

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

BY **KATE HAMILL**

BASED ON THE NOVEL

BY **JANE AUSTEN**



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY
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based on the novel by Jane Austen

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*Dedicated to John Buxton.
We love and miss you, John.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The world premiere of SENSE AND SENSIBILITY was produced by Bedlam (Eric Tucker, Artistic Director; Andrus Nichols, Producing Director) at the Sheen Center in New York City, on November 10th, 2014. It was directed by Eric Tucker. The set design was by John McDermott; the lighting design was by Les Dickert; the costume design was by Angela Huff; the sound design was by Eric Tucker and Katie Young; the assistant director was Aubrey Snowden; the choreography was by Alexandra Beller; the dramaturg was Emily Lyon; the dialect coach was Amanda Quaid; the production stage manager was Katharine Whitney; the assistant stage manager was Violeta Picayo; and the historical fact-checker was Jamie Lewis. The cast was as follows (in alphabetical order):

FANNY DASHWOOD/LUCY STEELE/
 LADY MIDDLETON/GOSSIP Laura Baranik
 COLONEL BRANDON/THOMAS/
 LADY MIDDLETON/GOSSIP Nigel Gore
 MARIANNE DASHWOOD Kate Hamill
 ELINOR DASHWOOD Andrus Nichols
 EDWARD FERRARS/ROBERT FERRARS/
 LADY MIDDLETON/GOSSIP Jason O’Connell
 JOHN WILLOUGHBY/
 JOHN DASHWOOD/GOSSIP John Russell
 MARGARET DASHWOOD/
 MRS. FERRARS/GOSSIP Vaishnavi Sharma
 MRS. DASHWOOD/
 ANNE STEELE/GOSSIP Samantha Steinmetz
 MRS. JENNINGS/GOSSIP Eric Tucker
 JOHN MIDDLETON/DOCTOR/
 SERVANT/GOSSIP Stephan Wolfert

CHARACTERS

ELINOR DASHWOOD — the eldest Dashwood sister; sensible.

MARIANNE DASHWOOD — the middle Dashwood sister;
sensitive.

MARGARET DASHWOOD — the youngest Dashwood sister;
10–13 years old.

MRS. DASHWOOD — mother to the Dashwood sisters.

JOHN DASHWOOD — half-brother to the Dashwood sisters
(from their father's side; no blood relation to Mrs. Dashwood).

EDWARD FERRARS — a gentleman; a bachelor.

FANNY (FERRARS) DASHWOOD — wife to John Dashwood
and sister to Edward; nasty.

COLONEL BRANDON — an older bachelor; over 45 years old.

JOHN WILLOUGHBY — an unusually handsome young man.

SIR JOHN MIDDLETON — a country gentleman; distant
relation to Mrs. Dashwood.

MRS. JENNINGS — a good-natured, boisterous woman;
mother-in-law to Sir John and a terror to the countryside.

LADY MIDDLETON — an over-bred lady.

LUCY STEELE — a young girl from no fortune.

ANNE STEELE — Lucy's sister; indiscreet.

ROBERT FERRARS — a callow young man; Edward Ferrars'
younger brother.

Also, to be doubled with the cast:

GOSSIPS 1–5 — a chorus of high-society creatures.

SERVANTS — including THOMAS.

DOCTOR

PLACE & TIME

England, 1790s.

NOTE

This play may be performed with as little or as much in the way of set, props, or spectacle as you prefer — in *Bedlam*'s world premiere, it was ingeniously staged with a few pieces of simple furniture. I encourage you to be as creative as you wish; it's meant to be a bit of a funhouse! Doubling is also encouraged; the only characters that absolutely should not be doubled are Elinor and Marianne, as the “sense” and “sensibility” foci of the piece. The Gossips may be assigned as needed. Have fun — Jane Austen would approve.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

ACT ONE

The Gossips

The Gossips, a chorus of high-society creatures, enter. They chatter away happily — in late eighteenth-century England, gossip (and a reputation created by that gossip) is lifeblood and social stricture and pastime and national sport and destiny. Whether or not it is delineated in the script, the Gossips are often watching or whispering or contributing to the action. The intent is to create an atmosphere in which someone is almost always observing and judging. It is oppressive and constricting, but not necessarily unfriendly; it is all great fun for the Gossips. The Gossips gather around a table, poised and ready to burst ...

GOSSIP 1. Did I tell you, I saw Lady Fagg and all of her five daughters last week ... (*All of the Gossips burst into speech simultaneously, in a great cacophony of sound, like gulls squabbling over food, talking over each other. They do not have to get through all of the dialogue.*)

GOSSIP 2.

The Miss Dashwoods are highly thought of throughout all the county, I think! Elinor Dashwood is said to possess a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, and yet an affectionate disposition. Marianne Dashwood is a lively

GOSSIP 1.

... with old Mrs. Hamilton, from Canterbury, and Miss Chapman, from Margate, into the bargain. I never saw so plain a family — five sisters so very plain! They are as plain as the Foresters, or the Franfraddops, or the Seagraves, or the Rivers —

enough girl, eager in all she does. I should think any young man who made a connection with the Miss Dashwoods should have little reason to regret it!

GOSSIP 3.

Dead of a fright, they say — I suppose he happened to look at his wife. I do not know what the Faggs should have for mourning. Perhaps bombazeen and crape, according to what is now almost universal. I wonder if it is too recent for the cousins to attend the gala on Tuesday? There is to be a concert, with illuminations and fireworks. Even the concert will have more than its usual charm for me, as the gardens are large enough for me to get pretty well beyond the reach of its sound!

GOSSIP 5. Well, we shall see. I find the Bingleys rather plain, but then there are very few true beautiful girls in the world. I respect Miss Chamberlayne for doing her hair well, but I cannot feel a more tender sentiment. Miss Langley is like any other short girl, with a broad nose and wide mouth, fashionable dress and exposed bosom. Mrs. Blount is much admired — with her broad face, diamond bandeau, white shoes, pink husband, and fat neck! (*With no great ceremony, a body is dropped upon the table, as for a funeral. The Gossips stare at it a moment before speaking, then gather around it.*)

excluding Miss Sophy, Miss Sally Fagg has some kind of a figure, and that compromises all the good looks of the family. It was stupidish; there was a lack of talk altogether.

GOSSIP 4.

It would be a fine match on her side, at least. I never thought the Miss Bennets anything *exceptional*, but they would pass as beauties in this county. Now Dorsetshire has *true* beauties; I met Lady Honeywood there, you know. I did not sit near enough to be a perfect judge, but I thought her extremely pretty, and her manners have all the recommendations of ease; and going about with four horses and nicely dressed herself, she is altogether a perfect sort of woman.

The Dashwoods

GOSSIP 1. Poor Mr. Dashwood — carried away so suddenly! Woke one morning with a fever, and drew his last gasp within the week! (*Overlapping with next line.*) Poor Mr. Dashwood!

GOSSIP 2. Poor Mr. Dashwood! But a very handsome funeral. The serenity of the corpse was most delightful. (*Overlapping with next line.*) Poor Mr. Dashwood!

GOSSIP 3. Poor Mr. Dashwood! And poor Mrs. Dashwood, in every sense of the word! You know that his widow and daughters are left with almost nothing! (*The Gossips, drawn sharply to this information, drop all interest in the corpse.*)

GOSSIP 4. No!

GOSSIP 1. Not truly?

GOSSIP 4. But Norland Park is such a large estate!

GOSSIP 2. Were there ... (*In hushed tones.*) very many DEBTS in the family?

GOSSIP 3. No, nothing like that. (*Officiously.*) It was a question of the law!

GOSSIP 4. DID SOMEBODY BREAK THE LAW? (*The Gossips all shush him.*)

GOSSIP 3. No, no. Mr. Dashwood could not *legally* bequeath it to the ladies. (*The Gossips are a bit disappointed.*) It all went to his son from the previous marriage, Mr. John Dashwood. (*John Dashwood enters.*)

JOHN. I think that I will give them a thousand pounds apiece to start their new life!

GOSSIP 4. But wasn't he a rich man already?

GOSSIP 3. Oh yes, he married into money. But his rich wife — (*Lowers voice.*) not a sympathetic creature! Moved into Norland Park the DAY AFTER THE FUNERAL, without a word of notice to the new widow! (*Fanny Dashwood enters; all the Gossips "tsk" reprovingly.*)

FANNY. My dear John, how can you think of taking four thousand pounds from the fortune of our dear little boy? What possible claim can the Miss Dashwoods, who are only related to you by half blood, have to so large an amount?

JOHN. My father's last request was that I provide for them, Fanny.

FANNY. Your father did not know what he was talking of, I dare say; ten to one he was light-headed at the time. Four thousand pounds!

JOHN. He did not specify any particular amount. (*Fanny waits.*) Perhaps if the sum were diminished by one-half. Five hundred pounds apiece would be a great increase to their fortunes!

FANNY. Two thousand pounds! What brother on earth would do so much for even his REAL sisters!

JOHN. One had rather do too much than too little. Do you think that they may expect more?

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

adapted by Kate Hamill

based on the novel by Jane Austen

4M, 4W: 17 total (doubling, flexible casting)

A playful new adaptation of Jane Austen's beloved novel follows the fortunes (and misfortunes) of the Dashwood sisters — sensible Elinor and hypersensitive Marianne — after their father's sudden death leaves them financially destitute and socially vulnerable. Set in gossipy late 18th-century England, with a fresh female voice, the play is full of humor, emotional depth, and bold theatricality. *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY* examines our reactions, both reasonable and ridiculous, to societal pressures. When reputation is everything, how do you follow your heart?

"... an unconditional delight ... invigorating ... a bouncy, jaunty take on Austen ... remains remarkably true to the values and priorities of its source. The classic Austen preoccupations with real estate, income, class, reputation and equilibrium in life are all rendered brightly and legibly here."
—**The New York Times**

"... so full of galloping comic vitality as to suggest a bunch of stupendously clever kids playing dress-up in the nursery. It's by far the smartest Jane Austen adaptation to come along since Amy Heckerling's Clueless, and at least as much fun."
—**The Wall Street Journal**

"Perhaps the greatest stage adaptation of this novel in history." —**The Huffington Post**

"... inventive, faithful, clever and hilarious. Kate Hamill's marvelous play is one of the finest stage adaptations of a literary classic. Our Jane would have expressed her approval."
—**TheaterScene.net**

"... rowdy, exuberant ... thoroughly modern yet not at all contemporized. Kate Hamill's felicitous adaptation gives us ageless emotions, couched in the mores and locutions of the past, yet timeless in their arduously suppressed intensity."
—**Time Out (New York)**

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