



## The Passion of Marianne Dashwood: Christian Rhetoric in *Sense and Sensibility*

ANNE RICHARDS

Anne Richards received her Ph.D. in rhetoric from Iowa State University and her B.A. in religious studies from Grinnell College. She recently published an essay in the interdisciplinary journal *Globalization*, on faith and agency among women from four world religions.

*The way Austen and her heroines seek to imitate Jesus is by learning the necessity of loving their enemies, turning their other cheek, denying themselves, fixing their faces on the heavenly Jerusalem, taking up their cross, and making the journey to the place of their metaphorical crucifixion. That place is the place of their atonement, their passion, their "death," their resurrection, and their triumph over the fallenness of "the world."*

—Jane Austen and Religion, *Michael Giffin*

### AUSTEN AND RELIGION

TAKING AS ITS STARTING POINT the question of whether Christian ideology plays a major role in Jane Austen's novels, this essay concludes, along with Michael Giffin's *Jane Austen and Religion: Salvation and Society in Georgian England*, that Austen "conducts her critique [of Georgian society] as a devout Christian believer" (2). Critics sympathetic to this view include Gary Kelly, who writes that "Austen's novels can be read as representing the protagonist's destiny according to an Anglican view of the human condition" (166), and Marilyn Butler, who labels Austen a "conservative Christian moralist" (164).

To many readers it may seem self-evident that Austen is a Christian writer. But Giffin observes that historical research and textual criticism in the Twentieth Century illuminated the religious turn of Austen's novels only

after the retreat of the academic study of English literature. Such study was, in Giffin's view, "explicitly or implicitly hostile to what one can loosely describe as the traditional western and Christian world-view" (2), and academic critics tended to accuse "those who did try to read [Austen's] novels from a philosophical or theological perspective . . . of either over-reading or misreading." His observation echoes that of Mary Augusta Austen-Leigh, Austen's great niece, who bemoaned the propensity of critics unsympathetic towards Anglicanism to misunderstand Austen's character and especially her religious sensibility. Austen-Leigh noted, for instance, that one French critic characterized Austen's temperament in a way "so mistaken as to be in some respects exactly the reverse of the truth" (93); in fact, Austen possessed a "piety which ruled her in life and supported her in death" (94). Among the many readers who missed this point was G. K. Chesterton, who believed Austen to be "supremely irreligious" (503; cited in Mudrick 150).<sup>1</sup>

Such a claim suggests a profound ignorance of Austen's life, at least. Austen's father, a "scholarly country vicar" (Brown 5), considered it his duty to inculcate in his children an appreciation of Anglicanism. Two of his sons became clergymen, and "[u]nder [his] guidance, Jane learnt to regard Christianity as a reasonable and practical doctrine which made sense in this world as well as offering hope for the next" (Collins xviii). Her life and thoughts were guided by the religious principles he had instilled in her, and the many prayers she composed for her family bespeak a humble devotion, e.g.,

May we now, and on each return of night, consider how the past day has been spent by us, what have been our prevailing thoughts, words and actions during it, and how far we can acquit ourselves of evil. Have we . . . disobeyed the commandments, have we neglected any known duty, or willingly given pain to any human being? Incline our hearts to ask these questions oh! God, and save us from deceiving ourselves by pride or vanity. (*Minor Works* 453–54)

By the standards of this century, Austen's every day was overfull of religious duties and rituals, and she developed, not surprisingly, "into an assiduous reader of sermons and a sharp critic of those she heard delivered from the pulpit" (Collins 52). Valerie Grosvenor Myer, who, like other biographers, believes that Austen's Christianity was "sincere" (236; see also James Austen-Leigh, Cecil, and Collins), notes that Austen especially approved of Bishop Sherlock's sermons, which "emphasized self knowledge."<sup>2</sup> She considered herself profoundly indebted to her own religious upbringing (Collins 236), as indicated by a prayer she composed which implored God "above all other

blessings . . . to quicken our sense of the value of that holy religion in which we have been brought up, that we may not, by our own neglect, throw away the salvation thou hast given us" (*Minor Works* 454). Like her life, her death was, for the time, an unremarkably pious one. According to Cecil, during the last stages of what probably was Addison's disease, "she fortified her spirit with frequent prayers and regular religious reading. One or other of her two clergymen brothers, James and Henry, used to read the service with her as an aid to devotion" (196). When informed late in July 1817 that she did not have long to live, she "took the news calmly but asked if she might have the Sacrament administered to her while she was still able to realize its full significance" (198). Her sister-in-law Mary, who nursed the invalid faithfully, reported to a relative that Austen was "resigned and composed, a believing Christian" (Myer 235). Her final words, delivered to Cassandra, were "Pray for me, oh pray for me!" (Cecil 198). At Austen's request, she was buried in Winchester Cathedral. In short, it is consistent with the evidence of her life and death to assert that Austen was "a devout Anglican who [accepted] the canonical truths presented in Jewish and Christian scripture, and who [assented] to the theological truths presented in the *Book of Common Prayer*" (Giffen 162).

Many twentieth-century scholars, however, have "questioned the relevance of Austen's religion to her fictional art" (Kelly 154). For instance, in an exchange of letters in the *Times Literary Supplement* of January and February 1944, Q. D. Leavis argues that "Austen's personal beliefs could only interest the literary critic if they were manifested in the novels." In the same vein, Laurence Lerner (1967) states that "however pious Austen the person may have been, Austen the novelist did not believe in God, because 'a belief or a value only matters artistically if it is artistically present' in the writer's work" (20, cited in Kelly). As the current essay will attempt to demonstrate, Austen's confidence in the spiritual hope cherished by her parents, and her admiration for behavior reflecting Christian morality, are evident in the themes, imagery, and narrative structure of *Sense and Sensibility*.

Wayne Booth attributes to the character "Jane Austen" generosity, penetrating judgment, tenderness, impartiality, an ability to see into the heart, morality, and wisdom (265)—all qualities associated with the Christian God. Indeed, Booth considers "Jane Austen" a "perfect" character:

When we read [*Emma*] we accept [Austen] as representing everything we admire most. She is as generous as Knightley; in fact, she is a shade more penetrating in her judgment. She is as subtle and witty as Emma would like to think herself. Without being senti-

mental she is in favor of tenderness. She is able to put an adequate but not excessive value on wealth and rank. She recognizes a fool when she sees one, but unlike Emma she knows that it is both immoral and foolish to be rude to fools. She is, in short, a perfect human being, within the concept of perfection established by the books she writes. (265)

Christian ideology provides a foundation on which Austen constructs this ethos and is qualified to mete punishment, to bestow reward, and to survey the world with a confident detachment unlooked for in an impoverished, dependent second daughter of a country parson. In this regard, Austen follows the tradition of Margaret Fell and may be seen as a forerunner of writers such as Charlotte and Anne Brontë, and Margaret Fuller and Louisa May Alcott.

Kelly writes that the plots of Austen's novels are "consistent with an Anglican reading of human history as a form of romance journey in which an omniscient yet benevolent deity presides over a historical plot of human error, fall, and redemption by both free will and grace, and which instructs the reader to hope for and aspire to redemption" (165). In the absence of Austen's staunch faith, there would have been no "benevolent diety" of the novels as Kelly intuitively and no "perfect" "Jane Austen" as Booth constructs her. Her spiritual confidence sets her narratives apart from those of Modern novelists such as Henry James (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* passim) and certainly helps account for her enduring popularity. In addition to being a sublime stylist, ironist, and dramatist, Austen deftly conveys the certitude "God's in His heaven: All's right with the world."

Some have ascribed to Austen's novels an overarching irony under which no ideology should be taken seriously. Prefacing *A Rhetoric of Irony* with an anecdote illustrating this misapprehension, Booth relates a discussion he has had with a student who is certain that *Pride and Prejudice* is ironic through and through. Assertions of this type "raise something of a problem," Booth explains, for they indicate "a world in which many critics insist on the value of multiple readings, on the 'open-endedness' of all ironic literature, and on the insecurity, or even relativity, of all critical views" (3). Eschewing this assumption of radical postmodern critique, Booth argues that although an author uses irony episodically within a novel, that novel may yet contain a "sincere" message that ultimately prevails over irony.

Having sketched the likelihood that Austen was a devout Anglican, this essay will examine the subtle ways in which Austen infuses *Sense and Sensibility* with Christian ideology by manipulating theme, imagery, and plot.

## Christianity and *Sense and Sensibility*

### THEME

The main characters of *Sense and Sensibility* are believable admixtures of those traits named in the novel's title. Yet there is one place in which individuals are either "sense" or "sensibility" characters—and that is the mind of Marianne Dashwood. Marianne denies as a matter of course the sensibility, and thus the humanity, of any person who is not a convert to her Romantic cult, who does not feel about feeling precisely as she does. The novel's title, then, depicts Marianne's *Weltanschauung*. By separating herself emotionally from the vast majority of her family and acquaintances, whom she believes cannot feel, Marianne disregards the foundational Christian commandment—love of neighbor, or charity.

For their lack of sensibility, Marianne harshly judges nearly everyone she knows. She tells her mother that she does not believe Edward Ferrars capable of emotion and states, "It would have broke my heart to hear him read with so little sensibility. Mama, the more I know of the world, the more I am convinced that I shall never see a man whom I can really love. I require so much!" (18). She finds fault with Edward's personal appearance insofar as she believes it reflects insensitivity: "His eyes want all that spirit, that fire, which at once announce virtue and intelligence. And besides this; I am afraid, Mama, he has no real taste . . ." (17). She repeats the accusation of Colonel Brandon: "He has neither genius, taste nor spirit," she pronounces. "His understanding has no brilliancy, his feelings no ardour, and his voice no expression" (51). Mrs. Jennings, according to Marianne, "cannot feel. Her kindness is not sympathy; her good nature is not tenderness" (201). Marianne even suggests that her sister lacks emotional depth: "Elinor has not my feelings," she tells her mother, and "therefore she may overlook [Edward's dullness], and be happy with him" (18). For Marianne, Marianne is the measure of all things:

With excellent abilities and an excellent disposition, [she] was neither reasonable nor candid. She expected from other people the same opinions and feelings as her own, and she judged of their motives by the immediate effect of their actions on herself. (201–02)

On first glance, Marianne loves and respects only her mother and Willoughby, but actually, Marianne loves and respects only herself. "The resemblance between her and her mother was strikingly great" (6), and in the final analysis any compliment Marianne pays her mother's sensibility or

nobility of spirit has its source in what she admires most in herself. Marianne's egocentrism is clear in her creation of the fantasy of Willoughby, ultimately an extension of her self-love. "I could not be happy," says Marianne, "With a man whose taste did not in every point coincide with my own. He must enter into all my feelings; the same books, the same music must charm us both" (17). The two young people have a "general conformity of judgment in all that related to either" (47), but it is clear that this conformity is not authentic: Marianne demands compliance, and Willoughby is enamored enough to ensure it:

[Marianne's] favorite authors were brought forward and dwelt upon with so rapturous a delight, that any young man of five and twenty must have been insensible indeed, not to become an immediate convert to the excellence of such works, however disregarded before. Their taste was strikingly alike. The same books, the same passages were idolized by each—or, if any difference appeared, it lasted no longer than till the force of her arguments and the brightness of her eyes could be displayed. He acquiesced in all her decisions [and] caught all her enthusiasms. (47)

Although Marianne has "scarcely allowed sorrow to exist but with [herself]" (346), she awakens morally at the end of the novel and no longer imagines herself separated from the rest of humanity by an extraordinary sensibility. Because she is a character of "sense" as well as "sensibility," and because her "illness [makes her] think" (345), she is capable of reform. One example may suffice to illustrate the transformation wrought in Marianne's attitude towards her own and others' sensibilities after her illness. When Marianne learns from Elinor of Willoughby's arrival at the Palmers' and of his confession, she does not seek encouragement "in the violence of her affliction" (7), nor does she consider herself only, regarding the matter. Rather, she considers first the feelings of her mother:

A thousand inquiries sprung up from her heart, but she dared not urge one. . . . As soon as they entered the house, Marianne, with a kiss of gratitude, and these two words just articulate through her tears, "Tell Mama," withdrew from her sister and walked slowly upstairs. Elinor would not attempt to disturb a solitude so reasonable as what she now sought. (348)

Marianne tells Elinor that "the future must be [her] proof. . . . [her] feelings shall be governed and [her] temper improved. They shall no longer worry others, not torture [herself]" (347). Evidence that Marianne's illness and

transformation are meant to be understood in terms of a rebirth in Christ appears in Austen's use of religious imagery and allusion throughout the novel, especially in narrating the heroine's involvement with Willoughby.

#### IMAGERY

Willoughby personifies spiritual ruin, and Austen signifies this by her use of Christian imagery in relating his story. To the extent that self-love corrupts him, Willoughby represents one of the moral alternatives facing Marianne. Because he is addicted to pleasure, he has chosen his god, and it is Mammon. His one distress is his fettered estate; he has no inkling of his spiritual bankruptcy, and he cherishes a faith that "the death of [his] old cousin, Mrs. Smith, [is] to set [him] free" (320). When this relation does not die, he abandons Marianne, whom he adores, for Miss Grey, whom he despises. The fact that he has leagued himself with the devil is the basis of the imagery he uses to describe to Elinor his last meeting with Marianne:

"What a sweet figure I cut. What an evening of agony it was! Marianne, beautiful as an angel, on one side, calling me Willoughby in such a tone!—O God—holding out her hand to me, asking me for an explanation with those bewitching eyes fixed in such speaking solicitude on my face! And Sophia, jealous as the devil, on the other hand looking all that was—well, it does not signify; it is over now." (327)

When Elinor sees Willoughby for that last time, she starts "back with a look of horror at the sight of him," obeying "the first impulse of her heart in turning instantly to quit the room" (317). Willoughby prevails on her to listen and throughout his speech utters the word *God* four times; *the devil*, twice; *soul*, three times; *heart*, six times; *guilty*, twice; *blessed*, twice; and also *diabolical*, *saint*, *heaven*, *faith*, *temptation*, and *atonement*. Like Marianne, Willoughby has been called on to make the moral choice, but he chooses darkness. Indeed, the only certain knowledge the reader gains from his confession is that he regrets he is no longer happy and that Marianne is welcome to continue her relationship with him now that he is married.

Marianne's moral journey, too, is punctuated by Christian imagery. When Marianne first meets Willoughby, she is—as the reader learns in an incidental conversation—on "High Church Down" (60). She is running to her family's cottage when she trips and sprains her ankle. "There, exactly there," she tells Elinor, "On that projecting mound—there I fell; and there I first saw Willoughby" (344). As the reader infers from the story of the young

Eliza, from the moment of meeting him, Marianne has been in danger of slipping from her adolescent self-absorption into his hedonism. Her impetuosity places her at especial risk.<sup>3</sup>

Marianne falls, but she is also resurrected. For Austen's active protagonists, writes Kelly, "the turning point is an act of self-abnegation or humility that could be described as Christian and that seems to occur against the run of the plot and thus to be providential, or the effect of grace" (163). After Marianne contracts an infection during the Easter season, it seems she will not live, but despite the failure of the doctor's medicines and a prolonged fever, she revives. Immediately after Willoughby's exit, Elinor returns to Marianne's room to find her sister "just awaking [from unconsciousness], refreshed by so long and sweet a sleep to the extent of [Elinor's] hopes" (333). What follows is the unveiling of a remarkable change in Marianne. Her emotions have become "too natural . . . to raise anything less tender than pity" in Elinor. Marianne has "'scarcely allowed sorrow to exist but with [herself]" (346), but her "'illness has made [her] think'" (345), and she repents of her former behavior:

"Long before I was enough recovered to talk, I was perfectly able to reflect. I considered the past: I saw in my own behavior, since the beginning of our acquaintance with him last autumn, nothing but a series of imprudences towards myself and want of kindness to others. I saw that my own feeling had prepared my sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to the grave. . . . I wonder at my recovery—wonder that the very eagerness of my desire to live, to have time for atonement to my God, and to you all, did not kill me at once." (345–46)

The language Marianne uses to describe how she envisions her new life with Elinor is, like Willoughby's speech to Elinor, noteworthy for the denseness of its Christian imagery:

"When the weather is settled, and I have recovered my strength," she said, "we will take long walks together every day. We will walk to the farm at the edge of the [High Church] down, and see how the children go on; we will walk to Sir John's new plantation and Barton Cross, and the Abbeyland; and we will often go to the ruins of the Priory, and try to trace its foundations as far as we are told they once reached. I know we shall be happy." (343)

Marianne vows that henceforth Willoughby's memory "'shall be regulated, it



shall be checked by religion, by reason, by constant employment” (347), and that she will “live solely for [her] family” (347). Marianne’s illness is much more than a physical episode: it is a spiritual rebirth.

#### PLOT

In addition to the general theme of the need to cultivate charity, and the religious imagery used in conjunction with Marianne’s illness and her relationship with Willoughby, there is at least one other aspect of *Sense and Sensibility* that points to the centrality of Marianne’s Christian journey. The action of the novel can be seen as conforming to one pattern; and this pattern, as having its point of reference in her “rebirth” (see Figure).

The two sets of relationships mapped in Figure One mirror each other. Willoughby and Lucy Steele (A) are both avaricious: Willoughby is unusually handsome, and Robert’s objections aside, the Dashwood sisters must acknowledge Lucy’s “considerable beauty” (120). Willoughby and Lucy are eager, affectedly open communicators: “Long before [Willoughby’s first] visit concluded [with Marianne], they conversed with the familiarity of a long-established acquaintance” (47); similarly, Lucy early singles Elinor out as the target of an “easy and frank communication of her sentiments” (127). Willoughby calculates that the death of his aunt, and later Miss Grey, will secure his fortune and freedom; and Lucy, that the death of Mrs. Ferrars, and then the death of the incumbent at Norland, will secure hers. Finally, Lucy and Willoughby are both associated with frivolity during the Christmas holidays. Willoughby dances from eight to four on the previous Christmas, and Lucy and her sister are “prevailed on to stay nearly two months at the Park, and assist in the due celebration of that festival which requires a more than ordinary share of private balls and large dinners to proclaim its importance” (152).

On first glance, Miss Grey and Robert (B) may seem to have little in common, but in fact they share their most salient characteristic: nondescription. Miss Grey is “a very fashionable-looking young woman” (176) whom even Mrs. Jennings has nothing to say about. “I never heard any harm of her,” that good woman tells Elinor, “Indeed, I hardly ever heard her mentioned” (194). Robert, too, is a person of fashion and inconsequence. When the Dashwood sisters are introduced to him, his broad stare “imprinted on Elinor the remembrance of a person of strong, natural, sterling insignificance, though adorned in the first style of fashion” (220, 221).<sup>4</sup>

The similarities between Colonel Brandon and Elinor (D) are clear. Nei-

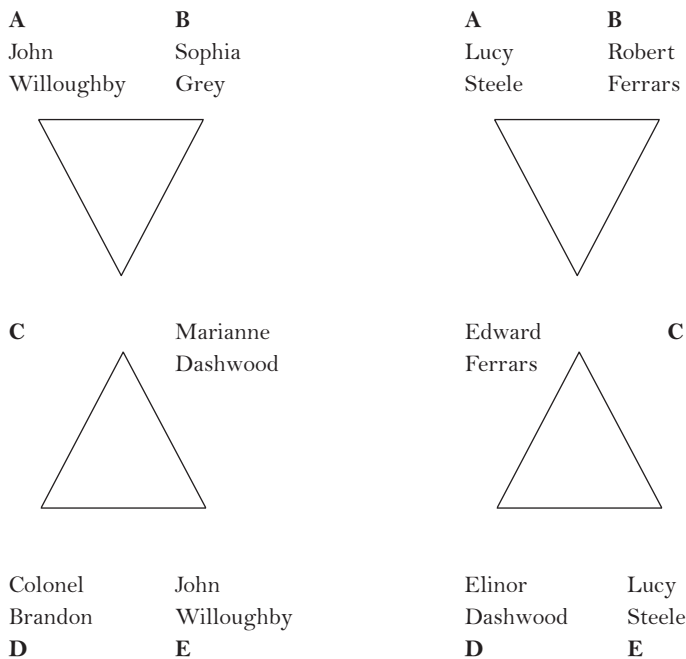


Figure. The centrality of Marianne and Edward to the plot of *Sense and Sensibility*.

ther character ever entertains high hopes of marrying the beloved. Even before Edward's engagement to Lucy is generally known, Elinor is "far from depending on that result of his preference for her, which her mother and sister still considered as certain" (22); and even after Willoughby has married, Mrs. Dashwood tells Elinor that Colonel Brandon thinks "'Marianne's affection too deeply rooted for any change in it under a great length of time, and even supposed her heart again free, is too diffident of himself to believe, that which such a difference of age, and disposition, he could ever attach her'" (338). Despite Elinor's and Edward's realistic appraisals, Elinor cannot keep herself from being secretly and painfully in love with Edward, nor can Colonel Brandon prevent himself from loving Marianne. Most important, both Elinor and Colonel Brandon personify charity, scrupulously performing "'with gentleness and forbearance'" the virtues that Marianne sets for herself upon reformation: "'the civilities, the lesser duties of life'" (347).

Marianne and Edward (C) are the only positive characters who are central to the lives of the others and consequently occupy the focal points of the diagrams. Marianne has been mistakenly attached to Willoughby, for she believes he is a much better man than he is; and Edward has been mistakenly attached,

as well—not simply because he has made a promise he must keep but because, like Marianne, he has made an egregious error in judging character:

Though his eyes had long been opened, even before his acquaintance with Elinor began, to [Lucy's] ignorance and a want of liberality in some of her opinions, they had been equally imputed to him by her want of education; and till her last letter reached him he had always believed her to be a well-disposed, good-hearted girl, and thoroughly attached to himself. Nothing but such a persuasion could have prevented his putting an end to [the] engagement. (336, 337)

As the plot spins out, the romantic statuses of Edward and Marianne both remain secret. Edward is engaged to Lucy although no one realizes this initially, and Marianne is not engaged to Willoughby although no one realizes this initially, either. The “engagements” end similarly: Edward and Marianne both receive callous letters from the persons they once were attached to, informing them that the attachments are either obsolete or fictitious. When Willoughby writes to Marianne, he returns her letters to him and a lock of her hair; when Lucy writes to Edward, she requests that he burn her letters to him, “but the ring, with my hair, you are very welcome to keep” (365).

Furthermore, Marianne is abandoned for Miss Grey, and Edward is abandoned for Robert (A–B). The choices are not remarkable: Willoughby has chosen Miss Grey for her money, and Lucy has chosen Robert for his. Edward's financial position is as attractive to Lucy as Marianne's is to Willoughby, and both replacements are inferior (B–C). When Lucy abandons Edward, his conscience is free to choose Elinor; when Willoughby abandons Marianne, her heart is free to choose Colonel Brandon (C–D).

Willoughby and Colonel Brandon, like Lucy and Elinor, are foils (D–E). Colonel Brandon and Willoughby are jealous of each other, as are Elinor and Lucy. Colonel Brandon suffers because he knows the truth about Willoughby; and Elinor, because she knows the truth about Lucy. Colonel Brandon reveals the history of the younger Eliza to Elinor, summarizing: “[Willoughby's] character is now before you—expensive, dissipated and worse than both. Knowing all this, as I have known it many weeks, guess what I must have felt on seeing your sister as fond of him as ever” (120). Elinor does not believe that Edward can ever be happy with Lucy. “Could he, were his affection for herself out of the question, with his integrity, delicacy, and well-informed mind, be satisfied with a wife like her—illiterate, artful, and selfish?” and she weeps “for him more than for herself” (140).

Finally, Willoughby confesses that he had no real love for Marianne

when he engaged her regard, and evidently Lucy had no more for Edward when she engaged his honor (C–E).

Austen's structuring of the main action in this manner is not an artifice but points to the centrality of the theme of Marianne's rebirth as Christian penitent. Marianne's conflict with Willoughby is a private battle symbolizing a universal one. The conflict between Edward and Lucy, however, is not internal and has no universal implications. Edward's release from Lucy's power is the result of circumstance alone. And Austen is remarkably clear about this, giving Edward a mock salvation at the hands of his mother, and thereby once again referring the reader to the novel's true salvation story—Marianne's.

After a proper resistance on the part of Mrs. Ferrars, . . . Edward was admitted to her presence, and pronounced again to be her son. . . .

. . . For many years of her life she had two sons, but the crime and annihilation of Edward, a few weeks ago, had robbed her of one; the similar annihilation of Robert had left her for a fortnight without any; and now, by the resuscitation of Edward, she had one again. . . .

In spite of being allowed once more to live, however, he did not feel the continuance of his existence secure, till he revealed his present engagement; for the publication of that circumstance, he feared might give a sudden turn to his constitution, and carry him off as rapidly as before. (373)

Edward has never been in danger of alienating a moral God; he has been in danger only of offending his mother. That his mother resurrects him is another circumstance, another exteriority, for which Edward bears no responsibility and harbors little concern. When told that he should write to her and beg her forgiveness, he refuses, saying, "I am grown neither humble nor penitent by what has passed" (372). But Marianne's rebirth is deeply heartfelt: she is painfully eager "to have time for atonement to [her] God" (346). "My spirit is humbled," she asserts, "my heart amended" (347).

The actions of Elinor, Robert, and Lucy find their common reference in Edward, just as the actions of Willoughby, Miss Grey, and Colonel Brandon find theirs in Marianne. But because of Edward's moral maturity, the novel's action strains for the illumination of that struggle taking place in Marianne's young and passionate heart. *Sense and Sensibility* is a novel about Marianne Dashwood—not for the reasons Romantically inclined readers might like to give, but because Marianne's *Christian* passion is the focus of the dramatic action of the novel.

This essay has supported Giffen's claim that Austen "is a Christian humanist, not a secular humanist—she is an Anglican author who writes Christian stories" (27). And, like Giffen, I have suggested that if Austen's "readers, her biographers, and her literary critics—fail to grasp the centrality of that fact and do not rise to the challenge that it presents to reading and biography and criticism, then we will misunderstand her life and misread her novels at their most profound level of interpretation." A close reading of *Sense and Sensibility* indicates that critical interest in Austen's religious ideology is appropriate, for Marianne's "Christian romance" provides the novel its focus. Marianne is the one character whose worldview embraces the false dilemma of the novel's title, the one character who walks safely through a forest of religious imagery, and the one character who develops internally and around whose pilgrimage Austen structures her story.

## NOTES

1. Chesterton expounded that Austen's "very virtues glitter with the cold sunlight of the great secular epoch between medieval and modern mysticism." Perhaps his conversion to Roman Catholicism left him unsympathetic towards certain Humanist and Enlightenment elements of the Anglican worldview.

2. Jane's familiarity with the ecclesiastical profession extended far beyond her father and the Bishop. In *Jane Austen: The Parson's Daughter* (1998), Irene Collins suggests the substantial role that clergymen played in the author's experience.

Her maternal grandfather and her great uncle had been clergymen; so were her godfather, one of her uncles, two of her brothers and four of her cousins. Her sister became engaged to a clergyman and of the young men who are known or believed to have been Jane's suitors three were clergy. She was acquainted with a great many other clergymen, for they were thick on the ground in rural areas, where the rest of the population was small. . . . Jane's published correspondence alone mentions over ninety clergymen with whom she was acquainted. (*xvi*)

Austen was as knowledgeable about the clerical life as an unmarried woman of her time was likely to be.

3. Note that the syllables of her name, spoken backwards, read "would dash and marry."

4. The reader, incidentally, first meets Robert in Mr. Gray's shop.

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