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**UNDER COVER:
AN EXPLORATION OF BOOK COVER DESIGN
AND READER PERCEPTION OF THE TEXT**

by

Maria Williams

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

in

**English
in the Department of English**

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Spring 2016

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Abstract

I am double majoring in graphic design and English and in doing so, am interested in studying the view of book cover design in both disciplines. This is partly a continuation of an Honors contract I did with Bob Winward in Fall 2015 when I designed multiple book covers. In this contract, a major aspect that determined whether a cover design was successful or not was whether the design was “true” to the text in the book. A literary critic, as opposed to a graphic designer who creates the cover, is given a book (and therefore a cover) and thus the cover art influences their interpretation of the text. In this thesis, I try to reconcile the two disciplines and the different attitudes they have towards book cover design. I will start by discussing the process of creating cover art and what makes a successful book cover according to graphic designers in the field. I discuss my own experience designing book covers for an Honors contract and how being an English major influenced my design process. I then explore the topic from an English major’s perspective by analyzing four different editions of Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*. In doing so, I examine how different aspects from the text are shown in each book cover and question whether “truth” is as easy to judge as a literary critic as it is to judge as a graphic designer. I ultimately hope to give greater understanding to book cover design as both a literary critic and as a graphic designer, and question whether the two disciplines can be reconciled.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank the Honors office and all of the support they have given me. Over the last four years, Amber Summers-Graham has guided and continually encouraged me to stay with Honors in order to get the most out of my education. I am grateful to Bob Winward for helping me with my book design Honors contract in Fall 2015, helping me gain skills and even more interest in book cover design. I would also like to thank Dr. Keri Holt for serving on my thesis committee and asking thoughtful questions and providing valuable feedback. I am forever grateful to Dr. Brian McCuskey, my thesis advisor, for the many classes I have taken from him that gave me the skills to complete this thesis. He took a chance on my “weird” idea for a thesis (his words) and had incredibly patience as I untangled my thoughts. He has taught me to think deeper and more creatively, two skills that will be invaluable in my life after graduation.

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Introduction

When I tell people that I am double majoring in graphic design and English, I often get confused looks. People usually say something along the lines of, “Well those are pretty different, aren’t they?” And then I give them a confused look in response. My two majors are much more similar than people typically think. In my English classes, I have learned to communicate with the written word; in my graphic design classes, I have learned to communicate visually. When I started becoming interested in cover design, I assumed that my two majors would become even more aligned than I originally thought. I would get to combine my love of design with my love of books. However, I soon realized that designing book covers split me in half. Suddenly, I was both Graphic Designer Maria and English Major Maria. Book covers from a graphic design perspective often raised questions that upset English Major Maria. The first part of this thesis will describe my experiences designing book covers and the problems it raised for me as an English major. In the second half of the thesis, I attempt to better understand these problems by stepping outside my own cover designs and analyzing different editions of Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) from an English major’s perspective.

What makes a good book cover?

In Fall 2015, I completed a book cover Honors project with the head of USU’s graphic design department, Bob Winward, and got to experience first-hand what a challenge it is to express visually what someone has already articulated in writing. It was an especially interesting experience designing book covers as an English major and book lover myself. By the end of the

semester, I had designed covers for about ten different books, including *A Game of Thrones* by George R.R. Martin (1996), *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka (1915), *Atonement* by Ian McEwan (2001), *Momo* by Michael Ende (1973), and *Dandelion Wine* by Ray Bradbury (1957). Most of the covers ended up being very graphic and minimal with a symbol included to represent the bigger theme in the book. There was a big learning curve in the designs, and it is apparent. It was interesting to compare the processes I found myself using in designing a cover to the processes explained by professionals.

There are differing definitions of what makes a successful book cover design, but the ultimate goal is to “translate the feeling of what it’s like to read the book” into a visual interpretation (Mendelsund, “The Jacket”). This one image as a book cover has a “distillation of the story” (Kidd, “Designing”). It doesn’t matter if it is ‘pretty’ or ‘ugly’: it just needs to be *something* (seductive, attention-grabbing, intriguing, weird, etc.) to convince the potential reader to pick up the book long enough to be interested to look inside. These ideas can be condensed into two criteria for judging a book cover: the book needs to be true, and it needs to be arresting. Designers say it in different ways, but ultimately the text needs to be accurately represented—is it true?—and the book needs to be sold—is it arresting?

Well-known designers consistently say that one thing needs to be done in order for a cover to be successfully arresting: avoid the literal. The book jacket should show the reader what isn’t there or point to some aspect of the story that the reader might not otherwise notice. In doing this, the book cover will “reward the reader” with “a little bit of mystery to allow for personal interpretation” (Jordan). These smart covers ultimately reward readers because readers feels like they are a part of the experience by having an active role in interpreting the symbolism. Designer Courtney Stubbett clarifies that “you don’t want to tell [the viewer] the story. It’s more

like you are creating the *potential* for the story, in as short a timeframe as possible” (Stubbert). It is this potential that allows the reader to really think about the concept of the design and feel involved in the experience.

Learning to design book covers

However, in order to get to the point at which a reader can interact with the book jacket, there has to be a design that draws the reader in. Designers agree that research is the key, and each researches differently. Designers constantly research other design work and get to know the field, which both inspires and leads them in new directions. Chip Kidd discusses why it is important for designers to research their peers; a teacher at his school said to “find out what everyone else is doing, and then do something completely different” (“Beautiful”). Doing the opposite of what is expected is something that Kidd accomplishes consistently with his book designs. For example, Kidd’s design of the cover for Augusten Burrough’s *Dry* looks like the type’s ink is running after being soaked in water. Understanding the constraints as a designer will often lead to unexpected designs. When a designer is actually working for a publisher, there are certain things to be aware of, such as the budget available, publisher/author constraints, and the marketing blurbs included on the cover.

Peter Mendelsund states that “a cover designer, first and foremost, is a reader” (*Cover* xiv). Mendelsund and Laura Duffy, among other designers, read the book with an incredibly close eye, taking notes in the margins about themes that stand out or ideas that could ultimately be translated into imagery. In his book *Cover*, Mendelsund says that one of his friends reads the book backwards, sentence by sentence, reading “against the grain.” However, some designers

only read certain genres' books before they design them (such as nonfiction or biography), and other designers don't read the books they design at all. Furthermore, there is a consensus that in researching the book, designers avoid the authors. Based on various interviews, designers reveal that authors are rarely helpful in giving suggestions about the book design. In fact, most of the advice that book designers give authors is to trust the professional designer and leave it at that. Nuno Moreira mentions that publishers are often helpful in "filter[ing] the authors' intentions or their over-creative ideas that might block [the designer's] approach to the cover" (Moreira).

It was through this research that I realized that my two majors perhaps didn't work as closely together as I thought. English Major Maria identified with the author of a book, and learning that graphic designers often ignored the author of a book altogether surprised me. But I did my duty during my Honors contract, and the first step to designing a book cover every week involved research, making sure I understood the story and what it was all about. I tried to pick up key themes that appeared in the books and choose some that I could possibly represent visually. I was lucky in that I had few design constraints, so that after researching I could go right to physically drawing thumbnails and sketching out ideas. So many pages of my sketchbook are filled with grids of box after box after box, most of them filled with scribbles and terrible design ideas. Once I settled on a couple of ideas that I thought could work, I would expand one of them to a bigger, tighter sketch to see what would happen. *Then*, with everything all planned out and sketched tightly, I brought it to the computer to digitize the idea. Through I stuck to mainly sketching, every designer's process is different. Stubbert mentioned free association keyword writing, which will help with finding the mood of the book, and with eventually finding stock photography, if there is need of it. Anne Jordan's method was unique; when she designs, it's a very physical process. During a project, her house is filled with all sorts of physical materials in

order to get the right imagery for the cover, which she eventually integrates with typography. As different as everyone's process is, most projects take time to be fully completed (if a design project can even ever *be* completed). Jordan says to "refine, refine, refine." Kidd says to let ideas "simmer and percolate in your head" ("Chip Kidd"). Mendelsund says that "design is not performed. It is, rather, endlessly rehearsed" (*Cover xvix*).

I felt that endless rehearsal each time my own cover design was finally set in stone and I brought it to Bob. He would critique it, always asking two questions to determine if it was a successful design: "Is it true?" and "Is it arresting?" Often, especially at the beginning of the semester, I would have to go back to the drawing board and start all over because the answer to at least one of the questions was, "No." What I am mostly concerned about in this thesis is what makes a book cover "true." A book cover that is "true" means that the cover accurately depicts the text in the book. This could mean a couple of different things. A cover may show an iconic scene from the book and have every action in the scene correctly represented, or it may have the main character on the front cover with the correct color of eyes and hair. But what if a cover has a plain background with just the title on it? That cover would not necessarily be "true" if the book was about WWII and the background color was hot pink and the text was a Hobo typeface. In this example, the tone of the design would not match its contents. A cover can be "true" by depicting the physical attributes of the text literally, or it can be "true" by accurately communicating the overall tone of the story. Stubbart articulates what is particularly tricky about designing book covers: the fact that there is an "abstract idea, of someone else's story, that [you are] trying to get across to an unknown audience. You are choosing and arranging a visual language to describe a text-based story by someone else" (Stubbart).

When I designed my first book cover, for *Dandelion Wine*, I hit my first snag in trying to arrange that visual language. When I brought the cover to Bob, he told me to go do more research on *Dandelion Wine* because the cover wasn't "true." He then told me to go to SparkNotes to read about the books I would be designing. Little English major me almost choked. I figured that a cover was "true" when the image corresponded with the text, but SparkNotes was *not* the original text. How could I use SparkNotes when I knew that these were books I should be reading anyway in order to simply be a well-rounded human being? Besides that, I grew up with corresponding SparkNotes with cheating. I never used SparkNotes. I always read the book. That's what you do. Unfortunately, I was left with little choice with a full school schedule and having to finish a book cover every week. Because of this fast-paced schedule, there was no feasible way that I could read all of the books for which I was designing covers. So, I learned to use websites like Shmoop and SparkNotes, among others, relying on them for summaries and analyses. Throughout the semester, the English major Maria continued to cringe every time I typed "Shmoop" into Google, but the graphic designer Maria felt increasingly confident about it. I felt that by using these resources, I could understand the book just as well as actually reading it. Perhaps I had an even better understanding of the stories with the analysis of themes laid out right in front of me. The English side of me did not feel comfortable with this, but who cared? I was in the art building, not the English building. So I gave English Major Maria a pat on the head, reassured her that I was doing my research, and sent her on her way.

Designing my own covers

I quickly felt like I understood the research step of designing book covers. However, oftentimes what would look great in my sketches would not work out once I actually put it into the computer. Take the example of *Atonement* shown on the left of the next page. In my sketchbook, and in my head, the idea was *very* cool. I chose handwritten script, because the book revolves around author Briony Tallis who, essentially, writes a book describing what she wishes had happened in her family's lives. A young Briony with a fondness for making up stories influences much of the story after she becomes the victim of a massive misunderstanding. This results in her ruining more than a few people's lives. The two characters in the middle of the design, Cecelia Tallis and Robbie Turner, are the two characters whom Briony controls the most with her story. I filled their silhouettes with smoke and had them gradually fading out towards the edges of the cover because I wanted to represent that with Briony taking control of their lives so easily, their hopes and dreams would not result in concrete outcomes. After much research, a lot of thought went into this cover. However, the minute Bob asked me, "Is it arresting?" I had to admit that, no, the average passerby would probably not pick it up off a bookstore shelf. Among other things, there is little contrast in the colors, and splitting the composition in half is not the most visually dynamic way to design a cover (or anything, really).

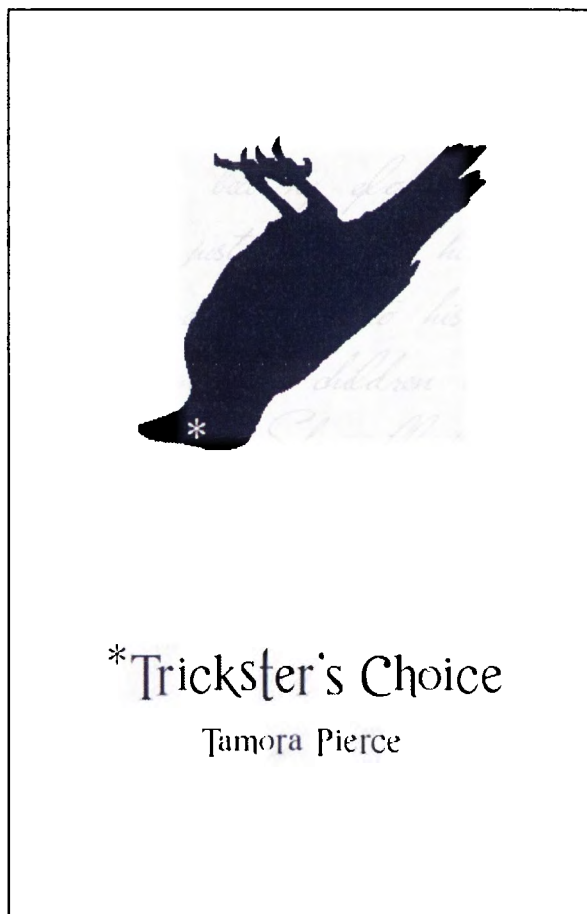
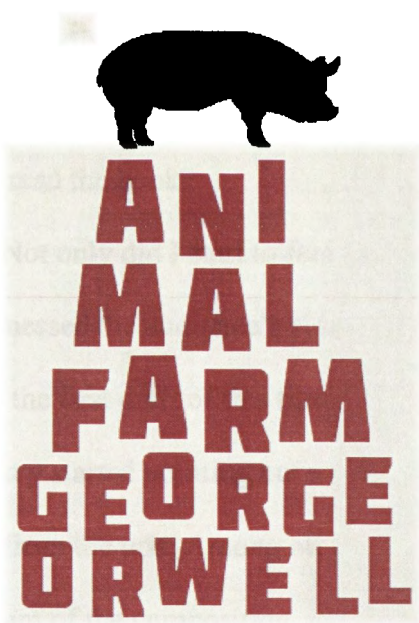
After, again, heading back to my sketchbook and working through multiple drafts, I ended up with the cover on the right as the final cover. This cover focuses solely on Briony's role in the story, rather than including other characters on the book jacket. After typing out the title countless times, physically crumpling up the paper (*so* many times to get just the right wrinkles), and scanning in the paper, I was finally left satisfied with the result. I felt that the

typeface conveyed a typewriter feel, which relayed the same message as the handwritten type in the first draft. The crumpled paper texture in the background added some dimension to the design and further highlighted the fact that Briony does her best to script out other people's lives. After talking to Bob, I decided to bold the "me" in "Atonement," as well as make it red, in order to make it stand out and connote a sense of danger, further emphasizing Briony's selfish actions throughout the story. After solidifying the *Atonement* design, I felt more confident in what I was learning about cover design.



The more covers I designed, the more I could see myself settling into my own style, understanding the culture of book cover design. Research what you can; then design from there. In researching book cover design, I came across Mrs. Henry Whitman, a designer who became popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century. *Decorated Cloth in America* explains that

Whitman's contribution to design was "largely what she eliminated, what she stripped away; and on average, that was almost everything" (Allen and Gullens 63). In most of her designs, she had only one or two elements in the composition. It was her goal to have "simplicity of effect and clarity of presentations, in the sense both of advertising and design" (Allen and Gullens 63). I realized that, for me, honing in on Whitman's ideas and having a simple composition was an easy way to make the composition attention-grabbing. It also provided an easy equation to display the book's central symbol. This is the direction I went with the two covers shown below, *Animal Farm* and *Trickster's Choice*.



There's a problem

Throughout the semester, I felt like I quickly learned to apply the principles that made a cover “arresting.” It had to have contrast; it had to be unique; and it had to make the audience think, even just a little bit. But whether a book cover I designed was “true”? That was harder to judge. On one hand, I felt like, as the designer, I had done my job. I had researched the book and truly put thought into it so that it would accurately depict the story or the characters or the themes or whatever else it needed to depict. But English Major Maria couldn't agree with that as easily. I hadn't read the books! How could I truly know whether the book cover I had designed was “true” or not? Despite my thinking about the metaphor of the pig being at the top of the composition in the *Animal Farm* design or that the type referenced Russian propaganda posters, who was I to say that the cover I had designed was “true” when it came down to the fact that I had not read the book?

Not only did I start to feel like I might be pulling themes out of thin air as a designer, I also witnessed the audience's side when my thesis faculty advisor, Dr. Brian McCuskey, looked through the first draft of this thesis. We were talking about my *Animal Farm* cover and Dr. McCuskey started pointing out a few reasons why it was a “true” book cover, displaying key themes from the text. Among other things, he mentioned how “George Orwell” (a human) was at the bottom of the composition, placed below the pig and the words “animal farm,” and how the scrambled letters breaking up the words represented the disintegration of language, which happens in the novel. As much as Designer Maria would love to take credit for thinking of all of the things he was mentioning, I had only purposefully done a couple. It had not crossed my mind that the text layout could represent the disintegration of language.

So here I am, split in half: Designer Maria feels satisfied with my designs while English Major Maria thinks that's a little presumptuous. This is the problem with "truth": there will always be disagreement about who actually decides what is "true" and what is not. It may be the author who holds the key to whether a book cover is "true" to the contents because she herself wrote the original text. However, there is no way for the average viewer to know what the author thought about regarding every aspect of her writing, much less her thoughts on the book cover. In "The Intentional Fallacy," W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley argue that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (Wimsatt and Beardsley³). So perhaps it is the designer that dictates "truth," deciding whether a book is accurate to its contents or not. The designer did, after all, create the cover. In this case, however, Wimsatt and Beardsley's argument extends to designers as well. Designers are, in a sense, a particular kind of author. They, too, are creating a work of art out of nothing but their imagination. If so, then maybe the final judge is the reader, whether it is an average person who picks up the book to see if she'd be interested, or whether it is a long-time fan of the book, picking up a new copy from his local bookstore because his copy at home has been taped together one too many times.

So what do I do?

In designing, I was too close to this problem. I was too concerned whether my covers were "true" or not, so it was difficult to fuse Designer Maria and English Major Maria in a productive way. In order to take a step back from my own book jacket designs, I needed to become a third-party observer. For this reason, I have chosen book covers from four different

editions of Jane Austen's first novel *Sense and Sensibility* to analyze, all created by different artists. *Sense and Sensibility* has been on the market for over two centuries, which means that there are many, many book covers that attempt to depict the lives of the Dashwood sisters. In addition to there being multiple editions to choose from, Jane Austen brings up multiple themes in *Sense and Sensibility*: gender, status, economics, history, etc. In each of the four following covers, different themes are brought out that appear in the novel, including point of view, independence and punishment, and the contrasting personality traits of sense and sensibility.

Sense and Sensibility follows the ups and downs of two sisters, Marianne and Elinor. At the beginning of the novel, Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters, Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret, move to a small cottage in Devonshire after John, the sisters' half-brother, and his greedy wife, Mrs. Fanny Dashwood, withhold their inheritance money. Before they move, Elinor falls in love with Fanny's brother Edward Ferrars, but keeps her feelings mostly to herself. Once in Devonshire, the girls become friends with a host of people, most notably Mr. Willoughby and Colonel Brandon. Marianne quickly falls in love with Mr. Willoughby, and the two are enormously outspoken with their affection for each other, much to Elinor's chagrin. However, both Marianne's and Elinor's love lives get put on hold when Elinor finds out that Edward is secretly engaged and Marianne realizes that Willoughby is not interested in marrying her. Colonel Brandon, in the meantime, is very much in love with Marianne and waits patiently in the wings for her to notice his existence. At the end of the novel, everything is sorted out, and everyone marries the person he or she should. Elinor and Edward tell each other their feelings, and Marianne marries and learns to love Colonel Brandon.

Throughout the novel, Elinor and Marianne consistently (but not always) represent the title's "sense" and "sensibility," respectively. Elinor typically reacts logically and with restraint

to emotional situations, such as finding out that Edward is engaged, while Marianne is very vocal and dramatic in her reactions, such as when she sees Willoughby at the party and he ignores her. Though these outward displays of affection often appear in gothic novels, Marianne's heavy reliance on her heart appears "too individualistic a philosophy for society, and too individualistic even for Marianne's own good, for she cannot really depend on her intuitions" (Butler 103). At this point in Austen's career, Marianne's sensibility, which would seem to be one of the "typically human-centred concerns of the previous expansive era, is now in the reactionary period identified as egotistical, solipsistic, and potentially anarchic" (Butler 104). At its best, having sensibility is having the capability to feel and express deep and expansive emotions. Marianne has trouble expressing feelings without becoming too dramatic and theatrical, thus losing credibility. Elinor, in contrast, is the sister who plays by society's rules. Marianne represents dangerous individualism, while Elinor's responsible actions throughout the novel "proclaim that the old style of social responsibility is accepted, *duty* (the idealized reading of upper-class motivation) put before the new individualism" (Butler 105). The contrast between the two Dashwood sisters' personalities is one of the most consistent themes throughout the book and throughout its many book covers.

1883 George Routledge and Sons Edition

One of the oldest covers I found is the 1883 George Routledge and Sons edition (shown on the next page) depicting a gothic novel version of *Sense and Sensibility* that I'm sure Marianne would be proud to be a part of. As she says of Edward Ferrars, "It would have broke *my* heart had I loved him, to hear him read with so little sensibility" (Austen 11). Likewise, I



think it would have broken her heart if the book *Sense and Sensibility* had a cover any less dramatic. This cover displays how the gothic taste was “an extreme instance of a development characteristic of the period: art openly designed for an expanded public. The role of the public in determining its art was implicitly admitted at the time ... The period is sometimes known as the age of sensibility,” and this love of sensibility greatly influences the design (Butler 29). This cover is “openly designed for [the] public” by relying so heavily on the appearance of romance between the two characters on the cover.

The cover (upper board) is an unsigned woodcut showing the scene in which Margaret and Marianne are running through the hills but “a false step brought [Marianne] suddenly to the ground.” Willoughby is “passing up the hill” when she falls and he quickly “offered his services” (Austen 27). The scene depicted in the cover, however does not have every single detail described in the book. In the novel, Willoughby has a gun which he sets down to help Marianne, and has “two pointers playing around him” (Austen 27). In David Gilson’s *A Bibliography of Jane Austen*, Gilson points out that in the woodcut, Willoughby is “in company with a *large* dog, not the ‘little black bitch of a pointer’ mentioned by Sir John Dashwood” (Gilson 258). Despite

this, the 1883 George Routledge and Sons edition is one of the only covers I could find that actually shows a scene from the book.

At first glance, the scene on the cover shows the typical gothic hero saving his heroine. However, it soon becomes clear that a few elements of the typical gothic romance are missing. Rather than Marianne staring into the eyes of her savior, she looks into the distance, barely noticing that Willoughby is grabbing her right arm with his and supporting her back. She looks off to the left of the cover, chin a little down, neutral expression on her face. That lack of connection is not one-sided: we as viewers cannot see Willoughby's eyes, much less see him looking down at the woman that he is destined to fall in love with. Because he bends his body forward towards Marianne, his head is tipped so the brim of his top hat obscures our view of the majority of his face. This lack of eye contact with Marianne and the viewers hints at the distrust that readers *should* feel when Willoughby is first introduced in the book, foreshadowing his dishonesty with Marianne. This is especially important with Austen's fixation on honesty in this book, with the word "sincere" appearing 32 times throughout the text and "deceit" 23 times.

Perhaps because of this dark foreshadowing, the heroine on this cover does not seem to be triumphant. In fact, Marianne's position relative to Willoughby's only foreshadows her continual defeat throughout the book. On the cover, as well as in the scene in the book, Willoughby stands above Marianne in order to help her up. It is significant that this illustration shows the moment *before* Willoughby "took her up in his arms without further delay," a position in which their heads would be close to the same level (Austen 27). Because the illustration shows the brief moment of delay before he sweeps her into his arms, Marianne is significantly lower in the composition than Willoughby. Their positions emphasize the power that Willoughby has over Marianne, which we see time and time again throughout the novel. When she falls in love

with him, he gains power over her emotions and, because she is filled with sensibility and is so expressive with her emotions, this also means he gains power over her actions. His control over her causes her repeatedly rash decisions: giving him a lock of her hair, confronting him in the middle of a party when he doesn't return her letters, etc. With Marianne's slightly slouched appearance, tilted head, and expressionless face, she almost looks like a doll that Willoughby is lifting up, not to save, but to control.

Much of the 1883 cover is in dark tones, either black or gray, so Marianne's white dress stands out. Clothing is rarely mentioned in Austen's works, and even then, often only so someone can comment on another's state of dress. When we find that Marianne "soon found out that of all manly dresses a shooting-jacket was the most becoming," what we really find is that Marianne is attracted to Willoughby. In *Between Self and World*, James Thompson remarks that the mention of this specific shooting jacket "exposes Marianne's thinly veiled attraction to Willoughby's person, and further, a shooting-jacket, with its association of youth and sport, contrasts favorably with Colonel Brandon's flannel waistcoat, with its associations of age and infirmity" (Thompson 21). The clothing that appears in book covers of *Sense and Sensibility* also have significance. Marianne, for instance, has a lighter dress in many of the book covers, including this 1883 version.

Marianne's white dress suggests a sense of purity and innocence. At the beginning of the book, when this scene takes place, Marianne has yet to be trampled by the world, and her sensibility is still strong. In fact, this is where she first seems to be punished for acting too freely—she does not just walk through the hills, she runs. Because of this running, her steps "brought her suddenly to the ground" (Austen 27). The illustration shows that the fall has muddied her white dress, reflecting the fact that this is the first of multiple instances where her

naivety is tainted. The contrast of lights and darks in the illustration also give readers a clue towards both parties' intentions. With this cover illustration printed as a woodcut, the lights and darks are obvious. In contrast with Marianne's (relatively) white dress, Willoughby is dressed in all dark colors, further darkened by shadows on his face and legs. Rather than depicting hero and heroine, these colors seem to reflect villain and heroine.

If Willoughby is the villain of the novel, he seems to get what he deserves. The presence of his dog foreshadows his domestication at the end of the novel. Willoughby, who used to save damsels in distress, becomes a mildly content husband. The dog next to him on the cover alludes to the end of the novel when "in his breed of horses and dogs ... he found no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity" (Austen 255). Though Marianne will have "domestic felicity" at the end of the novel as well, in this scene, she is not so content. Despite the open hills fading into the background, Marianne feels trapped in the bottom right corner of the composition. With Willoughby cutting her off diagonally and his dog blocking any other escape route, Marianne is stuck in the corner to wallow in the mud and her feelings. The outdoor setting's contrast with confinement brings even more attention to itself.

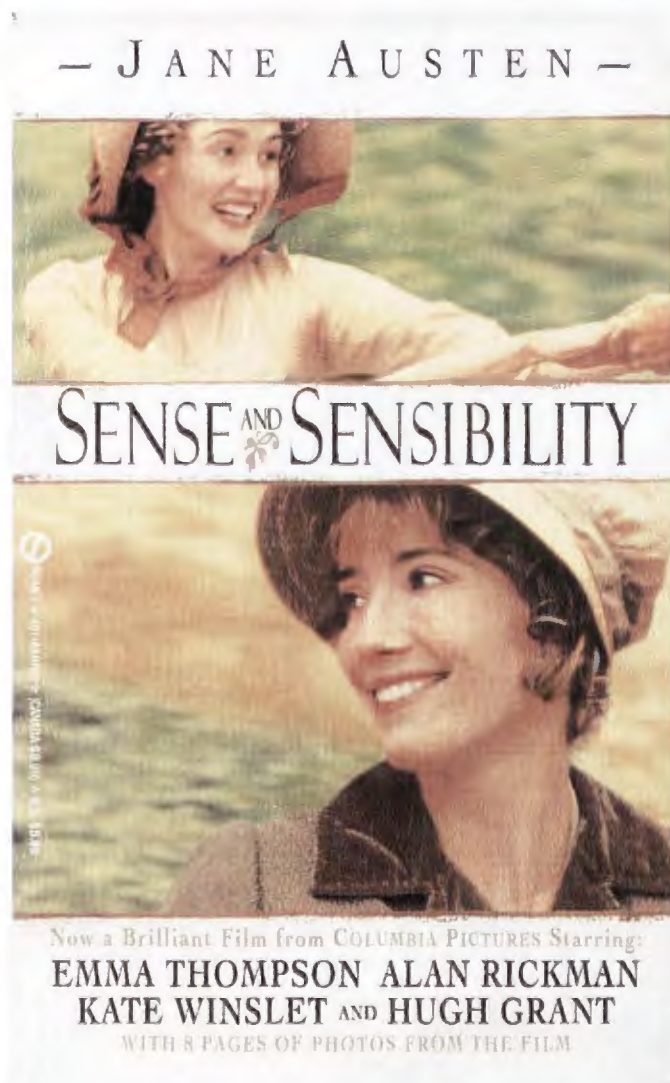
The confinement in the cover makes it easy to forget that though the cover solely features Marianne after she falls and Willoughby about to help her up, the scene depicted in the cover is actually missing someone. In the novel, Marianne and her younger sister Margaret agree to walk among the downs "for at least two hours" because, as Marianne questions, "Is there a felicity in the world... superior to this?" (Austen 27). When Marianne falls while "running with all possible speed down the steep side of the hill," Margaret is "unable to stop herself to assist her" (Austen 27). Therefore, it seems that though Margaret is not immediately before Marianne, she does witness Willoughby coming to the rescue and taking Marianne inside the Dashwood cottage.

Because Margaret is the viewer in this particular scene, when the audience looks at the book cover, they are automatically put into Margaret's shoes and therefore feel like they are there. For readers who are familiar with this scene in the book, this cover is automatically more intimate than the 1995 movie edition, which is a little more impersonal and does not show a specific scene from the book.

1995 Signet Movie Tie-in Edition

Because the 1995 movie tie-in edition by Signet (designed by Clive Coot, shown on the next page) is an explicit reference to the 1995 Columbia Pictures adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, this book cover is clearly aimed towards a specific audience. Not only does having pictures of real people on the cover make the book immediately more relatable to a female audience, but also having Kate Winslet and Emma Thompson on the cover draws in the viewer because they are recognizable faces. Having the actresses of the movie shows that part of the potential audience for the book cover is people who have seen the movie, liked it, and are interested in reading the book. As if it is not enough that the cover has the faces of the two main actresses on it, the bottom of the book cover also drops the names of the main actors that star in the movie. With such an emphasis on the film, it first appears that the book cover does not rely on the story at all to intrigue potential readers. The cover relies on the movie, well-known actors and actresses, and therefore any movie that they have previously acted in. Because they are well-known, the pictures of and names of the actors and actresses, bring to mind any movie, picture, or interview that the viewer has previously seen.

At the bottom of the cover, the text reads: "Now a Brilliant Film from Columbia Pictures Starring: Emma Thompson, Alan Rickman, Kate Winslet, and Hugh Grant with pages of photos from the film." Most of this text is set in an all-caps condensed font. This visual element at the bottom of the cover looks similar to movie poster credits, further enhancing the movie vibe. When the reader first looks at this book cover, it appears to be a movie poster with "Jane Austen" as the main actress appearing at the top of the composition. In fact, the actual movie poster for the 1995 *Sense and Sensibility* is almost the exact same design as the book cover. With this cover so obviously pandering to the potential audience, we as viewers feel like we stand



outside the story, observing the actors perform rather than experiencing the story ourselves.

At first glance, this cover seems to only feature the two sisters. However, as Marianne twirls in the top photo, we can see the hand of the man she spins with. Elinor's half of the cover, however, shows no sign of a man. This is consistent with how Austen represents the two sisters' relationships with men throughout the text. Just how Marianne has a man with her on the cover, much of her romance is seen in the book. On the other end of the spectrum, Elinor is very private. Even her proposal is

not seen: "this only need be said that when they all sat down to table at four o'clock... [Edward] had secured his lady" (Austen 242). Appropriately, no man is on the cover with Elinor.

Throughout the text, men continually influence Marianne—first Willoughby, who encourages her sensibility by being dramatic himself, and then Colonel Brandon, who contributes to her changed personality at the end of the book. Even at the end of the novel, when she realizes all that Willoughby has done and she marries the much better man Colonel Brandon, she still has a lack of control. In *Romantics, Rebels, & Reactionaries*, Marilyn Butler observes that "as it affects Marianne, the plot is the popular myth of subversion: new, individualistic ideas (sensibility) encouraged by a specious rootless stranger, Willoughby, bring her not to seduction—the subverted heroine's usual fate—but to the verge of death" (Butler 103). Though Colonel Brandon is, objectively, a better person than Mr. Willoughby, he still exhibits a certain kind of control over Marianne. At one point, Brandon elicits a warning to Elinor against Marianne's sensibility, using his old flame Eliza as an example. Yet when Elinor exhibits a wish that Marianne would renounce her sensibility, Brandon quickly says, "No, no, do not desire it" (Austen 37). In *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, Mary Poovey explains that in *Sense and Sensibility*, "men want women to be passionate, but, because they fear the consequences of this appetite, they want to retain control over its expression" (Poovey 192). In the 1995 book cover, it is impossible to tell (without having seen the movie) with whom Marianne holds hands. However, for the sake of interpreting the novel, I do not think it really matters *what* man she twirls with, just the fact that it *is* a man. Regardless of whose hand she holds, if he lets go, Marianne will fall.

The contrast between the two sisters is shown in multiple ways throughout all the editions of *Sense and Sensibility*. If a reader who knew nothing about the book were to look at the 1995

movie edition, she would still probably be able to tell that the two women on the cover are sisters based on the fact that they are both relatively young, look similar to each other, and, though they are on different planes, they are looking each other's directions with smiles on their faces. Based on their two images alone, it is easy to guess that the book is a story about these two sisters' relationship. In this aspect, it seems that this cover is more accurate than both the 1883 and 2000 covers.

Despite the two appearing to smile at each other on the cover, the major theme throughout the book is the fact that Marianne and Elinor display their emotions so differently, which makes them act and react differently from each other. The two images of the sisters are split with a white bar across the middle of the cover stating the title of the book. The images are also framed on top and bottom with white bars, the top bar displaying the author, and the bottom displaying the actors' names in the movie. There is significance to the fact that such a stark color divides their two images; the visual element represents the emotional themes. In the book, it is quite literally "Sense and Sensibility" that separates the two sisters. Marianne is so full of sensibility and Elinor sense, that they hardly understand each other half the time, or at least hardly understand each other's motivations.

The motion in their two pictures also reflects the two sisters' differences. Marianne has her arms out in front of her, spinning with a man. Her body is pulled back and her ribbon is loose, showing her movement. Elinor appears to be still. These displays of physical motion show the viewer how the two sisters react with emotion. Marianne goes into a flurry, crying, running, moving around, while Elinor stays quiet, not showing any emotion. If anything, Elinor will move to another room in order to grieve quietly.

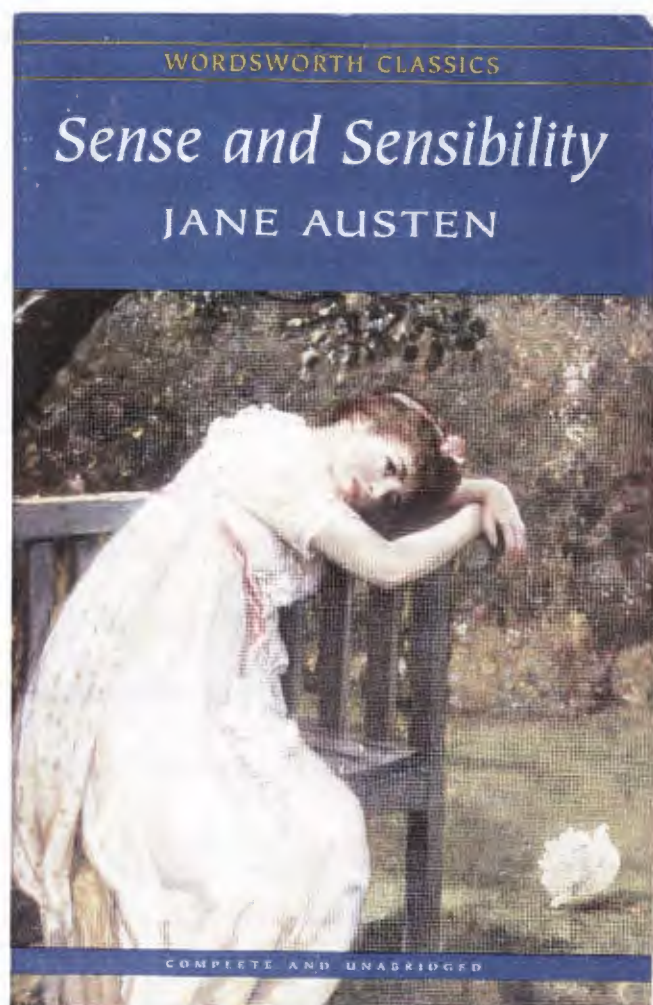
In addition to physical movement, the sisters' body positions suggest that Marianne is almost always moving forward (perhaps without looking both ways) and Elinor is either static or moving backward. In the 1995 edition, Marianne's face looks to the viewer's right while in the midst of spinning, which, to a Western viewer, connotes a sense of forward movement. Elinor, in contrast, looks to the left, which connotes stasis or backward movement. Because of these directions, the more positive Marianne draws the reader's eye once again.

Even with Elinor's picture physically taking up about a third more space than Marianne's, the sisters end up drawing the same amount of attention from the viewer. Marianne's red ribbon, combined with her lighter colored gown, draws the eye more than Elinor's brown coat. Even Elinor's coat buttoned up high on her neck, revealing less skin than Marianne's outfit, reflects the idea that Marianne refuses to be ignored throughout the novel. With her outward displays of emotion, Marianne gains the attention and sympathy of those around her. In comparison to Marianne, Elinor rarely gains sympathy because she is not outward in her displays of emotion.

2000 Wordsworth Classics Edition

Marianne's emotions are shown quite explicitly in the 2000 Wordsworth Classics edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, designed by Robert Mathias, shown on the next page. The 2000 cover stars a girl draped dramatically over the armchair of a bench and, based on the body language and forlorn expression, it is fair to assume that the girl is Marianne. The portrait of Marianne, a detail from *Sunday Afternoon, Ladies in a Garden* by English School, takes up most of the cover. Though this particular scene does not appear in the book, it is quite likely that the Marianne we

know would, at any moment, run out of the house and throw herself onto a bench in the garden. It seems that this cover depicts the way Marianne acts throughout the majority of the book, when she is still “resolved never to be taught” to govern her feelings (Austen 3). Again, her dress reinforces her youthful naivety: white suggesting purity and pink ribbons suggesting innocence. Even her face appears young, with big eyes and pink lips and cheeks. Though her eyes are open and looking out the front of the cover, it looks like she is lost in her own thoughts, which reinforces Marianne typically only being concerned with her own feelings. Elinor herself says to Marianne, “You do not suppose that I have ever felt much,” emphasizing that Marianne thinks of herself as the only one with feelings (Austen 174).



This eventually leads Marianne to trouble. Just like the 1883 cover hints that Willoughby is domesticated by the end of the novel, Marianne is eventually domesticated by her experience with Willoughby and by her marriage to Brandon. She finds herself “submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village” (Austen 255, emphasis added). None of that sounds like the Marianne that would run through the hills declaring her love for someone. The appearance of the white chicken in the bottom right corner hints at

this domestication of Marianne. The chicken seems to stand out an unusual amount with its bright white feathers against the dark green, and by the fact that it is the only other living creature in the composition.

Sense and Sensibility does end with Marianne finally being subdued as Colonel Brandon's wife, but the composition of many of the covers reflects her entrapment by both her own sensibility and her involvement with men. The fact that Marianne is so caught up in her own feelings, and does anything but keep them to herself, is continually a problem for her. Every time Marianne runs away with her feelings (often literally), she is punished. Just as when Marianne runs through the hills with Margaret, trips and falls, and is then confined to the couch, her freedom of expression always ends up limiting her. The multiple visual frames in the 2000 cover's composition emphasize this point. The biggest frame, only slightly visible in the book cover, is the tree in the background. The trunk and leaves curve around the contour of the bench, with the leaves coming a bit too close to Marianne's head for comfort. The back of the bench and the left bench leg frame the majority of her body. The back and sides of the bench literally have vertical bars, mimicking a prison cell. The leading lines of the bench also guide the viewer's eye to Marianne's head, where the frame of her arms closes in her face even further. Aside from the painting's composition, the blue bars on the top and bottom of the cover also enclose Marianne. The longer the viewer looks at Marianne's arms so close to her face, the tree leaves touching her head in the background, and the top blue bar getting quite close to her head, the more there is a sense of claustrophobia and confinement. Though the original painting (shown on the following page), also suggests this confinement, the full composition of the painting is ultimately more open, showing more of the garden and the outdoors. Marianne has the possibility of not being

confined, but she continually chooses her emotions over logical thinking, especially compared to Elinor, which ultimately limits her.

Marianne's confinement while still being outdoors, emphasizes the few objects in the painting's garden that the cover designer decided to crop out. In the original painting, a book lies open on the bench just to the right of Marianne. Based on the way that Marianne acts throughout



the majority of the book, I think it is a fair assumption that the book next to her is a gothic novel, or something equally as emotionally driven. Edward Ferrars comments that with authors such as

Thomson, Cowper, and Scott, Marianne "would buy them all over and over again: she would buy up every copy ... to prevent their falling into unworthy hands; and she would have every book that tells her how to admire an old twisted tree," such as the one behind her in this painting (Austen 61). It is interesting that it is cropped out of the end cover design, because that book is probably what causes Marianne to be so free with her feelings, eventually ending up in her confinement. After all, she abhors "spiritless" and "tame" reading (Austen 11).

Not only the book is cropped out of the cover image. In the rear right of the painting, another young woman stands in the background. Her back faces us as she picks roses near an arch of green leaves. It seems not enough that Marianne already gets the majority of the

attention; the cover designer decided to completely crop out the other woman. Throughout the book, Marianne's complete absorption in her own thoughts leads her to either forget her sister Elinor's feelings, or to convince herself that Elinor barely has feelings, at least compared to her own. When Marianne finally discovers that Edward is engaged to Lucy Steele, Elinor accuses Marianne of thinking Elinor lacks all feeling. Like her mother, Marianne "had erred in relying on Elinor's representation of herself" (Austen 238). The composition and cropping of the image on the book cover reveals this mindset of Marianne's. Marianne sees only her problems which means that we as viewers see only Marianne's problems. Or, if the viewer has not read the book yet, they see that *one* girl in the book has problems, problems enough to drape herself dramatically on a bench and stare into space. Though we cannot see Elinor on the cover of the book, the space around her in the painting contrasts with Marianne's space. Elinor is not confined by multiple boxes that pull her more and more inward. Though the hedge arch creates a visual frame right next to her, Elinor is free to roam the garden and pick flowers or, if she wants, free to leave the cultivated garden and go wherever she likes.

Though the 2000 edition does not show a specific scene, Marianne is at least placed in a landscape that seems like it could be around the cottage, and as viewers, we could easily be placed in Mrs. Dashwood's shoes. Mrs. Dashwood herself states that "Marianne's affliction, because more acknowledged, more immediately before her, had too much engrossed her tenderness, and led her away to forget that in Elinor she might have a daughter suffering almost as much" (Austen 239). When Elinor is cropped out of view, we as viewers are put in this same mindset as Mrs. Dashwood. With only having the option to view Marianne on the cover, viewers who have not read *Sense and Sensibility* may not realize that they should focus on Elinor "almost as much," if not more, than Marianne. However, despite the fact that Elinor is not featured on the

cover, she does appear on the spine (pictured to the left). Because this cover could be interpreted as being from Mrs. Dashwood's point of view, Marianne is the front and center, with Elinor staying on the sidelines. Margaret is probably up in the tree behind Marianne. Mrs. Dashwood's and Marianne's points of view align fairly similarly, thinking that Marianne is the sister with all of the feelings because she demonstrates them more freely. Marianne always seems to be

fighting to be the heroine, which is ultimately the problem and what contributes to her downfall.

As readers, it is easy to have the same mindset as Mrs. Dashwood even while reading the novel. Butler claims that Jane Austen, in her juvenilia and her three novels begun in the same decade, "derided the taste for sensibility as selfish and indulgent" (Butler 36). At the end of the novel, Marianne is domesticated and her sensibility curbed, or so it seems. Despite the suggestion that sensibility is a bad thing and can contribute to a woman's downfall, "Austen herself seems caught between her attraction to Marianne's sincerity and spontaneity, while at the same time identifying with the civil falsehoods and the reserved, polite silences of Elinor" (Gilbert and Gubar 157). Though Marianne frequently gets hurt because of her emotional reactions to the situations she is placed in, as readers, it is sometimes easier to identify with her romantic notions. It is easier to become emotionally invested in Marianne's dramatic outbursts and declarations of love than in Elinor's private (even to the reader) sorrows. Similar to Mrs. Dashwood, it is easy to get caught up in what is most visible. Thompson continues this same idea when he says that Marianne's "romantic notions of attachment" match the typical reader's viewpoint more than Elinor's "prudent and practical view." Because of this, even when readers accept that Elinor has "authority,"



JANE AUSTEN • Sense and Sensibility

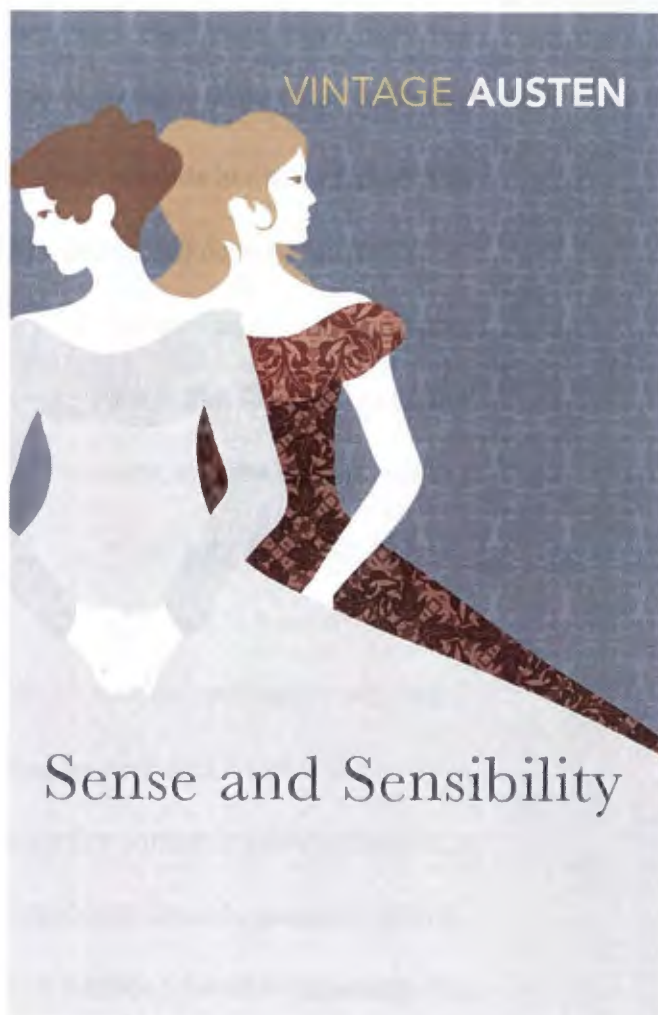


WORDSWORTH
EDITIONS

there will often be “muted expressions of disappointment” at how the book ends for Marianne and “disappointment that she has to be penalized with Colonel Brandon, chastised under a policy of reduced expectations” (Thompson 150). It is because of this automatic connection to Marianne that Austen chose the form of the novel that she did, using Elinor as the narrator. The reader is “restricted to Elinor’s emotional struggles,” automatically negating the possibility of identifying with Marianne too much, to the point where the reader would not appreciate what Elinor’s thought process is, and what she goes through (Poovey 188). Using Elinor’s point of view lets Austen “dramatize the complexities of what might otherwise seem an unattractive and unyielding obsession with propriety.” This also allows Austen to “filter the two stories of illicit passion” through Elinor, who generally pays more attention to her better judgement than to her emotion. “That the passion bleeds from the narrators of these two tales into Elinor’s ‘sense’ attests to the power of this force and to the dangerous susceptibility that, without proper control, might undermine the judgement of even the most rational reader” (Poovey 188). With using this form, Austen allows the reader to identify with Elinor on both an emotional and moral level. Despite Elinor being the narrator, covers such as the 1883 edition and the 2000 edition emphasize Marianne as being the main subject in the book. In these cases, it appears that the book cover actually undermines the form of the book.

2010 Random House Vintage Classic Edition

The edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, designed by Birgit Amadori (shown on the next page), shows both sisters, and it also shows the obvious contrast between the two. With a muted, non-objective design as the background and a simple serif typeface for the title, the attention is



left to the two figures on the left half of the cover. Because both the background and their dresses are patterned, the plain paper cutout heads draw the eye. Though it is unclear right away which sister is which, taking into account their character traits, Elinor has the brown hair and is the sister at the front of the composition, and Marianne has blond hair and is placed behind Elinor. Elinor is in front because she is both older (so she comes first in the family) and the majority of the novel is filtered through her mind, rather than Marianne's. Because of Elinor's age and disposition, she would also

more likely have had her hair up than Marianne. Elinor's hair is fixed up in a high bun with some curls framing her face, while Marianne's looks a little wilder, half pulled up, with a piece falling towards her face.

The two hairstyles are just one way we can see Elinor's sense and Marianne's sensibility. Elinor's emotions are much more tightly knit than Marianne's, showing just what she would like others to see. At the end of the novel, once Elinor realizes that Edward Ferrars is coming towards her cottage and not Colonel Brandon, she tells herself, "*I will be calm; I will be mistress of myself*" (Austen 240). This quote echoes Elinor's control over her emotions throughout the majority of the book. Marianne, on the other hand, is wild and free and does not much care who

sees what she feels. In fact, it seems that she would almost prefer *everyone* to see her feelings. The party where Willoughby spurns Marianne shows this contrast between the two sisters. When Marianne holds her hand out to Willoughby, he approaches, but mostly talks to Elinor rather than Marianne, and does so hurriedly:

Elinor was robbed of all presence of mind by such an address, and was unable to say a word. But the feelings of her sister were instantly expressed. Her face was crimsoned over, and she exclaimed, in a voice of the greatest emotion, 'Good God! Willoughby, what is the meaning of this? Have you not received my letters? Will you not shake hands with me?' (Austen 116)

When Edward unintentionally betrays Elinor, on the other hand, the most Elinor does is "think and be wretched," and that is only once she is alone (Austen 90). Elinor proves her good sense with her continual self-restraint in painful situations. Meanwhile, "Marianne's indulgence in sensibility almost causes her own death, the unfettered play of her imagination seeming to result in a terrible fever that represents how imaginative women are infected and sickened by their dreams" (Gilbert and Gubar 156-7). Elinor is rewarded for her sense and Marianne is punished for her sensibility.

The sisters' dress also reveals differencing tendencies towards sense and sensibility, just like Marianne's innocence is clear in other covers. Similar to the 1995 edition, in the 2010 edition, Elinor's long sleeves cover her up, while Marianne has a dress that just barely covers her shoulders, reflecting how Elinor hides her emotions much more than her sister. In addition to that, though Elinor is in the forefront of the frame, Marianne is by no means lost in the background. The contrast of her white arm and her dark red dress draws more attention than Elinor's light gray dress, which easily blends into her skin.

In the 2010 edition, the sisters again look in opposite directions. Like the 1995 edition, Marianne looks forward (to the right) and Elinor looks backward (to the left). This, again, shows how Marianne expresses her feelings more outwardly than Elinor. In a similar vein, Marianne's head tilts upward while Elinor's head tilts downward. Not only does this depict that they are opposites, but Elinor's downward tilted head hints at hiding while Marianne's suggests that she is proud of everything she shows the world. In fact, Elinor accuses Marianne of having a "reasonable and laudable pride which resists such malevolence." Marianne promptly replies, "...misery such as mine has no pride. I care not who knows that I am wretched. The triumph of seeing me so may be open to all the world. ... I must be wretched—and they are welcome to enjoy the consciousness of it that can. ... But to appear happy when I am so miserable—Oh! who can require it?" (Austen 125). Well, Elinor requires it, but that miscommunication is one of the reasons that Marianne understands so little of Elinor's reactions and why, in book cover after book cover, the sisters are consistently portrayed with opposite visual characteristics.

Despite the sisters appearing so opposite, they do seem to be more equal in the 2010 cover than in any other cover. The physical proximity of the two sisters suggests both the equality and the closeness between them. In Margaret C. Sullivan's *Jane Austen Cover to Cover*, Sullivan states that in the 2010 edition, "though similarly posed, [the sisters] look in different directions but their hearts are always close" (Sullivan 112). I would amend that statement by saying that their hearts eventually *get* close by the end of the novel, once Marianne understands Elinor a bit better. Thompson comments on this idea when he says that because the novel has so many contrasting pairs (such as the thematic contrast in the title itself), it suggests "a couplet structure of balance and antithesis." Despite this, the pairs in the book "do not necessarily lead either to neat valorized oppositions or to any happy syntheses." Elinor's sense and Marianne's

sensibility do not finally boil down to “restraint and excess nor to prudence and folly, nor does Austen offer us any easy Horatian mean between the two” (Thompson 148). The two slightly offset sisters in the cover could also look like they move towards each other, merging until they become one. Like Thompson says, Austen does not offer a clear moral at the end of the book to show what she absolutely deems best. However, this composition seems to emphasize the possible message at the end of the book; there needs to be a balance between sense and sensibility. It is only once Marianne tones down her feelings and Elinor expresses hers, that the two sisters get their happy endings.

The physical closeness between the two sisters suggests their emotional closeness, but the silhouettes of the Dashwood sisters are almost identical, making it appear that Marianne is a shadow of Elinor. This can be interpreted in a few different ways. With Marianne slightly hidden behind Elinor, it suggests that Elinor possesses the same characteristic of sensibility that Marianne does, except she hides it within herself, knowing better than to let it out. When Elinor first finds out from Lucy Steele that Edward Ferrars is engaged, Elinor replies with “a composure of voice under which was concealed an emotion and distress beyond anything she had ever felt.” Like I mentioned earlier, when Elinor is later alone, she becomes “at liberty to think and be wretched” (Austen 90). The contradicting words “composure” and “distress” and then later, “think” and “wretched” show that Elinor has both sense and sensibility, she is just much better at hiding it than her sister. But the relationship between the two girls and their respective sense and sensibilities is more complicated than that. Perhaps the shadow-like composition of this edition shows how they both have each other’s personality traits, or suggests the type of person that they are capable of becoming. The composition shows Elinor’s full figure while Marianne is cut off and behind her; this could show that Marianne will not realize her full potential until she

becomes like her more mature sister, hiding her feelings from the world, and thus acting more acceptable in society.

Though the 2010 cover seems to more accurately depict the story in certain ways, it differs from the other three book covers in that there is not as much feeling elicited from the reader when viewing it. The 1883, 1995, and 2000 editions convey strong feelings, and most often a sense of drama. However, the neat paper cutout style and the consistent subtle patterns of the 2010 edition offer little personal feeling to the design. The simple serif font of "Sense and Sensibility" and the sans serif "Vintage Austen" in all caps in the top right hand corner draw little attention to themselves and suggest a more contemporary feeling, distancing the book jacket from the original time period of the novel. Even the sisters' formal poses with their clasped hands and heads turning away feels a bit sterile and impersonal. The blank white faces with little expression add to this lifeless feeling. Though the pattern in the background and on the sisters' dresses adds texture, it does not add much life to the composition, either. However, with this style, the two sisters look a bit like paper dolls, reflecting the fact that society and societal conventions constantly influence how they act, and they have little actual control over their lives. The design has the feeling of being a paper collage, and it is perhaps because of this that Sullivan describes this edition as being "fresh and modern without pandering to potential readers" (Sullivan 112). This contrasts most obviously with the 1995 edition, which displays well known actresses on the cover, hoping to attract the attention of the audience connected with the movie as well as the book.

The problem gets worse

Though I've chosen only four editions of *Sense and Sensibility* to analyze, there are countless other editions that reveal the same themes talked about with these covers. Regardless of the style of book cover—woodcut, painting, photograph, etc.—or the content—two sisters, hero saving the heroine, etc.—there is a legitimate way to link what the cover shows the reader and what the text shows the reader. Whether the book cover is well designed or has little thought put into it, whether it is pretty or ugly, there are themes that can be revealed in the book cover that appear in the text. A large part of what makes a book cover successful is having the visual “be ambiguous enough to allow the reader to participate with his or her own imagination” (Minor). However, this ambiguity and personal participation didn't really clear anything up between my English side and designer side.

Wimsatt and Beardsley do say that the “evaluation of the work of art remains public; the work is measured against something outside the author,” which is one of their five “axiomatic” propositions (Beardsley and Wimsatt 10, 4). In my case of analyzing *Sense and Sensibility* for my thesis, I am very much “outside the author.” I myself am interpreting someone else's visual interpretation of yet another person's text. Once a book is designed and out on the market, there is an infinite number of people who will evaluate whether a book cover design is “true” or not. Because of this, maybe, instead of there being one “truth,” there are multiple truths. Looking at a piece of design and reading a piece of text is ultimately a personal experience. So perhaps there is an “author truth,” a “designer truth,” and a “reader truth.” However, this brings us to our first problem with the word “true.” The word “true” connotes an absolute. There is one “truth.” If

there are multiple readers that judge whether something is “true” or not, then it negates the idea of there being one absolute “truth.”

Wimsatt and Beardsley assert that the “meaning of a poem may certainly be a personal one” (Beardsley and Wimsatt 5). Again, this can be extended to book covers, with the readers placing their own personal interpretations on the covers that they see. With every one of the four *Sense and Sensibility* covers that I looked at, I could point out themes in the novel that appeared in the cover. When I looked at the *Sense and Sensibility* covers, I really looked at them through an English lens. Regardless of the cover I was looking at, and regardless of whether I thought it was good design or not (and “arresting” or not), I found something in each cover that made it “true” to at least some extent and found information from the text to back it up. In fact, I was surprised at how much English Major Maria actually pulled out of each cover.

Because of this, when looking at my analyses of the *Sense and Sensibility* book covers, Designer Maria would say with quite a bit of confidence that the majority of the analysis is purely my interpretation. Though I hope that my arguments about Austen’s cover have been convincing, even being a graphic designer, I seriously doubt that every single point that I made was purposefully done by the designer of each of the covers. In fact, I would assert that the *majority* of what I said was probably not done on purpose. English Major Maria laughs at this because on the other hand, I tried to find information from the text to back up what I was saying, so if I saw it in the cover and backed it up with the text, then what I saw was “true” in the literary analysis sense. I would, however, be able to pick which covers I thought had more elements of “truth” than others. If this is the case, though, then that means that every book cover could technically be “true.” This brings me to the second problem with the word “true.” Again, “truth” connotes an absolute. You cannot have a “scale of truthfulness,” choosing *how* true a book cover

is. If something is not one hundred percent true, then it is false. Therefore, as long as you use the word "true" to assess a book cover, there will be no easy way to determine whether the book cover is successful.

Conclusion

Between these two problems with the word "true," I've come to the conclusion that asking the question "Is it true?" in both English and design disciplines is an ineffective way of judging how successful a book cover is. In an English classroom, I would never raise my hand and say, "My opinion is 100% true and absolute." I would also never say that about an interpretation of a piece of art in one of my design classes. The word "true" is so final, and therefore limits the way to think about a book cover. "Arresting" was the other word used to evaluate my book covers during my honors project. To arrest literally means to catch and hold, or to stop. While a cover should stop the average book consumer in the store long enough to have them pick up the book, it should also accelerate them through the cover and into the text. So if a book cover is simply "true" and "arresting," it keeps the reader from moving forward into a deeper understanding of the book. Ideally, a cover that is in alignment with the book and is a provocative interpretation of the text will reveal a deeper, different meaning of the book than the reader first realized. The cover and text should be in conversation with each other, facilitating a cyclical process where the book cover makes the reader think deeper about the text, which in turn makes the reader think deeper about the cover. There should be space between the cover and text for the evolution of the reader's understanding of the book. The words "true" and "arresting" stop this progress.

So how do the two Marias factor into this? Despite trying to come to a conclusion all year long about how English Major Maria and Graphic Designer Maria can fuse together, I have yet to discover how this is possible. However, I have decided that having conflicting feelings does not mean that English Major Maria and Designer Maria do not operate together in a productive way. Having my two majors engaging in conversation with one another, even if that conversation is an argument, means that I am thinking about the relationship between my cover designs and the text, and that is the essential goal. This disconnect between my two majors creates the cyclical process where Designer Maria creates a cover and English Major Maria makes sure that the cover is in alignment with the text and engaging with it in an interesting way. Having these two viewpoints ultimately allows me to design better, creating covers that are valuable from every point of view.

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Reflection

I am so grateful that I completed my Honors thesis project my senior year. I swayed back and forth so many times on whether I wanted to continue in Honors or not, and Amber was infinitely patient with me. It is because of her that I decided to complete my undergrad with the Honors program. I feel quite a sense of accomplishment for completing a thesis as an undergrad. In doing so, I learned a lot about myself, my design, and my writing.

One of the hardest parts of starting this thesis was simply figuring out what I wanted to research and write on. Once I realized that I would just combine two aspects of my education that I loved, things got a lot easier. And then they got harder. It was interesting to see how my project evolved over the course of the year. I started thinking that I would write about how design and literature analysis worked well together, and quickly found that that was not what I should be talking about. I realized that my real question should have been: “*Can* design and literature analysis work well together?” But I didn’t really figure that out until the end of my project. (The answer is no, by the way. And yes.)

It seemed super overwhelming at first, having to write a 40 page paper. What really helped me at first was to think of the thesis as a combination of a lot of little papers. This made it appear much more do-able. Though I had written an abstract and a proposal, I honestly wasn’t completely sure where I would be going with my thesis. Because of this, I started with what I was interested in. I first picked *Sense and Sensibility* book covers to analyze, and it made it easier to think of it as an art history assignment. I read into every visual cue on the cover. I suppose that’s just like literary analysis, too, just a different medium. I wrote quite a bit without any problem once I thought of it as multiple small papers. It was also important for me not to get

caught up in where it was going to fit this visual analysis in the thesis as a whole, and just realize that I could put my thoughts down without worrying about any of that.

The next part was trickier. I was smart enough to use a contract to contribute to my thesis. In Fall 2015, I worked with Bob Winward to design book covers. For the first part of my thesis, I talk about that experience and do a little bit of analysis on my own book covers. This part was challenging for me, because while I have taken multiple art history classes and am familiar with writing about art, I am not used to writing about my own artwork. I felt really weird about it, to be honest. That's where the problem with my thesis came in. I realized that I had two different Marias in my head, and one of them thought my book covers were okay even though I hadn't read the books, and the other Maria was not okay with it. It was cool to see my thesis evolve as I was writing it. I realized then that I was asking the wrong questions.

The other part of my thesis that I thought was extremely challenging was writing my conclusion. I went through multiple drafts and every draft had a completely different conclusion. It took me a long time to realize that my problem was that I was asking the wrong question (again). The conclusion was such a struggle because I was trying to reconcile the two Marias by merging my two majors together. It was additionally hard because I was dealing with something that is actually an issue in my life. Rather than researching an abstract concept, my thesis deals with something that goes through my mind whenever I design a book cover.

It took a lot of frustration on my part, and a lot of brainstorm prompting on Dr. McCuskey's part, for me to finally figure out my conclusion. I was trying so hard to write a black and white, "this is the answer" conclusion that it took a while for me to accept that it was okay to have a "gray area" conclusion. I wanted so badly to merge those two majors together, but I finally realized that they just couldn't be merged. It was *so* satisfying once I had that realization

that they didn't have to go together. It was then that I realized the value of having two separate mindsets. Basically, even if those two Marias are arguing, that means that I am thinking deeper about a concept than I would otherwise. This makes my design and my analysis more valuable.

I think there are three pieces of advice that I would give to Honors students starting their theses. First, make a schedule for getting your thesis done and stick to it. Even if you aren't in the mood to do it, stick to that schedule. Spring Semester You will be grateful for it. Second, be willing to be flexible. It's okay if the thesis you started out with isn't the thesis that you end up with. It changed for a reason, and it is probably stronger that way. Third, make sure you pick a topic you care about. You'll be spending a lot of time with it, so make sure that you are cool spending hours thinking about this one topic. I chose a topic that I care deeply about, so I got excited every time I sat down to write about it. I think that enthusiasm ultimately creates a stronger thesis and one that you'll be proud of.

Author Bio

Maria Williams graduated Spring 2016 from Utah State University with a BFA in graphic design and a BS in English, with a creative writing emphasis. Over the course of her undergraduate career, she worked as a writing tutor with the Writing Center, the Writing Fellows program, and the Honors program. She has received multiple scholarships for art and English, and she has published multiple photographs and poems in local and national undergraduate literary magazines. She would like to have a career in the book publishing world and is starting her journey by interning with Don Congdon literary agency in New York City, summer of 2016.