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A reading of Ang Lee's 'Sense and Sensibility' and 'The Ice Storm'.

by
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Introduction

The two films I have chosen to analyse are 'Sense and Sensibility' (1995) and 'The Ice Storm' (1997). 'Sense and Sensibility' was written by the eighteenth century novelist Jane Austen. The adaptation of the novel into screenplay was written by the actress Emma Thompson. The 'Ice Storm' was written by the twentieth century novelist Rick Moody and turned into a screenplay by James Schamus. Both films were directed by Ang Lee.

'Sense and Sensibility' is a story about the problems of a widow and her daughters two hundred years ago. The film begins with Mr Dashwood (Tom Wilkinson) at his deathbed explaining to his son, by a previous marriage, that by law, Norland Estate belongs entirely to him. When he dies his widow and her three daughters lose their inheritance and their dowries. The Dashwoods become poor relations in their own home, under the presence of their half-brother, John Dashwood (James Fleet) and his manipulative wife, Fanny Dashwood (Harriet Walter). The film follows the theme of love and money and the romantic paths of two sisters of marrying age, Elinor Dashwood (Emma Thompson) and Marianne Dashwood (Kate Winslet). Elinor is full of sense and good judgement and Marianne, the impetuous younger sister, full of romantic sensibilities. Marriage is the only chance these two women have of any happiness, adventure and well-being. In the first few scenes of the film the audience is captured by the cruel circumstances the Dashwoods have been left in.

Things cannot seem to get any worse until Fanny announces that her brother Edward Ferras (Hugh Grant) will be coming to visit. In comparison to his sister, Edward turns out to be a kind, sensitive man. Inevitably Edward with his good-nature and Elinor with her good sense form an attachment, however, they are separated before a romance is allowed to bloom. The focus shifts to Marianne who is not looking for a quiet, placid man but for an intensive, passionate one. He appears as the dashing John Willoughby (Greg Wise), who is everything Marianne desires. Marianne's affections are also sought after by another man, the shy, sedate Colonel Brandon (Alan Rickman) who ultimately wins her. Edward and Elinor are finally re-united and marry.

The 'Ice Storm' is set in 1973, New Canaan, Connecticut. The opening scene focuses on the sixteen year old Paul Hood (Tobey Maguire) travelling home to be with his family for Thanksgiving. He is reading a comic book, Issue 141 of the Fantastic Four and begins his voice-over,

"That was the meaning of the Fantastic Four that a family is like your own

personal anti-matter. Your family is the void you emerge from and the place you return to when you die.”

Already the scene is set, the film is going to encompass the theme of family structure. Ben (Kevin Klein) and Elina Hood (Joan Allen) who have been married for twenty years and have two teenage children, Wendy (Cristina Ricci) and Paul (Tobey Maguire), are having marital problems. Ben is having an affair with their neighbour, Janey Carver (Sigourney Weaver) and their respective spouses suspect as much. Elena Hood's tolerance of her husband is growing thin. She seems a well-balanced modern woman but she still adheres to old-fashioned values. The film deals with issues left over from the 1960s. The adults have become bored with their lives and participate in pastimes such as 'key-parties', (this is when the husbands put their car keys in a bowl and the women pick them out to find a new sexual partner).

The children in the film also participate in sexual games. Wendy plays sexual games with the two Carver boys, Mikey Carver (Elijah wood) and Sandy Carver (Adam Hann-Byrd), while her older brother, Paul, looks for some sort of sexual conquest. The film ends with an ice storm which occurs when it is so cold that rain falls as ice. The title 'The Ice Storm' uses pathetic fallacy to represent the icy cold emotions of the adults and how it affects their children.

First of all I wish to consider how a Taiwanese director, Ang Lee, who did not come to America until 1978, and still struggles with English, managed to, in my opinion, successfully direct a nineteenth century film from classic English Literature, and also a film about America in the 1970s. I will look at Lee's influences from his own culture which led him to and enabled him to direct these films. Due to the films being set in past eras I will consider their historical relevance and the feeling of nostalgia, if any, which is created. I will also look at how Lee recreated the past and how difficult it was to achieve the necessary style of the film.

The two films are both adaptations from books, they are period dramas set in different countries in different eras. I wish to consider to what extent literature has influenced cinema and whether-or-not a director is restrained in his/her interpretation of the script into film.

'Sense and Sensibility' and 'The Ice Storm' are two films concerned with the family, especially the portrayal of the female. What makes these two films interesting for comparison is that they both focus primarily on females. I will analyse the status women have in the eighteenth and twentieth century society; how their positions have changed financially and socially. I will also discuss if the females in the two films bear any similarities to women today and question the relevance of the films for a modern audience. I will also look at the lead actresses and ascertain the influences they had on the films.

Ang Lee

"His movies have a dash of Hollywood comedy, an infusion of cinema, a hint of Broadway drama and a totally fresh approach."
(Ramsey, 1996, p.1)

Ang Lee had to achieve more than his counter-parts in becoming a highly acclaimed director. In Taiwan, where Lee originates, any involvement with the entertainment industry is seen as being low culture. Lee's conscious decision to become a film maker disgraced his family. He had to prove his worth as a good director to regain their confidence.

Lee exists in a world between American culture and Chinese philosophy. He came to the States to study theatre at the University of Illinois. He maintained his own Chinese identity within an alien culture which ultimately resulted in an approach to cinema which was derived from these two influences.

Lee first made a name for himself when he developed his theatre studies into cinema at the New York University film school where he made a short film 'Fine Line' (1985) which caught the attention of Hollywood. Lee went on to direct 'Pushing Hands' (1992) and due to its success mainly in Asia had the chance to make 'The Wedding Banquet' (1993). 'The Wedding Banquet' became a box-office legend. Based on the budget-to-box office ratio it beat 'Jurassic Park' (1993) to the number one spot (Schmaus, 1994, p10) Lee then went on to direct 'Eat, Drink, Man, Woman' (1994), a film totally Taiwanese in its content and essence.

The first of Lee's major films, 'Pushing Hands', 'The Wedding Banquet' and 'Eat, Drink, Man, Woman' each have one thing in common, they are films concerned with the family, especially the male as the head of the family. Each put into perspective the need for a father figure. 'The Wedding Banquet' focuses on questions of masculinity in a contemporary world. In 'Eat, Drink, Man, Women' the male, the father figure, tries to involve himself in the lives of his three bright, beautiful, young daughters. His place has become secondary in their lives yet he tries to grasp a part of theirs. The two films I have chosen to write about also directed by Lee, 'Sense and Sensibility' and 'The Ice Storm' continue the theme of the family, the importance of the father figure is still a relevant issue yet the focus of the films is on the female characters and their point of view.

Due to Lee's past experience of family dramas he was well equipped to make these

films. Lee would be interested in 'Sense and Sensibility' as the title reflects the 'yin and yang' or the opposites which occur in every day life. In interview with Ramsey, Lee states that 'Sense and Sensibility' is very similar to his other films. 'Eat Drink, Man, Woman' is a story of sisters, it contained both elements of satire and romance. Lee in the same interview explained his desire to direct 'Sense and Sensibility',

"It was exactly what I was trying to do – social satire combined with emotional drama. It has humour without bitterness and warmth without sappiness. There's that edge I like in my films."
(Ramsey, 1996, p.3)

Lee may seem like an unlikely choice to direct an adaptation of English Literature but an aspect which struck him was how closely he could relate to it culturally and socially,

"Late eighteenth century England is like Chinese society. It shocked them, how familiar I am with this feeling, this world. It's akin to the way I was brought up."
(ibid)

'Sense and Sensibility' is a compassionate film reflecting the combined influences of Austen and Thompson. It shows a compassionate interest in the female way of life in the eighteenth century. 'The Ice Storm' is primarily a male and female vision of the family structure. It is an extremely satirical film showing how difficult it is for the female to accept new freedoms which came with the sexual revolution of the 1960s. It also shows how the female demotes herself within the family and also society. In directing 'The Ice Storm' Lee dissects the family structure akin to what he has done in his previous films. 'The Ice Storm' depicts a horrible world of male insecurity and female unworthiness.

In an interview with Mary Hardesty, Lee was asked what excited him about 'The Ice Storm'. He replied,

"like 'Sense and Sensibility' it came from a book. It's a moving story set in 1973 – a year that has just become costume drama. Yet, it is very fresh in the audience's memory, and nothing much has been done on this period. It's a family drama, which I'm used to directing, but it's very opposite from 'Sense and Sensibility'. The social culture is hip and liberating. The characters have begun to feel uncomfortable with these freedoms. It's a good time to re-examine where we were, which is the beginning of our world today."
(Hardesty, 1996, p.3)

'Sense and Sensibility' and 'The Ice Storm' are far removed in their period settings and culture yet they are undeniably similar in their subject matter of family structure and gender issues. Lee is an interesting director as he steps outside the usual confines of gender. In the same interview with Mary Hardesty when asked what his immediate goal was answered, "To make each movie different from the last one." (ibid) In 'Sense and Sensibility' and 'The Ice Storm' Lee is directing films set at times totally foreign to him. The manners, customs, even the physique of the people portrayed are outside his

1903-1904

experience. They are Westerners; he is Eastern. As with Eastern disciplines and codes of behaviour the manner and mannerisms of the characters in the two films are the result of centuries of tradition.

The adaptation of novel into film

As already stated, 'Sense and Sensibility' and the 'The Ice Storm' are films which are derived from a literary background. It is interesting to consider what films can do that a novel cannot and vice-versa, also why literature has often dictated the conventions of cinema. Screenwriters have often looked to novels for a starting point, perhaps to accelerate the process of film making.

The novel and the film are two very different forms of entertainment yet they both have the same storytelling function. The novel is a written narrative for the enjoyment of one person, the reader. The film is a sequence of images, projected at high speed, to give the impression of moving images. A film can be experienced by a large number of people. To consider the basis of a novel is to associate it with one person, the author. A film, because of its industrial nature, is associated with a large number of individuals, and is produced, theoretically, for a profit. Although it is often thought that the author of a novel deserves more recognition for creativity than the director of a film as an author is seen as the sole creator of their work, this was not always the case. Early novelists were paid for each page produced, the length of each chapter was therefore dictated by the publisher and not the author. The significant difference between a film and a novel is that you can start and stop a novel, and the images created in a novel are from our own mind's interpretation. Also if you do not understand a part in a book, you can flick back the pages to check some detail which you may have missed.

When Lee read Rick Moody's novel he knew immediately he wanted to make it into a film. He relates this need to two instances,

"There were two moments at the end of a book—one was when a body is found—it hit me like a long-lost Greek tragedy and moved me so deeply I knew I had to make this film."

(Weiner, 1996, p.2)

The other one that affected him was the emotional family reunion of the Hoods at the train in early morning,

"There's an implicit understanding—a moment of connection in the aftermath of the ice storm—a little bit of hope—a little bit of warmth which is a treasure—I felt utterly moved and I knew there was a movie there and I had to make it."

(ibid)

A novel may be more literal and precise than a film but it still provides a wealth of visual stimuli. What a director does is show on screen his/her interpretation and visualisation

of a novel.

The degree to which a film is a good adaptation can be discussed in various stages. A poor adaptation can be described as one which only tries to re-create the novel page-by-page, resulting in a mundane representation with little or no artistic creativity. These films can be defined as purely functional, there is minimum interference of the interpretation of the novel onto screen. A mediocre adaptation of a novel into film can be defined as one which only uses the novel as a guideline, the novel has been re-structured and emphasis put on certain parts, but the film still does not show any creative uniqueness. The film can be described as a good analysis of the novel. A successful adaptation of a novel is when the the literature is dissected and the important elements the author is trying to convey such as the morals and underlying messages are extracted.

George Linden describes what is needed for a successful adaptation of a novel,

“a successful adaptation of the novel should not be the book. Nor should it be a substitute for the book. If it is truly successful, it should be a work of art in its own right which excites the reader to re-experience the novel.”
(Linden in ‘Screening the Novel’, 1990, p.10)

I think this is what makes Lee’s interpretation of ‘Sense and Sensibility’ and ‘The Ice Storm’ so successful. The original book ‘The Ice Storm’ by Rick Moody is an indepth account of 1970s families and society. Some of the events described in the book are grotesque and far more vivid than Lee chose to visualise on screen. Lee was asked in interview with Jennie Yabroff what elements of the book he wanted to retain and what elements he wanted to change.

“I tried to keep the emotional core of the tragedy – that’s what prompted me to make the movie. What I had to change was the structure, because cinematically we couldn’t do a lot of the things described in the book. There is a lot of masturbation in the book that we couldn’t show on the screen”
(Yabroff, 1997, p.3)

Even though the storyline in the film is changed to tone down the explicit subject matter of the book, the underlying messages have not altered. The breakdown of the family is shown significantly in Lee’s film with Ben and Janey having an affair. Lee in his directional style maintains an elegance on screen whilst depicting morally questionable issues.

“I think the movie is a lot softer. Less angry. I didn’t grow up there.....That distance helped me to make it art.”
(ibid)

‘Sense and Sensibility’ posed more of a problem. Nineteenth century novels by authors

such as Dickens, Eliot and Austen have been immensely popular and attractive to film-makers, and for television adaptations, in re-creating the past, indeed most of the popular BBC costume dramas have stemmed from this source. Lee had to compete against these adaptations to be accepted by the viewer who is used to these productions which are generally of a high standard. In interview with Nancy Ramsey, Lee discussed how he dealt with this,

"It's inspiring for the actors to have a vision different from what they are used to. They grew up with the BBC and Masterpiece Theatre and were hoping to do something fresh. I'm not familiar this tradition, so I just do the best I can."
(Ramsey, 1996, p.4)

Austen was a novelist writing for a prudish eighteenth century reader. In maintaining the essence of the book Lee understates the sexual implications between Edward and Elinor and Marianne and Willoughby. Lee could have made more of the sexual relationships between the couples as a twentieth century audience is generally more accepting of such issues. Lee, however, chose not to do this as this would not have been true to the representation of middle-class eighteenth century society. Any deviation into a more sexually explicit film would have gone against the morals presented by Austen, therefore resulting in a poor adaptation of her novel.

A question which arises is, is Lee trapped, and having to suppress his own creativity in portraying another artist's vision?

William Luhr and Peter Lehman point out,

"The reputation of a classic novel often led film makers to assume they could reconstruct the major events of the narrative and that the novel's greatness' would carry the rest."
(Luhr and Lehman in 'Screening the Novel', p.2, 1990)

When an individual goes to see a film an influence, amongst others, on their choice will be if the film has been adapted from a novel. Perhaps they have heard the novel is particularly good, especially if the book has been at the top of the bestsellers list, and they have not had a chance or no desire to read it. Due to this a film adapted from a novel can become its selling point.

Brian McFarlane, emphasises that it is impossible to expect a written form, the novel, to be exactly like film. (McFarlane in 'Screening the Novel', 1990, p.28) This would be impossible without major change. The film borrows from, intersects and transforms the novel to make it suitable for the screen. I think this can only successfully be achieved by the vision of one person, the director. Books are literal, everything is explained, we always know what the characters are doing, in which room the events are taking place and what their actions are. In film this is not possible; visually, circumstances can only

be expressed. In a film there is always a huge amount of detail in a shot which has no relevance to the plot but which is necessary in setting the mood of the film and also the scene. The camera can only express the mood of characters or specify what objects are or indicate where places are by using special camera trickery like zooming in and out, depth of field, different perspectives and photo montage.

Morris Beja puts the percentage of American films derived from novels at between twenty and thirty percent of the total released each year. (Beja, in 'Screening the Novel', 1990, p.2) He also states that three quarters of the best Academy awards have gone to adaptations. What makes film adaptations of books so popular with an audience?

A novel although enjoyable, can take a long time to read. Although you can start and stop a novel, not all people have the time. Novels are generally read by a fairly small audience. Films are relatively short, averaging ninety minutes and are shown to a large group of people. Statistics carried out by Dr. J.M Wober showed that more people have seen more adaptations than actually read the literature. (Wober in 'Screening the Novel' 1990, p.22/23) For those who do not read much seeing the film can elevate them into this hierarchy associated with literature. Going to the cinema is a pleasurable past-time and also a very social one; reading is a more personal experience. As society has developed there seems to be less time to spend on personal activities like reading. Also, the language and structure of a novel may be too difficult for a person to read, particularly adaptations of classical novels. Many films simplify the novel so that most people can understand it. A film which has been made from a successful novel attracts people to see the film based on it, in the anticipation of a good adaptation.

Aspects of Nostalgia in 'Sense and Sensibility' and 'The Ice Storm'

Nostalgia films in their narrowest sense are films about the past. 'Sense and Sensibility' takes place at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. It can also be more specifically a certain period in the past, 'The Ice Storm's' historical setting is easier to visualise; it is the era which encompasses the sexual revolution, Nixon and the Watergate scandal, the war in Vietnam, and more intimately the differences occurring in families between parents and their children and the disintegration of the traditional marriage.

'Sense and Sensibility' and 'The Ice Storm' can both be described as 'costume' or 'period' dramas. These two films command interest as we seem to have an infatuation with the past. We continually borrow from the past. The idiosyncrasies and eccentricities of the 1970s and the eighteenth century make fascinating viewing. A reconstruction of an era can only imitate the past, sometimes ridiculing it and sometimes admiring it. As outsiders we can easily criticise the past, it is easy for us to see its faults, also we can look at the past in a nostalgic light often longing for times gone by. Often there is a morbid fascination with period dramas. Oppression in society and of gender can attract viewers. It is escapist to watch the suffering of other eras as it can make the time we live in seem more superior and less suffocating. 'The Ice Storm' is extremely crucial if we consider the 1970s were only three decades ago; people will remember that era very well.

'The Ice Storm' is an example of the fascination with the 1970s as reflected in clothes, fashion and music, 1970s nostalgia has become the new fad in the 1990s. Anything retro is perceived to be trendy. 'The Ice Storm' is an example of the fascination the 1970s hold. However, is 'The Ice Storm' a nostalgia film? In other films like 'Forest Gump' (1994) nostalgia for the 1970s was essential in the development of the time-span which ran from the 1950s to the 1980s. This film is concerned with re-creating a time concerned with style. It is a film which flashes through periods of time, re-creating them perfectly and with a generally positive outlook; therefore it is a good nostalgia film. Although 'The Ice Storm' has cleverly re-created the clothes and the feel of the 1970s, Lee indifferently passes over this world. In an interview with Jennie Yabroff Lee was asked if he was worried that the costumes and storyline would overwhelm the story and the audience would not be able to get beyond the shag carpeting, wall hangings, jumpsuit and turtlenecks. Lee replied, "My principle is when in doubt, do less." (Yabroff, 1997, p.3). Lee was concerned with people and family rather than exploiting the

nostalgia aspect. The fact that it is set in the 1970s was not the issue.

The theorist Frederick Jameson author of 'Postmodernism and Late Capitalism', debates the issue of the move from modernism to post-modernism. Postmodernism challenges modernism's hostility to mass culture and the low or less serious popular arts. People did not understand the work of film directors such as Jean-Luc Godard, many could not relate to his work, it was seen to be only for an elite group of people. Postmodernism tried to bring mass culture to everyone. One of the most significant features or practices of postmodernism today according to Jameson is the distinction between pastiche and parody. The particular kind of pastiche which is evident in our commodity based world is that of the 'nostalgia film', "when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning." (Baudillard, 1984, p.59) Parody imitates the stylistic features of the original. Pastiche is another form of stylistic mimicry, but one which lacks the humour of parody. While parody works by means of reference to a specific style, pastiche is a gathering of styles from different sources. Parody can relate to popular culture films such as 'The Wedding Singer' (1998), a comedy set in the 1980s. The clothes and especially the sound-track are over-exaggerated and essentially very respective of the 1980s era. Pastiche relates more to films like 'Sense and Sensibility' which imitates the eighteenth century but not in a comical way.

Jameson writes that, "History has been replaced by 'historicism' or, "The random cannibalization of all styles of the past." (Jameson, qtd. Holmes, 1984, p.106) Jameson believes that the interaction with television and watching films is part of today's culture. Jameson states that a nostalgia film has no historical relevance as there is no memory involved with creating such a film. Jameson sees film as a commodity made for a commodity based lifestyle, or in the words of Guy Debord "the image has become the final form of commodity reification" (Debord, qtd. Holmes, 1998 p.106). Lee's concern with 1970s style is merely a director's need for authenticity in an historical drama rather than a need for a certain cinematic chic. In this case Jameson is wrong when he considers a period drama not to be historically correct. Some directors are concerned foremostly with the look of the film, the sound-track etc. Lee does see these elements as being essential but he is more concerned with Wendy as a child in turmoil and Janey as a cold, unpleasant mother. 'The Ice Storm' is therefore not a "random cannibalization of the past". (Jameson, qtd. Holmes, 1998 p.106) 'The Ice Storm's' story is an external one of marital discord and family disharmony at a time of crisis. Old standards are in the process of being dropped. America is in a state of turmoil with Watergate about to take place. The sexual revolution has happened and families are beginning to reap the results. The adults adopt the, 'Don't do as I do' attitude and are hypocritical and heavy-handed in their approach to their children's burgeoning sexuality. The symbolism of 'The Ice Storm' represents the coldness of the characters and the lack of real warmth towards

their children. Mikey Carver died as a result of his parents' incompetence. He went out into the ice storm to skate and slide about and because he was not being supervised he died in a freak accident. The question is, what were Mikey's parents doing when he was out in the storm? They were trading in their responsibilities at a 'key-party' for furtive sex.

I think Jameson does not consider the material background in producing a film. For instance 'Sense and Sensibility' is a direct response to an eighteenth century novelist's interpretation of the time she lived in. The novel was adapted into screenplay by Emma Thompson who has studied Austen's novels. The storyline may have been updated for a twentieth century audience but the essence of the film is in keeping within the boundaries of the eighteenth century.

'The Ice Storm' is an intense film, we spend three days in the lives of other people. This is where 'The Ice Storm' becomes historical and not nostalgic. In 'The Ice Storm' Lee is asking the viewer to read these people effectively as a microcosm of American society. This is how a good historical drama as opposed to a documentary works. Those who lived through the 1970s may feel nostalgic watching 'The Ice Storm' but that is not its function.

Some nostalgic films, especially American films like 'Little Women' (1994) will try to glorify a period of history as idyllic and will be more prone to bring 1990s sensitivities to the past, making the protagonist entirely sympathetic to a 1990's audience. For example, in 'Little Women', Marmee (Susan Sarandon) is portrayed in the film as a mild feminist while really Jo in the book was the early feminist forerunner. Lee in 'The Ice Storm' is not prone to this style. In 'The Ice Storm' characters which are totally antipathetic to a 1990's audience.

Nostalgia can be described as a sentimental longing for past times. 'Sense and Sensibility' can be related to other costume dramas. Julianne Pidduck in Screen magazine compares 'Sense and Sensibility' with Merchant – Ivory films such as 'A Room With A View' and 'Howard's End' (1992) or Kenneth Brannagh's 'Much Ado About Nothing' (1993) where there is a dramatical shift from scenes inside the house to the countryside. Pidduck says of this new staging of scenes that, "Nostalgic' English countryside informs a 1990s costume drama aesthetic." (Pidduck, 1998, p.386)

Heritage films such as those mentioned above depict England as traditional, beautiful and desirable. 'Sense and Sensibility' also paints a picture of England as having these qualities. Pidduck describes these qualities as,

"the quiet countryside and peaceful Georgian houses of Austen adaptations. These are

the vistas enjoyed by Austen's heroines as they gaze hopefully out of the window awaiting male suitors."
(Pidduck, 1998, p.387)

'Sense and Sensibility's' first long outside sequence involves the first private meeting of Elinor and Edward standing in front of Norland House. Pidduck likens the scenario to a picturesque landscape painting set into motion. Lee shows a 'chocolate box' view of eighteenth century England. The two discuss Edward's future where he states "a country living is my ideal". In the next scene we see Elinor and Edward riding on horseback with Norland seen at a far distance behind the two. Pidduck describes this diminishing of Norland as symbolic of Elinor's progress in losing her home. Elinor laments on how Edward can inherit his fortune while she cannot even earn hers.

The Dashwoods move from Norland, their family home, to Barton cottage which signifies their changed social position. I think the viewer is supposed to sympathise with the Dashwoods. However, Barton cottage is absolutely exquisite with its Dutch-interior colours of soft bluey-green and 'Shaker style' furniture; it would be hard to imagine a twentieth century viewer being ashamed to live in it. Lindsay Doran, producer of 'Sense and Sensibility' describes the film as having,

"Wonderful characters, a strong love story (actually three strong love stories), surprising plot twists, good jokes, relevant themes, and a heart stopping ending".
(Doran qtd. in Thompson, 1995 p.11)

I would consider 'Sense and Sensibility' to be a nostalgic film as unlike 'The Ice Storm' it presents a vision of the past which is visually pleasing and critically unchallenging. The people and the places of 'Sense and Sensibility' represent the conditions of the upper middle and aristocratic society at the time. Eighteenth century England is portrayed as a gracious time. However, Lee does make it clear that women were no more than commodities. Considering the constraints that Elinor and Marianne had to endure it was obvious that the film was going to have a happy ending. Elinor marries the man she loves, Edward. Marianne realises the unworthiness of Willoughby and falls in love with the less handsome but more genuine gentleman Colonel Brandon. In contrast 'The Ice Storm' is an uncomfortable film to watch. Lee presents nothing in 'The Ice Storm' to captivate the viewer. The eighteenth century as presented in 'Sense and Sensibility' is idyllic. The interiors of the houses in 'Sense and Sensibility' are reminiscent of women's magazines such as 'Homes and Gardens'.

The female roles in 'Sense and Sensibility' and the 'Ice Storm'

'Sense and Sensibility' and 'The Ice Storm' are two films set at a time of socio-economic change. 'Sense and Sensibility' is set at the dawning of the industrial revolution, around the middle of the nineteenth century. The changes in society are marked by the characteristics of the two leading female characters, Elinor and Marianne. Elinor seems to belong to the end of the eighteenth century, she is a representation of a classical era. Marianne is the pre-cursor of the Victorian Romantic era. Thompson writes of Elinor,

"Elinor and Edward seem both to belong to the eighteenth century, the age of Augustan reason. They are firm balanced, judgmental, drily humorous, far more Alexander Pope than Walter Scott."

Thompson continues,

"Marianne shoots towards the middle of the nineteenth century embracing each Romantic ideal like a new lover. The turn of the century seems to produce a Janus-like generation, some clinging to old systems, some welcoming the new age. Always a powerful time."
(Thompson, 1995,p.265)

Marianne represents the revolt from classicism to a freer more imaginative style. This is symbolised by her acceptance of her bouquet of wild flowers from Willoughby and her indifference to Colonel Brandon's cultivated flowers. Elinor represents the old values where a woman's place is in the home.

Two of the most important assets for women in the nineteenth century were to be either rich or beautiful. It is debatable how many people would have actually married for love. Marianne and Elinor came from a wealthy back-ground, with good prospects. When their father, Mr Dashwood, dies under the law of primogeniture his estate and money are not passed on to his wife but the eldest son. This leaves Mrs Dashwood and her three daughters in an awful predicament; they have five hundred pounds a year to live on, not enough for the three girls' dowries. Without dowries, the prospect of a good marriage, or at least, a marriage into money, is slim. Marianne has romantic sensibilities of marriage and sets up an image of the ideal man. Mrs Dashwood jokes and talks with Marianne about love, yet she has a realistic notion of their future if they do not marry well. Thompson elaborates on this,

"We're also aware that behind Mrs Dashwood's equally romantic visions is a harder-edged reality— she must get her daughters married for their financial and social security."
(Thompson,1995, p.217)

The most melodramatic moment which is handled with great sensitivity is Marianne's

'deathbed' scene where Elinor pleads with Marianne not to leave her. Elinor has passed her first bloom, in relation to her age she should be already married; she is probably scared she will lead the lonely life of a spinster if Marianne dies. The fact is that middle upper class women relied heavily on marriage for status and financial security. Not having that security meant the future looked bleak for Elinor if her sister and companion died. The Dashwoods' circumstances deteriorate after Mr Dashwood's death, and with only five hundred pounds a year considered themselves to be poor. However, they were still able to keep on two servants. The eighteenth century definition of poor compared to the twentieth century is very different, as we would still consider them to be fairly well-to-do. This clearly shows the social changes which have occurred. It is important to consider what it would have been like to be a woman and have absolutely no money. The reality of this is depicted only indirectly in the book and film through the character of Eliza; Brandon's first love. The story of Brandon, Eliza and her illegitimate child is described by Thompson as being "like a penny dreadful" (Thompson, 1995, p.272) but it is shocking within this world in the eighteenth century to hear of pregnancy, early death and betrayal. Eliza was a ward to Brandon's family. Brandon and Eliza fell in love but were not permitted to marry as Eliza was poor. When Brandon's father discovered the love between the pair Eliza was flung out of the house and Brandon was made to join the army. Eliza disappeared from all good society and was passed from man to man. When Brandon returned from the army he searched everywhere for her only to find her pregnant and dying in a poor house. That is the realism of being a woman with no money. The only way Eliza could survive was to prostitute herself. Life for someone without any money was short, brutish and hard. The Dashwoods are hardly going to find themselves in the position of Eliza but what is significant is that their social position will never be the same again unless they marry into wealth, as they cannot earn their own living.

If I consider Elinor in 'Sense and Sensibility' and Janey in the 'The Ice Storm' it is evident that the role of the female has not changed significantly through a two hundred year gap. Janey like Elinor has still found herself trapped in the home. With the sexual revolution, Lee emphasises Janey's need for liberation, Janey is seen to be frustrated as she missed out on the so-called fun the generation before her were having in the sixties.

Lee emphasises Elinor's intelligence by showing her tutoring her younger sister in perfect French. She is intelligent but she cannot work. There is no employment for women of her status in the eighteenth century. Janey belonged to the generation where the mother was still expected to stay at home. Janey missed out on the job she realises now she could have had, Elinor could not work either. Lee is saying that Janey and Elinor are both suffering from the frustrations of being a women of their time.

The casting of Sigourney Weaver as Janey is significant in that she is always portrayed in a strong, almost masculine role in her films. In 'Gorillas in the Mist' (1988) she plays Dian Fossey who was prepared to fight for the rights and lives of gorillas. Her other memorable role is that of Ripley in the Alien quartet, making her one of the only female action heroes. Viewing Weaver as Janey we can question why Janey was not a successful woman (in counter-balance, her husband, Jim, is there at the start of the silicon chip which has had such an impact on our culture since the 1970s.) Janey is caught in a vacuum where she wants to recreate her youth; she feels there were alternatives to her life. On the other hand, Elinor in 'Sense and Sensibility' had no alternative except the hope of marriage. In casting two well-educated and successful women in the roles of Janey and Elinor, Lee has made us aware of the constraints under which Janey and Elinor lived.

When Fanny, Edward's sister, acknowledges her brother and Elinor's attachment she makes her feelings perfectly clear to Mrs Dashwood as to how she disapproves of the match,

Fanny— You see Mrs Dashwood, Edward is entirely the kind of compassionate person upon whom penniless women can prey—
It is impossible for Mrs Dashwood not to get the point. She is appaled and furious.
Mrs Dashwood — I understand you perfectly.
(Thompson, 1995, p.57)

When Mr Dashwood was alive Elinor would have been perceived as being a perfect match for Edward due to her wealth and status.

Thompson writes,

"Sense and Sensibility is about love and money. Perhaps its main question is can love survive without money? A pithy question. Romantic codes tell us that love conquers all. Elinor disagrees. You need a decent wage, a competence. Some people need more money than love. Most people would rather have love against all our cherished ideals. But interesting that our 'Western' romantic symbols cost a great deal. Roses.....diamonds."
(Thompson, 1995, p.255)

This is shown when Willoughby leaves Marianne for Miss Grey and her fifty thousand pounds. Eventually Marianne sees Willoughby for what he is, a womaniser; he uses women for his own pleasure and benefit. Even though Willoughby had intended to marry Marianne he did ultimately desert her for money. In the middle and upper class society of the eighteenth century society a woman had only one function, to marry and produce an heir to maintain the family line; being rich was also a huge benefit.

In 'Sense and Sensibility' Lee handles the sexual aspect of the story discreetly. More is implied than is actually done. Marianne donates a lock of hair to Willoughby, who kisses

it. Edward lends a handkerchief to Elinor, who treasures it. Edward adjusts Elinor's shawl. There are many long shots of longing and realisation, when Brandon first sees Marianne and when Elinor sees Willoughby taking the lock of Marianne's hair.

In 'The Ice Storm' there are two overtly sexual scenes, but again, they are handled with delicacy. More is implied than seen as in the look on Janey's face when she picks the key and goes off with the young, fashionable man. Wendy is seen indulging in sexual play with Mikey and in bed with Sandy but the camera does not linger; we are aware of what is going on but are not voyeurs. Lee encourages his actors to 'say and do' more than what we actually see.

Janey is more sexually experienced in a way that Elinor and Marianne are not. Although Janey did not work she was not there for her children. The question is, is she happier? In the eighteenth century women may not have had as much power socially, yet within a family circle they were highly respected. A wife was important to continue the family line. In 'The Ice Storm', although women are liberated they do not seem to be respected. They are not held in as high regard within the family, even if they have more influence socially.

Melodrama

During the 1930s and 1940s the women's film was extremely popular. According to Hollywood's own market research it was concluded that women made up the majority of the cinema audience. Surveys were also conducted to ascertain what kind of films women wanted to see:

"It was concluded that women favoured female stars over male, and preferred, in order of preference, serious dramas, love stories and musicals. Furthermore women were said to want 'good character development.'
(Laplace, 1942, p.138)

The women's film or weepy as they are sometimes referred to can be categorised under the heading of melodrama. The term melodrama up until the 1970s was a term which hardly existed, except in referring to a melodramatic moment in cinema. Now the term melodrama encompasses a wide range of themes; crime melodrama, psychological melodrama, family melodrama, maternal melodrama, women's film and romantic drama. All of these themes are closely related, causing debate as to the true definition of a 'melodrama'. The common consensus from film critics such as Molly Haskell, Thomas Elsaesser, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Laura Mulvey seems to be that the melodrama focuses on social issues which are related to the family (even if they differ as to which protagonist in the film the plot focuses on).

Douglas Sirk describes the 1950s melodrama as an area which focuses on issues of sensitivity like sexual repression and frustration (Sirk, 1977, p.39). The conflict comes from people related by love or family; the view-point of the film centred around a female protagonist. 'Sense and Sensibility' is a prime example of the melodrama Sirk describes; the only difference being that the film revolves around two female protagonists, Elinor and Marianne. The melodrama begins with their father dying leaving them in difficult straits. Exceptional male interest comes in the form of the faultless gentleman Edward Ferras and the overly romanticised Willoughby. The male characters, especially the sister's lovers, although essential to the film's development spend very little time on screen. They are generally referred to more by implication. Thompson writes about the male characters,

"Making the male characters effective was one of the biggest problems. In the novel, Edward and Brandon are quite shadowy and absent for long periods. We had to work hard to keep them present even when they're offscreen. Willoughby is really the only male who springs out in three dimensions....."
(Thompson, 1995, p.269)

The male characters are essential to the development of the film but they are not the central characters. 'Sense and Sensibility' encompasses domestic and romantic themes revolving around two female protagonists Elinor and Marianne. The centrality of the female is what makes 'Sense and Sensibility' a melodrama. 'Sense and Sensibility' is not an action movie, the film focuses on detail, like the clothes the protagonists wear and also the houses and the interior of the houses.

'The Ice Storm' again focuses on women, Elena Hood, Janey Carver and Wendy Hood. Again 'The Ice Storm' is based around the family, focusing on the breakdown of its structure. Janey is having an affair with Ben, Elena's husband. Elena is in emotional turmoil and her daughter Wendy is growing sexually disturbed. Janey's character is icy cold, and in turmoil, reflecting the title of the film. Elena is perhaps the only adult whose character is developed. We glimpse something of her inner self. Elena's pain is felt when she realises her husband's unfaithfulness. She looks for emotional help in feel-good books such as 'Jonathon Livingston Seagull.' The difference between Elena and the Dashwood sisters is that no positive alternative has been offered to Elena only a demeaning encounter between herself and her neighbour Jim, the left-overs from a 'key-party.' The tragic story is also heightened when Mikey Carver, the son of Janey and Jim is killed in a freak accident. The accident occurs when Mikey is left unsupervised by his mother and father. The mother, Janey, has no warm feelings towards her two sons. When she arrives home after the 'key-party' she does not even check on her two boys to see if they are safe after the horrific ice-storm. When Ben Hood finds Mikey on the roadside he carries him straight to the Carver's house Jim lifts his son from Ben and tries to resuscitate him only to find his efforts are in vain. He puts his head on his chest and weeps. This is a moving scene as we watch a grown man cry over his dead son, it is the most melodramatic moment in the film. Jim Carver realises he has neglected his family. The critic Geoffrey Nowell-Smith points out that melodrama can arise due to the possible failure of the father to fulfil this function suitably. (Nowell-Smith, qtd. in Cook, 1985, p.76) The scene in the film which I think best describes this is when Jim Carver returns home from a business trip and states to his sons, "I'm home," to which Mikey replies, "You were gone?" Jim is not necessarily a bad person, he puts his business first before his family.

In the final scene in 'The Ice Storm' we see the Hoods standing united on the platform waiting for Paul's train to arrive. It has taken a tragedy, the death of Mikey, to act as a catharsis to enable them to reach this stage. Lee wants us to believe that one family, at least, has united. The hope at the end of the film is that this is not a transitory and that there will be communication between the children and their parents and that the Hood's family unit will survive, and also the family unit in the future.

Authorship Theory and Lee

The artist was once seen only as a craftsperson producing useful objects for a consumer society. As time developed the craftsperson and the artist became two separate ideas. While the craftsperson was crucial, the artist's survival relied on being favoured by the ruling class; art, therefore, became elitist. As the economy changed to a capitalist one, the artist was free to sell their work to a larger market. The emergence of the Romantic distinction between art and the commercial artist is reminiscent of the artist and craftsperson. Today we commonly consider most art as a commercial product to be exploited by society; its function is no-longer purely aesthetic.

Before the 'politique des auteurs', critics believed that because film was of an industrial and commercial nature and that so many people were involved in its production it could not be considered as art but only as a commodity. Cinema was only considered an art form when it was obvious that the film was produced by an individual who had a message of depth and meaning to express and who took control of the film to ensure that their message was carried through effectively.

The 'politique des auteurs' was created in the pages of the French journal, Cahiers du Cinema in the 1950s. The film-makers and critics who wrote for Cahiers du Cinema were interested in the form of the film and the mise en scene. The mise en scene is a phrase borrowed from theatre which refers to the way things are arranged on stage or 'put into scene.' In film the term can be used to mean the organisation of the finished film; the visual construction of the film. When the artist or director produces a personal work of art the artist has accomplished the status of being a true auteur. When there is no involvement in the film by the film maker; no personal involvement, the film maker reaches the level of a metteur en scene, not a true auteur. "The Cahiers du Cinema" critics made the distinction between 'auteur' and 'metteur en scene'. The politique des auteurs opposed the support French critics gave only to 'quality' French cinema. They also criticised the way the involvement of all persons responsible for the film, if even in a small way, was ignored.

The film critic and director Francois Trauffaut fiercely attacked this 'quality' cinema which he saw as the origins of the metteur en scene. Trauffaut drew attention to the brilliance of Hollywood films and directors such as Howard Hawks, Raoul Walsh, Samuel Fuller, John Ford and Alfred Hitchcock, directors who deal with narrative cinema. From this arose the whole debate of whether-or-not popular films from Hollywood were worthy of

comparison against high art cinema. It was considered that Hollywood cinema could only try to represent everyday life. The film, therefore, makes money; as the film was produced purely for an audience it supposedly could not be considered as high art or culture. Critics like Trauffaut put forward the idea that messages from the director could be made even in a commodity-based film production. Trauffaut tried to break down the resistance to mass art. Hollywood to realised the money-making potential in cinema,

“In Hollywood itself the films were marketed as exceptional cinematic events; their status as art was part of their commodity value, and the mark of the presence of the artist performed a function in the marketing process.”
(Cook, 1985, p.155)

Another film critic, Andrew Sarris, was writing criticism in the late 1950s. He reacted against the idea of social realism, films which were only concerned with serious social issues. After the war American film critics began to examine the value of social realism in society. Hollywood was, around the time of the 1940s and 1950s producing a large number of entertaining films which were being dismissed by critics due to their commercial popularity. Sarris highlighted the prejudice against popular entertainment films compared to ‘high art’ film. He wished critics to think of Hollywood films as worthy of appreciation. He also reformulated the ‘auteur’ theory by putting emphasis on the director as the artist and thinking force behind a film rather than the screen writer, producer or even the star. The concept of auteur, therefore, became more widely associated with the ‘greatness’ of a director. Through the director came a system of learning and understanding film. Noticing a certain trait of a director in a film can bring enjoyment to a viewer.

In the mid 1960s a debate arose between the left-wing intellectuals in the universities of Paris. Structuralism involved looking for structure or relationships in objects or things. The meaning of the text was deciphered through the reader. The reader became like the author of the text as the controlling source of coherence.

Structuralism drew attention away from the traditional concept of the “auteur” and focused more on other areas, shifting the auteur away from the centre of the film. Structuralism unsuccessfully tried to get rid of the idea of the auteur.

I think one element of the auteur argument which has not been fully looked at is how the scriptwriter is associated more with a film than the director if the scriptwriter is already well-known and has celebrity status. This debate arose over ‘Sense and Sensibility’. In a March issue of ‘Sight and Sound’ (1996) the opening paragraph began with,

“A film by Ang Lee is what we’re told we’re watching during ‘Sense and Sensibility’s’ opening credits but are we to believe it? Emma Thompson wrote the screenplay and although she didn’t craft the film as a vehicle for herself, she ended up taking the lead

role. So is hers the shaping vision behind it? In high-street terms the answer is yes..”
(Fuller, 1996, p.20)

The article continues,

“The selling points of this latest Austen movie are not Lee’s reputation as the auteur of ‘Pushing Hands’(1992), ‘The Wedding Banquet’ (1993), and ‘Eat Drink Man Woman’ (1994)..... For many the lure is the film’s cachet as an exquisite costume romance in the vein of James Ivory’s tasteful E.M. Forster adaptations, a cachet confirmed by Thompson’s presence as the heroine Elinor Dashwood and of fellow Merchant / Ivory alumnus Hugh Grant.”
(ibid)

The article totally disregards Lee’s involvement in the movie even to go as far as to compare Thompson’s life with that of Austen herself, the conclusion that is drawn is that Thompson’s screenplay is a personal psychodrama. Thompson can relate to Elinor. A comparison has been drawn up between Elinor not being able to earn her own living and Thompson always playing second fiddle to her former husband Kenneth Brannagh.

Lee had not even read a Jane Austen novel before he directed ‘Sense and Sensibility’ therefore it is not unnatural to think that the vision was more Thompson’s than Lee’s. However, in ‘Eat, Drink, Man, Woman’ the storyline and the feelings of the characters, the three daughters, are not unlike those of the Dashwoods in ‘Sense and Sensibility’. It even contained some of the same dialogue, word for word (in both films one sister says to another in a moment of anger, “What do you know of my heart?”) Amongst other similarities, the eldest daughter in ‘Eat, Drink, Man, Woman’ is similar to Elinor in that she has to keep her feelings repressed. Therefore, Lee is used to directing films about similar family subject matter.

Now that I have established that the director as the primary auteur does exist within film, I wish to evaluate to what extent Ang Lee is a classic auteur. Hitchcock, a classic auteur, made a personal appearance in each of his films plainly identifying, in a very obvious manner, the film as his own. Another way for a director to make a film very obviously theirs is to use the same actors. John Ford used the star John Wayne in a number of his films. Lee does not appear in any of his films yet he has used the same actors, Winston Chao and Sihung Lung. Before ‘The Ice Storm’ and ‘Sense and Sensibility’ Lee’s films were all Chinese therefore there is an automatic unity of place with Eastern culture and actors. ‘Sense and Sensibility’ and ‘The Ice Storm’ are obviously different as they are both set in historical times. Their subject matter is similar in that all Lee’s films have been family dramas but the period settings are very different. I also will compare the similarities in Lee’s directional style. Unfortunately I could not obtain ‘Fine Line’ or ‘Pushing Hands’ to include them in my discussion so I will only be able to consider ‘The Wedding Banquet’, ‘Eat, Drink, Man, Woman’, ‘Sense and Sensibility’ and ‘The Ice Storm’. I will do this by using my own observations, but also as a point of

reference I will use Emma Thompson's experiences in her diaries.

The most apparent similarity in these four films is their calmness, there is no physical violence or street violence in them. I think this reflects Lee's own personality. Thompson describes him as, "Ang who brings self-contained calm wherever he goes" (Thompson, 1995, p.207) He is also described as being "radiating". (p.228)

Lee also puts particular emphasis on his actors' well-being. To relax the actors Lee teaches them meditation and exercises. He also makes the actors do homework.

"He wants character studies and sets a list of questions mostly addressing background and 'inner life'. Inner life is very important to him."
(Thompson, 1995, p.211/2)

As there is plenty of dialogue in Lee's films and no action sequences the understanding of the characters' emotions is of utmost importance. Lee's directional style is not to dictate to his actors, he does not tell them exactly what to do,

"Ang's style of leadership is somehow to draw us all to him silently and wait for things to happen...he will stand for silent minutes on end thinking through the flow of the scenes to see if what we are doing will fit his vision. I find it very inspiring but it's quite different to being told what to do. More collaborative."
(Thompson, 1995, p.240)

There is a placidity and smoothness which runs through his films. Ang believes that if a scene is too busy the audience will just switch off. "He's very interested on the flow of energy in a film." (Thompson, 1995, p. 241)

Lee very often uses montage to depict areas in his work. In 'Eat, Drink, Man, Woman' in the opening scene there is no dialogue for about five minutes. We watch Mr. Chu the father preparing an elaborate meal for his daughters. In 'The Ice Storm' the same effect is used to show the storm taking its full effect. Lee switches from tree to tree showing the ice forming. In movement scenes where there is no dialogue, Lee likes to use a rhythmic flow of images. This is particularly evident in one scene in 'Sense and Sensibility' where Marianne is being carried in by Colonel Brandon after collapsing. The camera focuses first of all on a two-shot on Charlotte, Mr Palmer, Marianne and Elinor and back into a single shot on Brandon. The camera shows the urgency of the situation without disturbing the equilibrium. This style is also extremely evident in 'Eat, Drink, Man, Woman', when Mr. Chu is called unexpectedly and urgently to go to work. He enters the kitchen of a grand hotel where he is the head chef, the camera flows through the kitchen where there is a large amount of movement of chefs, bus-boys and general commotion. The camera darts through the huge workplace until Mr. Chu finally stops and the camera then darts from face to face looking at the facial expressions of each of the chefs. The urgency of the scene is very different from that in 'Sense and Sensibility',

yet the style Lee uses is the same to convey similar emotions. The camera flow is also shown in 'The Ice Storm' when Mikey and Sandy Carver spy on their parents through a large skylight above the living room. The camera focuses on them and then draws gently down to focus on each of the adults' faces individually without breaking the continuity of the camera.

The films Lee directs are exceedingly slow. The storyline of each of the four films focuses around the family where we see large numbers of people conversing with each other (very often around a dinner table). Lee's principal criteria is to put emphasis on the actors' face. Physiognomy is very important, not whether a person is good looking but in the spaces between the bridge of the nose and forehead. (Thompson, 1995, p.210) Perhaps this is why Lee often chooses theatrically trained actors such as Gemma Jones, Harriet Walters, Elizabeth Spriggs and Kevin Kline. These actors are trained to project more facial expressions.

Food is extremely important in his films, he even uses a food metaphor in describing how to make a film.

"Shooting is like buying groceries. It's the raw material, editing is like cooking; here you're putting together the real movie."
(Ramsey, 1996, p.2)

'The Wedding Banquet' and 'Eat, Drink, Man, Woman' even in their titles endorse this. In 'Sense and Sensibility' Lee was desperate for a kitchen scene in Norland Park which would show the entire staff of Norland preparing a huge meal. He wanted a bleeding Mr. Dashwood to be brought in through the kitchen door and laid on the table surrounded by all the raw joints of meat. Unfortunately though this was too expensive. Food is definitely a characteristic of Lee's work and style. Even though he did not get his dramatic kitchen scene in 'Sense and Sensibility' food still had a major influence in the film; it is one of Lee's major and favourite uses of imagery. The Dashwoods, in their cottage, cannot afford meat or sugar. When they have their picnic with Willoughby the foods they eat are apples, bread and water. In contrast at Sir John's home the food they eat is elaborate with large joints of meat, fancy cakes, wine and brandy. Food signifies the difference in wealth. In 'The Ice Storm' there is also emphasis put on food and eating. A significant part of the film's storyline centres around the dinner table. Even the food gives an indication of the time and period settings. At the Carver's dinner party the guests have typical 1970s food like cheese cake, which was fashionable at the time. In 'Eat, Drink, Man, Woman', the father, (the traditional figure) without fail makes a huge traditional dinner for his daughters, while his youngest daughter works in a fast-food outlet. This is a clear indication of the decline of the Chinese traditions, and the growing distance between the generations.

Another style Lee uses is static shots and long shots. In both 'Sense and Sensibility' and

'The Ice Storm' we view buildings from a distance. One of the first scenes we see in 'Sense and Sensibility' is a long shot of Norland (the Dashwood's first home) where the camera lingers on the building for a significant length of time. When Barton cottage is being viewed the same effect is repeated. Perhaps Lee is giving the viewer time to comprehend the Dashwoods' drop in their situation. In 'The Ice Storm' when the Carvers' house is shown it is shown through the bare trees, as if Lee is giving the viewer time to analyse it, the camera moves slowly through the trees, reminiscent of a horror movie. I think Lee is trying to let us know that this is not a pleasant household and to be wary of it. The image is unsettling. Thompson states that the buildings are just as important as the characters in depicting elements in the story. One of the shots Lee was particularly proud of shows Kevin Kline playing golf inside a glass house,

"I wanted the house to be open to nature, but give a feeling of being exposed. Through the house you see nature, and in the reflection you see the clouds. Inside you see Kevin wearing boxer shorts, playing golf."
(Hardesty, 1996, p.5)

The glass house exposes Kline and his true nature. He is having an affair and finds it accelerating. Looking at him playing golf it is clear how vulnerable he is.

The use of buildings is also shown in 'Eat, Drink, Man, Woman'. The eldest daughter wants to leave her family home as she finds it too suffocating. She invests money in houses which are being built only a couple of miles down the road. This house, to her, represents everything, freedom, independence, a whole new quality of life.

Pathetic fallacy is significant in each of Lee's films, 'The Ice Storm' being the more obvious and literal. The storm represents the brewing of family emotions, middle-class families try to throw away old conventions yet they feel uncomfortable in doing so. When the storm arrives the inevitable tragedy of Mikey's death occurs, when the storm settles the adults realise what they have done, they have neglected what is important to them. The Hood family, may have the chance to redeem themselves but for the Carver family, who have lost a child, it is too late.

The use of a dramatic skyline is important in Lee's films. In 'Sense and Sensibility' the sky always reflects the mood of the characters. When we first see the awful Fanny Dashwood travelling to Norland to claim her estate their carriage is followed by a dark cloud. When the Dashwoods enjoy better times like the picnic at Barton Cottage the sun is shining. When the youngest daughter leaves the home in 'Eat, Drink, Man, Woman' to live with her boyfriend she leaves in a shower of rain, expressing the unhappiness of her father.

As already mentioned, Lee believes a building to have as much significance as people

1892-1893

themselves, this is also true of the way he uses objects. Thompson writes about how he enthuses over imagery and symbolism,

“Ang is thrilled with all the topiary in the gardens. He had Marianne walking by this extraordinary wiggly hedge. Apparently it snowed one year and the snow froze the hedge. When the thaw came, they cut away the dead bits and continued to grow the hedge—in the shape of a wild snowdrift. It looks like a brain. ‘Sensibility’, said Ang, pointing to it triumphantly. ‘And sense,’ he continued, pointing in the other direction towards a very neat line of carefully trimmed flowerpot-shaped bushes.”
(Thompson, 1995, p.253)

This use of symbolism is also evident in ‘The Ice Storm’, Lee draws our attention twice to the old-fashioned ice-trays that are made out of metal rather than plastic. Lee shows Kline pulling back the lever to eject the ice, when the ice cracks I think it represents the breaking up of the family. In interview Sherry Weiner asked Lee what visual images the ice storm conjured up for him, Lee replied,

“When I think of the Ice Storm I think of water and rain falling everywhere. When it’s calm it forms a reflective surface, like glass in which the world reappears.”
(Weiner, 1996, p.2)

He relates these images into what he was trying to create in his film,

“The customs, morals, hopes and loves of the characters are infused, overturned and re-established by the force of nature the ice storm represents.”
(ibid)

I think there is definitely a unique style to Lee’s work, he does not see the need to over glamourise, he strives to make everything that little bit more subtle. I think this subtle element is what makes his films more appealing and which makes him a very unique director. Lee deals with moral issues in his films. He puts his own life experience into each of his films to make them an exploration of his own feelings. I do not think his films are pretentious, they have a classic style to them; his films do not shout at the viewer or try to shock the viewer with action sequences or overtly foul language. When I first saw ‘The Ice Storm’ I thought I was watching a film which was not going to hold my attention, but by the end of the film I was totally enraptured by the wealth of visual imagery and the powerful underlying messages which were so subtly bestowed upon us. I think this is true of all four of his films.

1900-1901

Conclusion

The adaptation of literature into film is not a new phenomenon, I think, Lee however does it with brilliance. He does not detract from the moral messages of each of the authors, Jane Austen in 'Sense and Sensibility' and Rick Moody in 'The Ice Storm' but ensures that every framing detail and visual metaphor is thought through to subtly portray the issues which arise from each respective era. Lee is therefore a true auteur, he stages events well for the camera, but does not sublimate his own creativity and personal interpretation.

'The Ice Storm' and 'Sense and Sensibility' are both period dramas. 'Sense and Sensibility' is nostalgic in that it is visually charming in Lee's re-creation of the eighteenth century. However, Lee projects the morals of the film efficiently to show the constrictions the female had to endure in the eighteenth century. People may feel nostalgic watching 'The Ice Storm' but that is not its function it ridicules and questions the 1970s. The 1970s is shown to be an embarrassing and demeaning era of American history. 'Sense and Sensibility' is a melodrama of female characters which largely concerns itself with the themes of family, money and romance. It is aimed at a female audience. 'The Ice Storm' is a melodrama aimed at both male and females. It is centred around the family, the disintegration of the family structure. The climax of the melodrama is the death of a child, Mikey Carver and the subsequent realisation of the parents neglect for their children.

Lee uses a wealth of directional styles, Lee expresses his own nature through his films, resulting in a continuous flow and calmness. Lee often uses montage, static shots and long shots. Lee can be considered a true auteur as his personal vision is coupled with a consistent and innovative visual style.

Lee uses imagery to express the mood of his films, the most important being the presence of food. He also enjoys using pathetic fallacy to express the feelings of his characters and their situations. Due to Lee's involvement with directing very wordy screenplays he is interested in the faces of his actors and actresses as he often focuses the camera on their facial expressions. He tends to use actors and actresses who have worked in the theatre. He enjoys the emphasis theatrical training gives to a screen performance.

In my work I drew a comparison between the financial and social status of females in the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century, more specifically in the 1970s. Lee examines the limitations of permissiveness, the way people are frustrated and trapped by the promise of sexual liberation. Lee in both films exposes the oppression of the female.

1890-1891

Sigourney Weaver draws attention due to her action hero persona, Lee giving her a contrasting role as a frustrated house wife makes us consider the role women had in the 1970s. The emphasis is also heightened by Weaver being a successful career women. Using Emma Thompson in 'Sense and Sensibility' also brings star quality to the film due to her oscar winning performance for Merchant and Ivory production, 'Howard's End'. Thompson is also a very successful women. Her presence as Elinor in another contrasting role, highlights the constraints women of her era, the eighteenth century, lived under.

1913

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