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Laure Blanchemain Faucon

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Unravelling Mysteries: Developing a “Method of Understanding” in Austen’s and Ang Lee’s *Sense and Sensibility*

Laure Blanchemain Faucon

As the many film adaptations of her works testify, Jane Austen has aroused popular interest for quite some time now, the first dating from as early as 1940. But with the more recent boom in the 1990s, there has also been a heightened interest in her novels’ potential for mystery and sleuthing. Stephanie Barron is now famous for her *Jane Austen Mysteries* series, novels which started in 1996 and feature Jane Austen as an amateur detective and P.D. James, who made a strong case relating *Emma* to detective fiction (James 243-259), capitalized on that potential in her novel *Death Comes to Pemberley* in 2011, a mystery sequel of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). This was in turn adapted by Juliet Towhidi, giving birth to the TV serial broadcast on BBC 1 in 2013 and on PBS in 2014.

A similar interest has been aroused among the critics. As Daragh Downes noted in 2012, “[c]ritical recognition of nascent detectivism in Austen is far from new” (Downes). Rosemary DePaolo and Jane Sturrock,¹ like PD James, focused on *Emma* and Mark Blackwell spotted the importance lent to “the collection and interpretation of evidence” (121) in *Sense and Sensibility*. Ellen Belton presented a wider study of the “detective plots” of Austen’s works, which “make extensive use of the sense of mystery as a structural narrative element” (43). Taking up Poe’s metaphor of the game between the detective and his opponent in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) and *The Purloined Letter* (1844), she showed how it applies to the relation between reader and author in Austen’s novels since “[e]ach heroine becomes an imperfect detective, inviting us to do better. Anticipating the modern detective story, Austen places obstacles in the path of the correct solution and challenges us to surmount them” (Belton 49). The author provides the clues that can enable the reader to solve the mystery (Belton 51).

It is undeniable that Jane Austen is toying with the reader in *Sense and Sensibility*, imbuing relationships and behaviours with an aura of mystery meant to arouse our curiosity. Yet studying more specifically how Dupin’s method applies to Austen’s novel can yield even more productive results. It helps transcend the apparent dichotomy implied in the title and implicitly developed by Daragh Downes, who laid the emphasis on the opposition between

¹ Rosemary DePaolo, “From Howtoits to Whodunits: Jane Austen to Agatha Christie,” *Clues* 2.2 (1981): 8-14. Jane Sturrock, “‘I’m Rather a Talker’: Speech and Silence in *Emma*,” *Persuasions On-Line* 28.1 (Winter 2007): n. pag., web 28 August 2015.

two kinds of detectives in *Sense and Sensibility*: the sensible, grounded in facts which are then rationally interpreted, and the sensibilibious, anchored in feelings and prizing subjectivity. Downes's reading, though separating the two approaches, raises an interesting point, since feelings, and the ability to understand the other, are key elements to solve mysteries in Austen's novel, paving the way for Dupin's reliance on a new form of empathy with the subject studied in an otherwise highly rational approach. *Sense and Sensibility* merges two aspects heralding the rise of the detective, which crystallized in the characters of Poe's Dupin (1841) and, later, Doyle's Sherlock Holmes (1887): the evolution of observation with the clinical gaze and the redemptive integration of Eighteenth-Century sensibility within a rational "method of understanding" (Austen 60). Being a good detective not only implies an ability to read signs and make the right diagnosis. It also implies a subjective projection into the mind of the other. This problematic reading of the others' character is to be related with the overwhelming presence of windows and frames in Ang Lee's adaptation of Austen's novel.

Unravelling mysteries: good and bad detectives

Though there is no murder or actual crime in Austen's novels, as Ellen Belton reminds us, yet mysteries abound (42). And this is entirely due to the characters' silences and lack of communication. June Sturrock writes about *Emma*:

[S]ilences are essential to this novel, which would have virtually no plot without them. Many people, notably P. D. James, who knows about these things, have written about *Emma* in terms of the detective story or mystery, and such narratives demand silences, gaps in the available information. (Sturrock)

This remark also applies to *Sense and Sensibility*. As Marianne says nothing about the state of her relationship with Willoughby, even once he has left for London, Elinor and her mother are puzzled and left to speculate. As Elinor suggests, "there [i]s one method so direct, so simple, and in her opinion so eligible of knowing the real state of the affair, and of instantly removing all mystery" (64): they should ask Marianne directly (64). But as Mrs. Dashwood refuses to distress her daughter with open interrogation, Elinor has no choice but to start investigating. Because open intelligence is not an option, the characters are left with their riddles and become amateur detectives, trying to find the right method to tackle those mysteries. And Elinor goes about it in a scientific manner.

"Specimens" of the various characters' behaviours and conversations are collected (94, 119) and Elinor only "venture[s] to pronounce" a judgement on Edward Ferrars, for instance,

after having “studied his sentiments” (16) and having had, according to Marianne, “many opportunities of estimating the minuter propensities of his mind” (15). She uses logic to draw conclusions and interpret what she observed. Because Willoughby was uncharacteristically cold in his farewell before going to London, she refuses her mother’s soothing hypotheses and probabilities and says: “suspicion of something unpleasant is the inevitable consequence of such an alteration as we have just witnessed in him” (60). She does not simply adhere to Mrs. Dashwood’s conjectures; she needs proof. She insists “on ample verification of claims made and hypotheses advanced” and “before moving from a ‘consideration of probabilities’ (162) to the drawing of a firm conclusion, she will take pains to collate a strong ‘body of evidence’ (159)” (Downes). As Downes shows, this is illustrated when Elinor resolves to observe Willoughby “with zealous attention” to “ascertain what he was and what he meant” (Austen 118).

Her remarks are indeed painstakingly backed up with evidence, as her reading of Brandon’s behaviour exemplifies:

His manners, though serious, were mild; and his reserve appeared rather the result of some oppression of spirits, than of any natural gloominess of temper. Sir John had dropt hints of past injuries and disappointments, which justified her belief of his being an unfortunate man, and she regarded him with respect and compassion. (38)

The hypothesis that he is experiencing “some oppression of spirits” is preferred because of the hints dropt. She also waits to be confirmed when she reads Marianne’s behaviour. During the conversation about the weather in London, Marianne is obviously thinking about Willoughby when she brightens up at the thought that sportsmen are likely to stay in the country with that fine weather and when she starts joyfully anticipating frosts. And Elinor “conjecture[s]” that “she will write to Combe by this day’s post” but she needs to “ascertain” her hypothesis: “But if she *did*, the letter was written and sent away with a privacy that eluded all her watchfulness to ascertain the fact” (124, italics in the text). Edward is also a fine observer and interpreter, as when he gathers from various conversations and Marianne’s behaviour that Willoughby is the reason of her sudden interest in hunters (69, 75-76).

Other amateur detectives try to unravel the mysteries of the others’ private lives, but either their observation or their logic is flawed. Mrs Jennings’s passion for matchmaking goes hand in hand with faulty discoveries of feelings and botched detective work:

She was remarkably quick in the discovery of attachments, and had enjoyed the advantage of raising the blushes and the vanity of many a young lady by insinuations of her power over such a young man; and this kind of discernment enabled her soon after her arrival at

Barton, decisively to pronounce that Colonel Brandon was very much in love with Marianne Dashwood. (28)

Judging quickly is bound to mislead in Austen's novels, even though there is an appearance of logic in the narrator's description of Mrs. Jennings's reasoning:

She rather suspected it to be so, on the very first evening of their being together, *from* his listening so attentively while she sang to them; and when the visit was returned by the Middletons dining at the cottage, *the fact was ascertained* by his listening to her again. *It must be so.* (28, italics added)

Her conjecture is confronted to facts before it is taken for certain. At this point of the story however, the conclusion is incorrect because the basis is faulty. The behaviour observed is not interpreted correctly: the fact that the Colonel pays Marianne the compliment of listening to her in silence while she is playing and singing to them is no testimony of his love. It merely evinces true taste and manners, which Mrs. Jennings, with her utter lack of them, is unable to understand. The irony here is double since Mrs. Jennings severely lacks true discernment but in the end her conjecture turns out to be right ... once she had given up on that theory.

Marianne's discoveries, on the other hand, are flawed because she is carried away by her feelings and has no sense of logic. Like Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, Marianne is influenced by her readings and has an overactive imagination, which leads her to absurd statements:

Every circumstance belonging to [Willoughby] was interesting. His name was good, his residence was in their favourite village, and she soon found out that of all manly dresses a shooting jacket was the most becoming. Her imagination was busy, her reflections were pleasant, and the pain of a sprained ankle was disregarded. (33)

The glaring subjectivity of her statement makes it absurd, as is her logic when she says about the impropriety of her going alone with Willoughby to Allenham:

[N]othing can be a stronger proof of it[s not being in the least improper], Elinor; for if there had been any real impropriety in what I did, I should have been sensible of it at the time, for we always know when we are acting wrong; and with such a conviction I could have had no pleasure. (52)

The assumption that Marianne, who openly discards conventions, should always be aware of the impropriety of her actions, sounds ludicrous and excessively naïve. Furthermore, using one's feelings as proof is irrational and no proof at all.

The “method of understanding” set afoot by Elinor, with more or less accurate results, carries some aspects prefiguring Dupin’s approach in *The Murders of the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery of Marie Roger* (1842) and *The Purloined Letter*.

Sifting through information

When taking on a case, the first step is to collect information and even before observing the murder scene and gathering physical evidence, much is to be learnt by a careful selection among the witnesses’ testimonies, to find the particulars that are actually meaningful. Analysis is defined by Edgar Poe as “that moral activity which *disentangles*” (Poe, *Murders* 92). A large part of it consists in separating facts from hearsay and subjective comments: in *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, for example, the witnesses’ remarks on the language they think they heard is to be stripped of all their subjectivity to lead to the conclusion that it was a language none of the characters, though from various countries, could comprehend, and perhaps no human language at all. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor shows how taking people’s words for granted, without disentangling the truth from subjectivity, inevitably leads to mistakes in character analysis. She reflects on how she has “frequently detected [her]self in such kind of mistakes, [...] in a total misapprehension of character in some point or other: fancying people so much more gay or grave, or ingenious or stupid than they really are” (71). She adds: “Sometimes one is guided by what they say of themselves, and very frequently by what other people say of them, without giving oneself time to deliberate and judge” (71). One needs time to confront viewpoints and analyse people’s tales to form one’s own judgement.

Thus, when she decides to investigate into the nature of Willoughby’s intentions towards her sister, she is

resolved not only upon gaining every new light as to his character which her own observation or the intelligence of others could give her, but likewise upon watching his behaviour to her sister with such zealous attention, as to ascertain what he was, and what he meant, before many meetings had taken place. (118)

Listening to what others have to say is part of the process but remains only a starting point, to be then confronted with observed facts.

It is also essential to check the source of the information and to know who to credit. For instance, when Margaret says that Willoughby has a lock of Marianne’s hair, Elinor double-checks her testimony to ascertain the fact and only credits it when she is satisfied by the circumstances in which she made that discovery (46). She knows when to discard

information. Downes underlines the “problem of narrative unreliability of characters feeding one another information that is insufficiently *material*”, which forces Elinor to “negotiate her way through a thick epistemological fog” (Downes). Mrs. Palmer’s “self-annulling claim” that she knows Mr. Willoughby perfectly well is taken as an example and Downes relates “this repeated distorting of intelligence, with the wounding of expectation that repeatedly motors the plot forward” (Downes). But the way Elinor and the reader are led to disentangle the truth also brings to mind the way Poe toys with his reader. Among the devices used in Austen’s little detective games in *Emma*, Belton mentions “the embedding of important information in a mass of unimportant detail” (52). This also applies to *Sense and Sensibility*, in which relevant particulars are to be distinguished from immaterial information, an approach that comes close to clinical observation.

Reading the body: the influence of the clinical gaze

As Donald Thomas points out, the literary detective originated in the new discourse on crime in the wake of the evolution of medicine:

The literary detective’s power, that is, is consistently represented as a new kind of reading, just as the genre which produced him was regarded as a new kind of writing in the nineteenth century. The systematic medicalization of crime in criminal discourse during this period corresponded to the literary detective’s development in a kind of master diagnostician, an expert capable of reading the symptoms of criminal pathology in the individual body and the social body as well. (3)

In nineteenth-century detective fiction, the body is converted into a text to be read. Observing with a clinical gaze, the detective is able to go to the bottom of the crime and find the truth.

As Foucault claims, the perception of the disease as a text to be read started with the rise of the clinical method at the end of the Eighteenth Century. He states that “[t]he formation of the clinical method was bound up with the emergence of the doctor’s gaze into the field of signs and symptoms” (Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic* 111), “bringing into play [...] the fundamental relation between the perceptual act and the element of language” (Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic* 116). The disease became then a series of symptoms to be decoded and “[i]n the general equilibrium of clinical thought, the symptom plays more or less the role of the language of action” (Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic* 113).² Interestingly, part of this clinical

² For the original French quotations, see Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique* 131 : « La formation de la méthode clinique est liée à l’émergence du regard du médecin dans le champ des signes et des symptômes. » Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique* 133 : « Le symptôme, dans l’équilibre général de la pensée clinique, joue à peu près le

practice comes very close to the sifting of information or disentangling that Dupin resorts to; it aims at “unravel[ing] the principle and cause of an illness through the confusion and obscurity of the symptoms,” “separat[ing] it from all that is foreign to it” (Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic* 107),³ determining in a manner of speaking, what is “material”, to take up Austen’s word, and what is not.

Jane Austen showed a true interest in medicine. Her “texts are full of enquiries and incidents about health” (Wiltshire 6) and illness and diagnosis became part of the plot in her novels, as Laurie Kaplan stated.⁴ In *Sense and Sensibility*, part of the mysteries the reader is led to unravel are medical, with characters acting as (poor) diagnosticians. It is interesting to note that Jane Austen herself presents the case to the reader as a series of symptoms, presenting the entire evolution of the disease, in all its stages, to make the reader’s diagnosis possible. As Akiko Takei writes, “[w]hen Marianne experiences a near death situation, [...] [t]he day-to-day changes in her condition are described with clinical accuracy” (Takei). And indeed, such thorough description fits the clinical approach: “It is no longer a question of giving that by which the disease can be recognized but of restoring, at the level of words, a history that covers its total being” (Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic* 116).⁵ The novel is here marked by the influence of domestic medicine; Austen’s description of Marianne’s illness is in keeping with Buchan’s description of pleurisy.⁶ Influenced by the clinical approach, Austen presents symptoms as a form of language: “shivering over the fire, [...] unable to read, [and] lying, weary and languid, on a sofa, did not speak much in favour of her amendment” (231).

The kind of observation needed to perceive those symptoms is also close to that of the detective. Though the clinician’s gaze mustn’t be naïve, yet it must be pure, free of all preconceived theories, discarding both the influence of preexisting grids on reason and the influence of imagination on the senses (Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic* 131). The approach of Poe’s detective is similar since what prevents the Prefect and the French police from finding

rôle du langage d’action. » Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique* 137 : « La clinique met en jeu la relation, fondamentale chez Condillac, de l’acte perceptif et de l’élément du langage. »

³ See Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique* 127-128 : « démêler le principe et la cause d’une maladie à travers la confusion et l’obscurité des symptômes », « séparer d’elle au moyen d’une analyse prompte et délicate tout ce qui lui est étranger. »

⁴ Kaplan 117: “Jane Austen’s novels and letters are full of discussions about the diagnosis and treatment of accidents, fevers, nervous ‘headaches’, gout, hysterias, and rheumatisms – all of the common ailments that made life miserable during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. [...] *Sense and Sensibility*, which we will concentrate on in this paper, uses a multitude of common medical emergencies as plot elements that propel action [...]”

⁵ Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique* 137: « Il ne s’agit plus de donner de quoi reconnaître la maladie, mais de restituer, au niveau des mots, une histoire qui en couvre l’être total. »

⁶ Wiltshire calls Marianne Dashwood’s fever “a sequenced and cogent study” (10), fitting Buchan’s description (46-47).

the letter they are looking for is the lack of purity of their gaze. Dupin compares the Prefect's method to "a Procrustean bed to which he forcibly adapts his designs" (Poe, *Purloined Letter* 257). As Agatha Christie later had Hercule Poirot explain, imagination must be held in check: "You gave too much rein to your imagination. Imagination is a good servant, and a bad master. The simplest explanation is always the most likely [...]" (58). If Marianne and Mrs. Jennings fail as sleuths in *Sense and Sensibility*, it is largely because of the interference of preconceived ideas or imagination. Both "forcibly adapt" what they see to what they already have in mind. Mrs. Jennings "assign[s]" sentiments "for her own satisfaction" (38) and Marianne is blind to the world around her. Because she wants frost to set in, her senses are tricked by her imagination and she sees "every night in the brightness of the fire, and every morning in the appearance of the atmosphere, the certain symptoms of approaching frost" (125). She perceives symptoms that are not there. Furthermore, like Poe's prefect, she is not looking for signs in the right place: just as the police meticulously examine room after room of Minister D.'s home instead of analysing his behaviour and character to find where he put the letter in *The Purloined Letter*, Marianne analyses Edward's body and manners to find out if her sister could love him, instead of looking for symptoms of love in Elinor's behaviour.

Her ineptness as a detective is related with her tendency to see illness where there is none. She calls Brandon an infirm because he complained of rheumatism and "talked of flannel waistcoats" (30) and she thinks Edward is ill because he has not come for a fortnight ("Nothing but real indisposition could occasion this extraordinary delay. What else can detain him at Norland?" [30]). Similarly, Mrs. Jennings, who is just as blinded by her preconceived ideas, proves to be a poor lay doctor, offering wine to treat depressed spirits, because her husband told her it treated gout, which was an even more harmful mistake. In Akiko Takei's words,

The absurd treatment proposed by Mrs. Jennings shows that the lay public used to try, almost at random, their limited treatment options, and that useless treatments were handed down from one generation to the next. The medical enlightenment of the public had not yet been realized. (Takei)

True enough, the episode of Marianne's illness proves all the characters, even Elinor, to be inept diagnosticians and according to Akiko Takei, "[t]he delay in curing Marianne and the repeated misdiagnoses by Elinor point to the uncertainty and unreliability of doctoring in the hands of the lay public" (Takei).

The existence of Buchan's book shows a rise of interest of amateurs in unravelling medical mysteries without the help of doctors. The thrill of making the right diagnosis,

observing and interpreting symptoms correctly, foreshadowed the thrill of the detective solving a riddle, looking for the truth. The amateurish dabbling with medicine does seem to be condemned in *Sense and Sensibility*, as Takei points out, mainly because toying around becomes dangerous when a life is at stake. Elinor sometimes errs as a detective, the most striking instance concerning the existence of an engagement between Marianne and Willoughby, but her mistaken diagnoses are much more damaging. That she should be so wrong seems surprising at first; though she is an imperfect detective, as Belton claimed, yet most of the time her reading of the characters' behaviour is correct. The reason might lie in her interest in psychological truths rather than in the body per se. Because Marianne's illness is largely self-induced, as she enjoys wallowing in her grief, Elinor, unaware of the power of somatization,⁷ underestimates Marianne's danger.

She fares better when she tracks symptoms that might give some insight into the state of mind of the other characters. Scientific observation is above all a way for her to find out hidden truths. Gestures and behaviours become a series of symptoms that need to be deciphered, providing some insight into the characters: Mrs. Dashwood rightly detects "symptoms of love" in Edward's behaviour to Elinor (13), though she wrongly assumes their marriage is bound to take place shortly, the miserly hypocrisy of John Dashwood and his wife is laid bare by the lack of "symptom" of "indigence" (175) and Marianne's evolution can be detected in the "happy symptoms" (260) of "reasonable exertion" (259). Downes rightly wrote that the characters of *Sense and Sensibility* "subject each other's bodies and gestures to hectic semiotic analysis. They fussily decode each other's words, whether heard, overheard or reported. They speculate ad nauseam on the psychological motives lying back of observable behavior" (Downes). This semiotic analysis is to be related with the influence of the clinical gaze and Elinor does not just speculate; she applies a "method of understanding" that brings both sense and sensibility into play.

Reading character in the age of sensibility

Reading the body as a text, and using the body as a way to communicate were already central concerns in the Eighteenth-Century sentimental novel. As Barbara Benedict puts it,

⁷ Kimiyo Ogawa shows how the way Austen turns Marianne's bout of melancholia into actual physical illness can be explained by the Eighteenth-Century discovery of the importance of the relation between mind and body in mental diseases and of the impact of the psychological on the physical with Tissot's treatise on onanism, for example. See Ogawa: "By medicalizing subjectivity and the soul itself, eighteenth-century medical theorists such as Julien Offray de La Mettrie and John Brown demonstrated that the mind, especially in relation to human passions, is inextricably bound up with the body." See also Wiltshire 13: Wiltshire shows how perceiving illness as a language implies somatization, in which "emotions are, so to speak, deposited in the body and there reproduced as illness symptoms."

“[t]he eighteenth-century English novel centers on the epistemological and moral problem of reading character” (311). Sympathetic communion of feelings does not require verbal expression in sentimental novels. The heroes’ and heroines’ heightened sensibility enables them to fully understand and even share the others’ woes and sentiments. Yet this unchannelled sensibility can also cloud their judgement, affecting their ability to read behaviour and making them easy targets for insensitive villains. Maureen Harkin underlines this deficiency in terms of semiotic analysis: “once out of his familiar domain, one of Harley’s most obvious and consistent features is his lack of skill in decoding signs” (330).

And indeed, Marianne suffers from the same plight. She is straightforward and genuine in all her expressions of feelings – delight makes her countenance glow (131), impatience becomes “an agony [...] affect[ing] every feature” (131), shame and vexation make her face “crimson[n] over” (131) and grief and despair make her “loo[k] dreadfully white” (132). She expects others to wear their heart on their sleeve too and is unable to suspect deceit. When Willoughby uses the ploys of sentimental fiction, using body language (“Willoughby’s behaviour during the whole of the evening declared at once his affection and happiness” [56]) and conveying an intention to marry her in his behaviour to avoid actually committing himself with words, Marianne is unable to detect potential foul play and takes the language of feelings at its face value: “Willoughby was all that her fancy had delineated in that unhappy hour, and in every brighter period, as capable of attaching her; and his behaviour declared his wishes to be in that respect as earnest as his abilities were strong” (38). Behaviour is, from her perspective, sufficient language and her fancy fills the gaps. Mrs. Dashwood, also touched by the language of feeling, is under the same delusion.⁸

Marianne’s inability to suspect evil is proof of her goodness and purity, as is generally the case in sentimental fiction. As Barbara Benedict explains, sentimental heroes cannot read faces accurately, they “see virtuously because they see naively: locked in a Lacanian mirror stage, they see themselves in the other [and] judge by their own responses” (321). Yet this naivety is criticized in *Sense and Sensibility*, with the importance lent to deciphering and detective work. Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood are to be blamed because they fail to pay attention to changes in behaviours alerting the good observer to the possibility of deceit. It does not mean that sensibility is not valued: it plays an important role in the reading of the body too.

⁸ See Austen 61 : “I have not wanted syllables where actions have spoken so plainly. Has not his behaviour to Marianne and to us all, for at least the last fortnight, declared that he loved and considered her as his future wife, and that he felt for us the attachment of the nearest relation? Have we not perfectly understood each other? Has not my consent been daily asked by his looks, his manner, his attentive and affectionate respect?”

Thus Jane Austen bridges the gap between naïve sensibility, all feelings, and a rational decoding of signs. Elinor is a better detective than Mrs. Jennings not only because she is a better, a more rational observer but also thanks to her sensibility. She feels anxiety and concern for her sister's well-being and because she is able to understand what Marianne is going through, "the frequent bursts of grief which still obliged her, at intervals, to withhold her pen" (134) become "proofs enough of her feeling how more than probable it was that she was writing for the last time to Willoughby" (134). When the answer to that letter arrives, Elinor is able not only to infer it from her sister's attitude – with her "death-like paleness," Elinor "[sees] as plainly [...] as if she had seen the direction, that it must come from Willoughby" (134) – but also to foresee the additional distress it will bring. She "fe[els] a sickness at heart as ma[kes] her hardly able to hold up her head" (134), while Mrs. Jennings treats it as a joke and still thinks Marianne and Willoughby are going to marry because she is unable to truly sympathize with Marianne's feelings, talking lightly of her looking "so ill and forlorn" (135).

This utter lack of sympathy makes her equally unfit to unravel the mystery of Colonel Brandon's abrupt departure: totally unequipped, all she can do is wonder and randomly pile up hypotheses (53-54). She repeatedly misinterprets his actions and even thinks he is in love with Elinor, while the latter, in true sentimental fashion, knows better because she can read the language of the eyes: "she watched his eyes, while Mrs. Jennings thought only of his behaviour; and while his looks of anxious solicitude [...], because unexpressed by words, entirely escaped the latter's observation, *she* could discover in them the quick feelings and needless alarm of a lover" (231). But the character least able to read behaviours remains Mr. Dashwood, who has absolutely no clues about what the others think: "Elinor [...] could not restrain her eye from being fixed on him with a look that spoke all the contempt it excited. It was a look, however, very well bestowed, for it relieved her own feelings, and gave no intelligence to him." (225-26). Elinor's eyes speak but ironically, this is a language Mr. Dashwood, who veils his consummate selfishness behind professions of sympathy, fails to understand.

Her superiority lies in her sensibility, but only because it is channelled for the purposes of the investigation. Adopting a rational approach, she is no longer blinded, as sentimental heroes and heroines usually were, to the true nature of cunning characters like Willoughby, or Mr. Dashwood. Her sensibility provides a point of entry into the other's psyche. This ability to open up to the other through feelings and to project herself in the other's mind foreshadows Dupin's colder form of empathy.

Part of the method used by Dupin to solve the mysteries he is faced with consists in identifying with his opponent, which implies “throwing [oneself] into the spirit of [one’s] opponent.”⁹ This seems a connection of thoughts through reason but it comprises feelings as well, since this identification is achieved, in the case of the boy playing the game of marbles, through a re-creation of the “thoughts and sentiments” matching the other’s facial expression: “I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression” (Poe, *Purloined Letter* 258). The startling display of Dupin’s power of observation and of his insight into the narrator’s mind in *Murders in the rue Morgue* includes the study of feelings explaining the flow of thoughts and association of ideas (Poe, *Murders* 96-99). As Robert Snell claims, the qualities of the analyst in Poe’s tales are not reducible to the application of reason (158): “he practices a kind of enquiring empathy or mirroring” (Snell 159).

Though Elinor’s acumen is far less impressive than Dupin’s, she knows how her sister and her mother think, how their brain works: “She knew that what Marianne and her mother conjectured one moment, they believed the next – that with them, to wish was to hope, and to hope was to expect” (16). Discerning patterns of behaviour, Elinor is able to put herself in their place and guess how they are going to respond. But her abilities are best displayed when facing her true opponent, Lucy. To disentangle the truth from lies, she analyses her character to better identify with her and find out whether she is indeed engaged to Edward:

However small Elinor’s general dependence on Lucy’s veracity might be, it was impossible for her on serious reflection to suspect it in the present case, where no temptation could be answerable to the folly of inventing a falsehood of such a description. What Lucy had asserted to be true, therefore, Elinor could not, dared not longer doubt, supported as it was too on every side by such probabilities and proofs, and contradicted by nothing but her own wishes. (103)

Elinor assesses Lucy’s intellect and the extent of her lies, based on her knowledge of her character. Though her observation and reading of characters is generally achieved, as pointed out earlier, thanks to her fine sensibility, which enables her to sympathize with others, yet her

⁹ Poe compares the analyst with the good player in draughts (*Murders* 93): “Deprived of ordinary resources, the analyst throws himself into the spirit of his opponent, identifies himself therewith, and not unfrequently sees thus, at a glance, the sole methods (sometimes indeed absurdly simple ones) by which he may seduce into error or hurry into miscalculation.” In *The Purloined Letter*, Poe uses the metaphor of the game again, with the game of marbles, showing how a boy was able to win thanks to a correct analysis of the opponent’s next move, an analysis that he is able to conduct thanks to “an identification of the reasoner’s intellect with that of his opponent” (257).

feelings, or “wishes” must be held in check to prevent errors. Interpreting Edward’s and Lucy’s attitude also leads her to the correct assumption that this is no engagement of the heart (103). The way she combines facts (the “opportunity of acquaintance in the house of Mr. Pratt”, “Edward’s visit near Plymouth”, “the intimate knowledge of the Miss Steeles as to Norland and their family connections”, “the picture, the letter, the ring” [103]) and analysis of behaviour, reading of the body (“his melancholy state of mind”, “his dissatisfaction at his own prospects, his uncertain behaviour towards herself” [103]) was already paving the way for Dupin’s method.

“Windows in their bosoms”: frames and reading of characters in Ang Lee’s adaptation.

In *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Dupin’s eerie ability to gain access, thanks to his method, to the others’ intimate thoughts, is described with the metaphor of the window: “He boasted to me, with a low chuckling laugh, that most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms, and was wont to follow up such assertions by direct and very startling proofs of his intimate knowledge of my own” (Poe, *Murders* 96). In Ang Lee’s *Sense and Sensibility*, windows and doors are used to convey the characters’ constant attempts at getting some insight into the others’ private thoughts. Julianne Pidduck presents the overwhelming presence of frames within frames in Ang Lee’s interiors as part of a gendered representation of space: while Elinor “sits demurely indoors” and “Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters hover by the window, hoping for the arrival of some eligible suitor”, male characters, “in contrast, tend to come and go, moving freely through the countryside” (381). Penny Gay is right to point out that this “formal, cluttered and mannered treatment of interiors” (Pidduck 382) conveys a sense of enclosure: women are “framed and contained by walls, doors, windows from which they gaze longingly at what they can make no move to own” (Gay 93). Elinor, Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood in particular are repeatedly portrayed sitting by the window, gazing wistfully outside¹⁰ and Elinor is recurrently shot within the frame of a door or within series of doors at moments when her lack of freedom can be felt.¹¹

¹⁰ A close up on Mrs. Dashwood, her head framed by the window, looking outside, shows her to be longing for more (28’17) as Marianne is washing Margaret, who, like Marianne in a previous scene, insists that she is cold (28’24). At Sir John’s place, after Willoughby left for London, Marianne is shown to be wistfully gazing outside (1’02’08; 1’02’42). In Mrs. Jennings’s place in London, she impatiently goes from window to window, looking for Willoughby (1’09’40). Elinor also repeatedly sits in front of the window, watching the characters outside (11’57; 1’54’31).

¹¹ On her very first appearance on screen, Elinor is doubly framed, in a long shot, by the doorway, where she is standing, and the window in the back, at the very moment when she is imposing restraint on Marianne, asking her contain her feelings, to play another, less mournful piece of music (3’28). She is again framed by the door in a medium shot when discussing their prospects and lack of options, reminding her mother that she has nowhere to go (3’52). This is a recurring feature: another long shot pictures her with her mother, framed by the doorway

This enclosing presence of frames within frames is part of the mannerist aesthetic of period drama, using paintings to “reconstruct the atmosphere of a given era and validate the film’s connection with the cultural heritage” (Vidal 111) and turning scenes into tableaux with various framing devices (mirrors, windows and doors).¹² In that setting, “[b]odies become objects trapped in the relentless succession of paintings, or slowly moving figures that traverse the frame from background to foreground” (Vidal 113). The slow movement of Ang Lee’s characters through a succession of frames as they come closer to the camera is then typical of heritage films and as usual in period dramas, the overwhelming presence of portraits both anchors the film in a cultural heritage and conveys the weight of the characters’ heritage. The conversation between Edward and Mrs. John Dashwood in the stairs at Norland is in that respect particularly enlightening. As Edward tries to soften his sister, insisting that the girls’ loss of their father changes everything (8’59), the high angle shot on the two characters conveys all the weight of patriarchy, which put Elinor, Marianne, Margaret and Mrs. Dashwood in this distressing situation. This awing power of the past, and of the patriarchal line, is further emphasized by the crushing predominance of portraits looming above them, especially with the initial traveling shot on the paintings, before the camera unveils the presence of Edward and Fanny (8’53).

Pidduck reminds us that “the window marks the threshold of inside and outside” (382) and analyses those thresholds, those “windows and doors”, as places “where arrivals and departures occur, provid[ing] focal points of narrative interest” (382), applying Bakhtin’s theory.¹³ One cannot deny that entrances and departures are highly charged, bringing important developments. Brandon and Edward’s entrance into the Dashwoods’ life is marked by framed shots of their figures and an emphasis on the crossing of thresholds. But if arrivals through doors “provide focal points of narrative interest”, it is above all because they usher in important discoveries. The fact that the film abounds so much with exits and entrances of characters before scenes can start certainly lends it a theatrical quality. But the scenes introduced by shots of characters framed in the doorway on their way in are almost infallibly scenes of disclosure giving the solution to the puzzles the characters are trying to solve.

at the moment when she insists that there is nothing she can do about Edward’s decision not to come and when she refuses to get carried away by her feelings, as they are not engaged anyway (38’57).

¹² Vidal 111: “Tableaux and deframings can function as critical strategies in the mannerist aesthetics of the period drama.” They are mannerist in the sense that “fixed framings, long takes, slow motion, zooms or superimpositions strain the narrative as a whole, drawing our attention to the visual textures of the film. This overwriting of the shot throws into relief the tension between discursive and figural dimensions of film” (Vidal 112).

¹³ In “Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel,” Mikhail Bakhtin writes that the chronotope of the threshold is “highly charged with emotion and value [and] its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of crisis and break in a life” (21).

For instance, in London, when Elinor goes to her sister's room to check on her, since she has just received a letter, her entrance (1'21'32) heralds the discovery of the truth about Marianne and Willoughby: they were never actually engaged and he is putting an end to their relationship. When Mrs. Jennings comes in not long after (1'35'07), she makes another revelation: Willoughby is to be married soon. Earlier, at Barton cottage, Brandon enters the house, expecting a pleasant moment with the Dashwoods – and Marianne in particular – only to discover that she is now completely engrossed by her feelings for Willoughby (43'27). In a later scene, Elinor, Margaret and Mrs. Dashwood enter the cottage after the service at the Church and discover that Willoughby, instead of proposing, as they anticipated, is leaving Marianne, drowned in tears (59'18). As Elinor tries to investigate and find out what happened, she follows her mother, coming to the landing where all the doors are shut to her, preventing any further inquiry and hiding Marianne's, Margaret's and Mrs. Dashwood's vociferous cries (1'01'43). The juxtaposition of closed doors surrounding Elinor, combined with the high angle shot, conveys a strong sense of enclosure and powerlessness as Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood refuse to share their thoughts and feelings, while Mrs. Dashwood's closed door further darkens the landing, symbolizing her refusal to help Elinor shed light on the situation.

Crossing thresholds in Ang Lee's homes: the unveiling of intimate secrets

In Ang Lee's adaptation, doors are then persistently used as transitions not only between scenes, but between the public and the private: the crossing of thresholds into the recesses of the house represents the discovery of the female characters' intimacy and a gradual unveiling of secrets. Willoughby's entrance into the cottage when he visits Marianne after her accident (44'57) marks the beginning of a growing intimacy between them. The theme of the detective is brought up with his playful allusion to the little spies that helped him find Marianne's name (45'10) and he discovers both Marianne's tastes and her feelings for him.

An even better case in point is Colonel Brandon's first discovery of Marianne. He is first depicted from the inside of Sir John's house, the open door framing his figure in an extreme long shot (30'24), making Brandon look slightly lost as he steps into the darkened hall. The voice of the heroine is drawing him in, guiding him through the dehumanized empty hall marking the boundary between the outside and the inside. The song she is playing is in fact Brandon's first clue about who he is going to discover. Indeed, music is used by Marianne to express her feelings and the song "Weep You No More Sad Fountains", originally written by John Dowland and sung to Patrick Doyle's melody, is in keeping with

Austen's characterization of the heroine with the focus on passion and pain. Marianne's performance is meant to display her sensibility, which is what Brandon prizes in her in the novel.

As he crosses the hall, a closer shot presents him framed in an intricate combination of walls, pillars and doorways (30'29), coming even closer to the camera and ending in a close shot leading to a focus on his emotional response. He finally stops in the doorway, stepping into the light as the mystery is lifted. As he is peeping at Marianne's private performance on the pianoforte, he is unseen by the other characters, who are pictured with their back to us, looking towards Marianne, the focal point of the subjective shot finally unveiling the Colonel's view (30'41). There is however an interesting twist with a shift in viewpoint from what the Colonel sees to Elinor's view of the Colonel (30'56), signalled by the use of continuity glance with the close shot on Elinor indicating that she has spotted him and is observing him (30'54). This sequence is then not only meant to represent Brandon's discovery of Marianne's character and sensibility: it also exposes his budding love for her. As Cheryl Nixon reminds us, in the novel, Brandon spends the whole evening with the family and listens to Marianne playing the pianoforte in silent respect, but not in raptures: "his film-created stare is meant to be read as one of emotional expression: it is love at first sight, physically displayed but unexpressed verbally" (39). Nixon is quite right to underline how male emotions are displayed to prove the male characters worthy of the heroines' feelings. In the end, Brandon turns out to be as passionate in his reading of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* as Marianne in her singing, as a close shot on his worked up features reveals (1'54'52).¹⁴ In the scene introducing Brandon, his emotional response matches the sensibility displayed in Marianne's song and shows that a communion of feelings is what leads him to read Marianne's character accurately. But the *mise-en-abyme* of sight, with the reversal between the unperceived observer and the watched character, cleverly rendering a pet theme of Jane Austen, also sets off Elinor's skill: she is the only one who sees him at that point and the subjective shot on Brandon watching Marianne shows her ability to perceive private emotions. The spectator is invited to read the Colonel's face with her and spot symptoms of

¹⁴ Another good example of the focus of the film on male emotional display could be the representation of Brandon's heart-rending anxiety during Marianne's illness (which Austen's Elinor reads as indicative of the extent of his love). Brandon is shown to be harrowed by feelings, waiting for news of Marianne's improvement. He looks oppressed, almost stifling, with his open mouth, and barely able to walk, his clothes in disarray with his opened waistcoat and his unfolded scarf. A heavy sense of enclosure is conveyed by the horizontal and vertical lines of the wooden counterpane on which he is leaning, while the high angle shot emphasizes his stifling powerlessness (1'49'17). Cheryl Nixon underlines how the male protagonists' love is exposed "through metonymic gift exchange" (36) – symbols of affections like Brandon's and Willoughby's bouquets or Edward's handkerchief "becom[e] a physical display" (37) – and with Edward's "verbal inadequacy" (38).

love, while Marianne's love song turns into a comment on his emotions, harbingering the pain of thwarted love.

Emma Thompson has been accused of Harlequinizing Austen in her script and cast choices, embellishing the love stories between Brandon and Marianne and between Edward and Elinor: "The casting of the film's heroes was instrumental in achieving the on-screen romancification of Austen's work" (Kaplan 180) and "[t]he affection that Hugh Grant's Edward Ferrars shows toward Elinor in the film also substantially embellishes the novel" (Kaplan 182). Cheryl Nixon shows the tendency to be common to most adaptations of Austen's novels in the 1990s: "The films endow Austen's courtship romance protagonists with emotional display emphasizing our current notions of 'romance' rather than late eighteenth-century understandings of courtship" (25). Casting Hugh Grant for the part of Edward certainly makes the hero a more compelling and attractive character than he originally was, especially with the fabricated scenes introducing him, presenting him as considerate, playful and generally more interesting, as we will see. The emotions displayed by the heroes however also provide opportunities for the other characters to exercise their acumen, as in the previous scene, while hinting at their superior skills as observers themselves. Indeed, various aspects of the detective theme, as they appear in the novel, seem to be crystallized in Thompson's Edward. Austen's character is portrayed as perceptive, easily unravelling the mystery of Marianne's love for Willoughby, but this aspect is magnified and elaborated on in Thompson and Ang Lee's adaptation.

Sensitive and considerate, the first thing Edward does is settle in the guest's room instead of Margaret's. He acts in the right manner because he is able to read the situation. He perceives the grief of the girls and their mother – he explains to his sister how the loss of their father explains the girls' attitude, as their lives will never be the same again (9'07) – and detects the awkward conflict between the two Mrs. Dashwoods. A much better observer than his sister, he is the one who spots the Atlas on the floor and finds Margaret. He knows how to handle the situation, helping the girl to hide from her sister-in-law and asking Elinor instead to come and fetch her. Better understanding than Elinor herself how Margaret's mind works, he is the one who comes up with a little ploy which draws the girl out of her hiding place. As in Austen's novel, proficiency as an observer and interpreter is indissolubly linked with a fine sensibility. In Nixon's words, Edward "proves his extraordinary powers of perception and sympathy" (36). This perceptiveness is again and again conveyed by a use of reactions shots enhancing Edward's response with close shots displaying his emotions, as he looks puzzled (8'31), surprised and embarrassed (8'13) or relieved (8'24).

His ability to share the other's feelings and viewpoints and to discover the truth is further suggested by Ang Lee's use of doors, doorways and thresholds. When Edward is first introduced to the family, he positions himself in front of a door framing his figure as he comes to a halt (8'05). This shot prefigures his role in the following scenes, where he is shown constantly hovering in between doors, while his place in the middle, between the two Mrs. Dashwoods, foreshadows his attempts at mediating the conflict between the two branches of the family. The fact that Elinor is in the foreground, standing out with her white dress, also suggests that she is one whose eyes are the most drawn to his framed figure, where all the characters' glances converge.

As Nora Stovel claims, "Thompson and Lee make excellent use of the architecture of the stately homes employed for settings, including effective use of windows and doors, hallways and vistas as framing devices" (Stovel). This emphasis on the period house is typical of mannerist period drama. Ang Lee however also fully exploits the potential of the place to mark the boundary between the public and the private. The double doors, laying emphasis on thresholds, are used to picture Edward's increasing intimacy with Elinor. When he comes to tell her where Margaret is hidden, he is first shot in front of the closed door, knocking politely. He then opens it, interrupting a private conversation between Elinor, Marianne and their mother about their financial limitations and the choice of a new house. As he lingers in the doorway, waiting for her, he gets a peep into their secret sorrows and difficulties and his superior position, as he is standing above the seated women, is related to his discovery of their secret, of the true state of affairs (10'13).

Another shot presents him hovering in between two doors, hesitating to meddle in Elinor's attempt to draw Margaret out, his figure once again framed by the doorway (10'34). The second door is slightly ajar this time and Edward no longer stays on the threshold but fully enters the room, as the Dashwood family is opening up to him, unwittingly letting him into their secrets. As doors begin to open, the Dashwood sisters can be said to be wearing "windows in their bosoms" enabling him to gain an intimate knowledge of their thoughts and feelings and it is at that point, leaving the dark doorway to step into the light of the library, that he finds the solution to gently make Margaret reveal herself.

The scene adding the final touch to this visual representation of his growing intimacy with Elinor is Edward's gradual discovery of the heroine's emotions as she watches Marianne play her father's favourite music on the pianoforte. The scene begins with an extreme long shot of Edward, appearing in the back within the multiple frames within the frame of a succession of doors, all wide open, and made quite clear by a very great depth of field

(12'37). As in the scene depicting Brandon's first entrance into Sir John's place, the extreme long shot makes Edward look lost, overwhelmed by the place, all the more so as he seems hesitant, repeatedly looking over his shoulder. He then comes closer and closer to the camera, crossing the thresholds, one by one, until he goes through the door in the foreground and turns to our right (12'54). As in the scene with Brandon, this movement implies a gradual focus on Edward's emotions. Again, the music played by Marianne seems to be drawing him in. The fact that her piano playing is a means for her to express her sensibility prepares us for emotional display, a recurrent feature in the film as the sound of the piano becomes a leitmotiv ushering disclosures of feelings, and the choice of the music is particularly suited to what Edward will discover: the girls' grief over the loss of their father. However, when a shoulder shot gradually unveils the scene, we discover not only Marianne, barely distinguishable, in spite of the great depth of field, at the end of yet another room, but Elinor, leaning on the doorframe and watching Marianne. There is again a frame within the frame: Marianne is visible through the doorway but Elinor herself is also framed by pillars, unwittingly offering herself to the view of Edward (13'04).

The crossing of thresholds becomes then a metaphor for the gradual discovery of Elinor's, not Marianne's, heart and sensibility: the following close shot on her displays intimate emotions, private tears which she then tries to stop. Marianne is not the one Edward is focusing on: she is now blurred with the shallow depth of field (13'13). The *mise-en-abyme* of sight suggests that Edward and Elinor bond over their perception of Marianne. This is further suggested when he joins her in the doorway, which comes to symbolize their shared perspective (14'01). Not only does Edward gain access to Elinor's heart, but he also gets to see through her eyes.

Spying through doors and windows: good and bad observers in Ang Lee's film

This use of the door or the window as representative of a character's view is recurrent in the film, revealing the characters' proficiency as observers unravelling the others' secrets. As Jacques Aumont states, the frame of the screen can be associated with a window and embodies a particular viewpoint.¹⁵ Added frames within the frame then tend to underline that viewpoint. In Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility*, there are repeated scenes depicting characters

¹⁵See Aumont: « Le cadrage est donc l'activité du cadre, sa mobilité potentielle, le glissement interminable de la fenêtre à laquelle il est assimilé, dans tous les modes de l'image représentative fondés sur une référence à un œil, à un regard, même désincarné.» « [Il y a] incarnation d'un regard dans le cadrage » : « La question est alors de savoir à qui appartient ce regard : au producteur de l'image, à l'appareil, ou, dans les formes narratives de l'image (spécialement au cinéma), à une construction déjà imaginaire, à un personnage. »

watching other characters through open windows or doors, often commenting on their relations, as when the two Mrs. Dashwoods argue about the prospect of Edward marrying Elinor (20'50) while watching them walk down the alley (21'17). Three scenes more specifically contrast Elinor's and Mrs. Dashwood's skills as observers. The first is when Elinor catches Willoughby in the act of cutting Marianne's lock. In Austen's text, Margaret is the witness who reports what she sees to Elinor. Thompson and Lee use this particular scene to display the heroine's powers of observation. The use of the open door to frame the little scene between Marianne and Willoughby (48'52) puts us with Elinor in the situation of a voyeur, discovering an intimate moment displaying the impropriety of the characters' conduct. The full shot contributes to that impression, further turning them into a spectacle, highlighting what Laura Mulvey calls their "to-be-looked-at-ness" (10). Elinor, however, is the only one who witnesses it and her mother's ineptitude as an observer is pointed out in the medium shot contrasting the two women's eyelines (48'48). Looking away, Mrs. Dashwood is unaware of what is taking place in her own house.

After Willoughby's unexpected and abrupt departure, a scene presents Elinor and Mrs. Dashwood, trying to disentangle the mysterious scene they have just witnessed. Elinor first stands in the doorway, in a full shot, giving her take on the situation, starting an analysis of Willoughby's behaviour (1'00'33). She then slowly enters and comes to sit down in front of Mrs. Dashwood (1'01'33). Typically, Elinor is facing the window as she is investigating and enjoining her mother to ask Marianne directly about her relation with Willoughby, while Mrs. Dashwood, reluctant to pry, has been sitting with her back to the window from the beginning.

The counterpart to this scene is to be found after Marianne's illness, in a scene created by Thompson: Colonel Brandon is reading to Marianne on the lawn in front of the house while Elinor and her mother are indoors. A medium shot of the two women sitting near the window shows them again to be looking in opposite directions (1'54'31) and their positions mirror the previous scene: Mrs. Dashwood is sitting with her back to the window, engrossed in her embroidery and Elinor is watching Brandon and Marianne, who can be clearly perceived within the frame of the window which, again, comes to represent Elinor's wonderful perceptiveness: the play on light and shadow further presents her as the hidden detective uncovering a secret. And once again, she is – with the spectator – the only witness to this telling scene.

As the mother comments that Colonel Brandon is not as dashing as Willoughby but has a more pleasing countenance because there was always a something in his eyes that she didn't like, a certain dose of irony can be felt since she is being represented as unable to

perceive key scenes. Furthermore, the film has shown her to be in raptures whenever Willoughby was present and the parallel with the previous scene at the window reminds the spectator of her unwillingness, at the time, to see evil in Willoughby. Elinor is the one pictured as the fine observer and the irony of the situation is further emphasized by her silent smile (1'54'38).¹⁶

Edward and Colonel Brandon might be more compelling in the film but in Austen's novel they are also, with Elinor, the only two other good detectives and Lee and Thompson's adaptation tends to emphasize that aspect, presenting them both, like Elinor, as observers who better decode signs thanks to their ability to feel and sympathize. And though the need to channel that sympathy in a rational "method of understanding" becomes less visible with the importance lent to what Nixon calls "male emotional display", yet Thompson and Lee do manage to convey Austen's ironical treatment of her characters' viewpoints, which is no small feat.

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¹⁶ Julian North studies the adaptation of Austen's irony onto the screen but analyses it only in the relation between sense and sensibility. See North 42: "Much of the humour of the film adaptation, as of the novel, derives from an ironic critique of sensibility from the perspective of sense."

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