

BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH TO THE MAIN CHARACTER  
IN JANE AUSTEN'S *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*

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**Abstrak**

*Studi ini membahas tentang hubungan antara pengarang dan tokoh utama di salah satu novel yang ia ciptakan. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis aspek-aspek kehidupan pengarang yang memberikan pengaruh secara tidak langsung terhadap pembentukan tokoh utama. Terdapat dua data yang digunakan dalam studi ini, yaitu buku biografi Jane Austen berjudul "Memoir of Jane Austen" (1870) oleh James Edward dan novel "Sense and Sensibility" (1811) oleh Jane Austen. Kedua data tersebut dipilih untuk dianalisis karena Jane Austen terinspirasi oleh kehidupan dan pengalamannya dalam menulis novel "Sense and Sensibility". Tokoh utama dalam novel tersebut secara tidak langsung merefleksikan kehidupan Jane Austen. Dalam memperkuat analisis, digunakan teori pendekatan biografi oleh Wellek dan Warren (1963).*

*Hasil analisis dari studi ini adalah terdapat lima aspek dalam kehidupan Jane Austen yang memberikan pengaruh terhadap karakter utama dalam novel. Aspek-aspek tersebut antara lain; hubungan persaudaraan dan karakter perseorangan, hiburan, kebudayaan, warisan, serta kekayaan dan pernikahan. Aspek-aspek tersebut memberikan pengaruh yang besar terhadap pembentukan tokoh utama dalam novel serta terhadap alur cerita novel tersebut.*

*Kata kunci: biografi, pengarang, tokoh utama.*

1. Background of the Study

Every literature can be studied through two different perspectives; through its intrinsic elements and extrinsic elements. Extrinsic elements can be defined as the elements that give indirect influence in shaping the system of fiction. Wellek and Warren (1963) introduced their extrinsic approach such as biography, psychology, society, ideas, and other arts. Biographical approach is being chosen as the topic of this study. Biographical approach is an approach that is used to comprehend and understand a literary work by studying deeper about the life of the author through the biography of its author. The biography of Jane Austen entitled

*Memoir of Jane Austen* by James Edward and her novel entitled *Sense and Sensibility* is chosen to be analyzed. Those data are used because the life and experiences of Jane Austen influenced her works so much and it is interesting to be analyzed. From the novel the readers can get information about the life in ancient time when women did not have any rights and choices.

## 2. Problem of the Study

The discussion of this study is focused on:

- a. What are the aspects on the life of Jane Austen that influence the main character in the novel *Sense and Sensibility*?

## 3. Aim of the Study

The purpose that especially achieved in this study is as follows:

- a. To analyze the aspects on the life of Jane Austen that influence the main character in the novel *Sense and Sensibility*.

## 4. Research Method

The data were taken from the biography of Jane Austen entitled *Memoir of Jane Austen* (1870) by James Edward and novel *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) by Jane Austen. The data were in the form of statements or sentences related to the life and experiences of Jane Austen that influences the main character in *Sense and Sensibility*. They were collected using documentation method and note taking technique. The data were analyzed using theory of biographical approach by Wellek and Warren.

## 5. Result and Discussion

A character is the creation of its author and it is possible if the author is inspired by her own life and experiences in creating a character or a story. It can be said that an author has the greatest effect on her work. Jane Austen was also inspired by her life and experiences in writing *Sense and Sensibility*. There are several aspects on the life of Jane Austen that give influence to the main character,

Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, and also the story in *Sense and Sensibility*. Those aspects are described follows:

a. The sisters relationship and personal characteristics

The novel *Sense and Sensibility* is a novel that tells the story of the Dashwood sisters, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, which was largely inspired by relationship own by Jane Austen with her beloved sister, Cassandra. As shown on her biography, Jane and Cassandra relationship was very close, it was may because of Cassandra was her only sister who can be a sister and friend. Jane and Cassandra have a close relationship even with their contrasting personalities as showed below:

“They were not exactly alike. Cassandra's was the colder and calmer characters; she was always prudent and well judging, but with less outward demonstration of feeling and less sunniness of temper than Jane possessed. It was remarked in her family that 'Cassandra had the *merit* of having her temper always under command, but that Jane had the *happiness* of a temper that never required to be commanded.” (*Memoir of Jane Austen*, page 8)

In the novel we can see the personality of Cassandra is reflected on the wise Elinor, while the personality of Jane had little common with the impulsive Marianne. It was remarkable in Dashwood family that the temper of Cassandra always under command. She could control her feelings better than Jane. In other hand, Jane Austen had the happiness of a temper that never required to be commanded. The personality of Elinor and Marianne are showed below:

“Elinor, this eldest daughter, whose advice was so effectual, possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother....” (*Sense and Sensibility*, page 4)

“Marianne's abilities were, in many respects, quite equal to Elinor's. She was sensible and clever; but eager in everything: her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation” (*Sense and Sensibility*, page 5)

As mentioned on the quotation above, Elinor was a wise girl who always gave her mother and sister an advice. Her advice always produced good result. She always used her sense in facing any problems. In the other hand, Marianne was impulsive. Marianne preferred to express exactly what she

feels, she lets everyone see and feel her misery or happiness, besides that she only followed her feelings in facing any problems or enjoyment.

b. Amusement

According to oxford dictionary amusement can be defined as the provision or enjoyment of entertainment. As revealed in the biography of Jane, education in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was mainly for boys as men were valued more than women. This was because women had very little rights and were not given much choice when it came to jobs. They learnt piano and embroidery and were expected to be housewives. Besides developed her imagination in writing, Jane love dancing, singing, laughing and conversing as showed on the quotation below:

“Jane herself was fond of music, and had a sweet voice, both in singing and in conversation; in her youth she had received some instruction on the pianoforte; and at Chawton she practised daily, chiefly before breakfast. I believe she did so partly that she might not disturb the rest of the party who were less fond of music. In the evening she would sometimes sing, to her own accompaniment...” (*Memoir of Jane Austen*, page 34)

She loved music and played piano very well since she did not go to school, so that she founded an amusement while playing piano. She usually practices playing piano before breakfast. She also would sometimes singing in the evening. Again in *Sense and Sensibility* these amusements were reflected as the entertainments and hobbies of the main character. The ability of Jane in playing piano and singing were reflected on Marianne Dashwood. Marianne on the beginning of the story was told as a very interesting girl. It is strengthen when there was a party at Barton Park in her earlier arrival. She was invited to sing a favorite song of Lady Middleton. Everyone was amazed of her performance at that party as showed below:

“In the evening, as Marianne was discovered to be musical, she was invited to play. The instrument was unlocked, every body prepared to be charmed, and Marianne, who sang very well, at their request went through the chief of the songs which Lady Middleton had brought into the family on her marriage ...” (*Sense and Sensibility*, page 23)

### c. Culture

According to oxford dictionary culture is defined as ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society. Some customs and social behavior in the society of Jane were reflected in the social life of the main character in *Sense and Sensibility*. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century a carriage and horse were important in daily life of people. A carriage and horse were used for travelling, farming, and trading. A pair of horses was necessary for Austen family as showed below:

“A carriage and a pair of horses were kept. This might imply a higher style of living in our days than it did in theirs. There were then no assessed taxes. The carriage, once bought, entailed little further expense; and the horses probably, like Mr. Bennet's, were often employed on farm work.” (*Memoir of Jane Austen*, page 11)

The quotation above revealed that a carriage and a pair of horses were own by Austen family. It was said that an owner of a carriage should pay more expensive fee in maintaining it rather than maintaining a horse, while a horse also had other function that usually uses in a farm. Carriages and horses were also used as transportation in the story *Sense and Sensibility*. It was showed in some chapter of the story that the Dashwood sister used carriage or horse as their transportation. For instance, when they stayed in London with Mrs. Jennings and were invited to a party, they used carriage to attend it as showed below:

“Lady Middleton, though in the middle of a rubber, on being informed that Marianne was unwell, was too polite to object for a moment to her wish of going away, and making over her cards to a friend, they departed as soon the carriage could be found. Scarcely a word was spoken during their return to Berkeley Street.” (*Sense and Sensibility*, page 123)

### d. Inheritance

In the period where Jane Austen lived, inheritance became a major problem in almost every family. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century male were more valuable than female. For instance, males go to school and females were not. The same thing happened for the heir in a family. The eldest son became the heir of the inheritance of their father. It also happened on the Austen family. The death of grandfather of Jane Austen caused the rest of the family to lead an unhappy

life due to all the fortune going to the eldest son. Mr. George Austen had nothing and should live with his rich and kind uncle. In 1764 he came into possession of the two adjoining Rectories of Deane and Steventon in Hampshire. When Mr. George Austen were about seventy years old, he had determined to resign his duties to his eldest son, who was to be his successor in the Rectory of Steventon and he had to remove to Bath with his wife and three daughters. This situation was revealed from the quotation below:

“Mr. George Austen had lost both his parents before he was nine years old. He inherited no property from them; but was happy in having a kind uncle, Mr. Francis Austen, a successful lawyer at Tunbridge...” (*Memoir of Jane Austen*, page 4)

This was also reflected in *Sense and Sensibility* where the females of the Dashwood ended up with nothing after the death of the father. Their brother and his wife inherited the rights of their home and the majority of their possessions. The mother and her three daughters were then left their home and stayed in a small house. It was a large downgrade from what could be referred as a mansion of great worth to the situation where these girls and their mother moved to a small house with minimal amounts of money. As showed below:

“Mrs. John Dashwood now installed herself mistress of Norland; and her mother and sisters-in-law were degraded to the condition of visitors. As such, however, they were treated by her with quiet civility; and by her husband with as much kindness as he could feel towards anybody beyond himself, his wife, and their child.” (*Sense and Sensibility*, page 5)

#### e. Wealth and marriage

In society of Jane, properties was also had a great influence in their life that was also reflected in the story *Sense and Sensibility*. Marrying for wealth in her novels plays a large role and is one of the main themes explored as in the story *Sense and Sensibility*. Women at that time were forced by their parents to marry a wealthy man of high status. It is because a woman will had a good life after the death of her father as long as she had a high status in the society.

In the biography of Jane it was revealed that Jane Austen firstly fell in love with Thomas Lefroy in her early twenty. He was a law student from

Ireland, the nephew of her dear friend Mrs. Lefroy and her husband, a neighbor at Steventon. Thomas Lefroy was from a good family but not wealthy, his father had been in the army. He was the oldest son of eleven children. Mr. and Mrs. Lefroy quickly sent Thomas home to separate him from Jane. It was done remember that Thomas should marry a woman with better income than him, if he marrying Jane Austen, he will had nothing. Thomas finally married someone with better income, therefore gaining a high place in society. Jane Austen may have felt somewhat betrayed with the knowledge of the marriage of Thomas Lefroy, it was revealed from the biography of Jane.

“At Ashe also Jane became acquainted with a member of the Lefroy family, who was still living when I began these memoirs, a few months ago; the Right Hon. Thomas Lefroy, late Chief Justice of Ireland. One must look back more than seventy years to reach the time when these two bright young persons were, for a short time, intimately acquainted with each other, and then separated on their several courses, never to meet again; both destined to attain some distinction in their different ways, one to survive the other for more than half a century, yet in his extreme old age to remember and speak, as he sometimes did, of his former companion, as one to be much admired, and not easily forgotten by those who had ever known her.” (*Memoir of Jane Austen*, page 22)

It also happened in *Sense and Sensibility*. Mr. Willoughby left Marianne, whom he did actually love. He was from a poor family, so he decided to marry someone with more money and higher status than him. He married Miss Grey, a woman who was rich but was not as pretty as Marianne. Miss Grey was described as a daughter of a nobleman with thirty thousand pounds. He even did not love Miss Grey, but if he had married Marianne he would have been living on the bare minimum as he was also lacking in riches. He will not had a better place in community if they were married. The reality of wealth before love was very much the norm.

## 6. Conclusion

From the analysis it can be concluded that there are several aspects on the life of Jane Austen that influence the main character in the story *Sense and Sensibility*,

those aspects are; the sisters relationship and personal characteristics, the family life, amusements, culture, inheritance, also wealth and marriage. These aspects gave great influence to the story of *Sense and Sensibility* since Jane Austen much influenced by her own experience and life in writing her novel.

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