robert and her sycophantic flattery of Mrs Ferrars.

A subtle hint from Lucy here that Fanny prefers her to Elinor. Notice features of Lucy's dialogue: she speaks in short, simple sentences (contrasting with Elinor's more complex thoughts).

Elinor is not willing to compromise her integrity by making hypocritical comments about Fanny's affability – and she is too well bred to voice her honest opinion. Consider the role of concealment in relation to Elinor and Lucy's behaviour – the benefits and disadvantages?

Remarks on analysing passage 2

The (often unwitting) exposure of characters' inner selves through their language is an excellent starting point for your analysis. However, you will need to go further than simply making this observation, by showing *how* revelations about character lead us to think about the 'bigger ideas' in the text.

The annotations include observations about the characters and their motivations. Remember, though, that the characters are not 'real' people and that their thoughts, feelings, actions and speeches are really showing us features of the society being depicted by the novelist. A 'complex' interpretation will always move from an understanding of character to a more abstract understanding of the writer's representation of human nature and society.

This section discusses some strategies for further developing your thinking about passage 2.

Main ideas in the text

Briefly reconnect with some of the main ideas explored by the text:

- balance is needed between reason and emotion (that is, between the rational and the romantic disposition)
- tensions between public actions and private opinions
- tensions between individuals and the values of society
- balance needed between individual freedom and social cohesion
- concealment often necessary within a small social sphere – can be associated with either tact and decorum (Elinor) or hypocrisy and deceit (Lucy, Willoughby, Fanny)
- women's lives (and men's?) circumscribed by rigidly enforced patriarchal values.

Main ideas in the passage

What are the main ideas in the second passage?

- Concealment and openness are important in different ways to different characters.

What do you know about some of the text's major concerns?

BE CAREFUL! Don't 'close down' your reading by limiting your thinking about the passage to what you already know about the text. Be prepared to include 'flashes of insight' as you work closely with the language of the passages.

Look for a deeper understanding of the text by noticing interesting links between the passages.

Look *inside* the passage for some of the text's major concerns.

- Money is important to Lucy (and to Fanny, John and Willoughby).
- A ‘suitable’ marriage is the way that most women gain financial security.
- Women sometimes compete for the affections of eligible men.
- Unpleasant ‘truths’ (greed, selfishness, vanity, spite) must be concealed – or disguised and made to appear acceptable.

Think about links to the wider text – and more specifically, to the other two set passages.

Links between characters and values

Which characters embody the ideas you have identified? Do these ideas reflect the values of the society being depicted in the novel? Or do they suggest that such values ought to be questioned and other values should be given more weight?

Make connections with the text’s views and values.

- Many characters value money very highly – including Mrs Ferrars, Robert Ferrars, Willoughby and Lucy Steele.
- Elinor and Marianne realise the necessity of obtaining financial security – but not at the expense of personal integrity.

Values questioned by the text

Does the author question or even condemn particular values? How? Why? Some examples are:

Recognise that characters *embody* the writer’s ideas.

- Austen questions the excessive preoccupation with money of those who live in considerable material comfort and financial security. She does so by creating unpleasant characters who are too concerned with money and what it represents to them: power, social position and a sense of privilege and superiority.
- Austen condemns marriage for financial gain – particularly through the unhappy marriage of Willoughby.
- The text recognises that some form of financial security is essential – a marriage based *solely* on romantic notions of ‘true love’ may not be wise and, ultimately, may not be happy.

Links with passage 3.

Other qualities or attributes condemned by Austen (perhaps also evident in passage 2) include hypocrisy, flattery, weakness, disloyalty, greed, snobbery, vanity and

Links with passage 1.

indiscretion. Characters who exhibit these qualities (and who are also unpleasant) are John and Fanny, Mrs Ferrars, Robert, and Lady Middleton.

Values endorsed by the text

What qualities does Austen value?

Be aware of how readers are positioned by likable and unlikable characters to adopt (or at least feel sympathetic to) the author's views and values.

- These could include honesty, intelligence, wit, compassion, tact, politeness, morality and integrity.
- Austen invites us to admire characters who embody some of these qualities, such as Elinor, Colonel Brandon, Edward and perhaps (to a lesser extent) Marianne and Mrs (Henry) Dashwood.

Links between passages

Brief links (through character) to the other two set passages include:

- Lucy Steele (passage 2) shows herself to be hypocritical, malicious, selfish, envious and ill-bred; compare her with Fanny and Willoughby, and contrast with Elinor.
- Elinor (passage 2) shows herself to be restrained, well-bred, honest and sensible; contrast her with Lucy – who does Austen think is the more suitable wife for Edward?
- Willoughby (passage 3) partially redeems himself, admitting his former selfishness, vanity, callousness, immorality and avarice; through his suffering, he partly atones for his treatment of Marianne. Comment on his character development and reasons for his transformation.
- Elinor (passage 3) reveals her capacity to be magnanimous, forgiving, compassionate and wise. Has Elinor's character developed? How and why?

Links between passages 2 and 3 through comparison and contrast of characters' values.

Recognise Austen's values and her view that tensions between oppositions need to be reconciled in the interests of harmony.

Passage 3

The annotations for passage 3 draw particular attention to Austen's presentation of views and values through characterisation and plot. They also pick up on several ideas present in passage 2, allowing for connections to be made between the passages in your response.

3.

What I felt on hearing that your sister was dying—and dying too believing me the greatest villain upon earth, scorning, hating me in her latest moments—for how could I tell what horrid projects might not have been imputed?—*One* person I was sure would represent me as capable of anything—What I felt was dreadful!—My resolution was soon made, and at eight o'clock this morning I was in my carriage. Now you know all.”

Elinor made no answer. Her thoughts were silently fixed on the irreparable injury which too early an independence and its consequent habits of idleness, dissipation, and luxury, had made in the mind, the character, the happiness, of a man who, to every advantage of person and talents, united a disposition naturally open and honest, and a feeling, affectionate temper.

The world had made him extravagant and vain—Extravagance and vanity had made him cold-hearted and selfish. Vanity, while seeking its own guilty triumph at the expence of another, had involved him in a real attachment, which extravagance, or at least its offspring necessity, had required to be sacrificed. Each faulty propensity in leading him to evil, had led him likewise to punishment. The attachment, from which against honour, against feeling, against every better interest he had outwardly torn himself, now, when no longer allowable, governed every thought; and the connection, for the sake of which he had, with little scruple, left her sister to misery, was likely to prove a source of unhappiness to himself of a far more incurable nature. From a reverie of this kind she was recalled at the end of some minutes by Willoughby, who, rousing himself from a reverie at least equally painful, started up in preparation for going, and said,

“There is no use in staying here; I must be off.”

“Are you going back to town?”

No—to Combe Magna. I have business there; from thence to town in a day or two. Good bye.”

He held out his hand. She could not refuse to give him her's;—he pressed it with affection.

“And you *do* think something better of me than you did?”—said he, letting it fall, and leaning against the mantle-piece as if forgetting he was to go.

Elinor assured him that she did;—that she forgave, pitied, wished him well—was even interested in his happiness—and added some gentle counsel as to the behaviour most likely to promote it.

Seems self-centred – but his lengthy confession and open admission of his selfish and dishonourable behaviour immediately beforehand is worth commenting on.

Characteristic silence as she ponders – note the length of the sentence here and the way she carefully considers various aspects of his situation.

Elinor's awareness of the way society shapes the individual.

The importance of money and 'connections' (and the sacrifice of integrity and happiness they often entail) is as real for men as it is for women in this society.

This is not simply egotism: Willoughby realises that Elinor's moral values are the ones he must adopt – and if she forgives him, he can begin to forgive himself. He will not, however, be permitted by the author to live entirely happily. His 'punishment' (the loss of Marianne) is a constant reminder of the disadvantages of marrying solely for money.

What is being revealed about Willoughby's character through his language? What do these revelations about character lead to in terms of the text's 'bigger' ideas about human nature and society?

Notice that he has no further need for concealment – indicative of his moral regeneration.

Another long sentence – a logical process of rational thought – describing cause and effect; shows Elinor's rational disposition. Contrast with Willoughby's emotional outpouring of feeling and his impulsive actions.

Willoughby's 'affection' for Elinor, and her 'affection' for him, reconcile the oppositions they previously represented – and show that she can also combine censure with forgiveness.

This seemingly small narrative detail implies his need for Elinor's forgiveness and his need for 'support' when she withdraws her hand. It also suggests his reluctance to detach himself from Marianne.

Elinor's fair-mindedness and compassion are what we would expect from an Austen heroine. She is an exemplar who embodies the values Austen considers appropriate for society as a whole.

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