Outside readings for *Persuasion*

Please read these four additional texts for Tuesday, May 5. They also serve as the presentation options for that day.

**Table of Contents:**

- Nancy Yee, "Friendship in *Persuasion*: The Equality Factor"
  This essay argues that the relationship between Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth (and especially the equality of that relationship) is illuminated by their relationships with their respective circles of friends.

- David Groves, "Knowing One’s Species Better: Social Satire in *Persuasion""
  Groves sees the novel—and in particular what he calls Austen’s social satire—as focused on class hierarchies.

- Gene Koppel, "The Mystery of the Self in *Persuasion"
  This essay considers the complexity of personal identity in relation to social structures and demands.

- Jennifer Fitzgerald, "Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* and the French Revolution"
  Like several of the essays we’ve read so far, this one argues that *Persuasion* is the most historically perceptive of Austen’s novels. In particular, Fitzgerald considers the context of war.
Friendship in *Persuasion*: The Equality Factor

NANCY YEE

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**Few would rate Jane Austen among the outspoken feminists of her day.** Yet in her novels of social life in early nineteenth-century England, where propriety rules, she manages to interrogate and even subvert common ideas about the roles appropriate for men and for women. In fact, through a reversal of these roles in her last completed novel, *Persuasion*, Austen succeeds in making Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth equals. In both independence of mind and strength of spirit, Anne Elliot is equal to Captain Frederick Wentworth. Anne finds few occasions to exhibit these traits, however, and she must often deliberately resist temptations to speak her mind openly. These qualities are expressed through her friendships. It is her independence and strength that move her to form and to maintain friendships outside of her family and, to some extent, of her social circle.

Through her focus on friendship in *Persuasion*, Jane Austen highlights parallels between the circle of friends that Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth draw around them. Austen employs these parallels both for their subtly ironic implications and as a means of underscoring Anne Elliot’s force of mind. It is through friends that Anne achieves the power to speak. And, ironically, it is Wentworth who, constrained by these same friends, is silent in the revised final chapters of the novel—a situation more usual for a woman. But that is just one of the many ironies that Austen plays with in what is sometimes considered to be the most socially subversive of her completed novels.

An emphasis on friends and friendship permeates *Persuasion*. In *Love and Friendship* (1993), Allan Bloom cites Rousseau’s idea that “whether there will be a proud and generous relationship to other men or one of hypocritical good fellowship grounded in murderous competition” (6) depends on one’s development of self-esteem or self-love. Lacking a true sense of self worth based on real human values, Anne’s father Sir Walter and her sister Elizabeth both
exhibit the kind of “hypocritical” friendship, “grounded in murderous competition,” when they reestablish contact with their grand relation Lady Dalrymple. At the same time, Anne is renewing her friendship with Mrs. Smith. Indeed, Austen creates Mrs. Smith to give greater emphasis to the difficulties that Anne Elliot must overcome essentially by herself before her engagement to Wentworth can be reestablished. Though others may fail to recognize her value, Anne has enough confidence in herself to form “a proud and generous relationship” with many people, both male and female.

Anne’s and Wentworth’s friendships are closer to the sort that Allan Bloom describes when he repeats Aristotle’s classical definition of friendship as “a relationship between persons who are alike. The friend is a kind of true mirror in which one can see oneself” (205). Just as Wentworth has his Captain Harville, Anne has her Mrs. Smith—whom I consider to be neither the misanthropic monster that one critic so delights in demeaning nor the merely tiresome cynic that another critic sees, whose role in the novel, he implies, is mercifully short (cf. Duckworth, Mudrick). Mrs. Smith has been described as Anne’s double, “a dark mirror-image of herself” (Honan 87), though much more explicitly worldly, and Harville can be seen as Wentworth’s double, though much more openly emotional. We know, however, that Wentworth has strong feelings and acts upon these feelings, as demonstrated by his subordinating his own interests to his desire to comfort and support Benwick after his fiancée’s death. The circle of friends that Anne brings together ultimately acts as a catalyst for many of the events, including the finally successful conclusion to Anne’s relationship with Wentworth.

From Lyme to Bath, friends and friendship are the focus. In fact, in the second half of the novel we are told that Anne “was soon sensible of some mental change” (124). Through the new friendships she has established, Anne becomes so independent of her family that she no longer feels the same attachment to Kellynch, the leaving of which had been so painful for her a few months earlier. She is conscious of “how much more interesting to her was the home and the friendship of the Harvilles and Captain Benwick, than her own father’s house in Camden-place, or her own sister’s intimacy with Mrs. Clay” (124). This new mental state suggests to the reader that Anne has become, even in her own estimation, a different person from the resigned and repressed young woman so easily overlooked by her immediate family. The circle of friends that she developed in Lyme has greatly enlarged her vision of the world.

Leroy Smith also notes this change in Anne’s mood in his 1983 book, Jane Austen and the Drama of Woman. He comments on the way the patriarchal system affects women’s character development. According to Smith, such a system “discourages development of the instrumental side of women’s nature” while at the same time encouraging them “to become nurturant, responsive and kind in their relationships” (163). These last three desirable traits are also those of the ideal friend, and both Anne and Wentworth exhibit these traits equally in their friendships. However, in at least one crucial scene, Anne’s “instrumental side” also appears as highly developed as that of any male. Wentworth, on the other hand, is praised for behavior that is both “nurturant” and “responsive.” When Benwick needed both solace and comfort, Wentworth provided them, thus appropriating the female function. Wentworth “saved poor James” (108), according to his friend Captain Harville. In Jane Austen and the Body: “The Picture of Health,” John Wiltshire comments that “Wentworth, in effect, nurses Benwick through the worst of his grief” (171). Conversely, after Louisa’s fall onto the pavement of the Lower Cobb, Anne assumes a male function by taking command. As Wiltshire notes, Anne “thinks quickly, resourcefully, and intelligently, making herself the effective temporary commander of this floundering human ship” (184).
In a recent study of Austen’s novels, Roger Gard suggests that in this scene on the Cobb “the relation between [Anne] and Wentworth is now one, at least, of parity” (197). Though the reader may appreciate this “parity,” both Anne and Wentworth are still constrained by the attitudes of their friends. Neither has yet seen the possibility that they could be joined in a marriage of equality. This scene is only the first of a complex series of role reversals that will finally bring that possibility to fruition.

It is through a reciprocal exchange of roles and friends that Austen brings Anne and Wentworth together, and the revisions that Austen made to the last chapters help us appreciate Anne and Wentworth as equals. By drawing deliberate parallels between Anne’s and Wentworth’s friendships in the novel, Austen emphasizes Anne’s increasing independence of mind and action and brings her finally to equality with Wentworth. Anne demonstrates both her gentleness and her strength through exercising the virtue of friendship. It is Wentworth who must learn to recognize her gentleness as integral to her strength of character. In *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood*, Alison Solloway observes: “[Anne] is constantly amused to find other people ‘caught’ in the ‘too common idea of spirit and gentleness being incompatible with each other,’ an archetype as dangerous as the assumption that separates women’s minds and hearts” (137).

The parallels between Anne’s friendship with Mrs. Smith and Wentworth’s friendship with Harville fall into several broad categories. First, when Anne and Wentworth form these friendships, both of them are for some reason vulnerable. Second, when they are reunited with their friends, after a prolonged break, the roles are reversed. It is now the friends who are vulnerable, each having experienced serious hardship. Third, each friend not only displays remarkable resiliency in his or her present difficult situation but also plays a significant role in the reconciliation between Anne and Wentworth.

Both Anne and Wentworth were most vulnerable when the friendships were formed. Anne, only fourteen, was a new student at school, “grieving for the loss of [her] mother,” when Mrs. Smith, then Miss Hamilton, “had shewn her kindness... had been useful and good to her in a way which had considerably lessened her misery, and could never be remembered with indifference” (152). Only a year or so after Anne had broken off her engagement with Wentworth and immediately after he succeeded in receiving his first posting as a commander on the Asp, Wentworth met Harville. Wentworth’s comment about that first posting—“It was a great object with me, at that time, to be at sea,—a very great object. I wanted to be doing something” (65)—has a subtextual meaning that only Anne can really understand. This subtext gives a second meaning to his recollection of his next posting on the Laconia and of “a lovely cruise together off the Western Islands” with Harville of whom he notes: “Poor Harville, sister! You know how much he wanted money—worse than myself. He had a wife.—Excellent fellow! I shall never forget his happiness. He felt it all, so much for her sake” (67). We are not fully aware of the irony of his barely concealed envy of Harville’s good fortune in having a wife to inspire him until the next to last chapter of the novel. It is then that Wentworth discovers from Anne’s decisive “Would I!” (247) that he himself could also have enjoyed the same good fortune had he been less pig-headed and written to Anne asking her to renew the engagement. Wentworth is forced to recognize that what he had considered his manly independence and strength of spirit was simply a failure to acknowledge Anne’s strength in sacrificing her immediate gratification to a higher sense of duty.

The ease or difficulty each one has in renewing the friendship underscores the freedom of movement that Wentworth enjoys as opposed to the constraints under which Anne must act. As
usual, all is smooth sailing for Wentworth. First, he obviously has the freedom to travel at a moment's notice: "Captain Wentworth's anxiety to see [Harville] had determined him to go immediately to Lyme" (94). When his friends learn why they have missed his company for a few days, they have nothing but praise for his goodness: "His acquittal was complete, his friendship warmly honoured" (94). Louisa, who has been enjoying Wentworth's attention, now seeing "merit in maintaining her own way" (94), is instrumental in getting a whole party to accompany Wentworth and to see Lyme for themselves. Thus, encouragement and approbation are given to a man to do what he feels is right. But Wentworth already has the means and independence to do so and does not need such public support.

Compare this to the difficulties Anne encounters in renewing her friendship with Mrs. Smith. Her ability to overcome them brings out her independence of mind on several fronts and provides an ironic commentary on her role within her family and society. It reveals her willingness to brave the disapproval of her father and sister and to act according to her own sense of duty. No other scene hitherto does that so well. She "mentioned nothing of what she had heard, or what she intended, at home. It would excite no proper interest there" (153). To the extent that she is able, she refuses absolutely to think or feel or act in any way according to the persuasion of Sir Walter and Elizabeth. Anne's father and sister are so busy in "pushing their good fortune in Laura-Place" (152) that they apparently do not even notice Anne's absence: "Anne had called several times on her friend, before the existence of such a person was known in Camden-place" (156). Instead of her friendship with Mrs. Smith being "warmly honoured" by her family, Sir Walter upbraids Anne roundly: "who is Miss Anne Elliot to be visiting in Westgate-buildings? . . . Every thing that revolts other people, low company, paltry rooms, foul air, disgusting associations are inviting to you" (157). These descriptive terms recall for the reader the actual description of the home of the Harvilles in Lyme. Its rooms are too small to fit the large group visiting there, but the Musgrove party nonetheless finds it charming.

Anne must display great determination to go against her father's wishes. Her sick friend is decried by Sir Walter as "a mere Mrs. Smith" (158); and, far from planning to join her in her charitable visit, he urges Anne to "put off this old lady till to-morrow" (157). Anne remains firm, and Austen's irony makes plain that Anne clearly recognizes the flaw in Sir Walter's arguments and that she

did long to say a little, in defence of her friend's not very dissimilar claims to theirs [Mrs. Clay], but her sense of personal respect to her father prevented her.
She made no reply. She left it to himself to recollect, that Mrs. Smith was not the only widow in Bath between thirty and forty, with little to live on and no surname of dignity. (158)

The upshot of a rather long debate between Anne and her father is presented succinctly in the opening of a new paragraph: "Anne kept her appointment; the other kept theirs" (158).

Anne is aware that her clear-sighted judgment is not shared by her father or her sister. She is placed in that state of "moral isolation" that Sulloway describes: "Many of the heroines' judgments shock their suitors and acquaintances; and this moral isolation places them in conditions of stress and loneliness quite similar to the plight of the historical feminists whose subversive ideas had reached the creators of these heroines by devious routes" (59). When Anne and Wentworth renew their respective friendships, the tables are turned. Both Harville and Smith have confronted physical and economic difficulties. Both are restricted in their movements, Harville being lame from a combat wound and Mrs. Smith crippled by rheumatic fever. Their
physical surroundings are also analogous, Harville reduced to “a small house, near the foot of an old pier of unknown date” (96) and Mrs. Smith to “a noisy parlour, and a dark bed-room behind” (154).

Yet, ironically, even under these difficulties, to Anne both friends offer a hint of unlimited prospects. There is “such a bewitching charm” in the Harvilles’ style of hospitality that Anne thinks with regret that but for the long broken off engagement “These would have been all my friends” (98). And in Mrs. Smith she finds “a disposition to converse and be cheerful beyond her expectation” (153). Anne especially appreciates Mrs. Smith’s “elasticity of mind” and “disposition to be comforted” (154).

There is another similarity between Wentworth and Anne in that both have apparently overcome their original loss or sorrow. Wentworth has begun courting Louisa, or at least appears to be doing so, and now fills the small rooms to which Harville has been reduced with a joyous company. And by the time Anne reconnects with Miss Hamilton (now Mrs. Smith) she has begun to recover some of the bloom of her youth and has attracted the attention of not one but two very eligible men, Captain Benwick and Mr. Elliot.

Both Harville and Mrs. Smith, however, also show great resiliency in responding to their present difficulties. Thus, each provides an interesting foil to Wentworth and to Anne. Captain Harville has fitted up his home to use every inch of space to the best possible advantage through “ingenious contrivances and nice arrangements” (98). “A mind of usefulness and ingenuity seemed to furnish him with constant employment within” (99). Likewise Mrs. Smith fills her hours with useful employment and even manages with Nurse Rooke’s help to offer some relief to “one or two very poor families” in her neighborhood (155). One recent critic, Charles Rzępka, even sees Nurse Rooke as Austen’s self-portrait and as her role model for contemporary single women, but as praiseworthy as she is made to appear, her role is too limited to be seen as such. Anne is clearly impressed by the courage but also by a certain natural inclination she observes in Mrs. Smith: “that power of turning readily from evil to good, and of finding employment which carried her out of herself, which was from Nature alone. It was the choicest gift of Heaven” (154). While appreciating the value of such resilience, Anne still suffers from occasional bouts of melancholy and depression over apparently losing Wentworth’s love and esteem. And Wentworth himself is still consumed with anger and resentment toward Anne for hurting him.

Austen uses links that she creates between these friends to bring about the final reconciliation between Anne and Wentworth. She develops a series of equivalent relationships in which Wentworth and Anne seem to exchange roles as sympathetic friend. What Wentworth was to Benwick in the past, Anne becomes; what Wentworth is to Harville in the present, Anne becomes. Finally, what Mr. Elliot should have been to Mrs. Smith in the past, Anne enables Wentworth to become in the future. These exchanges of roles between the central characters are also mirrored by equivalent exchanges involving Wentworth and Anne and the two minor characters, Benwick and Louisa. Just as Louisa exchanges Wentworth for Benwick, Benwick exchanges Anne for Louisa—though only Anne is fully aware of the latter exchange. Wentworth is conscious of Benwick’s superiority to Louisa in terms of seriousness and scholarship, but he does not seem to have noted Benwick’s initial attraction to Anne. What makes these latter exchanges more ironic is that Captain Wentworth acted very sympathetically toward Benwick when Benwick’s fiancée died the previous summer. Wentworth’s sympathy for Benwick’s suffering, as reported to Anne by Captain Harville, would be more aptly applied to Anne herself:

Captain Wentworth believed it impossible for man to be more attached to woman
than poor Benwick had been to Fanny Harville, or to be more deeply afflicted under the dreadful change. He considered his disposition as of the sort which must suffer heavily, uniting very strong feelings with quiet, serious, and retiring manners, and a decided taste for reading, and sedentary pursuits. (96-97)

Anne’s unspoken response turns out to be the more true: “he has not, perhaps, a more sorrowful heart than I have. . . . He will rally again” (97).

Anne and Wentworth begin to reach equality through these role exchanges and parallels, first in their sympathetic understanding of others and then in the debt they owe to friends for helping them understand each other. While Harville’s retreat in Lyme offers the perfect setting for Benwick to fall in love with Louisa, it is Harville’s real attachment both to Wentworth and to Benwick, along with his general good-heartedness, that moves him to offer room in his house to the psychologically injured Benwick, and then to the physically injured Louisa. Like Wentworth, Harville is attracted by Anne’s gentle spirit. Her gentleness encourages him to seek solace from her, first at Lyme and later in Bath. His seeking her out provides the opening for the crucial dialogue that allows Anne to reveal her own hitherto unexpressed feelings at last. Soon after meeting Anne again, in a rare exhibition of emotion, Mrs. Smith exclaims, “There is so little real friendship in the world!” (156). But by this point we have observed Anne connecting to an ever-larger group of friends who have been drawn to her by her gentleness and strength of mind and character.

The revised chapter in which Austen presented Wentworth’s silent proposal is the climax of friendship’s role in the novel. Turning the conventional love scene topsy-turvy, Austen silences Wentworth. Actively engaged in his role as a friend to Harville and to Benwick, Wentworth sits without speaking during most of the scene, focused on a letter he is writing for Harville to save Harville pain. Austen then gives Anne, acting in her role as Harville’s friend, the power to speak at last, while Harville assumes several roles simultaneously. Initially, Harville takes on Benwick’s role as mourner for Fanny, a role that Benwick has all too soon relinquished, but he also unconsciously exchanges roles with Wentworth by voicing sentiments about love and constancy that Wentworth would reveal if he could. Finally, Harville is even ready, albeit also unconsciously, to act for Anne.

Austen gives Anne the last word by having Wentworth admit that Anne holds the power to decide his fate. Anne is now in the position of strength. Wentworth even confesses in his note that what she says “overpowers” him (237). And probably remembering how apt he was to misread her sentiments in the past, Anne fears “some mischance” even now (239). She tells herself, “it would be in her power to send an intelligible sentence by Captain Harville” (239, italics mine). So Harville could be asked to assume even Anne’s role by acting in her place.

Austen again repeats the theme of the roles and role reversals of friends in the final paragraphs of the novel. As Wentworth takes the place of Mr. Elliot in exchanging vows with Anne, “their marriage, instead of depriving [Mrs. Smith] of one friend, secured her of two” (251). Anne “had but two friends in the world to add to [Wentworth’s] list” (251). And Wentworth proves “a determined friend” to Mrs. Smith (252), whose “enjoyments were not spoiled by . . . the acquisition of such friends” (252). Anne and Wentworth, now united as friends and as equals.

NOTES
1. Since Austen gives the reader such clear insight into Anne’s thoughts, I am always curious why Marvin Mudrick insists that we never see Sir Walter, Elizabeth, and Mrs. Clay through Anne’s eyes: “they are never assimilated to Anne’s story: the abuse that holds them off is so patently the author’s and generally so amusing that we . . . [never] trace it back to Anne, who seems incapable of it anyway” (219).

WORKS CITED


Back to *Persuasions On-Line* Table of Contents

Return to Home Page
KNOWING ONE’S SPECIES BETTER: SOCIAL SATIRE IN PERSUASION

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When the Ellots move out of their estate at Kellynch, Anne finds herself regretting that her father “should feel no degradation in his change” from Kellynch-hall to Bath, and should “see nothing to regret in the duties and dignity of the resident land-holder” (p. 138). Since her father shows little interest in the common people who work on his estate, it is left to Anne to visit “almost every house in the parish” before leaving for the city. Sir Walter Elliot, the opposite of his idealistic daughter, makes a single concession to his labourers by spending a few hasty moments giving “condescending bows for all the afflicted tenantry and cottagers who might have had a hint to shew themselves” (p. 35).

This episode carries a moral weight out of all proportion to its brevity. It tells us how to interpret the comic ironies of the first chapter of Persuasion, when the lazy, self-inflated baronet indulges himself by reading and re-reading the Baronetage, now the only book that holds any interest for him. The author does not want us to reject entirely the feudal traditions which have shaped her society in the past, but rather to see the vast difference between the self-centred Sir Walter, betraying the very traditions which provide his wealth and status, and his more socially-responsible daughter, who tries to revitalize and humanize those traditions. Persuasion is consistently conservative in its implied moral perspective, yet its satirical energy is constantly challenging readers to differentiate between the useless, self-flattering, self-serving conservatism of people like Sir Walter, and the humane, serviceable, concerned conservatism of Anne.

Like every Jane Austen novel, Persuasion uses a technique of very fleeting, occasional, but extremely provocative allusions to inequalities, injustices, lower-class sufferings, and controversial social issues of the day. For example, we must wonder what twisted social conditions could possibly result in a “farmer’s man” being arrested for stealing apples from the local curate, as we hear very briefly in the third chapter. Is this the only way that a mere “farmer’s man” could get apples? Were agricultural workers close to starvation? Were clergymen commonly seen as the enemies of the working people, and therefore as fitting victims of pilfering? Were curates so uncharitable that the hoarding of apples would seem perfectly reasonable?

Indeed, clergymen often seem mainly concerned with their own comfort and status, and regardless of community, in Jane Austen’s fiction. Charles Hayter in Persuasion enjoys “a curacy in the neighbourhood where residence was not required,” and as a result he “lived at his father’s house.” Hayter (not exactly the most promising name for a clergyman) is an absentee curate, just as Sir Walter Elliot has become an absentee landlord. Yet even the easy-going Charles Hayter is
said to have "a very fair chance ... of getting something from the Bishop in the course of a year or two" (p. 76).

The horrors of war would have an obvious topicality in 1816. Allusions to the recent wars are kept to a minimum in Persuasion, perhaps because too much reality would kill the enjoyment of reading. But the pleasant illusion of upper-class comfort is abruptly shattered when the narrator mentions in passing that "Captain Harville had never been in good health since a severe wound which he received two years before" (p. 94). Anne Elliot tries to tell her father that "The navy ... have done so much for us," and that they "have at least an equal claim with any other set of men, for all the comforts and all the privileges which any home can give." However, the baronet dislikes the mere mention of equality, and balks at the idea of renting Kellynch-hall to a naval man. Not only does life in the navy make men ugly, according to Sir Walter; it is also "the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction" (p. 19). Brief as these references are, they shock us into remembering the less privileged world existing outside the novel. A good reader will respond by adopting a less sympathetic and more analytic or questioning attitude towards the gentry and aristocracy depicted in Persuasion.

The subordination of women is a frequent target of Jane Austen's satire. Throughout Persuasion we are uneasily aware of the dreary future (either poverty or William Elliot) that awaits Anne if Wentworth fails to propose to her. Women, it seems, were expected to lead protected, ornamental lives, and to accept meekly whatever social status their fathers or husbands conferred on them. Even Captain Wentworth speaks of women as rather precious, almost angelic beings, until his sister more sensibly replies, "I hate to hear you talking so, ... as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures" (p. 70). The same dislike of inequality is apparent when Anne argues that "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands" (p. 234).

Anne is the one main character in the novel who always sees the essential equality of people, regardless of class or sex. Her closest friend Lady Russell has, like Sir Walter, "prejudices on the side of ancestry; she had a value for rank and consequence, which blinded her a little to the faults of those who possessed them" (p. 11). While her father and older sister revel in their association with the vacuous Lady Dalrymple, Anne declares herself "too proud to enjoy a welcome which depends so entirely upon place" (p. 151). A minor character tells her, "I have no scruple of observing to you, how nonsensical some persons are about their place, because all the world knows how easy and indifferent you are about it" (p. 46).

Her sense of equality, her concern for less fortunate people, and her indifference to rank, are partly what saves Anne from marrying her hypocritical cousin. At Bath she visits "her former governess," who puts her in touch with an old school friend Mrs. Smith, now a widow supporting herself by making and selling "thread-cases, pin-cushions, and card-racks." From Mrs. Smith the heroine learns the truth about William Elliot, and she also hears of some of the stories retailed by "nurse Rooke," stories which help "one know one's species better." As well as her geographic journey towards the ocean (from Kellynch to Bath to Lyme), then, Anne makes this metaphoric journey towards freedom by travelling down through the social scale, where she not only learns about lower-class life, but also sees more clearly the hypocrisy of relatively well-to-do characters like William Elliot and her own father. The knowledge Anne gains from her compassionate social journey gives her useful insight into human nature and preserves her from the obtuse inhuman snobbery of Sir Walter:

"Westgate-buildings!" said he; "and who is Miss Anne Elliot to be visiting in Westgate-buildings? - A Mrs. Smith. A widow Mrs. Smith, - and who was her husband? One of the five thousand Mr. Smiths whose names
are to be met with every where. And what is her attraction? That she is old and sickly. – Upon my word, Miss Anne Elliot, you have the most extraordinary taste! Every thing that revolts other people, low company, paltry rooms, foul air, disgusting associations are inviting to you ... " (p. 157)

Despite these satirical attacks, *Persuasion* in the last analysis advocates a cautious acceptance of social hierarchy and established traditions. It asks us to reject Sir Walter’s futile and merely selfish version of conservatism, in favour of Anne’s active, community-oriented, and more moderate version. For behind Anne’s impatience with her own family, and behind Jane Austen’s satire, there stands an old-fashioned ideal of the moral obligations incumbent upon people of privilege. Both Anne Elliot and Jane Austen still expect high standards of conduct from those who enjoy the cultural benefits of middle-or upper-class life:

Anne had never seen her father and sister before in contact with nobility, and she must acknowledge herself disappointed. She had hoped better things from their high ideas of their own situation in life, and was reduced to form a wish which she had never foreseen — a wish that they had more pride; for “our cousins Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret”; “our cousins, the Dalrymples,” sounded in her ears all day long. (p. 148)

The snobbish stupidities of those around her do not prevent Anne from seeing that a social hierarchy promotes the cultivation of humane, civilized values, values which might be obliterated under a more pragmatic social structure. It is precisely the absence of these moral, intellectual, or cultural qualities which the heroine and the satirist point to in their assessment of Anne Elliot’s relatives:

Anne was ashamed. Had Lady Dalrymple and her daughter even been very agreeable, she would still have been ashamed of the agitation they created, but they were nothing. There was no superiority of manner, accomplishment, or understanding. (p. 149)

The social ideal underlying the satire of *Persuasion* was formed in response to early nineteenth-century conditions. Perhaps Jane Austen would have been more liberal, if she had lived in prosperous or more fortunate times. But it would be a great error to try to read her novels through the tinted spectacles of twentieth-century presuppositions.

NOTE

THE MYSTERY OF THE SELF IN PERSUASION

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After observing that the “intense, highly organized pressures of a close-knit society” make privacy for the characters in Persuasion a “precarious luxury,”¹ D. W. Harding comments: “Although these are the conditions of all that happens, Jane Austen’s focus of interest is the survival and development of the private individual within [this society].”² What I will discuss here is the concept of individual identity that is implied by Jane Austen’s depictions of her characters’ struggles for “survival and development.”

Jane Austen’s work provides an especially fertile ground for exploring ideas related to personal identity. The dates of the author’s life fall directly into the period when, as John O. Lyons claims in The Invention of the Self, the traditional conceptions of identity began to give way to modern ones: “Under the sails of philosophy, religion, politics, and the arts the self was invented shortly after the middle of the eighteenth century.”³ Before this, while a person might consider himself as significantly more or less powerful, talented, intelligent, or fortunate than his peers, he did not consider himself to be essentially different from them.⁴ Fulfillment came not through a fevered search for a unique destiny, but through one’s traditional roles as a member of a family and a community. However, a short time before Jane Austen was born, the rapid transition began from this traditional, secure sense of self to our modern doubts as to the nature of the self – if indeed there is such a thing as the self in the first place.

What one finds in Persuasion concerning the nature of the self is a mixture of traditional and modern ideas, which is, of course, what one would expect to find in a work written in a period of transition. I believe that Persuasion fuses these traditional and modern elements into a conception of the self that manages to be complex, problematic, and hopeful, all at the same time. Thus when we go to Persuasion to explore the question of the self, we need not go merely as intellectual versions of Mrs. Elton of Emma, who “explored” to Box Hill in search only of superficial entertainment; in addition to intellectual amusement, we might possibly secure some genuine direction out of our “identity crisis,” and thus, perhaps, out of the twentieth-century wasteland.

The modern elements of Jane Austen’s conception of the self consist primarily of a belief in universal contingency – a conviction, fostered by the growth of science and empirical philosophy, that events can more plausibly be ascribed to chance or natural process than to any kind of higher plan – and an awareness of the essential mystery of the human personality. In all of her novels Jane Austen makes clear that her characters are the products of natural processes and specific circumstances; they are not generated out of ideal forms in the works of philosophers or moralists, or even, as the narrator insists on the first page of Jane Austen’s earliest major novel,
Northanger Abbey, of her fellow novelists.

In *Persuasion* heredity has clearly played an important role in forming the heroine and her two sisters (as Jane Austen read widely, and her father was a teacher as well as a rector, she almost certainly would have been aware of the “nature vs. nurture” – heredity vs. environment – debate that was carried on throughout the eighteenth century). Anne’s intelligence is obviously inherited from her mother, as is her physical beauty, so different from her father’s and Elizabeth’s. In the case of Elizabeth, the inheritance is simply reversed, with the genetic arrows pointing (rather accusingly) at Sir Walter. Of course it can be argued that Anne behaves more like her mother than her father because Anne was close to Lady Eliot until the latter died when Anne was fourteen. This raises a question that has no clear answer: why wasn’t Elizabeth, the older sister, similarly close to and similarly influenced by her mother? The contingencies of heredity and environment are at work here, both of them obviously, but, paradoxically, neither of them clearly. If one wishes to simplify and insist that Anne’s sensitivity to others had to be learned because a character trait like sensitivity cannot be inherited, one must remember that later in the novel the narrator unambiguously tells us that Mrs. Smith’s cheerfulness in adverse circumstances is “from Nature alone” (p. 154). The narrator also states that the intuitive insight into the characters of others which Anne possesses and Lady Russell does not, is a “natural penetration” which no amount of experience can impart to one (p. 249). At different moments, then, one feels confident that he can trace the workings of heredity, or of circumstances, upon a particular character. But in the world of *Persuasion*, as in our actual world, that confidence never lasts long. Of course, the reader of *Persuasion* can easily conclude that nature and nurture are both important, and that where he can understand or influence either he should direct his actions or his advice responsibly. But there are no other easy lessons in the novel. Insights into Jane Austen’s characters soon lead to the awareness (and this is the second major factor in Austen’s treatment of the self that can be called “modern”) that human personality is essentially a mystery.

The best example in *Persuasion* of the degree to which the self both can and cannot be understood is furnished by the transformation of Louisa Musgrove that is brought about by her accident on the Cobb. Louisa’s fall soon results in her engagement to Captain Benwick, a rather dreamy, intellectual young man whom the energetic and spectacularly unthoughtful Louisa almost certainly would not have seen as attractive before her accident. When Anne Elliot first learns about the engagement, the news astounds her. However, when she contemplates the proximity and mutual dependence of Louisa and Benwick after the accident, and remembers Benwick’s affectionate nature and his need to love “somebody,” Anne decides that “there was nothing in the engagement to excite lasting wonder” (p. 167):

Louisa had fine naval fervour to begin with, and they would soon grow more alike. He would gain cheerfulness, and she would learn to be an enthusiast for Scott and Lord Byron; nay, that was probably learnt already; of course they had fallen in love over poetry. The idea of Louisa Musgrove turned into a person of literary taste, and sentimental reflection, was amusing, but she had no doubt of its being so. The day at Lyme, the fall from the Cobb, might influence her health, her nerves, her courage, her character to the end of her life, as thoroughly as it appeared to have influenced her fate. (p. 167)

Anne’s calm, clear charting of the Musgrove-Benwick romance is intelligent (what else could we expect from Anne?), and, in general, true. But only in general. There is no reason for Anne herself to spend more time examining the matter; at that moment she realizes that the way is open for a possible reunion with Captain Wentworth, and she is overcome by feelings “which she was ashamed to investigate. They were too much like joy, senseless joy” (pp. 167-168). But we, silent, pedantic observers gazing past Anne into the text, see that there are aspects of Louisa’s transformation that remain puzzling. Of course, we can travel a bit further along the logical path
that Anne has marked out and, with our modern consciousness heightened by feminism, argue that since Louisa has no doubt been conditioned to act as men want her to act, her change isn’t difficult to comprehend: Benwick wishes her to be “a person of literary taste and sentimental reflection,” so that is what she will be. And this is probably true — but again, does it account for everything?

To return to Anne’s list (while there are no quotation marks around the passage, there is no doubt that it reflects Anne’s consciousness): the things about Louisa that have been altered include “her health, her nerves, her character to the end of her life ... [as well as] her fate.” Note the words which qualify this description. The accident “might” have changed her basic character “as thoroughly as it appeared to have influenced her fate” (italics are mine). As we have seen, most of the change can be accounted for. But the qualifying words show that some mystery remains. To what extent has Louisa actually turned into a different person? How deep is the transformation? How permanent is it? How much of it is conscious? How much of it is subconscious, brought about either by previous attitudinal conditioning or by actual physical changes in her nervous system? Neither Anne nor the reader is ever to know. Of course, this is largely because Persuasion is about Anne Elliot, and understanding Louisa Musgrove is not of central importance to the story. But great writers can always accomplish more than one thing at a time. Not pursuing the matter of Louisa’s transformation not only keeps the narrative focused — it also touches the edge of the reader’s consciousness (as it has the heroine’s consciousness) with a reminder that the self, in both its functions and its very existence, is basically a mystery.

The point that it is impossible to comprehend completely the personalities and actions of others is, of course, not original with Jane Austen. Montaigne, Hume, Richardson, Fielding and Sterne are some of the major writers who expressed their awareness that all any individual knows comes to him through his own limited senses. Thus we do not grasp the realities of the outer world, including the lives of other’s; we merely glimpse them (this point is obviously related to one discussed earlier, that the life of each person is the result of unique, contingent circumstances). Each of these authors also held that it is as impossible for a person to achieve complete understanding of his own self as it is of the outer world. And so does Jane Austen.

Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth possess a strong awareness of self that is beyond the other characters. Yet even these two distort reality when they contemplate their own motives and their own lives. Anne is vulnerable to momentary fits of sentimental delusion, as when the narrator ridicules her silent vow to remain eternally true to Wentworth: “Prettier musings of high-wrought love and eternal constancy, could never have passed along the streets of Bath, than Anne was sporting with from Camden-place to Westgate-buildings. It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way” (p. 192). Earlier the narrator hints that Anne’s recollections of the young Wentworth are also sentimentalized: “No one had ever come within the Kellynch circle, who could bear a comparison with Frederick Wentworth, as he stood in her memory” (p. 28) [Italics are mine].

Such lapses by Anne are few and minor (Anne Elliot, after all, was described by her creator as a heroine who is “almost too good for me”). But the same cannot be said for Frederick Wentworth’s indulgences in self-delusion. Wentworth never comes close to understanding the extent to which his illusion of being favoured by destiny (unlike “Poor Harville,” whose health and career were shattered by the war) contributes to his confident charm — for he is a hero in his own eyes as well as in the eyes of Anne Elliot and the reader. Even at the end of the novel, when he again understands the value of Anne and admits to having to learn to “brook being happier than I deserve” (p. 247), he fails to comprehend the heights of his presumption. When the spectacular luck which had permitted him and his battered ship to conquer the French and then to
escape a fatal storm by no more than six hours (p. 66) finally seems to run out by "half a second" on the Cobb (p. 109) when he lets Louisa fall, the shock of his miscalculation brings about only a partial awakening. Wentworth can now understand the noble unselfishness of Anne's behaviour and the immature foolishness of his own. This much his ego permits him to recognize (which in terms of a real human being would be a good deal), but no more. Ironically, as Louisa's fall also clears Wentworth's way to Anne, the incident no doubt registers in his subconscious as merely another proof that he is one of fortune's favourites! Wentworth, then, sees deeper than the other characters (with the exception of the heroine, of course) into his own nature, but he never achieves the wise humility before the mysteries of the self and its destiny which Anne demonstrates in Bath when she remarks to Captain Harville (they are arguing about which sex loves deeper and longer) that "We never can expect to prove any thing upon such a point. It is a difference of opinion which does not admit of proof. We each begin probably with a little bias towards our own sex, and upon that bias build every circumstance in favour of it which has occurred within our own circle ... " (p. 234). Anne might be willing to carry on a theoretical discussion of sexual identity, but she realizes that beyond her common sense and beyond her sensitive insights, there is ultimately a mystery.

While the sense of contingency and mystery that underlies the treatment of personal identity in *Persuasion* could be called "modern," Jane Austen is by no means a modern "wasteland" author. She wants her reader to be aware of the mysteries and uncertainties that surround him, not overwhelmed by them. There are important aspects of her attitude towards the self which are quite traditional, and which work in a fascinating way both to limit and to enhance the novel's modern insights.8

Most important, the ideal of personal fulfillment in *Persuasion* is traditional. If the way to complete understanding of the self is obscure, the way to fulfillment is clear: one must live by the spirit of creative love as a rational, responsible, humane member of society. Whether one calls this judo-Christian morality, or right reason, or Christian natural law is not important. It is Jane Austen's version of mainstream Western ethics and its functions in *Persuasion* through and beyond the social codes of the heroine's society. High intelligence goes for nothing, as the examples of William Elliot and of Captain Wentworth at his worst prove, if the character is not guided by the moral spirit which I have just defined.

Thus in *Persuasion* a modern sense of the fundamental mystery of identity functions together with a traditional confidence about how that identity is fulfilled. At first this might appear to be an improbable claim. How can one be confident in dealing with mystery? Further, as many contemporary writers remind us, there is a good chance that this mystery is only a flimsy camouflage over something far worse, an abyss. By Jane Austen's time David Hume had already raised the possibility that there is no such thing as a meaningful personal identity; his search for a "self" revealed no "soul" or "essence" - only a "bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity and are in a perpetual flux and movement."9

I believe that the answer to the question of how, in *Persuasion*, an awareness of contingency and mystery can co-exist with a confidence that life is purposeful, is as follows: the best kind of traditional mind, one such as Jane Austen's, is capable of creating a middle ground where the subjective and the objective (those two poles which transfixed, divide and direct our modern minds) are fused. The text of *Persuasion* forces the reader to experience its incidents with a unified or total response which includes not only reason and emotion (Susan Morgan correctly points out that Jane Austen combines these in all her works),10 but also all one's memories, observations,
encounters, reading – in short, one’s total experience. A purely subjective or objective
examination of any human problem (choosing a mate, for example) involving purpose or values
can produce only hopelessly inconclusive data based on either blind emotion or a computer-type
list of contradictory facts. Either direction, subjective or objective, leads to meaninglessness. The
unified response, however, makes it possible for one to decide questions of purpose or value
meaningfully (though, of course, not with scientific accuracy).

In *Persuasion*, the reader encounters the beauty, the contingency, and the mystery of nature in
the famous description of the cliffs at Lyme Regis (pp. 95-96). This description might point
towards blind process and the abyss. But the beauty and mystery of the scene might also indicate
an underlying meaning. Both possibilities communicate themselves to the reader. Similarly, the
character of Anne Elliot generates a sense of unity of being, of self. This can largely be explained
through descriptions of heredity and conditioning, but it cannot be entirely explained away
through those means. The sense of Anne’s unity of being remains; mystery remains. The reader,
his total response elicited by the text, recognizes his choice. Perhaps the presence which he thinks
of as Anne’s “self” has no meaningful existence. Perhaps it does. Each person must peer into the
shadowy middle ground of *Persuasion*’s textual world and the world of his own consciousness,
and decide for himself.

To summarize: the conception of the self in *Persuasion* permits the reader to retain his
everyday, common-sense confidence in the existence and nature of the self while insisting that at
the edge of his consciousness there should be an awareness that this knowledge has its limits;
beyond those limits there is mystery. The presence of mystery is accompanied by an awareness of
the abyss, but in *Persuasion* (unlike *Waiting for Godot*) the abyss represents only one possibility.
The total response which the text evokes in the reader contains another possibility, that mystery
veils not emptiness, but meaning. But if the reader is left to himself to reflect upon ultimate
fulfillment, he is never encouraged to waste his energy in deciding which direction he should be
traveling while he contemplates his final destiny. Traditional natural law morality – living up to
one’s everyday responsibilities in the spirit of love and duty – is marked out as the only path
which a person can rationally follow (a side benefit of this traditional insistence that fulfillment is
found through everyday social roles is that there is no need to seek one’s true identity in national,
historical, or racial archetypes; these approaches have proven fruitful for modern writers, but
they have been rather costly to the rest of the human race).

I am certain that the reader has noticed that I have used phrases such as “on the edge of
consciousness” several times. It almost as certainly has occurred to him that the problem of the
self is not the central concern of *Persuasion*. It is this very lack of emphasis on the self that I wish
to examine in my conclusion.

Part of the traditional wisdom of *Persuasion* is that self-centredness (“Pride,” to give it its
traditional name) is dangerous. Anne Elliot, for example, is by no means a social robot; she has
quite enough awareness to use her own unified response to her environment to distinguish the
genuine moral values of her society from the false ones. However, her basically unselfconscious
nature, her habitual desire to serve others rather than to dwell on her own loneliness and the
unfairness with which she – a person of superior abilities – is treated by others, keeps her fully
human (though, of course, not completely happy); the icy shell of egotism never has the
opportunity to form around her self and suffocate it. Self-awareness is a paradoxical quality. If its
intensity increases past a certain point it will destroy the very qualities – such as sensitivity and
the ability to love – that nourish it.

This rejection of over-awareness of the self demonstrates how thorough is the fusion of
traditional and modern elements in *Persuasion*. Humility, the habitual effacement of the ego which traditional Christianity praises, not only prevents the self from stifling its own best qualities – it also prevents the self from destroying its very apprehension of itself. As basic identity is almost infinitely complex and ultimately mysterious, an attempt to scrutinize it too closely will cause it (as Hume and modern writers such as Robbe-Grillet and Beckett[12] point out) to dissolve into a maze of perceptions.

Much has been written about Jane Austen and decorum. I believe that *Persuasion* teaches us proper behaviour in our relationship to our own selves, and to those of others. The fact that the problem of the self, which is a central concern to us, is a peripheral matter in *Persuasion*, is a part of the lesson. One must never lose contact with the self, but, on the other hand, one must not embarrass it with too much attention; one must keep one’s proper distance.

**NOTES**


2 Harding, p. 15.


4 Lyons, p. 32.


8 Alistair Duckworth writes that part of the task of the future criticism of Jane Austen’s work will be to “find ways of reconciling the necessity of ‘diacritical’ analysis of her novels with a sense of the embodied presence in her texts of ... received moral standards,” in “Prospects and Retrospects,” *Jane Austen Today*, ed. Joel Weinsheimer (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1975), p. 11. This essay attempts to take the direction indicated by Professor Duckworth.

9 Lyons, p. 22.


12 Langbaum, pp. 585-86.

Back to Persuasions #6 Table of Contents

Return to Home Page
Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* and the French Revolution

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It is a commonplace of Austen criticism that Jane Austen ignores contemporary history in her novels, placing her characters and her action within such narrow sociological, historical and geographical limits that most of “real life” is excluded.\(^1\) Whatever accusations may be made on this count with respect to her first five novels, *Persuasion* is obviously an exception, at least on one score. The inception of the action is firmly dated in parentheses: “(The summer of 1814.)”\(^2\) The special role of the naval personages in the novel is assured historically by this date: their recent active service against France in defence of the nation determines the eligibility of Captain Wentworth as a husband. The novel’s historical context is therefore precise and explicit – as thoroughly placed by contemporary references as many an historical novel.

Modern criticism has attempted to locate Austen more precisely in the historical context. One school identifies her as a highly conscious social historian: another presents a reading of the novels in the light of broad contemporary ideologies.\(^3\) Even these critics, however, concluded that technically the striking thing about her novels is indeed that they do not mention the French Revolution and barely allude to the Napoleonic Wars.\(^4\) Writing a book entitled, *Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, Warren Roberts assumes that “she made a deliberate choice not to discuss directly the events that so disturbed her world.”\(^5\)

The repercussions of the Revolution on the Austen family were direct. Her cousin Eliza was married to the French Comte de Feuillide, whose attempts to secure his property during the Revolution and to move permanently to England were the matter of family correspondence. Eliza was staying with the Austens at Steventon at the height of the Terror, from which she wrote of “the tragical events of which France has of late been the theatre.” Accused of conspiring against the Republic, the Comte de Feuillide was guillotined on 22 February 1794; in 1797 Eliza married Jane’s brother Henry.\(^6\)

Thus Jane Austen had immediate personal contact with the drama and suffering of the French Revolution, but did not choose to make it the subject of direct comment. As Tony Tanner notes, references to political phenomena such as the French and Industrial Revolutions, or the Napoleonic Wars, enter into her novels in the guise of “allusion ... sometimes so discrete or subtle that many generations of readers and critics did not notice them.”\(^7\) The contention of this note is that one such unobtrusive, subversive allusion to the French Revolution, which has escaped the vigilance of critics, occurs on the first page of *Persuasion*.

This presents the reader with a hypothetical Debrett entry:

ELLiot of Kellynch-Hall
Walter Elliot, born March 1, 1760, married, July 15, 1784, Elizabeth, daughter of James Stevenson, Esq. of South Park, in the county of Gloucester; by which lady (who died 1800) he has issue Elizabeth, born June 1, 1785; Anne, born August 9, 1787; a still-born son, Nov. 5, 1789; Mary, born Nov. 20, 1791. (p. 3)

The third Elliot child seems to have disappeared from view in critical readings of the novel, although as a son he would have been able to prevent the estate’s passing into the hands of Mr. William Walter Elliot. The date of his birth (and death) has likewise escaped notice. The date 1789 on its own may be merely determined by the two-yearly intervals of Elliot births. But his birthday is the fifth of November, surely a deliberately provocative date to choose.

Roberts’ comprehensive study charts the development of Austen’s political opinions in the light of the historical events with which she was most closely associated, and critics have argued for her specific ideological affinities with the conservatism of Burke. The family connection with Warren Hastings would certainly have drawn the novelist’s attention to his great adversary, even if the Reflections on the Revolution in France and on Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event were not widely known. If Austen had actually read Burke, she could not have ignored what the “Certain Societies in London” to which his title refers were, nor why he objected to their “Proceedings … Relative to that Event.” The casus belli is clearly spelt out:

On the forenoon of the 4th of November last [i.e. 1789], Doctor Richard Price, a non-conforming minister of eminence, preached at the dissenting meeting-house of the Old Jewry, to his club or society, a very extraordinary miscellaneous sermon, in which there are some good moral and religious sentiments, and not ill-expressed, mixed up in a sort of porridge of various political opinions and reflections: but the revolution in France is the grand ingredient in the cauldron.

Burke is of course referring to A Discourse on the Love of our Country, Delivered on Nov. 4th, 1789, at a Meeting-House in the Old Jewry, To the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain, the initial spark in the conflagration which was to be the English debate on the French revolution, since Burke’s reply to Price was followed by Paine’s Rights of Man: being an Answer to Mr Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution and so on.

Burke’s readers registered the occasion of his famous response and perhaps even its date. It appears likely that Austen deliberately remembered it in the birthday of the Elliot son and heir, while shifting the day by one. The fifth of November, Guy Fawkes Day, is an even more appropriate date, recalling an earlier subversion of the English state.

Of course Guy Fawkes did not succeed in blowing up Westminster, and the Elliot heir is still-born. Austen’s reference to radical politics is subdued, suppressed. Critics have argued that Persuasion marks a shift away from her endorsement of the status quo, to criticism and even rejection of contemporary society. It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that Austen’s rejection of the aristocracy (or at least of the aristocratic role in an hierarchical society) in Persuasion is not a crude, sudden gesture toward egalitarianism. But her satire on the vanity and worthlessness of the Elliots, and their aristocratic relatives Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret, is tart and unrelieved by humour. The sailors who people the novel, and the country in this interval of peace, represent a meritocracy; they have earned social prestige in their defence of the nation against Napoleon, and continue to deserve it by community spirit, as “that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance” (p. 252).

The Elliots’ precarious financial position which begins the novel derives from a contrasting dereliction of duty: instead of preserving the good of the nation, they have selfishly squandered and jeopardized the property entrusted to their care. Such wrongs might have been redressed by a responsible heir, but Sir Walter’s son is dead. Julia Prewitt Brown notes that “revolutions begin
with a crisis of legitimacy”,\textsuperscript{12} in this case, the loss of legitimate social privilege, now forfeited by the gentry, is symbolized by the death of the legitimate heir. The action of the novel indicates that the upper class has become so corrupt that it stifles at birth any possibility of redemptive stirrings from within. Corruption so pervasive allows no room for amelioration or compromise. Anne has to leave her own society and seek in the community of sailors a new ambience, the fresh air of an alternative life-style. Anne’s own family has as effectively excluded moral values as it has stifled at birth the one possibility of a hope of gradual change from within:

Anne ... had no other alloy to the happiness of her prospects than what arose from the consciousness of having no relations to bestow on him which a man of sense could value. There she felt her own inferiority keenly ... to have no family to receive and estimate him properly; nothing of respectability, of harmony, of good-will to offer in return for all the worth and all the prompt welcome which met her in his brothers and sisters, was a source of as lively pain as her mind could well be sensible of, under circumstances of otherwise strong felicity. (p. 251)

This then is Austen’s version of liberté, égalité, fraternité: Louisa enthusiastically endorses the navy’s “friendliness, their brotherliness. their openness, their uprightness, protesting that she was convinced of sailors having more worth and warmth than any other set of men in England: that they only knew how to live, and they only deserved to be respected and loved” (p. 99).

The perspective Persuasion achieves is complex and even paradoxical: the responsible conservative can no longer cleave to the landed gentry, who have so grievously betrayed their trust; she turns instead to the meritocracy of the rising middle class, in this case aptly represented by the navy. Jane Austen can hardly be styled a revolutionary (although Park Honan comments, with respect to her presentation of the navy, “Here Jane Austen is not Tory but Radical”);\textsuperscript{18} the action of Persuasion tends towards responsible moderation, an equilibrium of forces most notably achieved in Anne’s emotional psychology, between restraint and liberation of feeling, pain and happiness. But even Austen is not averse to a little subdued prodding, indicating her own awareness of the French Revolution and its significance to English society. The established order murders the infant (French) Revolution at birth, represented in the novel by the birth-death of the Elliot heir. But denying the possibility of restoration does not eliminate the need for reform; hope and responsible moderation will have to be found in the alternative English revolution, which quietly and persistently tolls the death bell of inherited privilege and aristocratic hegemony; the custodians of moral values will live, and reproduce, in the naval community.

NOTES

\textsuperscript{1} Beginning perhaps with her own estimation of modest scale: “3 or 4 families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on” and “the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour” (Jane Austen’s Letters to her sister Cassandra and others, ed. R.W. Chapman, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 401, 469). Marilyn Butler sums up the charge: “Of all the truisms about Jane Austen, the favourite for the past century at least is that she take [sic] no interest in the broad concerns of national life.” Marilyn Butler, Jane Austen and the War of Ideas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 161. See for example George Steiner: “At the height of political and industrial revolution, in a decade of formidable philosophic activity, Miss Austen composes novels almost extra-territorial to history.” George Steiner, After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 9.


Butler, p. 294.

Roberts, p. 7.

Pp. 19-20, 146.

Tanner, p. 13. See also the tiny fragments of information which Monaghan suggests contribute to the reconstruction of Austen’s social and historical universe ("Introduction: Jane Austen as a Social Novelist,” *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, p. 3).

Tanner begins his discussion of *Persuasion* with this entry in the Baronetage, highlighting “the dangers involved in seeking validation and self-justification in book as opposed to life, in record rather than in action, in name as opposed to function,” but does not notice the significance of the still-born son, who would of course have had a function if he had survived to have a name. By the end of the novel the Baronetage is, for Tanner, “a dead volume,” as the baby was (Tanner, pp. 208, 242).

Notably Duckworth, also Butler.

Duckworth, p. 45n.

Under the circumstances, a not exaggerated presumption. Duckworth shows a close correlation between the ideas and images of both writers, without proving direct sources.


(London: Cadell, 1789).

William Godwin also transposed this date, when recording his attendance at the Society. He wrote in his diary under Nov. 5: “Dine with the Revolutionists: see Price …” (William Godwin, MS diary, Vol. II [1789], Abinger collection Dep. e. 227, Bodleian Library, Oxford; quoted with permission of Lord Abinger). But the mistake seems to arise from the fact that in ruling out the days in his hand-made diary, he only allocated 30 days to October, thus recording 4 November by mistake on 5 November. However, there may have been a subconscious merging of Guy Fawkes with the “Revolutionists,” the Society for Commemorating the Glorious Revolution. (He made the same error in the diary for 1790, but by 21 November realized his mistake and went back to correct the dates.) Acknowledgement to Nicholas Roe for drawing my attention to this fact.


Brown, p. 145.