



Ain Shams University  
Faculty of Education  
Department of English

The Dramatic Element in Jane Austen's novels:  
A study with reference to "Pride and Prejudice",  
"Emma", and "Sense and Sensibility".

*A Thesis*

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master  
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*To*

**The Department of English  
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uncle Hosam.*

*To my dearest mother.*

*To my beloved husband and to my sons,  
Kareem and Adham.*



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***Abstract***

Jane Austen (١٧٧٥-١٨١٧) is one of the major writers of the nineteenth century. She is considered as one of the greatest of British fiction writers. She has a major impact on the development of the English novel. This thesis aims at studying and analyzing the dramatic element in Jane Austen's novels: Pride and Prejudice (١٨١٣), Emma (١٨١٦) and Sense and Sensibility (١٨١١). The fact that Jane Austen showed dramatic power of a high order in her novels, although she was one of the most outstanding and prominent novelists in the history of English Literature, has stimulated the writer of this thesis to make a study and analysis of the dramatic element in her novels, particularly that this is a point that has not been dealt with or investigated before, though some critics have felt it and alluded to it in bits and pieces, but no thorough or detailed study has ever been made of it before.

The writer of this thesis proposes to deal with Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, Emma and Sense and Sensibility. These three novels have been regarded by critics as being among the most outstanding and popular of the works of Jane Austen. Also, these specific three novels can be used to reveal and investigate Jane Austen's dramatic power as a novelist.

A review of the literature on Jane Austen and her period is presented in the **First Chapter** to give the reader background information about Jane Austen and the different variables that have affected her both as a writer and as a human being.

The other chapters trace the achievement of the dramatic element through both the verbal and nonverbal behaviour of the main characters of Pride and Prejudice, Emma and Sense and Sensibility. **Chapter Two**

discusses the essential functions upon which critics have agreed that should be performed by the well-structured literary dialogue. Then it investigates the accomplishment of these functions in a sample of important interactions in Pride and Prejudice, Emma and Sense and Sensibility.

**Chapter Three** presents an analysis of the speech of the main characters in the three novels to prove how the speech of each of those characters is an expression of his/her nature.

**Chapter Four** investigates how the different characters in these novels use nonverbal behaviour to suit the kind of relationship prevalent between them and the context of situations in which they partake. Central conversations are selected for the analysis to prove that the participants use nonverbal acts in the same way they are used on the stage, which stresses the dramatic element in the novels.

The analysis of the interactions selected has resulted in the general finding that Austen has been achieving the dramatic element while presenting her characters through their words and in depicting the way they interact with each other both verbally and nonverbally.

**Key Words:**

١. Dramatic element.
٢. Dialogue.
٣. Dramatic presentation of characters.
٤. Nonverbal behaviour.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Preface.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Chapter One: A Review of the Literature on Jane Austen and her Period .....</b>	<b>١</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Dialogue as an Important Dramatic Element in Jane Austen's Novels .....</b>	<b>٥٦</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Jane Austen's Dramatic Presentation of Characters .</b>	<b>١٢٦</b>
<b>Chapter Four: Nonverbal Behaviour and Dramatic Fiction.....</b>	<b>٢٠٦</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>٣٠٩</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>٣١٦</b>
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>٣٣١</b>
<b>Arabic Summary</b>	

## *Preface*

The thesis is divided into four chapters and a conclusion. **The First Chapter** is divided into two main parts: *biographical studies* and *critical studies*. The part entitled biographical studies reviews what critics such as W. Somerset Maugham, Mary Lascelles and David Nokes have written about Jane Austen's personal life and the personal factors that have shaped Jane Austen, the great writer. The part entitled critical studies deals with what critics have said about Jane Austen's literary achievements. Herbert H. Clark (١٩٩٦: ٣١٨) writes:

**“The fundamental site for language use is conversation, spontaneous dialogue among two or more people. Although conversations are created from utterances, they are more than the sum of parts.”**

Owing to this importance of conversation, I thought it is necessary to give the dialogues in Jane Austen's novels much of my attention. Hence, **Chapter Two** presents a list of what literary critics agree to be the essential functions of the literary dialogue. Central conversations are selected from the three novels, Pride and Prejudice, Emma and Sense and Sensibility, and are analyzed to show how they perform many of the previously listed functions that literary critics have regarded as being characteristics of the well-structured literary dialogue as an important dramatic element.

In **Chapter Three** of the thesis, I attempt to show how characters are presented through their words. Central characters of Pride and Prejudice, Emma and Sense and Sensibility are presented through their

utterances. We have a representation of the proud, the prejudiced, the self-confident, the honest, the sensible and the passionate and sensitive character. The speech of each of the main characters in the three novels is analyzed; the purpose is to show how the words of each character well match his/her nature. The study of what a character says provides us with a key that opens the door to an understanding of the nature of that character and his/her personality.

**Chapter Four** presents a study of nonverbal behaviour in the three novels, Pride and Prejudice, Emma and Sense and Sensibility. Various indications are discussed through the analysis of nonverbal behaviour the participants use. As what happens on the dramatic stage, the nonverbal acts used in these three novels vary according to the context of situation, the kind of relationship prevalent between the characters, and to who the speakers and the addressees are.

Finally, the Conclusion is devoted to the findings of the thesis.



# Chapter One

**Chapter One**  
**A Review of the Literature on Jane**  
**Austen and her Period**

The last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first two decades of the nineteenth century witnessed some drastic changes that helped the art of novel to flourish. The development of the natural sciences, the French Revolution, the rise of the social sciences, the Terror and the rise and fall of Napoleon were the most prominent of these changes. To Walter Myers (1927:22) the shaping forces that affected the Victorian novel are:

**“First a group of literary and artistic forces – naturalism, impressionism, symbolism, and expressionism – ; second development in biological science and related philosophy; third developments in psychology.”**

Thus, the Victorian novel has been highly peculiar in form as well as in content. The pioneers of such a sort of novel are: Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, George Meredith, George Eliot, the Brontë sisters and Thomas Hardy. My main concern here is Jane Austen.

The era in which Austen was born was like most periods of history, a period of transition. During the late seventeen hundreds and early eighteen hundreds, England, as a country, was in a period of turmoil – the onset of the Industrial Revolution and the changing social order and consequent ascent of the middle class brought great changes in class and gender expectations. The growing population became more mobile. Middle class families, who were busy earning money through trade or professions, aided in the increased developments of towns and cities. The shifting of funds from the upper class to the rising middle class increased the accessibility of books to the public. Lending libraries and cheap

publications allowed easy access to genres that were previously available, and of interest, only to the wealthy. Two of these genres were novels and conduct books. According to Nancy Armstrong (1993:897), “Conduct books addressed a readership comprising various levels and sources of income and included virtually all people who distinguished themselves from the aristocracy, on the one hand, and from the laboring poor on the other.”

Coincidentally, or sociologically, the development of that middle class increased the volume of writings by women. Accessibility to the written word and increased literacy of both sexes meant that more and more women were reading. Their worlds were expanding, and many took the next step by becoming writers. Publications of all sorts began to flourish, and, as a result, more opportunities became available for female authors to break into a traditionally male literary world. Of further significance, the moderate literary and financial success these women were experiencing served to bolster confidence and a sense of achievement. Women were, in fact, quietly working their way into the mainstream and exerting an influence over the females coming after them. Jane Austen was one of these writers.

The literature on Jane Austen may be grouped under two main headings:

I. Biographical studies.

II. Critical studies.

### **Biographical Studies:**

Jane Austen (1775-1817) was born on the sixteenth of December 1775 at Steventon rectory in the country of Hampshire, and there spent her years of childhood and youth. In describing the place where Jane Austen was born and brought up, Mary Lascelles (1939:1) writes:

**“Above, Steventon warren with its close texture of herbage and its junipers looks as though it had never been very different and would not easily be changed; below, the taller elms mark the courses of the valleys. All still keeps some air of privacy and retirement.”**

Of landscape Jane Austen says little in her novels; but that little is to the point. She gives, as a country woman would, the country and the season, and expects the mind's eye of the reader, supported by memory and imagination, to form the visible background of her stories. Her family have recorded her “love of the country and delight in natural scenery.”

Jane Austen was very much attached to the rectory where she was born and brought up. It was always to that place that Austen felt great nostalgia. Critics stated that she was an autobiographical novelist as all Austen's sympathetic characters take pleasure in the country, and are infatuated with native countryside.

If we start our discussion with the domestic influences on Jane Austen, we have to allude first to the role played by her father in her life. Austen's father had great effect on her as an artist and as a human being. She was her father's favourite child and he admired her intelligence and alertness. He was always behind her, encouraging and supporting her. It was her father who, as soon as her first novel was completed, wrote to inquire of a publisher “What would be the expense of publishing it at the author's risk?” meaning, presumably, at his own, as W.A.Craik (1969:33) records.

According to W.Somerset Maugham, Jane Austen absorbed her moral principles from her pious father, who was the rector of Steventon. Thus she was pious because of the religious atmosphere in which she was born and brought up. W.Somerset Maugham (1904:56) writes:

**“She read sermons, and was particularly fond of Sherlock’s, a divine born in the seventeenth century. ... Jane Austen was pious without being devout. She went to church on Sundays, and partook of communion; and doubtless both at Steventon and Godmersham family prayers were read morning and evening.”**

The death of her father, George Austen, on the morning of January 21, 1805, suddenly after only a two-days’ illness, thus affected Jane Austen greatly. The death of her father, with whom she was very much infatuated, caused Jane Austen a feeling of great disappointment. After her father’s death, as John Halperin (1984:143) records, Austen wrote to inform her brother Frank of their father’s death: “Heavy as is the blow, we can already feel that a thousand comforts remain to us to soften it.” Her father had been a major source of spiritual and moral support to her, and she very much felt his absence. In fact, Jane Austen, in the course of her life, came under the influence not just of her father, who helped in shaping her moral outlook, but of the whole family. Mary Lascelles (1939:2) writes:

**“For Jane Austen, humankind was of first importance, and in her human world her own family stood foremost. She was by no means confined to its society, but she was never, unless in short visits to her intimate friends, quite separated from it.”**

So, Jane Austen’s family was indeed so important in her life. Lascelles also adds (1939:5):

**“This group of people was the focus of Jane Austen’s early life. If its members regarded themselves, as a family, with some complacency, it was not to be wondered at. They had between them a more than average share of good looks and good humour, lively minds and spirits. They were not quarrelsome among themselves.”**

Jane Austen was highly influenced by her beloved only sister, Cassandra, most important of them all in Jane Austen's life, yet remains the most shadowy. A strong and subtle sympathy bound these two together. "They were everything to each other," wrote one of their nieces, who had known them longest, as W.A.Craik (1969:187) records. They seemed to lead a life to themselves within the general family life. They alone fully understood what each had suffered and felt and thought. Cassandra was the dearest member of the family to Jane, and indeed by far the most intimate friend she had in the world. It was to Cassandra that Jane wrote nearly all of the letters that have come down to us; and the very absence of literary style in these documents and their meagreness of information about Jane's literary career is a substantial proof of the complete intimacy of the two women. Cathy Dean (1998:1) writes:

**"Two girls of about the same age with six brothers would naturally form an offensive and defensive alliance; and between these two sisters as they grew from childhood into maturity ripened a marvellous friendship, where each took delight in the other's gifts and pleasures. They were all in all to each other; they were never married, and they remained in the diminishing family circle while the brothers struck out into the world. It was in Cassandra's arms that Jane died; and how terribly the survivor suffered we shall never know."**

These words assure that Cassandra was the main companion for Austen's childhood and adolescence. Sylvia Townsend Warner (1907:9) records that their mother, Mrs. Austen, said: "If Cassandra were going to have her head cut off, Jane would insist on sharing her fate."

To continue our discussion about the domestic influences on Jane Austen and the role played by her own family in her life, we should refer to the great effect made by her brothers on her as an artist and as a human

being, as they were a very important source of encouragement and support to her both emotionally and financially. Her eldest brother, James, played a constant part in her life. He became rector of Steventon after his father, and his knowledge of English literature allowed him to guide and instruct Jane Austen in her early literary attempts. Cathy Dean (١٩٩٨:١) writes:

**“At Oxford he had a high reputation among the undergraduates for his literary skill and his knowledge of English literature. It is to this young Oxonian that the world owes a debt of gratitude; for on his return to the rectory, his mind full of his favourite books, he took charge of the reading of his two younger sisters, and guided them at their most docile age into the green pastures of literature.”**

Edward was the second brother, who was adopted, while a boy, by his distant cousins and took the name of Knight. He was able to give his widowed mother and sisters a home after some years. He was especially kind and helpful to Jane Austen. The third brother, Henry, next in age after Edward, was thought by the rest to have been closest of all the brothers to Jane herself in sympathy and understanding. He superintended the publication of her novels, and helped her in some details of her business dealing with her publishers, and she highly valued his criticisms. Most critics have concentrated on the emotional support as well as the helping hand Henry had given to her. Concerning the significant role played by Henry to encourage and support his sister's early literary attempts, Sylvia Townsend Warner (١٩٥٧:١٤) writes:

**“Henry, who must be considered the first ‘Janeite’, may have thought that publication would encourage composition, so, in ١٨٠٣, Northanger Abbey was sold to a publisher called Crosbie, and the negotiations were carried out through her brother Henry.”**