Disciplining Love
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CHAPTER 3

Austen’s Sensitive Men

Willoughby, Brandon, and the Regulation of Sensation

I could not be happy 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. . . . Mama, the more I know of the world, the more am I convinced that I shall never see a man whom I can really love. I require so much! (Marianne Dashwood in Austen, Sense and Sensibility 14–15)

That is what I like; that is what a young man ought to be. Whatever be his pursuits, his eagerness in them should know no moderation, and leave him no sense of fatigue. (Marianne Dashwood in Austen, Sense and Sensibility 38)

The relation to self that constitutes the end of the conversion and the final goal of all the practices of the self still belongs to an ethics of control. (Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self 65)

Marianne Dashwood critiques the rational mode of masculinity adhered to by men like Henry Tilney and the disciplined model of masculinity followed by men of restraint like Edward Ferrars, and she instead announces her expectations of a male lover who remains inexhaustibly passionate. Marianne wants men to dismiss the restrictive structures of modern society and feel power(fully). Marianne encourages men to embrace and vocalize their emotions and energies, and for the young heroine such explicit passion is an essential character trait of her idealized lover. Her reflections strongly influence our readings of her two suitors: the mature Colonel Brandon and the youthful Willoughby. Both Brandon and Willoughby are well-schooled in the tradition of male sensibility, and they demonstrate their susceptibility to feeling throughout the narrative. Austen’s Sense and Sensibility (1811) relates the story of each man’s romantic pursuit of Marianne, but it also dramatizes the dangers that confront sensitive men; moreover, the novel documents the efforts of these men to regulate their emotions and order their aesthetics of
existence by adhering to models of male behavior prescribed by post-Revo-

lutionary discursive forces. Brandon has learned to temper his sentimentality
by reverting to Burke’s conception of a modern chivalric man; Willoughby
painfully discovers that he, too, must limit his volatile passions, but he
instead relies upon Enlightenment principles of rationality to mitigate the
risks of his impulsive behavior. Most importantly, Austen dramatizes how
both sensible male characters must abandon the role of the male lover to
secure their hegemonic social/sexual subjectivities. Brandon and Willoughby
craft socially functional aesthetics of existence, yet Austen’s text illustrates
how their accomplishments depend upon their control of emotions.

Austen’s presentation of these men’s struggles to regulate their sens-
ibilities resembles the Hellenic process of self-formation that Foucault
introduces in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure.* Foucault
indicates that the success of the ancient Greek world depended upon the
individual’s understanding of “the relationship with the self that enabled
a person to keep from being carried away by the appetites and pleasures,
to maintain a mastery and superiority over them . . . to remain free from
interior bondage to the passions, and to achieve a mode of being that could
be defined by . . . the perfect supremacy of oneself over oneself” (31). This
efficient Greek system of self-discipline promoted a citizenry based upon
individual self-surveillance, including the supervision of irrational passions.
Brandon and Willoughby participate in a modern version of this method of
self-formation; and yet, there is an important distinction between Brandon
and Willoughby’s self-regulation and the ancient Greek practice. Foucault
points out that for the proper Greek man, the control of sensation actually
becomes a source of great pleasure “in which the relation to self takes the
form not only of a domination but also of an enjoyment without desire and
without disturbance” (*The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3* 68). Brandon and
Willoughby, however, discover that they must manage what Deleuze and
Guattari theorize as the diversity and unpredictability of love to ensure their
abilities to meet other standards for proper English masculinity; for Austen’s
modern English men, the discipline of their feelings promotes their social/
sexual regulation rather than their sensual pleasure.

Austen introduces both sensitive men following the Dashwoods’ move
to Barton Cottage, and we quickly discover that Colonel Brandon has
already regulated his susceptibility to sentiment. Sir John Middleton initially
describes the Colonel as the “only . . . gentleman there besides himself . . .
a particular friend who was staying at the park, but who was neither very
young nor very gay” (28). Austen echoes Sir John’s sketch of Brandon as a
stoic yet genteel man; she depicts her elder hero as “silent and grave,” add-
ing that “his appearance . . . was not unpleasing, in spite of his being in the
opinion of Marianne and Margaret an absolute old bachelor, for he was on the wrong side of five and thirty.” The narrator concludes that “though his face was not handsome his countenance was sensible, and his address was particularly gentlemanlike” (29). Austen’s narration highlights the maturity and reserve of Brandon, but it also suggests his extant sensibility; he is an older gentleman who has felt and experienced a diversity of sensations. And while he currently seems neither interested in nor capable of exposing such sensitivity, he has the knowledge and tact to listen attentively to Marianne’s music; he “heard her without being in raptures . . . and she felt a respect for him on the occasion, which the others had reasonably forfeited by their shameless want of taste” (30). Marianne appreciates Brandon’s refined sophistication, especially his sensitivity to musical pleasure, but she criticizes him for not appearing “animated enough to be in love” and adds that he “complain[s] of rheumatism. . . . the commonest infirmity of declining life” (31–32). She recognizes Brandon as a man of sensibility who has disciplined his emotions to such an extent that he can no longer experience erotic love. Indeed, the Colonel refrains from the destabilizing behavior of a male lover, and he is too old and rheumatic to perform the virile masculine behavior requested by Wollstonecraft and her followers; he instead reverts to the safety of Burke’s model of chivalric masculinity to order his aesthetic of existence.

Austen presents Willoughby, unlike Brandon, as both a virile man and a lover. The youthful suitor originally appears as a “gentleman carrying a gun, with two pointers playing round him.” When he observes Marianne’s fall, he “put down his gun and ran to her assistance.” He “offered his services, and perceiving that [Marianne’s] modesty declined what her situation rendered necessary, took her up in his arms without farther delay, and carried her down the hill” (35). Willoughby’s actions may resemble those of a romanticized chivalric hero coming to the rescue of the ailing maiden, but he also demonstrates his virility by exerting great physical strength and endurance. Austen notes his “manly beauty and more than common gracefulness,” and Marianne constructs him as an “equal to what her fancy had ever drawn for the hero of a favourite story.” 3 He is an impressive male specimen who makes a heroic entrance, “and he then departed, to make himself still more interesting, in the midst of a heavy rain” (36). Austen initially constructs Willoughby as a storybook hero: mysterious, handsome, and virile. The excitable heroine concludes, “Every circumstance belonging to him 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” (37). She immediately identifies Willoughby as the manifestation of her ideal man who remains physically powerful and emotionally unrestrained.
Sir John confirms many of Marianne’s quickly formed impressions of Willoughby. He dubs the young man “as good a kind of fellow as ever lived. . . . A very decent shot,” and declares “there is not a bolder rider in England” (37). Sir John’s remarks remind us of Willoughby’s superior physical skills: he knows how to ride and hunt, and he performs such activities in a bold manner. Sir John also informs us of Willoughby’s fondness for sensual and social activities by noting his ability to dance “from eight o’clock till four, without once sitting down” (38). He is a tireless dancer whom Marianne praises for his “perfect good-breeding,” his ability to unite “frankness and vivacity,” and his declaration that “of music and dancing he was passionately fond” (39–40). He pays her great attention while she recovers from her injuries, and the heroine learns that he is a great and passionate reader, leading her to conclude that “Willoughby was all that her fancy had delineated” in her earlier attempts to outline the ideal male companion. Willoughby amazingly appears to fulfill all of Marianne’s standards for an acceptable man, but Austen foreshadows the perilous social consequences of his impressive feat when Elinor notes that he “[slighted] too easily the forms of worldly propriety, he displayed a want of caution” (41–42). Willoughby may be an imposing man trained in the traditions of sensibility, but he has not curtailed his passions, and this lack of discipline encourages his involvement in desubjectifying amorous activities that engender dangerous sexual and social consequences. Austen establishes and ultimately traces an important distinction between Marianne’s admirers; while Brandon relies upon traditional chivalric behavior to organize his aesthetic of existence, Willoughby will eventually turn to rational principles to order his unstable social/sexual subjectivity.

And yet, Willoughby shows few rational tendencies early in the story. His love of sensation and his fervent disregard for customary behavior remind us of Montague, the maligned rake of Mary Hays’s feminist reform novel, Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796). Montague is “blown about by every gust of passion” and “had never given himself time to reason, to compare, to acquire principles”; Hays adds that Montague was “accustomed to feel, and not to reason” (37). Willoughby shares Montague’s faith in the infallible accuracy of sensory perceptions, and Austen’s male figure also too often neglects rational thought in favor of emotional urges. Willoughby acts impulsively, maintains no profession, and like many of the vilified male figures of Jacobin novels, shows little inclination toward assiduous behavior. Sir John informs the Dashwoods that “Mr. Willoughby had no property of his own in the country . . . he resided there only while he was visiting the old lady at Allenham Court, to whom he was related, and whose possessions he was to inherit” (37–38). Willoughby demonstrates no ambition to enhance
his standing in the modernizing nation through his own labor and instead prefers to trust in the beneficence of his aged aunt. He may be a striking young man, but he enjoys neither the direction of aspiring middle-class men nor the independence of rational male characters. Austen differentiates Willoughby from fictional men such as Henry Tilney and the many farmers of Jacobin novels who pursue industrious agricultural work rather than depending upon a familial inheritance. Willoughby is completely opposed to Enlightenment principles of progress, many of which were adopted by late-eighteenth-century feminist thinkers such as Wollstonecraft and Hays. Willoughby does not appear interested in achieving hegemonic security through his relations with women; rather, he experiences pleasures and sensations during his time with Marianne. Austen’s novel, however, ultimately illustrates how Willoughby must reconfigure his method of relating to/with women. He must embrace the advice of Wollstonecraft and Hays—specifically their insistences that men respect the rational capacity of women and dismiss the role of the lover within marriage—to ensure his participation in the emerging national community.

While Willoughby eventually sacrifices amorous activity for conjugal stability, Brandon has already relinquished the behavior of a lover. Elinor displays great concern for Brandon’s delicate constitution, especially in comparison to his youthful counterpart. She seriously questions “what could a silent man of five and thirty hope, when opposed by a very lively one of five and twenty” (42). Brandon appears too mild, with a reserve that “appeared rather the result of some oppression of spirits, than of any natural gloominess of temper,” to compete with the aggressive hunter for the young heroine’s attention. The Colonel has previously felt emotions, and although he is not “naturally” melancholic, he has learned to regulate his passions by adhering to the chivalric model of masculinity advocated by Burke. Willoughby claims that Brandon “is just the kind of man . . . whom every body speaks well of, and nobody cares about; whom all are delighted to see, and nobody remembers to talk to” (43). Willoughby’s comment suggests the social acceptability of a male like Brandon. He is a culturally approved man who causes no disturbance and garners no notice because he has constructed his aesthetic of existence in accordance with the specific requests of the post-Revolutionary discursive field. He appears to have all the essential characteristics of a proper English man—save a wife—with no prominent insufficiencies.

Despite Brandon’s hesitancy to pursue romantic love, he is nonetheless highly skilled at feeling and appreciating sensation. Willoughby may be more dramatic in his display of emotion, but Austen informs us that Brandon remains “on every occasion mindful of the feelings of others” (53).
He is reminiscent of the benevolent paternal figure of Ann Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), Armand La Luc, who is similarly described as “ever sensible to the sufferings of others” (258). Radcliffe claims that La Luc’s “mind was penetrating; his views extensive; and his systems . . . were simple, rational, and sublime” (245). Like La Luc, Brandon expresses empathy and compassion throughout the story; in addition, both men have panoramic minds and display a remarkable ability to accept both the laws of reason and sublime happenings. Elinor instructs Willoughby and her sister that the Colonel “has seen a great deal of the world; has been abroad; has read, and has a thinking mind.” She declares that she has “found him capable of giving me much information on various subjects” and notes that “he has always answered my inquiries with the readiness of good-breeding and good nature” (43). Elinor reconfigures the Colonel as an experienced and oft-consulted reference manual, and she concludes that he is “a sensible man, well-bred, well-informed, of gentle address . . . possessing an amiable heart” (44). Elinor correctly identifies the Colonel’s education and experience, as well as his training in both sensibility and chivalry; this background informs both his sensitivity and his sense of duty to others.

Brandon is especially concerned about his abandoned niece, Eliza, and when he receives news of her whereabouts, his interest in her welfare becomes paramount. Austen notes that he “changed colour, and immediately left the room” (54). The Colonel is sensually affected by the report of Eliza’s abandonment, but he quickly suppresses these passions and acts as a dutiful man. He cancels the party to Whitwell and departs for London, informing Willoughby and his other guests, “I cannot afford to lose one hour” (55). Brandon sincerely regrets both the abrupt nature of the day’s canceled event and his sudden exit, but he immediately begins his journey on horseback, after bowing silently to Marianne (56). The narrator emphasizes the Colonel’s chivalric behavior whenever he becomes emotionally overwrought; rather than allowing himself to become flushed with sentiment, he mounts his horse, heroically departs to save an endangered woman, and offers a humble bow to his would-be lady. Austen carefully distinguishes Brandon’s heroic performance from the actions of many obnoxiously chivalric men showcased in the fiction of the 1790s. For example, the Colonel is clearly distinct from Coke Clifton, the villain of Thomas Holcroft’s radical novel, *Anna St. Ives* (1792), who is devoted to “a high sense of fashionable honour” and “well acquainted with foreign manners” (5; 117). Unlike Clifton, Brandon is not a foolish practitioner of arcane French customs; the Colonel is a responsible man who maintains great compassion for Eliza and relies upon chivalric traditions to keep his masculinity structured. His journey to London is crucial to the development of the narrative because it precipi-
tates Willoughby’s mysterious departure from Barton, but it also illustrates how Marianne’s suitors revert to alternative models of male social/sexual subjectivity whenever their sensations become overwhelming. While Brandon relies upon ideals of duty to guide his actions, Willoughby is initially obsessed with pleasurable sensations promised by social activities such as the outing to Whitwell. The novel demonstrates how Brandon’s strategy promotes a model of masculinity better suited to stabilize English men, domestic settings, and the post-Revolutionary nation.

Following Brandon’s departure, Austen stresses the instability promoted by Willoughby’s libertine behavior; the young suitor provides Marianne with a horse and later captures a lock of her hair. Both incidents suggest Willoughby’s physical intimacy with the heroine: the gift of the horse recalls the unrestrained passion often associated with artistic renderings of the animal, and the shearing of Marianne’s hair certainly reminds us of a similarly aggressive man’s activity in Pope’s “Rape of the Lock” (49; 51). Austen’s young lover may be named after the rakish figure of Francis Burney’s *Evelina* (1778), but his courtship strategies resemble the undisciplined sentiments exhibited by William from Inchbald’s *Nature and Art* (1796). Inchbald claims that “William indeed was gallant, was amorous, and indulged his inclination to the libertine society of women”; she adds that William was “well versed in all the licentious theory” and “thought himself in love, because he perceived a tumultuous impulse cause his heart to beat, while his fancy fixed on a certain object, whose presence agitated yet more his breast” (41; 45). Like William, Willoughby is schooled in excessively romantic conduct, and he, too, quickly convinces himself of the sincerity of strong feelings derived from his experiences of physical sensations. Willoughby becomes even more forward in the absence of Mrs. Smith. He escorts Marianne, without an attendant, around what they presume to be his future home at Allenham. He acts as a confident lover, and while Marianne is undoubtedly exhilarated by Willoughby’s amorous performances, even the young heroine becomes concerned about his resources. As she reflects on the possibility of sharing Mrs. Smith’s house with her passionate lover, she “could easily conceive that marriage might not be immediately in their power; for though Willoughby was independent, there was no reason to believe him rich.” She knows that he “lived at an expense to which” his present income “could hardly be equal, and he had himself often complained of his poverty” (61). Marianne is aware of her lover’s financial limitations and the impossibility of their sudden marriage, but she remains convinced that Willoughby will be her lover, her husband, and a landed gentleman. And yet, Austen reveals that Willoughby is primarily a pleasure seeker who has little interest in the responsibilities of an English gentleman modeled by men such as Mr. Darcy and Mr. Knightley.
Willoughby may unwisely assume a level of future financial security, but he never announces an inheritance; and unlike Brandon, he shows no inclination to perform the social duties of the aristocratic gentleman, such as administering an estate and caring for dependents. Rather, Willoughby is enamored of the simplicity and charm of Barton Cottage. He insists that “not a stone must be added to its walls, not an inch to its size, if my feelings are regarded” (62). Willoughby appears much like Pierre de la Motte, the indebted fugitive of The Romance of the Forest, whom Radcliffe describes as “a man whose passions often overcame his reason, and, for a time, silenced his conscience” (2). Willoughby experiences a similar emotional engulfment, as he is incapable of accepting either the rationality of time or the mutability of human existence. He neither wants his friends nor their house to alter; he is attached sentimentally to Barton and implores, “Tell me that not only your house will remain the same, but that I shall ever find you and yours as unchanged as your dwelling; and that you will always consider me with the kindness which has made every thing belonging to you so dear to me” (63–64). He echoes Wordsworth’s desire to remember always “spots of time.” Willoughby wants to capture and continuously return to moments and people of great sensation. He appears to have little ambition for either the aristocratic life proposed by the discourses of Burke and his followers or the culture of merit and progress theorized by the Jacobins. While he has a strong admiration for the past, his nostalgia is not for a lost chivalric system and its noble man. Austen presents Willoughby as a passionate male who is fond of a simple lifestyle and frustrated by the conflicting desires of the modern English nation.

Austen’s narrative shatters Willoughby’s attempt to experience continuously the simple sensations aroused by his time at Barton. He is able to remain near this “spot” only a day longer; distraught with emotion, he informs the Dashwood family (after attempting to reveal the matter to Marianne) that “Mrs. Smith has this morning exercised the privilege of riches upon a poor dependent cousin, by sending me on business to London” (65). Willoughby’s explanation accentuates both his unstable social/sexual standing and the authoritative function of his female relation, whose influential power reminds us of the efforts of Wollstonecraft and other Enlightenment feminist thinkers to expand the social conception of women. Mrs. Smith employs her financial standing to affect Willoughby’s behavior, and as Phoebe Smith notes, she is specifically concerned with preventing “Willoughby from following the dictates of his heart to marry Marianne” (11). Mrs. Smith prompts her nephew to discipline his overwhelming passions for the heroine and concern himself with the “business” of developing a hegemonic social/sexual subjectivity through marriage. In leaving he declares, “I will
not torment myself any longer by remaining among friends whose society it is impossible for me now to enjoy.” Willoughby does not make a heroic exit like Brandon; instead, the young virile suitor exits pining of his suffering and indicting his aged female relation. Elinor notes this severe alteration in his manner and claims that his present actions are “so unlike a lover, so unlike himself” (66). Elinor’s remarks suggest both the common perception of Willoughby as a lover and the nascence of a significant alteration in his aesthetic of existence. Mrs. Smith compels him to leave Barton after she learns of his scandalous affair with the second Eliza; he no longer maintains strong passions for Miss Williams, and his abandonment of her and their newborn child exposes Willoughby’s improper training as a man of feeling. Austen illustrates how Willoughby must now dismiss his romantic passions for Marianne to acquire a socially sanctioned masculine subjectivity; modern England cannot allow its young men to act impulsively with fervent passion. Austen specifically demonstrates that he must address the dictates of Enlightenment feminist thought: Willoughby must establish a new appreciation for the social potential of women, relinquish his identity as a lover, and adopt rational principles to craft a nationally proper masculinity.

Austen foreshadows such a change in Willoughby’s emotional demeanor, but when Marianne travels to London she eagerly expects to encounter the same passionately exuberant man. The narrator notes that the heroine “was internally dwelling on the perfections of a man, of whose whole heart she felt thoroughly possessed, and whom she expected to see in every carriage which drove near their house” (121). While Austen’s narration reveals the excessively romantic attitude of Marianne, it also reminds us of the contradictory expectations for proper English masculinity that Willoughby must negotiate; he has traveled to London in accordance with the directives of Enlightenment and feminist writers for a man of reason, yet he is still idealized as a lover by the heroine. His actions in London reflect this tension as well as an impending change in his aesthetic of existence. He no longer behaves as a passionate and virile figure unconcerned with custom and propriety; the influence of Mrs. Smith and his own financial need have clearly forced him to reorder his sexuality in accordance with the desires of modern English society. While Brandon maintains regular contact with the Dashwood sisters, Willoughby’s endeavor to restructure his sexual subjectivity forces him to hide from the heroines. When he eventually encounters Marianne, after Elinor notices him in a crowded room of a London party, Austen indicates that “he immediately bowed, but without attempting to speak to her, or to approach Marianne, though he could not but see her” (152). He now tries to behave in a manner for which he had earlier rebuked Brandon: Willoughby would like to be noticed by all and approached by none.
Willoughby adopts the socially approved behavior of a reserved man who rehearses the customary chivalric niceties modeled by Henry Tilney, but Marianne, unlike Catherine Morland, refuses to allow such hackneyed propriety. She demands, “Good God! Willoughby, what is the meaning of this? Have you not received my letters? Will you not shake hands with me?” (152). She rebukes his disciplined emotions, but Willoughby, who now seeks social/sexual security, can no longer dismiss the stable models of hegemonic masculinity provided by codifying structures such as chivalry and reason. The narrator claims that Willoughby could not avoid confronting Marianne, “but her touch seemed painful to him, and he held her hand only for a moment. . . . all this time he was evidently struggling for composure.” Willoughby is still a man of feeling, but he will not permit himself the opportunity to enjoy or reciprocate physical sensations, especially previously felt sensations. He can only speak briefly to his former lover before he “turned hastily away with a slight bow and joined his friend” (153). Austen highlights Willoughby’s determination to regulate his powerful emotions with the order promised by the cold logic of an extreme rationalist; his decision to solidify his social/sexual subjectivity through marriage is a rational choice informed by business. Like Brandon, Willoughby will not be able to banish completely his propensity to feel, but the narrator records his attempts to strategically manage his sensations.

The London scenes also document a different but equally difficult struggle for Brandon, who has already successfully disciplined his susceptibility to emotion. The narrator notes that the Colonel continually visited the heroines at Mrs. Jennings’s home; “he came to look at Marianne and talk to Elinor” (145). Despite his extant desires for Marianne, Brandon restrains from actively pursuing their pleasurable potential; he instead performs as a chivalric gentleman who remains concerned about his ward and passively admires his beloved. He arrives at Berkeley-street one afternoon looking “more than usually grave” and “sat for some time without saying a word.” He informs Elinor that her “sister’s engagement to Mr. Willoughby is very generally known” and then questions, “Is every thing finally settled? Is it impossible to—? But I have no right, and I could have no chance of succeeding.” He is nonplused and effectively silenced by his own thoughts and abridged words. He can only tell Elinor that for Marianne he “wish[es] all imaginable happiness; to Willoughby that he may endeavour to deserve her” (149–50). Brandon momentarily adopts the mindset of a lover, only to leave his performance incomplete. He may appear to imitate the ancient Greek model of self-formation, garnering ostensible satisfaction from his well-ordered masculinity, but he has actually constructed a carefully regulated aesthetic of existence that does not permit the volatile emotions engendered by love.
Austen presents Brandon much as Mr. Dudley, the virtuous paternal figure of Jane West’s *A Gossip’s Story* (1797), who “possessed in eminent degree the virtues of the head and the heart . . . [and] knew how to reduce his desires to that moderate standard, which is most likely to produce content” (I: 13–14). The Colonel, like Mr. Dudley, is a man learned in both knowledge and sensibility, but he most importantly knows he must contain his feelings to ensure the safety of his sexuality and the comfort of his social existence.

After Willoughby’s formal break with Marianne, Brandon successfully explains—at least to Elinor—the primary reasons for his regulated sensations. He struggles to relate the story of the Elizas, including Willoughby’s scandalous activity with his young ward. He compares his love for the first Eliza to Willoughby’s relationship with Marianne and informs Elinor that he and the first Eliza “were within a few hours of eloping together for Scotland” (179). He discusses the plight of his romantic childhood love, her divorce from his brother, and her death; his account again reveals his strong commitment to a sense of duty inspired by his adherence to a chivalric form of masculinity. We learn that after he finally located the abandoned first Eliza, Brandon nursed her during her final moments of life and accepted the dying mother’s child as his responsibility (181). The Colonel’s account of earlier events invites us to revise our conception of his character. He again appears very similar to Mr. Dudley, whose mind was “awakened to all the impressions of duty both to his Maker and his fellow-creatures” and “[possessed] sufficient strength to overcome the extreme indulgence of hopeless grief.” West indicates that “though [Mr. Dudley] found it impossible to forget that he once was most happy, he acquiesced with patient resignation in the limited enjoyments which his situation allowed” and preserved “the anxious tenderness of the paternal character” (I: 15). Like Mr. Dudley, Brandon reveals his youthful romantic happiness, but he is now a responsible and resigned patriarchal man who can neither forget the pain of his troubled past nor actively pursue new experiences of pleasure. While his discussion with Elinor provides scandalous information concerning Willoughby, Brandon’s story also demonstrates his commitment to emotional discipline and his allegiance to Burke’s conception of a noble and dutiful masculinity. 8

The Colonel’s history, likewise, reemphasizes his training in the traditions of sensibility. Like Mr. Dudley and Willoughby, Brandon, too, was once a passionate lover. He has stabilized his subjectivity, but he is not yet a complete modern English man, as he still lacks the social/sexual security engendered by a hegemonic marital relationship. Unlike Willoughby, however, the Colonel benefits from a solid financial standing because, as Johnson reminds us, the “days of [his] subjugation to a corrupt father and older brother are happily behind him” (*Jane Austen* 70). England has updated
its economy, and Brandon is no longer subjected to archaic traditions that dictated familial roles; the Colonel's economic and social stability enables him to perform two prominent actions in the final stages of the novel that confirm his commitment to the traditions of sentimentality and chivalry: his offer of the Delaford living to Edward Ferrars and his service as Elinor's attendant and Mrs. Dashwood's escort during Marianne's illness. When he learns of Mrs. Ferrars's strategy to impede the planned marriage between Edward and Lucy Steele by withholding her son's inheritance, the Colonel is astonished at the “impolitic cruelty . . . of dividing, or attempting to divide, two young people long attached to each other” (246). He is sensible of the feelings of young lovers—even if he will no longer behave as a lover himself—and critical of the coarse heartlessness exhibited by Mrs. Ferrars. In addition, his gift of the Delaford parsonage to Edward recalls a chivalric economic structure in which land was administered by a feudal lord. His genteel beneficence circumvents the authority of Mrs. Ferrars and provides Edward with a domestic sphere, a safe opportunity to marry without the risks of love, and a chance to solidify his involvement in the modern national community.

Yet Brandon sees his action as neither heroic nor noble. He remains a disciplined man who reveals little interest in gallant ceremonies. He does not even want to make the offer himself; he requests, rather, that Elinor present the living to Edward. Miss Dashwood lauds the Colonel's generosity toward a man he does not know and insists that there “are not many men who would act as he has done . . . few people who have so compassionate an heart!” (249). Even the timid Edward realizes that Brandon “is undoubtedly a sensible man, and in his manners perfectly the gentleman” (253). The comments of Elinor and Edward remind us of Brandon's sensibility as well as his adherence to a chivalric model of maleness. He is a sentimental man schooled in genteel behavior, but he prefers the role of a dutiful protector and provider to the gallant activity of a glorified hero. The Colonel's behavior is reminiscent of another of Jane West's kind-hearted paternal figures, Mr. Herbert, who presides over The Advantages of Education: Or, the History of Maria Williams (1793). West announces that “integrity seems [to be] the predominant feature of [Herbert's] soul. He has the greater share of independence, of sentiment, than I ever knew a man possess. Nothing can persuade him to alter a conduct which he considers to be conscientious; and he fears no person's resentment, when engaged in the cause of virtue” (II: 225). Like Mr. Herbert, Brandon believes in the sincerity of his own emotions, and he is determined to act upon them regardless of the social consequences. As a man of sensibility, the Colonel trusts his feelings, but he has also trained his sensations to prevent the possibility of an uncontrollable overflow of
passions, and this careful discipline allows him to remain perpetually useful to his modernizing society without relinquishing his sensitivity.

When the Dashwood sisters remove to Cleveland, the Colonel quickly follows and continues his service to Marianne and Elinor. Brandon remains a dutiful companion of the heroines, but Miss Dashwood also notes the “needless alarm of a lover” in “[Brandon’s] looks of anxious solicitude on Marianne’s feeling, in her head and throat, the beginning of a heavy cold” (267). Austen documents how Brandon remains sensibly affected by Marianne’s sickness; it frightened him, and the narrator notes that he “tried to reason himself out of fears” (270). When Elinor later approaches him about her sister’s worsening condition, the Colonel listens “in silent despondence;—but her difficulties were instantly obviated, for with a readiness that seemed to speak the occasion . . . [he] offered himself as the messenger who should fetch Mrs. Dashwood.” Brandon is still sensitive to sensations, but he will once again perform as a responsible chivalric figure, offering to transport the mother of Marianne to her bedside. Austen informs us that “whatever he might feel, [Brandon] acted with all the firmness of a collected mind, made every necessary arrangement with the utmost dispatch, and calculated with exactness the time in which [Elinor] might look for his return” (272). While he appears to perform as a romantic hero, he still acts in a controlled and ordered manner, outlining his travel plans and determining his timeframe. Despite his well-trained susceptibility to feeling, Brandon is organized and regulated.

Following Brandon’s departure, Willoughby arrives at Cleveland and attempts to acquire from Elinor news of Marianne’s health. He stammers, “Your sister . . . is out of danger. I heard it from the servant. God be praised!—But is it true?—is it really true?” Elinor attempts to remain silent, but Willoughby proclaims, “For God’s sake tell me, is she out of danger, or is she not?” (278). He is emotionally overtaken with his concern for the heroine’s health, and paralleling Brandon’s inability to inquire coherently of Marianne’s marital arrangements, Willoughby can only stutter his words. When Miss Dashwood inquires the reason for his surprising visit, he provides an ambiguous response: “I mean . . . to make you hate me one degree less than you do now.” He continues, “I mean to offer some kind of explanation, some kind of apology, for the past” (279). Willoughby knows that his recently related history has transformed his social reputation, and he asks Elinor for the opportunity to account for his behavior. He begins his story by defending his innocent initial attractions to Marianne and the Dashwood family at Barton. He informs Elinor that at that time he “had no other intention, no other view in the acquaintance than to pass my time pleasantly while I was obliged to remain.” He claims that Marianne’s person and charms
“could not but please me” and acknowledges that originally his “vanity only was elevated” by her affection (280). He suggests that his time with Marianne at Barton was sensibly pleasurable and claims that while he was susceptible to such sensations he was also ignorant of the dangers associated with amorous emotions. Willoughby presents his incipient romantic desires for the young heroine as accidental, but as Austen’s novel suggests, even men who unintentionally adopt the pose of a lover endanger the social/sexual security of themselves, others, and the nation.

As Willoughby’s compromised masculinity is in part due to his economic instability, he also attempts to explain his precarious financial status. He declares that his “fortune was never large” and indicates that he “had always been expensive, always in the habit of associating with people of better income than [himself]” (280). He is a connoisseur of pleasure, and although he had always maintained hope in the possibility of a significant inheritance after the death of his aunt, Willoughby indicates that “it had been for some time [his] intention to re-establish [his] circumstances by marrying a woman of fortune” (280). Unlike Delmont and other industrious men of Jacobin novels who plan to earn their sustenance through agricultural labor, Willoughby’s monetary hopes rest upon a familial inheritance and a marriage to a wealthy woman. He is honest about his desires for an ample income, and he freely admits that marrying Marianne “was not a thing to be thought of.” He concludes that he “was acting in this manner, trying to engage her regard, without a thought of returning it” (280). Willoughby announces both his coarse desire for affluence and his careless, but eventually powerful, interest in Marianne. He grants, “I did not know the extent of the injury I meditated, because I did not then know what it was to love” (280). He expresses his own surprise at developing sincere amorous emotions for Marianne. His comments recall the irrational and uncontrollable quality of love; they also remind us that even a man who performs briefly as a romantic lover risks significant consequences. Willoughby once developed powerful amorous passions for Marianne, but he has now learned that aspiring modern men must view love as a rational activity based upon pecuniary and utilitarian concerns rather than desire. West describes The Advantages of Education as a fictional attempt “to counteract the evils incident to the romantic conclusions which youths are apt to form” (I: iv). Austen’s novel, likewise, illustrates how modern English men must treat romantic passions like a dangerous narcotic; the only sure way to prevent possible peril is to practice total abstinence.

Willoughby, of course, did not keep such a vow, but he learned that he must regulate his susceptibility to emotions and sensations because “a circumstance occurred—an unlucky circumstance, to ruin all [his] resolu-
tion, and with it all [his] comfort” (281). According to Willoughby, when Mrs. Smith discovered his scandalous activity with Eliza, she threatened to relinquish her future financial support, although she did offer to “forgive the past, if [he] would marry Eliza” (283). Willoughby acknowledges that he once maintained romantic feelings for Miss Williams, but their affair now seems childish and immature. He briefly appears to behave as a man of sensibility who will not accept a passionless marriage complemented by a large inheritance from his aged aunt, but he is also not willing to pursue his ostensibly sincere love for Marianne without some degree of economic stability. He now reverts to the safety of rational behavior displayed by men like Henry Tilney. Willoughby acts in a “reasonable” manner, as he departs for London, “[believing himself] secure of [his] present wife, if [he] chose to address her” (283). He opts to dismiss his passions and the sentiments of the male lover to pursue the social standing facilitated by an economically promising marriage. His rational decision also implies a consciousness of his previous irresponsible performances as a lover; he must now turn to stern Enlightenment codes to repair the damage amorous feelings inflicted upon his masculinity. He has also come to appreciate the mandates of late-eighteenth-century feminist thinkers. He respects the new social presence of women like his aunt, and as Wollstonecraft instructs, he does not confuse his responsibilities as a husband with the identity of a lover. Indeed, he concludes that his own “domestic happiness is out of the question” (291). Willoughby will not enjoy marital bliss, and it is precisely his willingness to forgo the felicity of amorous experiences that allows him to stabilize his social/sexual subjectivity.

Following Willoughby’s confession and explanation, Austen allows Brandon a similar opportunity to reconfigure himself through his unheard conversation with Mrs. Dashwood. The emotional mother effectively recreates Brandon, describing him as a desperate sentimental man who will also be a useful addition to her family. She tells Elinor that he “opened his whole heart to me yesterday as we travelled,” and according to Mrs. Dashwood, the Colonel has loved Marianne “ever since the first moment of seeing her.” Mrs. Dashwood concludes that Brandon’s regard was “infinitely surpassing anything that Willoughby ever felt or feigned, as much more warm, as more sincere or constant. . . . Such a noble mind!—such openness, such sincerity!—no one can be deceived in him” (295). She depicts Brandon as a passionate lover who is well trained in sentimental behavior, but she also highlights his social stability. Mrs. Dashwood admires “His fortune too” and explains that “at my time of life . . . everybody cares about that;—and although I neither know, nor desire to know, what it really is, I am sure it must be a good one” (297). Mrs. Dashwood’s characterization of the Colo-
nel establishes him as a man suitable to serve as Marianne’s protector and ostensible lover. He is a disciplined man of sensibility who relies upon his “noble mind” to manage his aesthetic of existence. Brandon’s control of his passions prevents him from enduring the volatile consequences of love, and his financial standing enables him to revert continually to chivalric male activities to participate in the national community.

Austen concludes her novel by reporting both Marianne’s eventual marriage to the regulated Colonel and Willoughby’s frustrated marital status. Austen suggests that Brandon “still sought the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat” and concludes that he “was now as happy, as all those who best loved him, believed he deserved to be” (333). Her ambiguous narration reminds us of the Colonel’s melancholic past and sentimental training, but it also suggests the limits—and the publicly anticipated limits—of his conjugal bliss. Brandon’s experience of pleasure derives from his control rather than his overflow of sensations, and the narrator implies that even his friends do not expect him to experience exuberant joy. Austen adds that Marianne “restored his mind to animation, and his spirits to cheerfulness,” and “her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby” (334). Marianne can recharge the Colonel’s sensibility and facilitate his social life, but she can only love him as much as she did Willoughby—and even that will take time. Marianne briefly appears like the far more timid Catherine Morland, whom Tilney hopes will learn to love different flowers. The restricted nature of her commitment to the Colonel may be crass, but is also essential, as he could not successfully manage an immoderate amorous experience. Brandon is more financially stable than Willoughby, but it is his emotional discipline that distinguishes him as a socially functional mate for Marianne. He will not allow passions to overwhelm himself or his wife, and his control also allows him to perform various social roles prescribed for the proper English man.

The narrator shows how Willoughby can also successfully fulfill numerous expectations for the appropriate national man once he relinquishes his amorous inclinations. Willoughby, like Brandon, does not enjoy unbridled domestic pleasure, but he eventually discerns how to accept the compromises involved in his socially sanctioned conjugal relationship. He was not forever heartbroken, nor did he abandon the world; rather, “he lived to exert, and frequently to enjoy himself” (334). He remains a virile man of sensibility, as he continues to relish the possibility of physical sensations. Austen notes, “His wife was not always out of humour, nor his home always uncomfortable; and in his breed of horses and dogs, and in sporting of every kind, he found no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity” (334). Like Brandon’s ambiguous future “happiness,” Willoughby’s joy in life appears
limited and somewhat perverted. His “domestic felicity” involves almost everything but his wife, and while he is certainly not a miserable hermit, like Gulliver, he seems more interested in his horses than his supposed lover. Austen illustrates how Willoughby’s decision to discipline his susceptibility to emotions helps him to meet other post-Revolutionary expectations for English masculinity. He can still hunt, ride, and appreciate sensations, but he must no longer allow his emotions to overtake his reason. He has established a secure aesthetic of existence by acting rationally, and while he is now able to participate in the burgeoning modern nation, he must perpetually abstain from the multiplicities and volatilities of love to maintain his status.

Neither Willoughby nor Brandon is able to exist as an unchecked man of sensibility, and Austen demonstrates how each suitor must avoid amorous emotions to ensure his secure domestic life. Willoughby restrains his susceptibility to romantic love by relying upon rationality to direct his behavior, while Brandon consistently relies upon the socially accepted chivalric model of behavior to order his sexuality. Willoughby may become more disciplined, but he is clearly still a man in training who is learning to respond to the dictates of reason and the requests of Enlightenment thinkers such as Wollstonecraft. Brandon is already disciplined, and while he may not be an extremely exciting male figure, Austen suggests that he is the kind of man who is of great use to the nation during the cultural unrest of the early nineteenth century. The Colonel still must solidify his social/sexual subjectivity, and his need for amelioration prefigures Austen’s later depictions of aspiring tradesmen who strive to develop and broaden their identities as English men in order to assume more significant social responsibilities; moreover, Brandon’s guarded masculinity also anticipates the stable sexualities of social administrators like Mr. Darcy and Mr. Knightley, who perform vital leadership roles in their communities. Marianne may idealize a passionate man, but Austen’s story illustrates that post-Revolutionary English society desires carefully disciplined masculine subjects who will assume the responsibility of guiding England through its post-Revolutionary transformation. These men, of course, must still marry to establish hegemonic identities and reproduce a national citizenry, but as Wollstonecraft argues and Austen’s text dramatizes, functional and secure marriages must not involve Deleuzian love.