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Research Question: To what extent Jane Austen's Novel "Sense and Sensibility" reflects 19th century English aristocratic society on the basis of family life and relationships and the role of men and women in the society?

Abstract

19th century is an important period of time for most of the countries in the world. It is right after the French Revolution and in the world most of the perceptions and human being's life styles were altering consequently and most of the nations were getting affected from each other. Jane Austen is a British author who generally reflects the characteristic values of the English society of her time. England is also affected from the changes in the society even though it is an island country. However, England was at that time at the threshold of the Industrial Revolution which changed all of the life style of the society completely. "Sense and Sensibility" is a novel which is printed at the beginning of 19th century which means it can reflect all the mixture of perceptions and the changes in the society.

In addition role of men and women in the society is the most important criterion which reflects the social, economical and cultural tendencies of that society. Family is another fact that has been important since the beginning of the life and family is the basic relationship that can be build between the people.

Therefore, concerning the importance of these social issues, Jane Austen's novel "Sense and Sensibility" has been analysed extensively. In order to analyse them well firstly, the theme and the history of England was carefully studied and associated with the situation in the book. Secondly, the characters and the relationships between the characters are carefully studied in order to point out the effects of the changes and the mixture of perceptions. Lastly, the differences between the perceptions are compared and contrasted in order to obtain the effects of changes.

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Introduction

19th century, which involved the Industrial Revolution that was newly spreading along Europe, was like the transformation century for England and the English society. The coming changes in the economical activities and way of living resulted in a massive change in people's social life. However, this altering could not take place instantly, but it took lots of time to be completed. Like all the massive changes in whole nation, the change had affected especially people's social life, on the basis of family life and relationships between relatives, the moral values and the position of men and women in the society. Jane Austen's first novel, which was published in 1811, is a reflector of the changes and consequences of these changes. The book was printed at the beginning of the 19th century, which marked the new life style based upon new economic tendencies. Therefore, the novel consists of the changes in the life style and people's efforts to adapt themselves and their perceptions to this new life style.

The novel begins with the death of Mr. Dashwood and his first wife's son inheriting all his wealth and consequently Mrs. Dashwood's and her three daughter's, Eliza, Marianne and Margaret's becoming obliged to live with a smaller amount of income. They need to empty their house in Norland for John Dashwood and this makes especially Eliza sad as she has already built a good relationship with their guest Edward Ferrars. They manage to find themselves a small cottage in Barton Park and start a new life. Their landlord is Sir Middleton who is a joyful and friendly man and Dashwoods receive good friendship and support from him. He organises dinners and tea parties in order not to leave Dashwoods alone and one day Marianne meets John Willoughby who is a guest of Middletons, and on the following days, they fall in love with each other. However one day Willoughby becomes obliged to leave Barton Park urgently and leaves Marianne behind with great sorrow. Later on, in Middletons' house Dashwoods meet lots of people including

the fiancé of Edward Ferrars, Lucy Steele. Her existence forces Elinor to forget Edward and with great effort, she manages to control herself. Eventually, Elinor and Marianne receive an invitation from Mrs. Jennings, Lady Middleton's mother, that offers them to come and stay in London. During their stay in London they learn about Willoughby's betrayal of Marianne and Edward and Lucy's relationship's becoming known. Colonel Brandon, whom the girls have met earlier in Middletons' house and who is in love with Marianne, continuously visits them and a good friendship is built between Elinor and Colonel Brandon. Eventually, Dashwoods and Mrs. Jennings receive an invitation from Mrs. Jennings' little daughter Mrs. Palmer to go and visit her in Cleveland. Before returning home they decide to accept this invitation but in Cleveland Marianne gets a serious cold, which forces Willoughby to visit and confess the reasons of his betrayal of Elinor. After Marianne recovers, Dashwoods return to their cottage at Barton Park and they learn that Lucy and Mr. Ferrars are married. However, it turns out that Lucy did not marry Edward but his brother Robert and this information makes Elinor happy. Edward visits Elinor for proposal and Colonel Brandon's finding a job for Edward, gave them comfort that they can live happy. In addition Colonel Brandon also proposes to Marianne and the two close sisters live in an intimate relationship with each other and their mother.

To sum up, Jane Austen uses all relationships between family members and the interaction between wealthy families in order to analyse the male and female mentality, their roles in the society and the existent moral values and the deterioration of these values.

Role of Men and Women

In many societies in the world, since big kingdoms and governments are established, the roles that are given to women and men vary. In most cases, women are not classified as a citizen and most of the social and political rights that are given to men are not given to women. The beginning of the 19th century is a time period during which the same discrimination can be observed obviously. Although the wealthy region of the country is much luckier than the middle or lower class, the discrimination is clear and evident.

The main difference can be seen in the professional arena. Men are allowed to get a job in the parliament, military or in the court so that they may have a political power and earn a lot of money. However politics or military are seen as two significant ways to increase the wealth and parents cannot think another way to canalise their children so most of the men try to get education and be involved in politics and some of them cannot finish their education or find out that politics is not the right way to satisfy themselves, and as a result, in order not to be dismissed from their parents' notice, stay at home and do nothing. In the family, all of the income and wealth were collected on the men's side legally, which means women had no right to build up their own social strength, they should be dependent on men because of money.

In the book, *Willoughby*, the Ferrars brothers, Sir Middleton and Colonel Brandon are the main examples to all of the cases. Willoughby is an unemployed man who is trying to be wealthy by inheritance and spend this money on luxury. He does not have any intention to work and earn some money himself but he is expecting the money to come to him from a distant relative. He is a "*hard-hearted rascal*" (Austen, 287) as he states because although he is becoming attached to Marianne and having great satisfaction with

her existence, the danger of being disinherited by the farther relative, Mrs. Smith, from whom he will inherit a huge fortune, makes him forget about Marianne and leads him to find a wealthy woman to marry and get her money. Namely, he is work-shy but in order to fulfil his luxurious needs he dares to break everybody's heart.

The Ferrars brothers are completely different from each other. Robert Ferrars is more like Willoughby who is only trying to find comfort and wealth without being employed in the court, in military or parliament. The family wealth is great and by obeying all the rules and restrictions of his mother, he is trying to get more of the inheritance. He also likes the luxury, huge parties among aristocracy and beautiful women. Edward Ferrars is just the opposite of his younger brother, who does not want to obey his mother's commands; he has a secret rebellion to the mentality of marrying a wealthy woman as he does not give much importance to money and luxury. He wants to work and receive education in Oxford as a clergyman so that he can earn his living, but his mother prevents him from doing so as he will not have prestige in the wealthy society. He cannot rebel against his mother until he is encouraged by Elinor.

Colonel Brandon, is one of the typical but differentiated wealthy men in the society. He has found the way to earn money in joining the military; however, he obtained a great wisdom of moral values in his education. He is not like Willoughby who gives more importance to money than people. He owns large acres which brings him a lot of money and he likes being useful and helpful to people as he helps Edward when he is searching a church to earn his own money. *"I have seen Mr. Ferrars two or three times in Harley Street and am much pleased with him(...)the living of Delaford, now just vacant, as I am informed by this day's post(...)"* (Austen, 250) When he meets someone he becomes a good friend and confidant since he is well-educated.

Lastly, Sir Middleton is a typical rich man in the society. He has a huge house and a big land which he has inherited from his parents and he has an elegant wife who stays at home and looks after her children. He is also unemployed and he likes parties, luxury, hunting and sports, enjoys chatting with people, organising big parties which everybody attends. He likes being unemployed and as he has lots of money, he does not need to be concerned about finding a job.

In other words, men have the overall control of the house and money since they are the ones who earn money; however, if they had inherited a big amount of fortune from their parents, they prefer not to work but enjoy themselves with luxury.

On the other hand, women have fewer responsibilities in the society. First of all, most women have to try to marry wealthy men, if they are lucky, and have to depend on men along their lives as most of the jobs were not available for women and also the right to receive education, until the end of university, is not given to women. Women are generally responsible for taking care of the house and the servants, and controlling the house while men are out of the house. One of the important responsibilities that is assigned to women is to raise children so that the inheritance of the family wealth will continue without interruption. They have a right to comment on the decisions and persuade their husbands if they could although generally they have to obey men.

In the novel *Lady Middleton*, Marianne and Elinor Dashwood, Fanny and Lucy are the most outstanding examples to the role of women in the society. Lady Middleton is a typical example of classic women who stay home and dealing with children, being kind to her husband, showing an impressive performance on parties and see only the women like her as friend. Her job is only being “mother” to children and she has no economical

independence as all her wealth became her husband's after marriage. In addition, her marriage does not have the basis of love but respect and money while they are not a compatible couple with Sir Middleton: *"Sir John was a sportsman, Lady Middleton a mother. He hunted and shot, and she humoured her children; and this was their only resources"*.(Austen, 31)

Fanny is Josh Dashwood's wife and she is alike Lady Middleton; however, she is a little bit more selfish and impolite and can use the weaknesses of his husband for her own good. She became wealthy woman by her husband's inheritance so she does not have the inborn of the elegancy as she is not raised with it. She is not educated both in scientific and cultural manners and she does not have many skills than gossiping about others and chatting with other women. However, marriage has raised her respectability as she can convince her husband by powerful words for not to "exaggerate" the testament of their father about helping his sisters-in-law: *"What brother on earth would do half as much for his sisters, even if really sisters! And it is-only half blood! But you have such a generous spirit!"*(Austen, 11)

Lucy Steele is one of the typical girl who tries to get a wealthy husband and be involved in the high society, live in luxury, not to work but have fun. When Edward asked her for marriage she immediately accepted partly because of her love but mainly the possible inheritance from her mother. She is "the merest awkward country girl, without style or elegance, and almost without beauty"(Austen, 265) with Robert Ferrars' words. She praises everybody to seem sympathetic especially Lady Middleton and Mrs. Ferrars. However, her real intentions are made revealed with her breaking up with Edward, after he is disinherited by his mother, and marry Robert who is going to be the wealthy son of Ferrars family.

Marianne and Elinor Dashwood are obviously different from the general type of women in the society. After their father's death, they are obliged to take care of themselves and their mother, and by this way they learn to be strong and determined in order to survive without being dependent on the men. They only have the income from their father but they can point out how to spend the money carefully, namely they do not need the escorting of a man. They have a fine cultural education as Marianne knows a lot about arts, books and analyses, and she can play piano very well while Elinor can paint beautifully and loves reading books very much. In addition, their characteristics are not corrupted as they cannot say something which they think that is wrong: "*Marianne was silent, it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial occasion; and upon Elinor, therefore the whole task of telling lies when politeness is required it, always fell*" (Austen, 109). However as the society requires women to be uneducated, they also could not receive an education and they also do not have a job to earn their livings.

To sum up, women are generally on the background in the society and they are compelled to be uneducated and having no job so that they cannot get their independence and they are forced to be under control of men.

Family Life and Relationships

From the beginning of life family has been an important foundation for people. The reason for that is a family gives relief and comfort to all its members. People can find comfort near their partners and both sides can trust and support each other at hard times. In addition family is also important for the child as children always need both their parents next to them during their growth. Kinship is also important between families as sisters and brothers are generally the main support in people's lives. On the other hand, as people become friends with each other, the relationship between families also involve quite an important role in the society. However, in the 19th century in England, the relationships between families and among the family members are also affected from the changing conditions in the world. The marriages and friendships started to be based on money and benefit; so love and respect have lost their priorities. In the book the existent families are reflectors of the changing relationships and people's becoming affected by this change. These families are; Dashwoods, Middletons, other Dashwoods and Ferrars.

To start with, Dashwoods are four women who are trying not to suffer from the difficulties of life and to get over all the hard times by supporting each other. Among the family members, a strong love that binds them together exists and getting benefit from the relationship is never considered. Mrs. Dashwood married Henry Dashwood on the basis of love and respect that both sides feel for each other. In addition she is like the perfect mother who both builds good relationship with her daughters and between her daughters. The three girls have a real sister relationship together. Margaret generally does not get involved in their conversations but all three of them love and respect each other and they are the major and permanent source of support for the other as no benefits or selfishness are involved in their relationships. In addition, they are trying to reflect these properties to their relationships with other families. They always try to be honest and establish relations

with people as if politeness is not required. Telling lies or praising someone is not suitable to their characters and when lies are necessary they prefer to remain silent. They cannot be in friendly manners with someone that they find selfish as they cannot love these people. Indeed, their ending their relation with Willoughby after his betrayal becomes known is a fine proof of this: *“She rejoined in his being cleared from some part of his imputed guilt(...)nothing could restore him with a faith unbroken, a character unblemished, to Marianne”*(Austen,308)

Secondly, Middletons is a type of family which is quite different from Dashwoods. Between the members, Sir and Lady, there is a strong profit relationship as their marriage is based on the benefits that both sides will take advantage of. Lady would receive a fine title which is well-respected in the society and have a comfortable life which she would gain with Sir Middleton's money and she will have a comfortable environment for raising child and taking care of them. On the other hand, Sir Middleton would also benefit from the marriage as he would have a cultivated and elegant lady as a wife who will be a great mother to raise children and get more money after her relatives' death. Love and harmony not having an important role can be understood from their different life styles: *“Sir John was a sportsman, Lady Middleton a mother.”*(Austen,31). As a result of being selfish in their family relationships, they have also the same attitude to the other families. Sir Middleton is a man who can communicate with everybody; however, Lady Middleton selects her friends according to their wealth and cultivation. She likes Fanny who is also a conceited woman and who is very similar to herself and she cannot be friendly to Dashwood girls as they are honest and unable to lie or praise her and her children like Lucy Steele does.

John and Fanny Dashwood have a typical wealthy family as Middletons. John and Fanny do not have a good and sincere relationship. They consider each other as partners who will live together until death and they respect and care about each other; for example when Fanny becomes ill when she learns about Edward's and Lucy's engagement, John cares about her a lot. However it is hard to say that they are in love with each other because the most important thing that binds them is the money that Mr. Dashwood has and will have after the death of his father. Indeed, Fanny gives more importance to the money that John would give to his sisters-in-law as she tries her best to make John decrease the amount of money. When benefits are taken to much importance in their relationship the effects can also be seen on their relationships with others. Fanny and John are trying not to be in friendly manners with their relatives as they do not want to help them financially. They think Mrs. Dashwood is poor and so her friendship may mean nothing to them and also she is quite different from other wealthy women since she cares for people and love more than money. The reason of their building a good relationship with Middletons can be the wealth they own and the elegance they have as an aristocratic family.

Another different type of family is Ferrars with weak and easily breakable among its members. Mrs. Ferrars is a strict and rich woman who is closely attached to traditions and cannot like or tolerate anybody. For example Elinor, who is different from the classical woman who obeys everything. She is trying to control their sons with the power of her fortune; which means she does not have much love for her sons. *"(...)if he were to enter into any profession with a view of better support, she would do all in her power to prevent his advancing in it.(...) Edward is dismissed for ever from his mother's notice"*(Austen, 236-237) She can dismiss Edward from her notice for his mistake of engaging with Lucy. His sons also do not have a normal emotional relationship with their mothers and each other.

Robert only loves his mother because of the money she has and obeys whatever she wants to be the number one. He also only makes fun of Edward because he is different and considers him just an acquaintance. Edward is far different from both his brother and mother. He is emotional and pretends to be sympathetic towards others. He cannot feel himself comfortable when he is with wealthy people who only think about their own welfare. As a result of having different perspectives, the relationships they experience with people are also different and they cannot act like a family. Mrs. Ferrars likes and only people who praise her well and who are wealthy. Her son Robert is similar to his mother and he is only interested in the people who love parties and live in luxury. His interest in Lucy and their marriage can be based on love; however, Lucy has had a strong ambition for wealth and respect and thus, she uses this marriage to fulfil her ambitions. Edward's being different in his manners also distinguishes itself in his relationships too. In his relationships, he chooses only the people whom he can love and feel comfortable with. His friendship with Elinor is the main indicator of this fact. He finds love, comfort and support near Elinor and when he finally obtains the opportunity for not fulfilling his promise to Lucy, he goes back to Elinor to propose.

To sum up, it can be said that family life and relationships were changing from family to family but generally in the 19th century, people have built relationships based on money and profit. There are naturally some exceptions like Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters or Edward but Aristocratic and wealthy classes mainly value money and power it brings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, 19th century English aristocratic society consists of many different types of perceptions and characters as a result of the changing conditions in the country after the Industrial Revolution. Some of the people are very rich and are trying to get richer and richer; some people are humble and give less importance to money but more to the personality and likeability of people around them. Some others try to obtain money by inheritance without working and live a luxurious life. Some are ambitious to be respected and for the sake of that, they do anything to reach their aims. Lastly, some people are trying to work and find their personality.

Jane Austen's book "Sense and Sensibility" , published in 1811, reflects this mixed type of society. The book consists of at least one example for each of the different types in the society. Josh Dashwood is a person who tries to get richer and for the sake of this he neglects his promise to his father and decides to help to his step-mother and sisters less in order to spend less money. Willoughby tries to obtain money and live wealthy with inheritance and when he cannot, he betrays Marianne and marry with a rich woman to own a fortune. Colonel Brandon is a man who is honest and friendly to people and gets a job at military in order to gain his independence and strength. On the other hand, Marianne and Elinor are such young women that although they cannot have a job, they are trying to improve their skills by reading and dealing with art. In addition they cannot lie or praise somebody well for being friends because their family education cannot let them do something like that.

To sum up, Jane Austen's book is a reliable source for people to understand and analyse the conditions in 19th century, as it contains all kinds of examples for each type of people of the wealthy class. In addition it is possible to see the effects of changing the

traditions and the perception of the whole society and the confusion the Revolution has created within the society.

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