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'The Loveliest Medium': The New Element in Jane Austen's 'Persuasion'.

'Her character was now fixed on his mind as perfection itself, maintaining the loveliest medium of fortitude and gentleness.'

Persuasion, (Vol. 2, chap. 11).

HER sixth novel, *Persuasion*, was completed by Jane Austen on August 6th, 1816. It had taken her a year to write¹, the year that saw the ill health and bankruptcy of her brother Henry Austen, and that separated the publications of *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. The first symptoms of her own fatal illness had just appeared², but in spite of its increasing demands upon her energy and spirits, in spite of the shock of her brother's disgrace and the tedious proof-reading that must be finished before *Emma* could appear, in spite even of the diversion of her interest to a new piece (*Sanditon*) the following year, Jane Austen did not intend to publish her new novel for another year³. Such a resolution suggests that she was not satisfied with *Persuasion*, and that given the opportunity, would have revised more than she had already done in 1816.

Whatever else she might have reshaped, cut out, or expanded, the one thing we can be certain of is that the character of Anne Elliot would not have been changed. Four months before she died, Jane Austen warned her niece, Fanny Knight, 'You will not like it, so you need not be impatient. You may *perhaps* like the Heroine, as she is almost too good for me.'⁴ Anne Elliot had become a personality, and was ready to be introduced. But

1. J. A. 's Memorandum in the Morgan Library, quoted R. W. Chambers, *Jane Austen. Facts and Problems*. The Clark Lectures, Trinity College, Cambridge. Oxford 1948, p. 81.

2. Jane Austen's last illness has been convincingly diagnosed to have been Addison's disease of the adrenal bodies, of which her *Letters* provide the first recorded case. Cf. Zachary Cope, 'Jane Austen's Last Illness', *British Medical Journal*, July 18th 1964, pp. 182-3.

3. *Jane Austen's Letters*, collected and ed. R. W. Chapman. 2nd ed. 13th March, 1817, p. 484.

4. *Ibid.*, 23rd March, 1817, p. 487.

everything and everyone around her might well have undergone drastic change. In the light of our knowledge of the juvenilia and the earlier novels it is tempting to guess at probable alterations, to feel convinced that a thorough revision would have filled in the shadowy outlines of that important character, Lady Russell, varied with dialogue the long stretches of narrative that mark Anne's visit to Uppercross, taken Mrs. Smith out of her sickroom and made the story's action less dependent on gossip at second and third hand, and expanded the rapid jottings descriptive of Lyme Regis scenery into a more fitting background to the reawakening of Wentworth's interest in Anne. But from here it is a short step to the indulging in futile speculation regarding the novels Jane Austen might have written had she lived longer; ice only a little thinner than that on which the critic treads who insists on approaching *Persuasion* as if it were a finished work of art. This it is not, although a year's initial preparation had, of course, taken the novel far beyond the stage of tentative notes. There are two facts that no responsible critic can ignore: first, that *Persuasion* was far from complete in Jane Austen's view when she died in 1817, and second, that the author's dissatisfaction or uneasiness could ultimately have affected any detail in the novel except the character of Anne Elliot.

I have rehearsed these facts here only because in their light a number of reputed elucidations of Jane Austen's purpose and judgments of her achievement in *Persuasion* begin to appear ingenious but irrelevant.

One of these is Dr. Marvin Mudrick's statement that 'in *Persuasion*, Jane Austen's tone has acquired a sharp personal edge'⁵. He bases his conviction on an analysis of Jane Austen's treatment of Sir Walter Elliot, Elizabeth Elliot, Mrs. Clay, and above all, of Mrs. Musgrove and her dead sailor son, Dick. I shall state later why I find it hard to agree with Dr. Mudrick's estimate of the first three. Dick Musgrove, certainly, will always remain a puzzle, because his death two years before the novel opens leaves Jane Austen with no satisfactory reason for her unduly harsh description of him as

a thick-headed, unfeeling, unprofitable Dick Musgrove, who had never done any thing to entitle himself to more than the abbreviation of his name, living or dead.⁶

He has no function in the novel at all, except that his memory, affectionately invoked by his mother, provides the first proof of those 'tastes so

5. Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen. Irony as Defense and Discovery*, Princeton 1952, p. 207.

6. *Persuasion*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 1926, Vol. I, Chap. 6.

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similar ... feelings so in unison'⁷ that Anne believes herself to share with Wentworth. When Mrs. Musgrove laments Dick's loss to Anne, she suppresses a smile but listens kindly⁸; when Wentworth's turn comes, his amusement is equally spontaneous and similarly replaced by sympathy and 'the kindest consideration'⁹. This incident is not unimportant, for it is the first real sign of the affinity of mind that exists between the estranged lovers, and this alone must suffice to sustain the reader (although acts of kindness on Wentworth's part intervene) until very much later, when Wentworth, preparing to break the news of Louisa's accident to the elder Musgroves, says, 'I have seen considering what we had best do.'¹⁰ The first scene pinpoints their superiority to the friendly, bustling, absurd Uppercross world even as it shows their sympathy for it. The second is, as Anne realises, 'a proof of friendship, and of deference for her judgment'¹¹ and another sign that they are as one in their concern for the Musgrove family. Not that this justifies Jane Austen's treatment of the unfortunate Dick, the crudeness of whose portrait is so blatantly out of key with the gentle flow of this section of the novel. Dr. Mudrick rightly points this out, but he does not explain it; indeed, he cannot, since his position is that *Persuasion* must be judged as it stands¹². The picture of Dick Musgrove is explainable, in fact, only in terms of what we know of Jane Austen's letters. It is almost as if a page from a letter had got in among the manuscript leaves, and indeed, it appears very probable that Jane Austen, casting about for a means of bringing Wentworth and Anne into proximity, had seized on 'poor Dick,' a half-forgotten personality from her own experience, prepared for him hastily by causing Louisa to walk to the Cottage and send the harp along in the carriage, elaborated him rapidly so as to extract some dubiously comic value from Mrs. Musgrove's 'large fat sighings'¹³, and never returned to soften the picture as she doubtless would have done, if she had had the opportunity. For Anne and Wentworth share, by implication, their creator's opinion of Dick Musgrove, and it is difficult to believe that Jane Austen would have allowed such a discord in the harmony of Anne's character to go unsoftened or unaltered, from what we know of her re-writing of the last pages of *Persuasion*.

7. Chap. 8.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. Chap. 12.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Mudrick, p. 240.

13. *Persuasion*, Chap. 8.

Even if we did not have the assurance of their most recent commentator that Jane Austen's achievement in her revisions of the last part of *Persuasion* 'was not, in the act of creation, a swift and effortless performance, but a triumph of rethinking won through trial and error'¹⁴, we cannot doubt it when we examine the changes she made. Consider, for instance, the motive behind the emendation of the passage describing Anne's reaction to the revelation of William Walter Elliot's true character. The passage originally read:

..... pained for Lady Russell & glancing with composed Complacency & Lenient (?) Triumph upon the fact of her having been right & Lady R wrong herself the most discriminating of the two. *She* had never been satisfied. Lady Russell's confidence had been entire.

Jane Austen drew a line through it and left the manuscript to read
and pained for Lady Russell, whose confidence in him had been entire.¹⁵

The change removes all hint of gleeful self-satisfaction or aggressiveness from the passage, and leaves the affectionate sympathy that is the keynote of Anne's character. Acutely sensitive to niceties of tone and atmosphere as Jane Austen proves herself to have been in making this and other changes, it is unlikely that her original picture of Mrs. Musgrove's sorrow for her son would have survived a lopping and cropping. Anne Elliot is the novel's centre, and Jane Austen could not allow her peculiar charm to be destroyed. But Dick Musgrove is merely a piece of machinery, and could afford to await his creator's leisure, the leisure that she never had.

The only alternative to this is to allow Dr. Mudrick's theory of a 'sharp personal edge' to stand without explanation and without a shred of further justification, for Mrs. Musgrove never refers to Dick again, and despite Dr. Mudrick's statement that 'not until the revision (of the original final chapter) does Jane Austen see Mrs. Musgrove as the muddle-headed but kindly matron demanded by the story'¹⁶, she is never again ridiculed for her union of plumpness and sentimentality. On the contrary, Mrs. Musgrove is treated ever afterwards, by both Anne and Wentworth, with

14. B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts*, OUP 1964, p. 86.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

16. Mudrick, p. 217.

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'the kindest consideration.' Her comfortable person is the centre of a 'fine family piece'¹⁷, and she seems herself the spirit of Christmas hospitality as she protects the little Harvilles from her own spoilt grandchildren¹⁸. She gives Anne 'the kindest welcome' on meeting her in Bath¹⁹, and it is the warmth of her personality (for we hardly meet Mr. Musgrove) which invites regretful comparisons with 'the sad want of such blessings' in the Eliot establishment²⁰. Wentworth and Anne are in harmony when they speak (at different times) of the Musgroves:

(Wentworth:) 'The Musgroves are behaving like themselves, most honourably and kindly, only anxious with true parental hearts to promote their daughter's comfort.'²¹

'Such excellent parents as Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove,' exclaimed Anne, 'should be happy in their children's marriages. They do every thing to confer happiness, I am sure. What a blessing to young people to be in such hands!'²²

If Dick Musgrove's portrait were eliminated or somewhat softened, his mother's treatment in Chapter 8 would have been automatically revised at the same time, for her size offers no provocation to the satirist or the ironist except in her sorrow. Indeed, her plump person is useful to Jane Austen in this same scene, when her position in the middle of a sofa symbolises the barrier that stands between Wentworth and Anne; or at the White Hart Inn, where she sits enthroned among steady old friends, the very emblem of warm and uncritical friendliness²³.

Sir Walter, Elizabeth, and Mrs. Clay are very different propositions. They are not merely characters who fail 'to advance the interests' of Jane Austen's heroine²⁴, but whose existence and continuing prosperity challenges and denies all that Anne has been taught by experience to value. Dr. Mudrick defines her position admirably when he declares that Anne 'has learned that the conflict of her time engages objects and symbols, and

17. *Persuasion*, Vol. II, Chap. 2.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Vol. II, Chap. 10.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Vol. II, Chap. 2.

22. Vol. II, Chap. 10.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Mudrick, p. 207.

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that she can deal only with persons'²⁵. Sir Walter, Elizabeth, and Mrs. Clay have no use for Anne, for very good reasons. Sir Walter measures women according to his own standards of personal beauty: Anne is unlike him, and therefore 'haggard'. Elizabeth values people as they contribute to her own consequence: an unmarried younger sister is a continual reminder of her own single state. Mrs. Clay seeks a return for her flattery: Anne has nothing to exchange. To these one might add Mary Musgrove who differs from the rest in having plenty of uses for Anne, but reveals her own insensitivity by employing her merely as companion, confidante, baby sitter, and general dogsbody. None of these characters appear to have been created merely in order that they shall be destroyed. It is one of the many signs of *Persuasion's* maturity that they are not destroyed, but continue to flourish in the enjoyment of their material prosperity. In a fascinating glimpse of the future in which Jane Austen suggests that Mrs. Clay might take precedence over Elizabeth, she leaves them to destroy one another. Anne simply ignores them, as she leaves the cramped coldness of her father's house for the freedom of spirit that will be hers as the wife of Wentworth.

Why must we regret that Elizabeth Elliot's character does not develop after Chapter 1?²⁶ Do we regret that Lady Catherine de Bourgh does not develop after our first glimpse of her at Rosings? Or Caroline Bingley? Or Lucy Steele? Or John Thorpe? Jane Austen's attention in the first draft is necessarily concentrated on her development of Anne, and on a quite new departure for her, a male character who undergoes the process of self-discipline and self-revaluation that she has hitherto reserved for her heroines. We cannot know how revision would have affected Elizabeth Elliot, but she and the others are brilliantly realised in their speech in the novel as it stands. One wonders, incidentally, what feature of *Persuasion* led Virginia Woolf to believe that 'Jane Austen would have trusted less to dialogue and more to reflection to give us a knowledge of her characters'²⁷. There is nothing in the presentation of these persons that would lead one to think so:

'Very well,' said Elizabeth, 'I have nothing to send but my love'²⁸

25. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

27. cf. Virginia Woolf, 'Jane Austen', from *The Common Reader*, (1925) in *Jane Austen. A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Watt, New Jersey, 1963, p. 23.

28. *Persuasion*, Vol. II, Chap. 10.

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'Wentworth? Oh! ay,—Mr. Wentworth, the curate of Monkford. You misled me by the term *gentleman*. I thought you were speaking of some man of property: Mr. Wentworth was nobody, I remember; quite unconnected; nothing to do with the Stafford family. One wonders how the names of many of our nobility become so common.'²⁹

'Yes, I made the best of it; I always do; but I was very far from well at the time; and I do not think I ever was so ill in my life as I have been all this morning—very unfit to be left alone, I am sure ... So, Lady Russell would not get out. I do not think she has been in this house three times this summer.'³⁰

'Indeed I do say it. I never saw any body in my life spell harder for an invitation. Poor man! I was really in pain for him; for your hard-hearted sister, Miss Anne, seems bent on cruelty.'³¹

Insincerity, pride, self pity, crudity of mind are caught for ever in these lightning portraits. Long before Anne Elliot comes to life as a character, or her story told, Jane Austen ranges before the reader the people who menace her personality and her discriminating mind. Anne is no Elizabeth Bennet, to return with zest the bludgeoning of a Lady Catherine. Jane Austen is *en garde* on Anne's behalf, and she lays bare the innermost souls of the Elliot family and their familiar with sure, precise strokes. The analysis is deadly, because the ironic wit which is Jane Austen's instrument is couched in language that has the deftness and finish of her maturity. She can demolish in a line, in a turn of phrase, and Sir Walter and Elizabeth, Mary and Mrs. Clay betray themselves with every word they utter. We could not wish for clearer outline, we only regret that we do not see more of them. Comic as they are, theirs are the values that oppose the Wentworth-Anne marriage, and Jane Austen probes their depths in a study that is among the most careful in all the novels.

Consider Mrs. Clay. Dr. Mudrick complains that this character 'is not given time to condemn herself by incident'³². In Dr. W. A. Craik's opinion, Mrs. Clay's 'whole connexion is with Elizabeth, and her own

29. Vol. I, Chap. 3.

30. Vol. I, Chap. 5.

31. Vol. II, Chap. 10.

32. Mudrick, p. 211.

language—the few times she does speak—points to nothing but herself³³. Miss Lascelles felt similarly—that the reader has never had anything but Jane Austen's word for the William Elliot–Mrs. Clay liaison³⁴. Are these judgments justified? Certainly, Mrs. Clay attaches herself to Elizabeth, since Sir Walter is best approached through his favourite daughter. She is quick to see that the Elliots' lives are ruled by personal vanity and pride of rank, and she presses these keys from her very first appearance at Kellynch-hall. But once she goes with them to Bath, and is allowed to share in their social triumphs; when, particularly, she comes into the orbit of Mr. Elliot, her behaviour is described with an ambiguity that is surprisingly detailed for a minor character in a first draft. Emma suspects Jane Fairfax on less evidence than Jane Austen hands us concerning Mrs. Clay. There is the eagerness with which Mrs. Clay recognises Elliot's knock on the door, on Anne's first evening at Camden-place³⁵. Is his knock so very characteristic? Or is Mrs. Clay expecting it? Or is she merely flattering Elizabeth? We are not sure. Her enthusiasm need not be all on Elizabeth's behalf. Elliot's behaviour is equally ambiguous. Despite Elizabeth's public encouragement, he manages to avoid a definite commitment. His behaviour is polite and correct enough to make Lady Russell think of him for her beloved Anne³⁶. He criticises Mrs. Clay, but only to Anne, and then only in Mrs. Clay's absence³⁷, and Anne herself notes with perplexity that 'Mrs. Clay found him as agreeable as anybody'³⁸.

From the time Wentworth is known to be expected in Bath, Anne leads an intensely agitated mental life, the passionate preoccupation that will at last find adequate words in the scene at the White Hart Inn. Any detail that engages her attention or curiosity, outside her own problems must necessarily be arresting, simply because it manages to do so. There are some such details, one being that very odd 'point of civility' that must be settled between Anne and Mrs. Clay as to which will walk home and which will ride. Anne, we know, would rather walk home in the rain than be forced to bear the insincerities of the Dalrymples. But Mrs. Clay? She has not shown herself so pressingly eager to be of service to Anne before; and would not it have been more natural for her to wish to accompany Elizabeth, and in all the glory of Lady Dalrymple's carriage? But there

33. W. A. Craik, *Jane Austen. The Six Novels*, London 1965, p. 172.

34. Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art*, London 1939, p. 206.

35. *Persuasion*, Vol. II, Chap. 3.

36. Vol. II, Chap. 4.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Vol. II, Chap. 5.

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is a bonus attached to the walk, which is the company of Mr. Elliot. And though we know Anne's mind, there is no adequate reason for the 'generosity so polite and so determined'³⁹ with which Mrs. Clay insists that she is wearing the thicker boots. Anne has no time to reflect on this interesting incident, because it is just then that she glimpses Captain Wentworth through the shop window, and the moment is gone for ever; 'for a few minutes she saw nothing before her. It was all confusion. She was lost.'⁴⁰

On their walk home, Mr. Elliot's conversation is full of 'insinuations highly rational against Mrs. Clay.' He could be sincere; he could be covering up Mrs. Clay's indiscreet eagerness. Anne could not care less—'just now she could think only of Captain Wentworth'⁴¹. From this point on the hints become increasingly obvious, and Anne's inability to perceive what is before her eyes and interpret it correctly reveals the extent of her own preoccupation. She wonders that Mrs. Clay should 'assume a most obliging, placid look' at the prospect of Elliot's evening visit, but puts it down to good acting⁴² having been diverted from her half-suspensions by Mrs. Smith's assurance that Mrs. Clay's objective is Sir Walter. She does not believe that it is Mr. Elliot whom Mary spies 'deep in talk' with Mrs. Clay at the corner of Bath-street (when he is supposed to be away for the day at Thornberry-park) until she sees him herself⁴³, and does not recollect that Mrs. Clay had herself left Camden-place directly after breakfast on a self-imposed errand⁴⁴. Anne's personal problems keep her mind in 'restless agitation' at the prospect of the morrow's card-party (will Wentworth be there?) but she does remember to ask for an explanation of the *tete-a-tete*, only to have her suspicions smoothed away by Mrs. Clay's plausible chatter and the private supposition that Elliot had perhaps been censuring her designs on Sir Walter—an odd explanation, when one comes to think of it⁴⁵. But Anne's attention is not really on Mrs. Clay, and neither is the reader's, for at every moment Jane Austen is heightening the suspense that attends the climactic stages of the Wentworth-Anne romance. All we can complain of is that Jane Austen does not exploit the richly comic possibilities of the Sir Walter-Mrs. Clay—Mr. Elliot triangle, but it is hardly surprising that she does not. Sexual intrigue was not a

39. Vol. II, Chap. 7.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. Vol. II, Chap. 10.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

subject that she found funny, or would have cared to handle in a novel, for public and private reasons. A flirtation between Henry Crawford and Maria Bertram in the grounds of Sotherton is all very well; but the impulses that cause their elopement can only be inferred, although the ground has been prepared long before. And so Mrs. Clay ends up under Elliot's protection in London, and if we did not expect it to happen, it is not her creator's fault. Jane Austen scatters clues enough to satisfy any reader of Agatha Christie. To do more would have been to destroy the delicate mist of inward preoccupation through which Anne perceives people and things in the final pages of *Persuasion*.

It is regrettable that Mr. Mudrick's baseless discovery of 'abuse' and a 'personal edge' is made so early in his study of the novel, for it takes away something from his admission that the new element in *Persuasion* is its personal feeling⁴⁶. It forces him to state that Anne, Elinor Dashwood, and Fanny Price 'share one distinction which no other major Austen character may claim: they are all unsubjected to the temper of Jane Austen's irony.'⁴⁷ To say this is to keep the unlikely company of Professor Garrod, who wrote of these very three as inhabitants of 'a land flowing with milk and water'⁴⁸. And is it justified?

Certainly, in *Persuasion* it is no longer Jane Austen's purpose to trace her heroine's approach to self knowledge, the principal source of irony in earlier work. Anne Elliot's progress is conceived on different lines; Anne gradually reasserts herself, quite firmly, if with characteristic gentleness. She progresses in a revaluation of Lady Russell, and towards a new confidence in her own judgment and the validity of her own ideals. Jane Austen described Anne jokingly as 'almost too good for me', but her virtues are not superhuman, and her failings are common enough. They include delight that she can destroy masculine indifference:

Jealousy of Mr. Elliot! It was the only intelligible motive! Captain Wentworth jealous of her affection! Could she have believed it a week ago, three hours ago! For a moment, the gratification was exquisite.⁴⁹

46. Mudrick, p. 218.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

48. H. W. Garrod, 'Jane Austen. A Depreciation' (read May 23rd 1928), in *Essays By Divers Hands*, being the Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom. Vol. VIII, (London 1928), p. 37.

49. *Persuasion*, Vol. II, Chap. 8.

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The essential difference between Anne and a coquette like Isabella Thorpe is that Anne's next wish is to end Wentworth's agony with an assurance of her love, while Isabella would have done her utmost to prolong it. Anne's momentary triumph is endearing because it occurs in a character generally so superior to pettiness. It emphasises her humanity, and the reader triumphs with Anne at this point, having witnessed stage by stage the trepidation, the indecision, the misgivings, the longing to look on her lover, and the acute discomfort in his presence that have preceded it.

She now felt a great inclination to go to the outer door; she wanted to see if it rained. Why was she to suspect herself of another motive? Captain Wentworth must be out of sight. She left her seat. She would go; one half of her should not be always so much wiser than the other half, or always suspecting the other of being worse than it was. She would see if it rained.⁵⁰

Who can say that Jane Austen does not treat this heroine with irony? *Why was she to suspect herself of another motive?* That is as much Jane Austen's dryly amused voice as it is Anne's exasperated one. It is a note that is struck, not once, but often:

She hoped to be wise and reasonable in time; but alas! alas!
She must confess to herself that she was not wise yet.⁵¹

She had some feelings which she was ashamed to investigate.
They were too much like joy, senseless joy!⁵²

By some other removals, and a little scheming of her own, Anne was enabled to place herself much nearer the end of the bench than she had been before, much more within reach of a passerby.
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It is not, of course, the astringent narrative tone of *Emma* that Jane Austen employs in the delineation of Anne's gentle personality. For the first time she presents a sympathetic picture of a tender hearted heroine that is entirely successful. Anne's tenderness of heart is united with a discriminating mind, an intrinsic moral superiority that Jane Austen had captured before in Elinor Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet, and Fanny Price.

50. Vol. II, Chap. 7.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Vol. II, Chap. 6.

53. Vol. II, Chap. 8.

Tenderness of heart is a side of human nature, possibly of her own nature, that Jane Austen had not cared earlier to examine at heroine-level. Her single essay in that direction had been the creation of Fanny Price, and it was neither wholly satisfactory nor convincing. Perhaps Jane Austen was not ready, when she wrote *Mansfield Park*, to handle a personality so different from her own, conscious that her most immediate need was for the discipline to which she had just subjected Elizabeth Bennet's self-confidence and intended to subject Emma Woodhouse's headstrong arrogance. There is no knowing the extent of self control, self discipline and self chastisement that everyday social intercourse must have involved for Jane Austen, whose writing provided her with a means of externalising her personal problems. Her desperate need to find 'some mode of existence for her critical attitudes'⁵⁴ can be detected in the loneliness and isolation of her intelligent heroines (I exclude Catherine Morland, though her innocence of mind substitutes for intelligence in providing her with shining armour against the attacks of the worldly). It can be sensed in the urgency of Jane Austen's commitment to the moral standards of Elizabeth Bennet, in her personal protection of 'my Fanny'. In *Persuasion*, as in the other novels, Jane Austen works out the problems that were involved for her in her quiet and apparently contented existence in a society with which she was morally at war; and in its gentle heroine she is able to capture at last the disciplined restraint that marked her own maturity.

The impulse that moved Jane Austen to the creation of a Fanny Price or an Anne Elliot may, on the other hand be explained by the probability, despite the loyal assurances of her family, that she lacked gentleness herself, though she admired and loved the quality in her sister Cassandra, and wished to resemble her more. However it may have been, there appears in every novel the figure of a young woman remarkable for her sweet temper and gentle disposition, who has her creator's sympathy. Elegant in her mind and manners, patient under the humiliation of her father's behaviour, there arises in *Northanger Abbey* the first of these, Eleanor Tilney, on the occasion of whose marriage Jane Austen's own joy 'is very sincere'.⁵⁵ Jane Bennet is primarily a foil for the livelier Elizabeth, yet she associates positively with herself an atmosphere of quiet cheerfulness and sincerity. Elizabeth admires and loves Jane—

54. D. W. Harding, 'Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen. *Scrutiny*, VIII (1940) pp. 346—262, and Ian Watt, ed., op. cit. (see note 27) p. 170.

55. *Northanger Abbey*, Vol. II, Chap. 16.

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'My dear Jane...I do not know what to say to you. I feel as if I had never done you justice, or loved you as you deserve'.⁵⁶

Superior in understanding, often amused by Jane's ingenuousness, Elizabeth values in her sister the quality she knows herself to lack—

'till I have your disposition, your goodness, I never can have your happiness'⁵⁷.

Emma similarly values the quality in Harriet Smith and her sister Isabella Knightley:

'There is no charm equal to tenderness of heart ... there is nothing to be compared with it. Warmth and tenderness of heart, with an affectionate, open manner, will beat all the clearness of head in the world, for attraction: I am sure it will. It is tenderness of heart that makes my dear father so generally beloved—which gives Isabella all her popularity. I have it not; but I know how to prize and respect it.'⁵⁸

It is too late, as Jane Austen ironically remarks, for Emma to set about becoming simpleminded; and Emma's enthusiasm for Harriet is another of those errors of judgment she is continually making. Yet Harriet and Isabella can arouse Emma's sincere admiration, though they may not *permanently* win her respect.

Up to the time Jane Austen unites it with a penetrating mind in Anne Elliot, the gentle disposition has figured with success in minor roles only, setting off the vivid personalities of an Emma Woodhouse or an Elizabeth Bennet, sometimes treated with amusement but never with harshness, even in the case of Harriet Smith in whom a tender heart surely approaches idiocy. Elinor Dashwood has something in her that foreshadows Anne, but she is outstanding for her admirable strength of mind and capacity for self control, rather than for gentleness. In *Mansfield Park*, Jane Austen's first attempt to give the quality heroine status in Fanny Price is unsuccessful for two reasons. Fanny's claim to the reader's sympathy lies in her constant affection for Edmund, and the weakness of Edmund's character casts a

56. *Pride and Prejudice*, Vol. II, Chap. 1.

57. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Chap. 13.

58. *Emma*, Vol. II, Chap. 13.

shadow of doubt over the rightness of Fanny's judgment, although she shows herself more discriminating as regards Crawford. A second reason is that, despite all Jane Austen does for Fanny, she cannot prevent her appearing a trifle dull beside the brilliantly executed portraits of Mary Crawford and the Bertram girls. In *Persuasion* the experiment is at last successful. Like Fanny, Anne is modest, patient and constant; like Elinor she has firm principles and self control; like Elizabeth she is intelligent, discriminating, and possessed of a fine sense of the ridiculous or absurd. The analogy of chemistry comes readily to mind, for Jane Austen displays to a marked degree the love and use of logic, the capacity to learn by patient trial and error, the reliance on order, and the distrust of emotionalism that characterise the scientific mind. In Anne her chemistry has worked at last, to produce the perfect incorruptible blend—

What ever dyes was not mixt equally—

and here wit and a quick intelligence are happily married to a gentle heart. In the novel as a whole the hard, bright quality that Jane Austen had herself perceived in *Pride and Prejudice*⁵⁹ has mellowed and modulated to a deeper tone.

Far from revealing the sharp edges of personal animosity, the irony of *Persuasion*, as it operates through Anne Elliot's observing eye, has quietened. Jane Austen's attitude to personal and social weaknesses is as critical as ever, but it appears more controlled and better balanced. The 'elegant little woman of seven—and—twenty, with every beauty excepting bloom'⁶⁰ is, like her creator, intelligent, and possesses an unconceited awareness of the fact. Dr. Craik has noted the smoothness with which 'Jane Austen's comments slide easily into Anne's'.⁶¹ Yet, despite her ironic sense of humour, Anne practises self control. If she did not, one would not find Mrs. Musgrove saying, as she does:

'I am sure neither Henrietta nor I should care at all for the play if Miss Anne could not be with us.'⁶²

An exquisite feeling for the comic remains, but Jane Austen, like Anne, has achieved with experience a greater sense of tolerance, of perspective, of control.

59. *Letters*, February, 4th, 1813 p. 299. 'The work is rather too light, and bright, and sparkling; it wants shade'

60. *Persuasion*, Vol. II, Chap. 5.

61. *Op. cit.*, p. 170.

62. *Persuasion*, Vol. II, Chap. 10.

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It is difficult, otherwise, to account for the new restraint with which she treats the subject of the unmarried woman in society. It is a part of Jane Austen's genius that the deeply personal becomes, through her organised and sophisticated art, the impersonal. For example, Miss Bates and the poverty that renders her so dependent on other people's kindness are continually in Emma's mind, but Jane Austen can recreate quite unsentimentally in the elderly spinster a partial projection of herself. One recalls Emma's reflection that

a single woman with a very narrow income must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid. The proper sport of boys and girls.⁶³

She is teasing Harriet, but there is here an echo of personal bitterness, as there is also in the narrator's description of Miss Bates as having

no intellectual superiority to make atonement to herself, or frighten those who might hate her into outward respect.⁶⁴

Jane Austen's attitude in these passages is not a simple one, neither is it completely resolved, but the undeniable bitterness that underlines the apparent composure of her tone threatens, although it does not destroy, the over-all poise of *Emma*. In *Persuasion*, however, all is changed:

Thirteen winters' revolving frosts had seen (Elizabeth Elliot) opening every ball of credit which a scanty neighbourhood afforded, and thirteen springs shown their blossoms, as she travelled up to London with her father for a few weeks' annual enjoyment of the great world. She had the remembrance of all this, she had the consciousness of being nine-and-twenty to give her some regrets and some apprehensions; she was fully satisfied of being still quite as handsome as ever, but she felt her approach to the years of danger, and would have rejoiced to be certain of being properly solicited by baronet-blood within the next twelve-month or two.⁶⁵

Hatred and unhappiness have settled, and Jane Austen's new tone is one of amused ridicule, devoid of personal urgency. Miss Bates' never-ending monologues and her well-meant blundering add up to comic value in

63. *Emma*, Vol. I, Chap. 10.

64. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, Chap. 3.

65. *Persuasion*, Vol. I, Chap. 1.

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Emma, but her spinsterhood is treated throughout with delicacy and sympathy. But Elizabeth Elliot is comic as her father is comic, in her exaggerated vanity and pride, but in her spinsterhood most of all. The irony with which Jane Austen unfailingly treats this aspect of her (Elizabeth closes the *Baronetage* with averted eyes, and pushes it away) suggests that *Persuasion* was written by a happier, more contented, more relaxed person than was *Emma*. Jane Austen's ironic wit still underlies the texture of the novel, it rises occasionally to the surface and we recognise the familiar flash—

‘We do not call Bermuda or Bahama, you know, the West Indies.’

Mrs. Musgrove had not a word to say in dissent; she could not accuse herself of having ever called them any thing in the whole course of her life.⁶⁶

but it never jars the counterpointed harmony of her tone. *Persuasion's* setting and the delicate evocation of its quiet atmosphere are peculiarly identified with its heroine and in key with her character. Anne's late-flowering romance finds a melancholy echo in the often-pictured autumn scenes at Uppercross, Wentworth's interest sharpens with the sea breezes at Lyme, their ultimate reunion is part of springtime in Bath. The rush of emotion beneath Anne's calm exterior is caught with extraordinary immediacy:

A thousand feelings rushed on Anne, of which this was the most consoling, that it would soon be over. And it was soon over. In two minutes after Charles' preparation, the others appeared; they were in the drawing room. Her eye half met Captain Wentworth's, a bow, a curtsey passed; she heard his voice; he talked to Mary, said all that was right, said something to the Miss Musgroves, enough to mark an easy footing; the room seemed full, full of persons and voices, but a few minutes ended it. Charles showed himself at the window, all was ready, their visitor had bowed and was gone, the Miss Musgroves were gone too..... the room was cleared, and Anne might finish her breakfast as she could ...

Mary talked but she could not attend. She had seen him. They had met. They had been once more in the same room.⁶⁷

66. Vol. I, Chap. 8.

67. Vol. I, Chap. 7.

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To Anne, the minutes have passed like a dream, her inward sensations so vivid that ordinary conversation becomes indistinct, a familiar family party seems a tumultuous crowd. Much of the rest of the novel is seen through Anne's eyes, and ordinary events receive a heightening because of the intensity of the emotion that possesses the observer's mind. A concert at Bath and a shopping expedition on a wet day take on a sparkle because they are seen through Anne's excited, anxious eyes. Her quiet personality sets the tone of the novel, and in this connection it is interesting to see how she shares an aspect of the distinctive charm of that unlikely character, Mary Crawford. As the Crawfords entered the ballroom at Mansfield Park, we learned that

the stiffness of the meeting soon gave away before their popular manners and more diffused intimacies; little groups were formed, and everybody grew comfortable.⁶⁸

Despite the hint of disapproval in the phrase *popular manners and more diffused intimacies* (Jane Austen is doing her best for Fanny), the mere presence of this attractive couple creates an atmosphere of ease and enjoyment. One recalls the 'heartiness, and ... warmth, and ... sincerity' that Anne's visit calls forth from the Musgroves in Bath,⁶⁹ and compares it a little later on with the visit of Sir Walter and Elizabeth,

whose entrance seemed to give a general chill. Anne felt an instant oppression, and, wherever she looked, saw symptoms of the same. The comfort, the freedom, the gaiety of the room was over, hushed into cold composure, determined silence, or insipid talk, to meet the heartless elegance of her father and sister.⁷⁰

The pervading tone of *Persuasion* is not that of coldness, or cruelty, of bitterness or animosity, the qualities that mark Elizabeth and the rest of the Elliots, but the gentle restraint of Anne, who is made welcome wherever she goes.

Her charm, though great, would not alone qualify Anne Elliot for the status of heroine, however, and Jane Austen makes quite clear what those qualities are that do. Like Catherine Morland, whom the devious intri-

68. *Mansfield Park*, Vol. II, Chap. 10.

69. *Persuasion*, Vol. II, Chap. 10.

70. *Ibid.*

gues of Isabella Thorpe entirely escape, Anne looks for honesty and frankness above all else in her personal relationships with other people. She feels

that she could so much more depend on the sincerity of those who looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind varied, whose tongue never slipped.⁷¹

Anne reveals her love of open dealing as it more widely affects society in her suggestions for Sir Walter's retrenchment, which were

on the side of honesty against importance. She wanted more vigorous measures, a more complete reformation, a ... much higher tone of indifference for everything but justice and equity.⁷²

Social honesty is a principle with Anne, as it is not with her family.

With these high principles regarding her own dealings with society goes, pleasantly, a humane tolerance of the weaknesses of other people. Like Elizabeth Bennet, Anne finds the study of character 'most amusing'⁷³, but her conclusions are based on longer experience and a more modest estimate of her own merits. She is more controlled, more acute, possesses more perfectly that 'quickness of perception ... a nicety in the discernment of character, a natural penetration'⁷⁴ which is too often rendered inaccurate in Elizabeth's case by her preconceptions. Anne is entertained by the Crofts' style of driving, which she imagines to be 'no bad representation of the general guidance of their affairs'⁷⁵. She perceives the origin of Henrietta Musgrove's concern for Dr. Shirley's increasing age and infirmity with some private amusement, but generously remarks

how desirable it was that he should have some active, respectable young man as resident curate, and was even courteous enough to hint at the advantage of such resident curate's being married.⁷⁶

It is this same generous courtesy, coupled with a sense of filial duty, that prevents Anne answering Sir Walter's sneering crudities on the subject of Mrs. Smitn, with the retort that her friend

71. Vol. II, Chap. 5.

72. Vol. I, Chap. 2.

73. *Pride and Prejudice* Vol. I, Chap. 9.

74. *Persuasion*, Vol. II, Chap. 12.

75. Vol. I, Chap. 10.

76. Vol. I, Chap. 12.

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was not the only widow in Bath between thirty and forty, with little to live on, and no surname of dignity.⁷⁷

Like Elizabeth Bennet, Elinor Dashwood, Eleanor Tilney, and Emma Woodhouse, Anne stands for the principle of family loyalty. Unlike Elizabeth, who was, one remembers, 'in agonies' at the public behaviour of her family⁷⁸, Anne had 'nothing to blush for in the public manners of her father and sister'⁷⁹, but their private behaviour is calculated to wound her gentle, affectionate spirit. Sir Walter's objections to the navy as offering opportunity to obscure social climbers are voiced callously (or at best, tactlessly) in Anne's presence.⁸⁰ She is patronised by Mary—'Dear me, what can *you* possibly have to do?'⁸¹—slighted by Elizabeth to whom Anne is 'nothing,' compared with Mrs. Clay⁸². Yet she never betrays her family or discusses them with other people, even Lady Russell, never accepts or invites pity. It is only when a higher duty intervenes that Anne sets her family at defiance, and publicly acknowledges her acquaintance with Wentworth 'in spite of the formidable father and sister in the background ... and felt equal to every thing which she believed right to be done.'⁸³

As the root from which these heroine-like virtues spring, Anne possesses, in spite of an incurably romantic nature, the supreme one of good sense. She has, like Marianne Dashwood, her 'favourite grove',⁸⁴ and is fond of quotations from the poets, but her purpose in resorting to them is to subdue, not indulge, her emotions. It is evidence of the stability of Anne's mind that, despite the emptiness of her life at Kellynch, she refuses Charles Musgrove's proposal of marriage and attempts to fill her life with 'duties'. Anne is

glad to be thought of some use, glad to have any thing marked out as a duty.⁸⁵

The sweetness of her character is the result of a necessary sanity and steadiness reminiscent of Elinor Dashwood, not of an incredible saintliness. Like

77. Vol. II, Chap. 5.

78. *Pride and Prejudice*, Vol. I, Chap. 18.

79. *Persuasion*, Vol. II, Chap. 11.

80. Vol. I, Chap. 3.

81. Vol. I, Chap. 5.

82. Vol. II, Chap. 4.

83. Vol. II, Chap. 8.

84. Vol. I, Chap. 3.

85. Vol. I, Chap. 5.

her creator Anne must 'keep on reasonably good terms with the associates of her everyday life', has 'a deep need of their affection, and a genuine respect for the ordered, decent civilisation that they upheld'⁸⁶. And so Anne finds herself things to do, she catalogues the books and pictures at Kellynch-hall, carries out Elizabeth's directions regarding the garden, arranges her books and music, goes parish visiting, nurses her nephew, and plays country dances by the hour for the lively Musgroves. Unembittered but still in love, Anne shows gentleness under affront, and endless tact in smoothing difficulties and clashes at Uppercross; she redirects Benwick's reading along more sensible lines; and if her own eyes fill with tears as Wentworth dances with Louisa, that fact is known to nobody. It is her controlling good sense, her determination to guard her own peace of mind that holds the reader's respect, even when her situation invites sympathy or her acute emotional agitation provokes amusement. Anne's good sense defines the extent of her emotion, and in no other novel does a heroine, silly or sensible, reach the emotional intensity achieved by her. Her constancy and steadfast affection are the very texture of the novel, but there is no straying over the bounds of sentimentality. Nowhere does Jane Austen so touch the heart as when Anne gives way at last to the feelings she has kept so long to herself, and reserves for her sex in the hearing of her lover the single unenviable privilege 'of loving longest when existence, or when hope is gone.'⁸⁷ A declaration of such deeply felt, passionately expressed emotion as this gives the Jane Austen heroine a new dimension; and our response to it is the greater for our awareness of the strength of her habitual self control.

Anne's is a character that undergoes little change from the first page of *Persuasion* to the last. Jane Austen's purpose in creating this heroine is to reveal her personality, not to discipline it, and Anne's calm composure, her intelligence, her tolerance, her high principles, her good sense, and her beating heart are all hers when the novel begins. In the other novels, the reader watches Emma, Elizabeth, Catherine and Marianne blundering, repenting, revaluing earlier judgments. But Anne's error is past history. She

had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older: the natural sequence of an unnatural beginning.⁸⁸

86. D. W. Harding, op. cit., p. 170.

87. *Persuasion*, Vol. II, Chap. 11.

88. Vol. I, Chap. 4.

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Anne's progress is made towards independence of spirit, not towards surer judgment. She refuses Charles Musgrove, though Lady Russell would have liked the match; Admiral Croft's manners may not suit her friend, but they delight Anne, who warms to his 'goodness of heart and simplicity of character';⁸⁹ Lady Russell considers the Dalrymples 'an acquaintance worth having'⁹⁰—Anne is more fastidious. The novel moves towards the moment when Anne, given the chance she never dared to hope for, will fearlessly take the step she wavered from earlier, of marriage with Wentworth. There can now be no pull of conflicting loyalties, no fear of imprudence. A rich Captain Wentworth is now considered by a money-minded society to be quite worthy of a Louisa Musgrove, or even of an Anne Elliot. It is Anne's merit that she never doubted the worth that her society now recognises. Her love is a 'generous attachment'⁹¹ that penetrates the cloud of obscurity that Wentworth's lack of name and prospects had raised between him and Lady Russell. Anne's error lies in having subjected her own sure instinct and discriminating mind to the apparently superior judgment of her god-mother. Anne does not blame herself for it; hers was no moral fault but the result of inexperience and youthful timidity. She never withdraws from her original estimation of Wentworth. It is he who must discipline his first impulses, control his resentment, and admit at the novel's end that he 'must learn to brook being happier' than he deserves⁹².

The major artistic triumph which is the creation of Anne Elliot tends to obscure a minor one, Jane Austen's presentation of Frederick Wentworth. Henry Tilney was little more than a clever young cynic, faultless in Catherine's worshipping eyes, a useful mouthpiece for his creator's opinions. It is doubtful whether Edmund Bertram, Edward Ferrars, and Colonel Brandon could have mustered among themselves enough convincing weaknesses to equip a single one of them for the realities of ordinary life. Fitzwilliam Darcy is the only one of Jane Austen's heroes with a genuine failing, and his stateliness is so overpowering that the reader tends to concede pride as a weakness natural to an Olympian. It is only with George Knightley in *Emma* that Jane Austen holds the reader's interest—and yet Frank Churchill and Henry Crawford, her 'bad' young men, are completely believable. But it is with Wentworth alone that Jane Austen makes a fair trial of her own strength. He has, unlike Knightley and Darcy, no

89. Vol. II, Chap. 1.

90. Vol. II, Chap. 4.

91. Vol. II, Chap. 8.

92. Vol. II, Chap. 11.

money, no position, no great name behind him. He has instead the pleasant personality and the pennilessness that Jane Austen had combined inauspiciously in George Wickham and Willoughby, the attractive adventurers of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. When Anne falls in love, it is with 'a remarkably fine young man', handicapped by 'a great deal of intelligence, spirit and brilliancy'⁹³, for these personal advantages do him no good with the people who guide Anne's decisions at this time. Dr. Mudrick points out with truth that Wentworth represents a class, that his personality evinces 'all the new bourgeois virtues—confidence, aggressiveness, daring, an eye for money and the main chance'⁹⁴. They place him with the Crofts and the Harvilles, in eternal opposition to the Elliot establishment. Yet, although *Persuasion* is in many ways a faithful mirror of its time, and reflects without distortion the economic and social pressures that work upon its characters, its interest does not dwell here.

Wentworth's struggle to get on is over by the time he reappears at Kellynch-hall as an eligible suitor to Louisa Musgrove; and at no time does Jane Austen suggest that his inferiority to the Elliots lies in anything but his lack of funds. When Sir Walter feels the need to retrench and Mr. Sheppard dangles the bait of Kellynch-hall before Wentworth's wealthy brother-in-law, Admiral Croft, the barrier vanishes. Wentworth has no difficulty in fitting into the elegant pursuits of Bath, although he prefers to spend his time in sensible company; and even Elizabeth Elliot understands what a social asset it will be to count 'a man of such an air and appearance as his'⁹⁵ among her acquaintances there. If Jane Austen comments on class differences at all, it is to show the obtuseness of a society that can recognise true worth only when it is united to money. The world of *Persuasion* is observed through Anne's eyes, and she has no concern with economics, only with the language of the heart. Even her suggestions for Sir Walter's retrenchments were more idealistic than realistic⁹⁶.

In the long interval that elapses before the reader meets Wentworth a second time, his memory is kept alive by a series of subtle touches. We note, even before we meet him first, that Anne is surprisingly well informed of the movements of naval men and vessels for a provincial young lady with no family connections in the navy. Even the Musgrove family, with a son at sea, are

93. Vol. I, Chap. 4.

94. Mudrick, op. cit., p. 235.

95. *Persuasion*, Vol. II, Chap. 10.

96. Vol. I, Chap. 2.

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little ... in the habit of attending to such matters ... unobservant and incurious ... as to the names of men or ships⁹⁷

but Anne can, without prior notice, give her father a full account of Admiral Croft's career and position⁹⁸. This is the kind of tiny incident by which Jane Austen illuminates from time to time the ceaseless turmoil that underlies the calm exterior Anne presents to a hostile and prying world, the mental activity that goes on in the privacy of her quiet silence. With only navy lists and newspapers as her sources of information, Anne has devotedly and unobtrusively followed Wentworth's career. Their angry parting has given her no cause to hope for a renewal of his addresses, but their brief and intense association has provided her with a standard of masculine perfection that she will never relinquish. No second attachment, we learn, 'had been possible to the nice tone of her mind, the fastidiousness of her taste'⁹⁹. Such a passage tells us much about Anne, but it tells us even more about Wentworth. Despite her friends' urging and her own delight in domesticity, she remains faithful; not to a sentimental memory, but to a standard of excellence that she will not trade for an inferior article. Wentworth's character grows in the reader's mind, its qualities defined by implication as Anne coolly sums up the people she meets. Charles Musgrove, likeable enough, practical and sensible (after all, he valued Anne enough to propose to her, and likes her ever afterwards), is casual and selfwilled. Mr. Elliot, regarded by Lady Russell as the perfect match for Anne, seems to her god-daughter as

rational, discreet, polished, but ... not open. There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the evil or good of others¹⁰⁰.

Anne's estimation of every new acquaintance is made with reference to the standard Wentworth has provided, and her doubt or distrust is an indication (since we have learned to respect her judgment) of his worth. In spite of his resentment at her earlier withdrawal, and his rather graceless determination to prove his independence of her, it is soon clear that she has provided him in her turn, with an unchanging standard of feminine perfection. His original opinion of her alters no more than does hers of him;

97. Vol. I, Chap. 6.

98. Vol. I, Chap. 3.

99. Vol. I, Chap. 4.

100. Vol. II, Chap. 5.

he 'had never seen a woman since whom he thought her equal'¹⁰¹. Jane Austen will send Wentworth's emotions to school, not his judgment, which is as unerring and discriminating as Anne's own.

An attractive portrait of Wentworth is painted in Chapter 4, of which the keynote is confidence and independence. He is clearly not the man to view caution kindly, even if that caution is exercised in his interests. He is aware that always beside Anne, guiding (and he has every excuse for thinking, ruling) her decisions, is the figure of Lady Russell. He leaves Anne in anger, determined to forget her. An interesting parallel is struck

It was a great object with me at that time to be at sea; a very great object. I wanted to be doing something¹⁰².

While Anne has been contriving occupation for her mind at home, Wentworth has been seeking distraction in activity. He returns, and they meet again. Jane Austen allows her reader to look into his mind as he reflects on that meeting, in a passage that is subtly ambiguous throughout:

He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shewn a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the effect of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity.

He had been most warmly attached to her, and had never seen a woman since whom he thought her equal; but, except from some natural sensation of curiosity, he had no desire of meeting her again. Her power with him was gone for ever¹⁰³.

In presenting an apparently detached account of Wentworth's state of mind, Jane Austen lays bare the emotions that he will not admit to himself. The last two sentences, carrying the overtones of his unmistakable, characteristically energetic speech, give away his resentment at having been betrayed and (because he attempts to mask them), his interest in Anne's welfare and his continuing love. We are spared a revengeful hero. Still in love, full

101. Vol. I, Chap. 7.

102. Vol. I, Chap. 8.

103. Vol. I, Chap. 7.

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of hurt pride, Wentworth is ready to fall in love on the rebound; so begins his association with Louisa Musgrove, coupled with a studied air of polite indifference to Anne that she is meant to see. But she is 'not out of his thoughts' when he describes his ideal partner to his sympathetic sister¹⁰⁴. Any mention of her name attracts his closest attention. His real tenderness for her breaks through his elaborate pretence of indifference on at least two occasions while they are at Uppercross; he rescues her from her nephew's playful torture¹⁰⁵, and he perceives her weariness on the long walk back from Winthrop, arranging for its relief¹⁰⁶. At Lyme he is dragged out of his carefully constructed armour by Elliot's open admiration of Anne¹⁰⁷, and by the quiet competence she shows when he and everyone else are striking attitudes of helpless distress around the unconscious Louisa¹⁰⁸. From this point on, he admits even to himself that his feeling for Anne is unaltered, although he claims no credit for this:

Thus much indeed he was obliged to acknowledge—that he had been constant unconsciously, nay unintentionally; that he had meant to forget her, and believed it to be done. He had imagined himself indifferent, when he had only been angry; and he had been unjust to her merits, because he had been a sufferer from them.¹⁰⁹

Wentworth is always, if we can overlook his historionics on the Cobb at Lyme, true to life. His faults are not glossed over, his attractiveness remains. It is the warmth of his nature that captivates Anne, a quality that Jane Austen skilfully registers through his fluent, vigorous speech, his actions and his thoughts. Even at the close, when all is in train for a happy ending, there is no easy solution for Wentworth, no 'perfect friendship' possible with Lady Russell. He teases Anne, but the memory remains of how her influence once estranged them.

In the long pause between Anne's early happiness and its final renewal, Jane Austen presents her as an interested (though sometimes unwilling) observer of marriage and married life. Sir Walter Elliot and his deceased wife, Elizabeth's campaigns for matrimonial aggrandizement, the mutual

104. *Ibid.*

105. Vol. I, Chap. 9.

106. Vol. I, Chap. 10.

107. Vol. I, Chap. 12.

108. *Ibid.*

109. Vol. II, Chap. 11.

disenchantment of Charles and Mary Musgrove, the relationships existing between the Crofts, the Harvilles, the Musgroves, the Smiths, all provide Anne with material to ponder over. She is the reluctant witness of Charles' irresponsibility and Mary's selfishness as they dispute the rival claims of a parental dinner party and their sick child¹¹⁰. The nature of Anne's 'generous attachment' to Wentworth is implicitly defined by contrast with Mary's querulous selfpity. Lady Elliot, we learn, 'had humoured, or softened, or concealed' Sir Walter's failings during her unhappy married life¹¹¹. Mrs. Croft declares affectionately that

the happiest part of my life has been spent on board a ship. While we were together, you know, there was nothing to be feared¹¹².

Even placid Mrs. Musgrove has known the rigours of separation, for

Mr. Musgrove always attends the assizes, and I am so glad when they are over, and he is safe back again'¹¹³.

Anne's love for her mother's memory, her admiration of Mrs. Croft, and her affection for Mrs. Musgrove are the results of her observations and speculations about the married state. She is quick to see the glance that passes between Captain and Mrs. Harville, which speaks their accord¹¹⁴, believes that she leaves 'great happiness behind her' as she quits their tiny house,¹¹⁵ and finds 'a bewitching charm in ... hospitality so uncommon, so unlike ... dinners of formality and display'¹¹⁶. She is delighted by the happiness of the Crofts, who bring with them to Bath 'their country habit of being almost always together'¹¹⁷, and like the Gardiners in *Pride and Prejudice*, this older couple provide the younger with the constant example of an ideally happy marriage.

Opposing this ideal is the marriage based on material values, trusted in by Sir Walter and Elizabeth:

110. Vol. I, Chap. 7.

111. Vol. I, Chap. 1.

112. Vol. I, Chap. 8.

113. *Ibid.*

114. Vol. I, Chap. 12.

115. Vol. I, Chap. 11.

116. *Ibid.*

117. Vol. II, Chap. 6.

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She had, while a very young girl, as soon as she had known him (Mr. Elliot) to be, in the event of her having no brother, the future baronet, meant to marry him, and her father had always meant that she should¹¹⁸.

There reappears here the attitude of mind that made Charlotte Lucas accept Mr. Collins 'solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment'¹¹⁹, and Maria Bertram to reflect that it was, 'by the ... rule of moral obligation, her evident duty to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could'¹²⁰. Anne has a moral fineness that Elizabeth Elliot, Charlotte, and Maria conspicuously lack. In *Persuasion*, as in other novels, Jane Austen examines the marriage of convenience, but never does she provide an easy answer, here or elsewhere; there is none. Living in a society whose moral flaws she clearly perceives, Jane Austen's only defence is to voice through Anne Elliot's inflexible constancy to Wentworth, her own ideal of morality in personal relationships.¹²¹

An expose of marriage is not, however, Jane Austen's only moral interest in this novel, although it is an important one. She is, in this last work, outlining her minimum requirements of a way of life in which the human spirit can grow. To do this, she uses the method she had brought to perfection in her earlier novels. Various strands of interest weave and interweave, and from these, firm concepts of social and human decency arise and are established. Two groups are contrasted with the Elliot establishment—the Musgrove family at Uppercross (excluding Mary, of course), and the naval officers who cluster about the Crofts and the Harvilles. Anne thinks of the Musgroves 'as some of the nappiest creatures of her acquaintance'¹²², and looks back 'with fond regret, to the bustles of Uppercross'¹²³. Despite Sir Walter's snobbish reluctance to introduce the Crofts at Laura-place, the Admiral and his wife consider 'their intercourse with the Elliots as a mere matter of form, and not in the least likely to afford them any pleasure'¹²⁴. When, towards the end of the novel, all the main characters are concentrated in Bath, comparisons arise out of their social

118. Vol. I, Chap. 1.

119. *Pride and Prejudice*, Vol. I, Chap. 22.

120. *Mansfield Park*, Vol. I, Chap. 4.

121. cf. *Letters*, p. 103, November 18th, 1814: 'Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection'.

122. *Persuasion*, Vol. I, Chap. 5.

123. Vol. II, Chap. 2.

124. Vol. II, Chap. 6.

meetings that provide an idea of the meaning of social decency in Jane Austen's world. The warm informality of the Navy families and the Musgroves shows up the Elliots' coldness and insincerity. The Crofts invite comparison with the Dalrymples: Anne avoids Lady Dalrymple and seeks the company of the Crofts and of Mrs. Smith, while Sir Walter pursues the Dalrymples and hopes to avoid the Crofts, failing to perceive that both families ignore *him*. Admiral Croft has, of course, sized up Sir Walter at their first meeting, and is unimpressed by his rank, although he wonders a little at his vanity. Mrs. Croft is equally level-headed; she sees the Musgrove girls as they are, merely 'very goodhumoured, unaffected girls, indeed'¹²⁵. In their endurance and their courage, and in their abiding affection for each other, they present Anne with an ideal of wedded stability that she bases her own standards upon. When they make the acquaintance of Charles and Mary Musgrove, Mary seems even shallower, her marriage emptier than ever. The Crofts and the Harvilles represent the freer, fresher atmosphere into which Anne will escape from the cramped narrow-mindedness of the Elliot establishment. Like the Gardiners in *Pride and Prejudice*, like Anne herself when she recommends 'a larger allowance of prose' in Benwick's daily reading to counteract the unhealthy effects of excessive emotional indulgence¹²⁶, they represent Good Sense. Theirs are the values which Anne will adopt in the future, making a happy exchange of false pride, insincerity and heartlessness for belief in personal merit, integrity, and affection.

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