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Sense and Sensibility: Delineation of Maternal Sway by Jane Austen

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Abstract:

*This paper delves deeper into how Jane Austen, who was one of the most celebrated writers of her time, weaved the mother- daughter relational dimensions in one of her masterpieces, *Sense and Sensibility*. It delineates the portrayal of motherly figures who significantly possessed irreconcilable differences with their progeny, yet posed intense maternal sway over their inward tenets be that carried similitude or dissimilitude. The paper composes theoretical renderings from the intricate synthesis of Motherhood studies that brings forth the constituting forces of maternal psyche. Again, it intensely deconstructs the stereotypical and preconceived notions of idealised motherly figures by drawing sheer contrastive features upheld by the mother characters of the text. This research, moreover, explores how the daughters mature along the course of their trajectory striking a laudable balance between their sense and sensibility being wedged by maternal sway.*

Keywords: Mother- daughter relational dimension, deconstruction of stereotypical mother figures, Maternal sway over offspring.

1. Introduction: Jane Austen has extensively been credited with being a keen spectator of human nature and creator of vivacious and convincing characters of both sexes. *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) is famous among Austen's novels that had greatly been preoccupied with questions of maternal concern. In practicality, mother's do not often bid farewell from Austen's world. Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* is over- congested with mothers. The only parental authority over the Dashwood sisters and the Ferrars brothers is owned by their mothers. Over and over again, mothers are condemned for pampering their children, either as an outcome of too low sensibility or too great. Precisely, it is the ignorant inclination towards a child on the root of resemblance to the mother which results in this imbalanced behaviour. Mrs Dashwood, Mrs Ferrars and Mrs Jennings all seem to favour their second child to their first and in each circumstance, this occurs to be since the second child similarises the mother more.

In the novel, Austen portrays this reality regarding Mrs Dashwood and her daughters as such: "Elinor possessed a strength of understanding and coolness of judgement ... to be the

counsellor of her mother ... that eagerness of mind in Mrs Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence ... her (Elinor's) feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them: it was a knowledge which her mother had yet to learn" (8). In this view, this paper explores how maternal identity and authority are rooted and reflected at the heart of the child's personality and how the feminine sense of self and the world are fundamentally connected to the distinct maternal sway. This exploration is established by connecting the argumentative notions of maternal power discussed in Motherhood Studies by various writers with the attitude, vitality and ideas regarding motherly domination posed by Austen in the novel.

2. Objectives: This paper pivots around the objective of deconstructing idealised and surreal mother figures that inevitably pose impact on their offspring. The ever-existent stereotypical representation of mothers is vehemently redeemed in this paper to manifest the universal categorization of the motherly figures and their efficacies on their daughters. The investigation tries to delineate the portrayal of mother-daughters duo, their mutual pursuit of individual growth and the subsequent balance of their selves between sense and sensibility.

3. Literature review: English society of eighteenth century was subject to the development of varying parenting styles and subsequent parent- child relational dimensions. Jane Austen, a significant emblem of this society endeavoured to depict mother figures extensively contrastive to the traditional and stereotypical roles. *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) is one of the most resembling of this type. The novel is congested with mothers who essentially possess dissimilitude from their progeny yet pose profound impacts upon them. Boyd, in her article, "Mothers and Daughters: A Discussion of Theory and Research" depicts vivid corners and dimensions of the exclusive feminine relationship of a mother and a daughter. It gives vent to those various factors and catalysts that shape their individual reality, identity, values and norms regarding life. It provides such psychoanalysis that renders to potent maternal influence over the internalization of the daughter's personal values and behaviours that embodies her exterior of character. Again, Morrison asserts in "Of Woman Borne: Male Experience and Feminine Truth in Jane Austen's Novels" how Jane Austen has long been hailed being a keen observer of human nature and creator of vital and convincing characters of both sexes. Critics censured that the male figures of Austen's novels are inadequately characterised or crudely utilized only to manifest a masculine resistance to the marginalisation of male experience. Moreover, Morrison puts that the relations between older and younger women are central to the generational structure of Austen's fiction. In "Womanhood in Jane Austen's Novels", Myers with the support of Erik Erikson's writing regarding a concept of the nature of womanhood discusses in this article, the inner maturational struggles of women's lives with the adult, mature, rational, educated male world that Jane Austen profusely dramatizes in her novels. Pildes examines in the article, "Mothers and Daughters: Understanding the Roles" the multidimensional views of a mother-daughter relationship which encompasses the lives of these two feminine. She argues that motherhood is one of the low status, unsalaried 'professions' in our society. Moreover, here, she has examined the mother /daughter relationship as it exists within a society which

has systematically and institutionally devalued women, preventing mothers and daughters from relating to each other with mutual love and support. Apart from these scholarly renderings, the most significant theoretical underpinnings are derived from the brilliant extracts of Kawash on Motherhood studies. She emphasises in “New Directions in Motherhood Studies” on Motherhood studies, an area of scholarship being on precarious ground ignored by mainstream academic feminism, fragmented and discontinuous in the academic margin. She stresses that the choices to be a mother are profoundly shaped by one’s age, race, income, education and position and regardless of all these, becoming a mother means a decrease in autonomy, economic security, health and happiness. Though the feminist engagement with motherhood in the last decade has been fragmented, but today Motherhood studies uniquely have a transformative effect in feminist studies with a broader social context. Moreover, these studies give vent not only to the obstacles and challenges a mother faces but also how Motherhood in the twenty-first century seems to refigure the relations of body, care, kinship, presence, and desire, all of which provided a more secure basis for ideas about motherhood in the past. Thereby, the research insights of this paper are extensively derived from the above-mentioned scholarly minds though there seems to reside a minor gap of not establishing connections and maturation of mothers and daughters who manifestly contrast each other in not outwardly, but inwardly tenets.

4. Methodology: The investigation is expansively carried upon in the qualitative method by the application of Kawash Samira’s direction on Motherhood studies followed by the rigorous textual and thematic analysis of Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*. Furthermore, it derived ideations and interpretive synthesis from other scholarly works based on the text, Motherhood studies, and feminism to turn this paper to be a credible one.

5. Discussion and Analysis: The relations between older and younger women are central to the generational structure of Austen’s fiction. Besides she profusely dramatizes the maturational struggles of women’s lives in her novels. She explores the interior of her heroines in terms of their lives, vitality, and the bearing on their future possibilities. Sylvia H. Myers in her “Womanhood in Jane Austen’s Novels” upholds the fact “how her (Austen’s) heroines attempt to mediate between their somatic needs, their sense of their personal necessities and their social obligations and obstacles is drawn in her portrayal of the feminine psyche. In the novels, Austen builds upon the rights of her heroines to function in the three levels of womanhood by expanding her degree of self- knowledge, reaffirming her integrity or demonstrating her capacity for independent thought and action” (228). Finally, within each inner space of the heroines the connotation of good or bad mothers, foster mothers or mothering aunts is especially notable in deciding their fate to be left empty or to be fulfilled, to be cherished or merely to be used up.

Theoretically a few critics explore the distinctly sophisticated relationship between a mother and her daughter. Among many, Carol J. Boyd in “Mothers and Daughters: A Discussion of Theory and Research” depicts vivid corners and dimensions of the exclusive feminine relationship of a mother and a daughter. It gives vent to those various factors and catalysts that shape their individual reality, identity, values and norms regarding life. It

provides such psychoanalysis that renders to potent maternal influence over the internalization of the daughter's personal values and behaviors that embodies her exterior of character. It again states that since mothers and daughters ascertain them with each other, and because their personal boundaries are not very vibrant, daughters brawl all of their lives to separate themselves from their mothers which consequently implies the mutual and intense impact of the mothers upon their daughters (291-301). Here the connection between the Dashwood sisters and their mother as well as their mother's dominant sway over Marianne's temperament is potentially rendered with vivacity.

In this connection, some other essayists draw the persistent peculiarities between the two sisters pervaded in the course of the novel. Equally J. M. S. Tompkins in his "Elinor and Marianne: A Note on Jane Austen" portrays the elder Elinor as an amiable, ingenious mind, excellent to solicit, mirthful but stable and naturally endowed with vigor and charm. Further, he finds her placidly reserved and determined to excel the usual limits of a female persona. Again, he draws distinctive contrast between the two sisters and the treatment they expose regarding the prime phase of their life (33-43). In this fashion, Tompkins discovers the brilliant yet varied exposures of the two sisters revealed in the novel.

Moreover, the deleterious insights reserved by some of the daughters towards their mother are dexterously drawn by a couple of writers. Such as in "Mothers and Daughters: Understanding the Roles" Judith Pildes focuses on the "strand of negative emotions possessed by the daughters towards their mothers in terms of their upbringing. Some daughters condemn their mothers and oppose to imbibe her tenets" (5). Likewise, it is Elinor who often ends up acting as the mother figure, it is she who has the strongest inner sense of right and wrong, and she is solely the one in the family who demonstrates discretion and dignity. Here Austen sketches the similar scenario in the following extract from the novel "She (Elinor) knew that what Marianne and her mother conjectured one moment, they believed the next- that with them, to wish was to hope, and to hope was to expect. This temperament of the two, she reproached to the fullest" (23). Thus, what Pildes observed was just the case of Elinor as she refuses to accumulate her mother's quickness of perception, romantic insistence and unthinking narcissism among many. Consequently Elinor was alienated from her mother and sister by her emotional maturity. Hence, she was a solitary strider in her world of coherent visions.

Furthermore, maternal affection is again censured as a practice of careless selfishness. Many have appreciated each instance while others have been irritated with the equilibrium presented in the novel that the second child replicates the mother. It becomes obvious when Marianne loves a man who has already loved another. Austen portrays this miserable Marianne with such intensity "Elinor, I have been cruelly used; by Willoughby ... It is too much! Oh! Willoughby, Willoughby, could this be your's! Cruel, cruel- nothing can acquit you" (180). Then after Marianne another example of Robert Ferrars' conversion to affluence and pride through coincidence rather than personal merit mirrors the motherly double "This must be worse than all- his mother has determined, with a very natural kind of spirit, to settle *that* state upon Robert immediately, which might have been Edward's on

proper conditions” (251). Likewise Charlotte Palmer repeats the experience of her mother as she settles into a life of homely comfort and personal thoughtlessness. Again, Elizabeth William is seduced and abandoned as a duplication of her mother’s experience. Thus repeating the history of the mother, the child ironically proves the intense motherly occupation upon them.

Another, significant sway that Mrs Dashwood had over her daughters was her hasty resolution about their life partners though her love and affection for them was notably boundless. She used to jump quickly up to positive conclusions whenever found a seemingly eligible suitor for her daughters which certainly put influence upon their decisions. This speedy observations and swift deductions, however, might be one of the foremost foundations of the girls’ being enmeshed in their love lives. This stands evident in the text when Elinor attempts to solicit Mrs Dashwood’s suppositions regarding Edward as she was simply persuaded with every seemingly virtue demonstrated by him. “She easily comprehended all his (Edward’s) merits; the persuasion of his regard for Elinor perhaps assisted her penetration; but she really felt assured of his worth” (Austen 18). Moreover, this tendency turned worse in the following excerpt “No sooner did she perceive any symptom of love in his behavior to Elinor, than she considered their serious attachment as certain, and looked forward to their marriage as rapidly approaching” (Austen18). Then once again, to the worst, Marianne’s entangled love life was acutely reprimanded by Elinor due to her mother’s immature and instant inference regarding Willoughby. This very incidence is illustrated by Austen in the novel “Oh! My dear mother, you must be wrong in permitting an engagement between a daughter so young, a man so little known, to be carried on in so doubtful, so mysterious a manner! I long to inquire; but how will my interference be borne!” (158). This is exactly how Mrs Dashwood demonstrated absolute absurdity in resolving her estimations about her daughters’ soul mates.

Apart from the Dashwood sisters’ chief instance of maternal domination, there is another vibrant manifestation in the novel about the Ferrars brothers being awfully affected by their mother’s dire despotism. Edward Ferrars was the wretched one to be captivated by his mother’s extremely authoritative whims. In the novel, Austen thus says “Mr. Ferrars (Edward), I (Elinor) believe, is entirely dependent on his mother ... Edward is not himself aware that there would be many difficulties in his way, if he were to wish to marry a woman who had not either a great fortune or high rank” (141). This very speculation turns shockingly accurate when Edward rejected to marry the opulent girl of her mother’s choice. Enslaved by her disparaging stubbornness and pride, Mrs. Ferrars even went to the extent that she disinherited Edward for not being obliged by her fancy wishes. This is evident in the text “Edward is dismissed for ever from his mother’s notice. His own two thousand pounds she protested should be his all; she would never see him again ... she would do all in her power to prevent his advancing in any profession” (Austen 251). This vicious mental shape of a mother shocks and shakes every reader with utter disgust on such unusual maternal monocracy though she posed a sort of remorse towards the end of the novel.

Concluding remarks: To conclude, it is prevalent in the text that it is the mothers not their offspring who mature the most along the course of the story. Mothers who have been confined within the latch of sensibility, either abandon or adore their progeny whereas mothers capable to rehearse their reasons essentially bring up rational and poised citizens. This is as well the case of the two sisters- Elinor and Marianne who learn to balance themselves between sense and sensibility being freed from their mother's unusual lenience and unfounded dominance.

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