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## The Final Chapters of *Persuasion*: Austen's Passionate Revision

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THE SINGLE SURVIVING MANUSCRIPT of any part of any of Jane Austen's published novels was found long after her death in July 1817. A thirty-two page manuscript of sixteen small pieces of paper written on both sides, containing two last chapters of *Persuasion*, which Austen drafted and discarded in July of 1816, was discovered in Cassandra Austen's desk, after her death in 1845. This extraordinary discovery deepens our knowledge of Austen's writing process and the challenges she faced in trying to write a satisfying ending to the novel. She was also clearly trying to write a conclusion that would draw on patterns from the rest of the book. Readers can now see this entire manuscript, either in a facsimile of all thirty-two pages in the 2006 Cambridge edition of the novel (281–313) or in a digital archive of all the fiction in Jane Austen's hand, along with transcriptions of it (*Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts*). Modern editions of the novel, following the 1923 Chapman edition, usually include a transcription of the so-called "cancelled chapters." Some editions also include a photograph of at least one sample page of the manuscript to demonstrate the difficulty of deciphering Austen's handwriting with her numerous cross-outs and corrections.

The existence of manuscript chapters with writing that Austen mostly discarded has inspired a great deal of commentary by critics, nearly all of them agreeing that the revised conclusion of the novel is startlingly better than the much-emended versions in the original chapters. In a short essay in 1986, Brian Southam summarized the differences between them, contrasting the "confusion and excitement" of the events Austen placed in the Crofts' lodgings

in her first drafts, with the “outward calm and spaciousness” of the scene at the White Hart Inn. He concludes by refuting Henry James’s idea that Austen’s writing process was “swift and effortless,” demonstrating that what she finally worked out is “a triumph of rethinking won through trial and error” (323).

I am following the extensive and thoughtful commentary on the cancelled chapters and Austen’s revised ending of her novel in this essay, as I try to imagine and then highlight the thinking and rethinking that Jane Austen brought to her work in reconstructing the last chapters. Reading the two endings together brings a reader to the surprising discovery that Austen had not figured out exactly how she was going to end her novel or resolve the issues it explores, including Anne’s initial powerlessness and silence, and her gradual emergence as an articulate and passionate woman. Long ago, I wrote about the revised chapter 11 in an essay about teaching one scene each from *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* (Folsom). Now, in writing about the first draft of *Persuasion*’s ending and all three of the final published chapters, I am trying to explore what may have been Austen’s thinking as she so brilliantly superseded her earlier draft.

Studying the facsimile of the manuscript pages allows a reader to see the writer working hard to create a dramatic ending. The manuscript page headed “Chap. 10” begins with Anne Elliot walking through the streets of Bath, anxiously pondering all she has just learned about Mr. Elliot from Mrs. Smith and framing unanswerable questions about what she should do (314). In an excellent essay on the manuscript pages, Katie Gemmill points out that these unanswerable questions have a “frenzied tone,” and she cites them: “How to behave to him?—how to get rid of him?—what to do by any of the Party at home?—where to be blind? where to be active?—” (*P* 314; Gemmill 112). As Gemmill observes, the result is to present Anne as agitated and perplexed, not calm and thoughtful as she has been in many scenes since the visit to Lyme, able to absorb and then recover from her own strong feelings (113).

In the manuscript of chapter 10, as Anne walks, she happens to meet Admiral Croft near his lodgings. Another careful reader of this draft is Paul Wray, who argues that in order to get Anne and Wentworth together in this draft, Austen “alters the character of Admiral Croft.” Wray correctly observes that when the admiral urgently insists that Anne must stop in and see Mrs. Croft, without telling Anne who else is there, his deceptive behavior is completely unlike the friendly, hearty, good-humored admiral we have seen at Uppercross, Kellynch, and in the streets of Bath.

Once Anne is inside his house, in the manuscript chapter, Admiral Croft “insisted on Anne’s sitting down” to wait in a room where, to her surprise and dismay, she finds that Captain Wentworth is already there, sitting by the fire. Admiral Croft abruptly calls “Frederick” to come and speak with him outside the room, and though he firmly closes the door, Anne overhears her name and the word “*Kellynch*” spoken repeatedly (316). The reader comes to understand that Admiral Croft is delegating Captain Wentworth to ask Anne if the report the Admiral has heard is true, that she will marry Mr. Elliot, and to tell her that, if it is true, the Crofts will leave Kellynch so that Anne and Elliot can live there. Wentworth comes back in the room, “irresolute & embarrassed,” and then speaks in a “voice of effort & constraint” (316–17).

The conversation Austen developed here between Anne and Wentworth is painfully awkward for them both. Anne must remain sitting in intense agitation through Wentworth’s excruciatingly long, hesitant speech before she can finally reply, briefly but firmly, that the admiral is “misinformed” and that there is “no Truth in any such report” of her marrying Mr. Elliot (317–18). Their understanding is achieved in a “silent, but a very powerful Dialogue” (318), followed by their review of the past that Austen later put into the new chapter 11 and in the new chapter 12.

There are several ways that, even though flawed, this scene makes sense. It is logical that Anne would be preoccupied in thinking about Mrs. Smith’s revelations about Mr. Elliot and that she would be trying to figure out what she should do about notifying her father and sister about his “true character” (Gemmill 112), as she had tried to decide about warning Elizabeth about Mrs. Clay. The idea that Admiral Croft has heard a rumor that Anne is engaged to Mr. Elliot is also logical, as the two have been seen together by various people in Bath. The scene places Anne abruptly in a situation of intense feeling with “No time for recollection!—for planning behaviour, or regulating manners!” (315) as she has often experienced elsewhere in the novel. It highlights the kindness of the Crofts, evident in earlier scenes, in their willingness to give up Kellynch if that will help Anne, for whom they care. It repeats a pattern of Anne overhearing conversations about herself. It then puts Anne and Wentworth alone together in the same room, while the Crofts discreetly avoid interrupting them, so that they can talk. It shows Wentworth’s passionate nature in his emotional effort to ask the question he fears to ask. But the resolution, the “silent . . . Dialogue;—on his side, Supplication, on her’s acceptance,” is a tepid and unconvincing way to reach the conclusion: “They were re-united” (318).

As many commentators on this draft have pointed out, it keeps Anne sitting down while Wentworth is standing. Worse, as Wray argues, the relationship between Anne and Wentworth, which since the scenes at Lyme has had Wentworth “turning into listener, Anne Elliot into speaker,” is reversed, now making her again the listener and him the speaker. Even more disappointing, the scene as written in this chapter 10 abruptly changes the story’s direction and essentially ends the novel by forcing a direct meeting between Anne and Wentworth, who struggle through an agonizing conversation to get to the desired resolution.

The manuscript of these so-called cancelled chapters of *Persuasion* contains actual dates of Austen’s writing. The first manuscript page, marked “Chap. 10,” has the date “July 8.” The manuscript of “Chapter 11” ends with the word “FINIS” and the date of “July 18.—1816.” This date is exactly one year before Jane Austen died. The many cross-outs and emendations suggest Austen’s struggle in the ten days she spent writing these chapters, as does an earlier “FINIS” she wrote and dated “July 16” on the verso of leaf 14. Her conclusion completed, according to her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh, “her performance did not satisfy her. She thought it tame and flat, and was desirous of producing something better. This weighed upon her mind, the more so probably on account of the weak state of her health; so that one night she retired to rest in very low spirits” (147). James Edward does not mention the obvious crossings-out, rewriting, and revising that show how much Jane Austen struggled with the first half of the chapter 10 she finally discarded. The very first page of the cancelled chapter 10, for example, has at least nine lines totally obscured by being crossed out with heavy ink marks.

But he goes on convincingly in his account of how Austen decided to rework the ending: “The next morning she awoke to more cheerful views and brighter inspirations; the sense of power revived; and imagination resumed its course” (148). Cassandra noted that Jane finished *Persuasion* on August 6 (*Minor Works*, facing 242), so these dates mean that Austen wrote a new chapter 10 and a new chapter 11, with the brilliant scene at the White Hart Inn, and revised and recopied parts of her old chapters 10 and 11, which became parts of the new chapters 11 and 12, in just nineteen days. And as James Edward Austen-Leigh wrote about the new chapters 10, 11, and 12, “Perhaps it may be thought that she has seldom written anything more brilliant” (148). Most critics of the published ending agree with him.

One approach to studying the original and the revised endings is to study the exact words, the cross-outs, and insertions in the manuscript pages,

and the way in which they are either discarded or transferred and rewritten in the final version. One critic who has reconstructed Austen's struggles in writing the manuscript chapters 10 and 11 is Jocelyn Harris. In *A Revolution Almost beyond Expression*, Harris sorts out hundreds of choices of diction, the probable writing process, and the implied purposes of Austen's deletions and corrections of these two chapters. Her book uncovers hidden meanings of Austen's painstaking, multiple revisions of words and sentences in the first half of the manuscript chapter 10 and then her drastic discarding of much of that work.

John Wiltshire, who has also carefully deciphered the writing in Austen's original chapter 10, figured out the writer's first, second, and even third choices of language in the pages of the manuscript where Anne sits waiting in the Crofts' drawing room while the Admiral and Captain Wentworth talk outside the closed door. In his reconstruction of Austen's changing intentions about this scene that she created to bring Anne and Wentworth together, he points out that it presents "the reiterated trope of Anne's unhappy and partial overhearing" of conversations about herself. "As before in *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot hears herself spoken of, again only in snatches, but in this scene it is even in a context she cannot understand. Her powerlessness is graphically represented by the door" behind which the two men talk about her (156, 158). The reason for Austen's feeling dissatisfied with this ending, Wiltshire speculates, is that once again she "has left her heroine in a powerless, actually silenced condition" (160).

Another way of reading the two chapters 10 side by side, which is the idea of this essay, is for a reader to try to imagine Jane Austen's thinking—and even her pleasure—in tossing out the whole agonizing scene in the Crofts' rented parlor and returning to her story, slowing it down, greatly expanding it, and adding more participants than in the earlier version. It makes us imagine a writer reveling in her fresh ideas and refreshed powers, as her nephew suggested, enjoying the opportunity to bring so many characters back into new scenes where they all behave and speak totally in character. Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot, for example, now appear in two different scenes in chapter 10: first in their own rooms in Camden-place, and then at the White Hart Inn as they deliver cards and an invitation to their rooms for the next evening. In both scenes, Austen depicts them outdoing themselves in pomposity, stinginess, and arrogant elegance.

As in the cancelled chapter 10, Anne begins the new chapter 10 pondering the truth she has learned about Mr. Elliot from Mrs. Smith, but not while walking through the streets of Bath. As Gemmill points out, in the new

chapter 10 Austen portrays Anne back in her father's lodgings in Camden-place, with a "more measured mixture of Anne's distress at discovering Mr. Elliot's villainy and her quiet confidence about how to proceed" (112). Anne spends the rest of the day with her father and sister, whose insulting comments about Lady Russell reveal again his obsession with appearance and her scorn of reading, and with Mrs. Clay, whose flattery of Elizabeth is answered by Elizabeth's weirdly blasé comments about Mr. Elliot. Anne is forced to see Mr. Elliot again when he calls in the evening. He tries again to engage Anne's curiosity about the praise he says that he has heard about her, not knowing how much his allusions to the unnamed source of this praise—Mrs. Smith—bring into her mind the "least excusable" aspects of his past (233). But now, her behavior is guarded and reserved; she is "decidedly cool to him" in order to undo any prior suggestion of an "intimacy" between them (232). To her relief, he says that he is leaving Bath the next morning, to be gone for two days.

Austen begins her most masterful revision of the ending by imagining what would happen when unexpected visitors arrive in Bath. The next morning, just as Anne looks for a moment to go to enlighten Lady Russell about Mr. Elliot, Austen has Mary and Charles Musgrove surprise the Elliots by dropping in unannounced at their Camden-place residence (234). Sir Walter and Elizabeth, after they realize that the Musgroves do not expect to stay with them because they are already settled at the White Hart Inn, rise to the occasion and happily show off their fancy drawing rooms to Mary.

Austen arranges a way to explain why the Musgroves have come to Bath, which members of the family have come, and which ones are still back at Uppercross, by allowing Anne to have a private talk with Charles Musgrove while Mary is being regaled with "mirrors and china" (237). Charles gives her a "very plain, intelligible account" of Mrs. Musgrove's plan to come to Bath to buy wedding clothes for Henrietta and Louisa. In the account, Anne "saw a great deal of most characteristic proceeding" (235). Austen takes the time to develop the cordial and amusing conversation between Charles Musgrove and Anne, allowing Anne to laugh as she hears about how Charles and Benwick are becoming friendly brothers-in-law as they become better acquainted at Uppercross, and enabling Charles to describe how Louisa has been changed by her accident. The logic of who would remain at home and not go to Bath—Mr. Musgrove, Louisa, Captain Benwick, Mrs. Harville and her children, and the little Musgrove boys—and who would make the unexpected outing—Mrs. Musgrove, Henrietta, Charles and Mary Musgrove, and

Captain Harville—Charles explains, exactly as Anne observes: with a “great deal of most characteristic proceeding.”

It’s impossible not to imagine Austen herself feeling relieved to get back into the world with these characters she knew so well. She manages a complicated but logical sequence of visits, conversations, and chance encounters, facilitating events in both the new chapter 10 and the new chapter 11 by the brilliant contrivance of having many people able to come and go in the “spacious” “dining-room” of the Musgroves’ rooms at the White Hart Inn (240). That morning after the Musgroves’ arrival, when Anne goes there to welcome Mrs. Musgrove, the narrator says, a “morning of thorough confusion was to be expected. A large party in an hotel ensured a quick-changing, unsettled scene” (240). Captain Wentworth and Anne are both present in this relatively neutral setting during the first day after the Musgroves’ arrival, with Austen managing a moving cast of visitors. She dramatizes an argument between Mary and Charles about theater tickets and captures Mary’s excited comments about sighting “her own cousin,” Mr. Elliot, words that embarrass Anne and thwart Wentworth, although they allow Anne to indicate Mr. Elliot’s unimportance to her (241).

The “reintroduced Musgrove party,” as Gemmill notes, “creates continuity between the two volumes,” providing “readers with final access” to these characters (117). As James Edward Austen-Leigh remarked, “the pictures of Charles Musgrove’s goodnatured boyishness and his wife’s jealous selfishness would have been incomplete without these finishing strokes” (148). Still, the various personalities and conversations make clear the challenge for the writer to arrange a meeting between the two silenced lovers who are still constrained by the necessary decorum of meeting in a semi-public place. Chapter 10 ends without resolving that stalemate.

Austen then figured out a way to assemble a different group of people the next morning in the Musgrove rooms at the White Hart Inn. Chapter 11 begins with Anne going in the morning as she had promised to the Musgrove apartment, where she hears “immediately” that Henrietta and Mary have gone shopping, giving Mrs. Musgrove “the strictest injunctions” to require Anne to stay there until they return (249). Captains Harville and Wentworth are already there so that Wentworth can write a letter arranging to have a portrait of Benwick reframed for Benwick to give to his new fiancée, Louisa. Mrs. Croft has come to the inn to welcome Mrs. Musgrove to Bath, and the two older ladies are sitting together and chatting. Anne has “only to submit, sit



down, [and] be outwardly composed," even though she is "plunged at once in all the agitations" that she had expected not to begin so soon (249). Capturing Anne's surprise, the narrator says, "There was no delay, no waste of time" in Anne's inner response to the electrifying presence of Captain Wentworth: "She was deep in the happiness of such misery, or the misery of such happiness, instantly" (249–50).

A particularly effective quality of this scene, one which has not been carefully analyzed in most of the criticism of chapter 11, is Austen's scrupulous attention to the speakers' physical placements and tones of voice in the scene. Wiltshire is one critic who does analyze it: he says, "the physical relations between the figures in the room are configured as aural relations," reintroducing "the trope of overhearing" (161). Unobtrusively but specifically, Austen locates these five people in the Musgroves' apartment parlor, indicating their distances from each other and the pitches of their voices. Two minutes after Anne enters the room, Captain Wentworth tells Captain Harville that he will now "write the letter we were talking of, Harville," and he goes to a separate table to be "engrossed by writing" and "nearly turning his back on them all" (250).

In a diagram of these placements, Wentworth would be seated at a table—perhaps a small writing desk—at the other side of the room from the area where the two ladies are seated. At this point, Captain Harville is also seated, but seems "not disposed to talk," while Mrs. Musgrove is telling Mrs. Croft the story of Henrietta's engagement, "just in that inconvenient tone of voice which was perfectly audible while it pretended to be a whisper" (250). Anne must be seated near the ladies, though she "felt that she did not belong to the conversation" but at the same time could not "avoid hearing many undesirable particulars." The awkwardness persists as Mrs. Musgrove recounts such a "great deal" of "[m]inutiae" about her daughter's romance with Charles Hayter in her "powerful whisper," that Anne "hoped the gentlemen might each be too much self-occupied to hear" (250). The confessional nature of Mrs. Musgrove's story enables Anne almost telepathically to imagine Wentworth's impatience with such talk, for she has frequently been able to read his disdain at something he overhears. The scene thus picks up and varies the novel's pattern of allowing characters to overhear other people's conversations even *before* the conversation between Anne and Harville as well as the pattern of Anne reading Wentworth's mind.

When the two ladies' conversation turns to deploring long engagements, Austen sets up another kind of overhearing from what happens elsewhere in the

novel. Here Anne and Wentworth are both overhearing the same apparently irrelevant conversation, but one that has personal meaning to them both. The two ladies each offer warnings about uncertain engagements, and both women recall instances from their own experience of the dangers of long engagements. Their comments seem so oddly pertinent to Anne and Wentworth's own experience eight years before, perhaps even hinting at an excuse for Lady Russell's advice, that Anne feels "an unexpected interest," and she "felt its application to herself, felt it in a nervous thrill all over her" (251). She instinctively glances over to where Wentworth is seated and perceives that he stops writing, raises his head, listens, and then turns round to give "a look—one quick, conscious look at her" (251). Austen's writing here seems to slow down, pause, repeat words to describe this deeply meaningful but almost imperceptible exchange. Then, as so often happens to Anne in earlier scenes, as she registers this external experience inwardly, she feels shock and resulting confusion that briefly overcome her normal consciousness, and the two ladies' talk is "only a buzz of words in her ear" (251).

Meanwhile, Captain Harville "had in truth been hearing none" of the ladies' conversation (251), for Austen imagines that this one of the "gentlemen" *is* so absorbed in his own thoughts that he tunes out the ladies' voices, and that, plainly, the other gentleman *has* been attending to their voices, as he cannot help listening to anything that Anne may be hearing. Captain Harville now leaves his seat and moves to a window, and Anne, who seems absent-mindedly to be watching him, becomes aware that he is motioning to her to come stand by him. A kind of silent communication takes place, with Captain Harville merely smiling at Anne and giving "a little motion of the head," indicating an invitation that she correctly interprets as meaning, "'Come to me, I have something to say'" (252). Austen conveys Harville's assumption of a friendship between himself and Anne by this gentle, undramatic gesture. Anne willingly leaves her seat and goes to stand with him at the window, "at the other end of the room from where the ladies were sitting, and though nearer to Captain Wentworth's table, not very near" (252). The striking difference between this scene and the one in the cancelled chapter 10 is, as Wiltshire notes, that "the positions of speakers and listener [are] reversed" (161).

With this change of Anne's location, the two ladies' voices fade out, and now the only two speakers are Harville and Anne. As the conversation between these two unfolds, again it is impossible not to feel Jane Austen's pleasure at creating this long, leisurely conversation. She seems easily to imagine how these two adults, a man and a woman, connected only by their recent

acquaintance and easy friendship, but without the painful intensity of any romantic involvement, might enjoy exploring their own thoughts with each other. The captain opens with his story about the portrait of Benwick and ends his speech with a mournful remark about his sister, Fanny Harville, for whom the portrait was originally intended: "Poor Fanny! she would not have forgotten him so soon!" (252). Anne replies "in a low feeling voice" (252). When she says, "It would not be the nature of any woman who truly loved," Harville smiles, implying that she is making a claim for all women (253). Undefensively, Anne smiles in return, and confirms that he is right. The two then debate whether men or women are more constant in love, or which sex is more predisposed "to be inconstant and forget those they do love, or have loved" (253).

Another quality of this conversation that has not been much discussed in the criticism is its improvisational nature, as Anne and Harville both try out arguments defending the constancy of their own sex, picking up the novel's interest in contrasting the lives of men and women. The tones of this exchange at first seem musing, friendly, respectful, and rather relaxed. "Both enjoy their debate, but they are talking quietly so as not to disturb Wentworth's writing," Wiltshire says (162). Each one is speaking with feeling, but each responds to what the other says with tact, sometimes with playfulness, and in an open spirit. Neither one is in a hurry, since both Anne and Harville are waiting for someone else to be ready to do something. Both are invested in the argument, and both are talking about personal experience and personal sorrow, though the reader knows much more than Harville can of Anne's secret life. When Anne directly describes her own experience—"We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us" (253)—Harville points out that this description does not apply to Benwick, who has been living with the Harvilles, so she willingly revises her argument. "True, . . . very true; I did not recollect; but what shall we say now, Captain Harville?" (253). He likewise kindly offers a way to refute his argument that all literature, including "[s]ongs and proverbs," all prove "women's fickleness": "But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men" (254).

The questions of how much Wentworth can overhear of their conversation, and of whether or not Anne intends for him to overhear her words, have been discussed by various critics. Several critics declare that Anne intends her speeches to be heard by Wentworth. Tony Tanner writes that Anne "hopes that the nearby Wentworth . . . will hear them and detect the personal message contained in the general statements" (241). Linda Bree says that Wentworth "overhears the whole" of Anne's speeches (34). Even the editors of the Cambridge

edition say that Anne's "speeches to Harville form the heroine's declaration of love to the listening Wentworth" (lxxxii). Harris, too, says that "Anne declares her love within Wentworth's hearing" (190).

These statements do not, I think, capture the subtlety of this scene, nor do they do justice to Austen's careful way of making clear that Wentworth *cannot* hear everything that Anne says, nor do such statements capture the meanings of what Anne actually does say. The questions can be more accurately answered by noting what the narrator says about the levels of the speakers' voices, and by noting how Austen implicitly and explicitly measures the distance between the window where the two speakers are standing and the writing table where Wentworth is sitting. For example, Anne's first speech is "in a low feeling voice," suggesting that Wentworth probably could not hear exactly what she says. Harville next tries out an argument that men's love is stronger than women's love, based on the idea that men have greater physical strength, and Anne replies with an argument that women's love lasts longer than men's, just as women are longer-lived than men.

But not wanting to win the debate by insisting on women's experiences, Anne follows this argument with a description of the necessary struggles and courage of men's lives, a speech reflecting her generosity of spirit. She repeatedly addresses Captain Harville as "you," as she names the hardships and demands of a sea-captain's life, which he certainly has experienced, but her description of course reveals how vividly she has imagined Wentworth's life: "You have difficulties, and privations, and dangers enough to struggle with. You are always labouring and toiling, exposed to every risk and hardship. Your home, country, friends, all quitted. Neither time, nor health, nor life, to be called your own. It would be too hard indeed' (with a faltering voice) 'if woman's feelings were to be added to all this'" (254).

The last words of Anne's deeply felt speech are spoken "in a faltering voice," so it seems that Wentworth must be able only to perceive the ardor in her tone but not to catch all of her exact words. Surprisingly, at that moment, "a slight noise" calls their attention to the formerly "perfectly quiet" quarter of the room where Wentworth sits: "It was nothing more than that his pen had fallen down, but Anne was startled at finding him nearer than she had supposed" (254). Her thought indicates that Anne has at least subconsciously measured her distance from Wentworth, and at least subconsciously figured out that Wentworth probably could not hear her exact words. But perceptively reading his slight movement—accidentally dropping his pen—Anne surmises that Wentworth "had been occupied by them, striving to catch sounds, which

yet she did not think he could have caught" (254). Anne's almost clairvoyant knowledge of Wentworth's mind suggests that Austen intends to show that he could not have caught those sounds. With his attention drawn to Wentworth, Harville apparently raises his voice and calls out to his friend, "Have you finished your letter?" Wentworth answers briefly, "Not quite. . . . I shall have done in five minutes." Harville replies that "[t]here is no hurry on my side. . . . I am in very good anchorage here" and then turns back to their conversation, "smiling at Anne" and "lowering his voice" (254).

This seems to be the moment when Wentworth begins his letter, for his first words are, "I can listen no longer in silence. I must speak to you by such means as are within my reach" (257). Then he writes his piercingly passionate letter, ardently offering himself again to Anne, "with a heart even more your own, than when you almost broke it eight years and a half ago" (258). Near the end of the letter, after he has overheard more of the conversation, he writes, "I can hardly write. I am every instant hearing something which overpowers me. You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice, when they would be lost on others" (258). He thus indicates his incomplete overhearing of Anne's exact words, but also his heartfelt attention to her beloved voice and way of talking.

It is right after Wentworth drops his pen that Harville tries out the argument about all literature proving women's fickleness, ending with his offered answer, "But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men" (254). Anne accepts his offer, and says, "Perhaps I shall.—Yes, yes, if you please, no reference to examples in books," and she notes men's advantage in education and in telling their own stories: "the pen has been in their hands" (255). This is funny because the pen has been in Wentworth's hand and funny because he has just dropped it. And it's ironic because Jane Austen is pointing out how few books were written by women, and because she is writing this one and letting Anne declare, "I will not allow books to prove any thing" (255).

Giving up the idea of using books to prove his point, Harville draws on his own experience, and his impassioned voice betrays how deeply he feels about it: "Ah!" cried Captain Harville, in a tone of strong feeling, 'if I could but make you comprehend what a man suffers when he takes a last look at his wife and children" (255). His heartfelt descriptions of a sea-captain's anguished farewell and the same man's ecstatic homecoming are clearly his own vivid memories of parting and reuniting with his own wife and children. But at the end of describing his own powerful personal experience, Harville seems to realize that, although these are his real feelings, they may not necessarily be

all men's feelings, so he adds, "I speak, you know, only of such men as have hearts!" as he is "pressing his own with emotion" (255).

In response to such an impassioned speech and such personal memories, Anne likewise raises her voice. "Oh!" cried Anne eagerly, 'I hope I do *justice* to all that is felt by you, and by those who resemble you. . . . I should deserve utter contempt if I dared to suppose that *true attachment and constancy* were known only by woman" (256, italics added). The exclamation "Oh!," the word "cried," and Anne's vigorous diction ("utter contempt," "dared to suppose") make it clear that she speaks up strongly in response to the powerful personal feeling in Harville's speech. That Wentworth can clearly hear not just her voice but the words of her "eloquent assertion of human equality" (Wiltshire 164) is proven by his picking up of her exact language in his letter: "You do us *justice* indeed. You do believe that there is *true attachment and constancy* among men. Believe it to be most fervent, most undeviating in F. W." (258, italics added). Both incredibly touching and almost ironic, Wentworth's letter and his renewed passion for Anne Elliot offer a correction to her side of the argument about men's and women's constancy. He *has* loved only Anne.

When Anne makes her last exceedingly kind and self-revealing argument, "All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone," her voice has undoubtedly sunk to barely audible, and after she finishes, she could not have "uttered another sentence" because "her heart was too full, her breath too much oppressed" (256). Wentworth could have overheard the sorrowful tone of her final claim, but not exactly what she says, which Wiltshire points out "is hardly a declaration of love," but an "expression of feeling" notable for "its wryly ironic retrospective sadness" (163). Captain Harville, with kindness equal to Anne's, acknowledges her beautiful speech in his final concession: "You are a good soul. . . . There is no quarrelling with you.—And when I think of Benwick, my tongue is tied." He puts his hand on her arm "quite affectionately," and lets her have the last word (256). At last, she is able to express to Captain Harville feelings "long withheld in silence" (Wiltshire 163), and he responds with good-natured simplicity.

The answer to the question, "does Anne declare her love to Wentworth?" must be, "no, not exactly." Austen makes it possible for Anne to express her passionate feelings, but only the reader can hear and understand every word, and only the reader can fully know how eloquent Anne Elliot can be, after all. The beauty of the scene, however, is that even if he cannot hear every word, Wentworth can still witness Anne's generous, reflective way of speaking in a

conversation that engages her as an equal, thinking person. He can perceive her intelligence and warmth, and he definitely hears the deep emotion in her voice as she speaks of “true attachment and constancy” in men. He responds with his passionate letter.

A very interesting argument in Jocelyn Harris’s book on *Persuasion* is her speculation about the effect on Jane Austen of reading the anonymous review of *Emma* written by Sir Walter Scott and published in March of 1816. Austen certainly did read it—though she might not have known who wrote it—because she mentions it in a letter of April 1. In his review, Scott comments perceptively on *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma*, but overlooks *Mansfield Park*, as, in her letter, Austen noticed and regretted. But he concludes his unsigned review with a gently worded reproach to “authors” who no longer seem to celebrate the power of romantic passion. He asks, “Who is it, that in his youth has felt a virtuous attachment, that however romantic, or however unfortunate, but can trace back to its influence much that his character may possess of what is honourable, dignified, and disinterested?” (296). Scott deplores the pattern in recent novels of ignoring “Cupid” in favor of “calculating prudence,” and he ends his essay with a tribute to “the influence of a passion which has been well qualified as the ‘tenderest, noblest and best.’” Harris suggests that perhaps reading Scott’s reproach to authors and his tribute to romantic passion encouraged Austen to “turn a tame, flat, manuscript into her last, most passionate text” (61–62).

Wentworth’s letter reveals the complexity of Austen’s conception of his character and also stands out as the only passionate declaration of love that Austen ever wrote: “You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. Tell me not that I am too late, that such precious feelings are gone forever. I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own than when you almost broke it eight years and a half ago. . . . I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant” (258). Now, as he enters the debate on men’s and women’s constancy, he says that he was “never inconstant.” He always loved Anne, even when he was angry. Captain Wentworth’s letter, more explicit and heart-wrenching than any statement by Mr. Darcy or Mr. Knightley, is another breakthrough for Jane Austen, another sign of her renewed confidence in her powers and her rights, as she reconceived her book.

When Wentworth leaves the room with Harville, without a glance or a word to Anne, and then abruptly returns and hands her his letter “with eyes of glowing entreaty,” Austen’s words capturing Anne’s feelings are in explosive

language: the “revolution which one instant had made in Anne, was almost beyond expression” (257). After the kinds of little distractions and agonizing delays that Austen is so good at imagining, the two lovers are able to walk alone together on “Union-street” (a street that had not existed in Bath when Austen lived there, but whose name perfectly fits her purpose now), then turn into the “comparatively quiet and retired gravel-walk” and exchange again “those feelings and those promises . . . that had been followed by so many, many years of division and estrangement” (261). Exploring the novel’s hidden premise that renewed love and mature love may be even better than its first fulfillment, Anne and Wentworth are “more exquisitely happy, perhaps, in their re-union, than when it had been first projected; more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other’s character, truth, and attachment; more equal to act, more justified in acting” (261). Austen rarely repeats words in a sentence unless they are in a character’s speech, but here, the six repetitions of the word “more” in her account of Anne’s and Wentworth’s happiness indicate Austen’s own passionate invitation to the reader to celebrate their reunion. Later in chapter 11, Anne calms her “high-wrought felicity,” to grow “steadfast and fearless in the thankfulness of her enjoyment” (266). The chapter concludes with Anne and Wentworth talking about the past, analyzing their own earlier decisions, and allowing Wentworth to describe his discovery that he “must learn to brook being happier than I deserve” (269).

It is true that some plot threads are dropped in Austen’s three brilliant final chapters. Anne never gets to enlighten Lady Russell about Mr. Elliot’s despicable past, but perhaps that interview is not really needed since Mr. Elliot’s quitting Bath for London and his setting up Mrs. Clay there makes clear “how double a game he had been playing” (273). Still, it is striking how much of the original chapters 10 and 11 Austen could retain in the new chapters 11 and 12. Wentworth’s explanation of his discovery that he still loved Anne and thought of her as the model of womanly perfection, his remorse at Louisa’s accident, his shock at discovering that the Harvilles considered him as practically engaged to Louisa, his anguish in recognizing his horrible mistakes in relation to both the Musgrove girls, and his ecstatic relief at Louisa’s engagement to Benwick were all vividly worked out in Austen’s first attempt at imagining what he would explain in his “re-union” with Anne (262–64).

However, when Austen recopied and revised the second half of the original chapter 10 for the final chapter 11, Harris explains, she changed the free indirect speech she had used for Wentworth’s discoveries, putting it more powerfully into his own spoken words to Anne: “I was considered by Harville an



engaged man! . . . I was startled and shocked” (*P* 263; Harris 52). Wentworth’s “account becomes more dramatic and self-blaming,” says Harris (53), demonstrating new depth of self-knowledge and willingness to admit his own mistakes. But the subtlety of the revised ending, Wiltshire writes, “is a sign that the novelist’s imagination is now in full poetic command of the inner meaning of the narrative that she has worked on” (162–63). In the original chapter 11, Austen had already figured out and written how Sir Walter and Elizabeth in their ways, and Mary Musgrove in hers, would react to the news of Anne and Wentworth’s engagement, and how it would have shocked Mr. Elliot when it sprang upon his consciousness (270–72). She had already written the forgiving paragraphs about Lady Russell that she finally put in chapter 12: “There was nothing less for Lady Russell to do, than to admit that she had been pretty completely wrong, and to take up a new set of opinions and of hopes. . . . She loved Anne better than she loved her own abilities” (271–72).

But carefully comparing every word of the old chapters 10 and 11 with the new chapters 11 and 12 allows the reader to see the subtlety and absolute rightness of Austen’s many small revisions and modifications in the language of her first draft. The revisions show, as Gemmill says, “the various ways her genius operates when she goes back . . . to the foundation that she has laid in her draft” (122). Reading the two versions together enables the reader once again to imagine that we can watch Jane Austen, the gifted, confident, secure master writer, revising and perfecting her brilliant final novel.

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## Self-Delusion and Agitation in *Persuasion*

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IF WE ARE TO MEASURE the force of self-delusion in *Persuasion*, we might start with Mrs. Clay's freckles. It is not clear whether, in the second decade of the nineteenth century, those freckles would have been thought so bad. But Sir Walter Elliot has a thing against them, so how can Mrs. Clay realistically hope that she might eventually hook him? She can hope so because Sir Walter's self-delusions are absolute. As we witness—and as she witnesses—his various reality denials, we are being prepared for the moment when he declares that Mrs. Clay's daily application of Gowland's skin lotion “has carried away her freckles” (146). What cosmetic powers! If he can believe this, he truly is vulnerable to all her scheming.

Sir Walter's habit of self-delusion takes him to anti-existential extremes. Vanity makes him deny the bluntest facts of life. In his mind, the deepest biological processes are to be reversed in his case, and Elizabeth's case, alone: “Sir Walter might be excused, therefore, in forgetting her age, or, at least, be deemed only half a fool, for thinking himself and Elizabeth as blooming as ever, amidst the wreck of the good looks of everybody else; for he could plainly see how old all the rest of his family and acquaintance were growing” (6). His sensitivity to every sign of aging in those who surround him persuades him that he is immune from time. Persuasion in this novel is so often self-persuasion. Others visibly get older in order to show him that he does not. Self-delusion is powerful enough to invert logic.

Other characters in the novel delude themselves more forgivably or innocently. There is Mrs. Musgrove, listening to Captain Wentworth talk

about his nautical exploits to the assembled company at Uppercross: “Ah! Miss Anne, if it had pleased Heaven to spare my poor son, I dare say he would have been just such another by this time” (64). Anne suppresses a smile when she hears this—which means that she does not smile: only the reader knows of her passing reflex of amusement, suppressed out of kindness. The temptation to smile comes from Mrs. Musgrove’s motherly self-delusion (unshared by her other grown-up children) about her son. The reflex is of a piece with Anne’s other responses in the first half of *Persuasion*: she does not smile openly until the second volume of the novel.

Or what about Louisa Musgrove, overheard from behind that hedge by Anne and the reader, explaining to Captain Wentworth that Anne once turned down her brother Charles’s proposal of marriage: “‘They think Charles might not be learned and bookish enough to please Lady Russell, and that therefore, she persuaded Anne to refuse him’” (89)? How wrong can you be? Lady Russell, we already know, was all for Anne’s accepting the proposal; at nineteen her protégée might have hoped for better, but three years later the match appears to her a pretty good one. Un-bookishness did not come into it. Anne had her own reasons for turning him down and was not to be persuaded otherwise. And the reader can suspect, without knowing, that Captain Wentworth might be catching a hint of the truth.

Then there is Mary, her powers of self-delusion being never failing. “I am so ill I can hardly speak,” she informs Anne when the latter first arrives at Uppercross—but as a prelude to spouts of monologue (37). There is something wrong—something tactless or jarring or inconsiderate—in almost every sentence that Mary speaks or writes. But also she is invariably wrong in her judgments about matters of fact. Here she is in conversation with Anne, guided by her strong aversion to the prospect of Henrietta marrying Charles Hayter: “And as to Captain Wentworth’s liking Louisa as well as Henrietta, it is nonsense to say so; for he certainly *does* like Henrietta a great deal the best. But Charles is so positive!” (77). For Mary, Charles being positive is but further evidence that she must be right. She wants to be right because she wants Charles Hayter to be thwarted, so she deludes herself into this misjudgment. She makes reality fit her wishes. In her letter she explains how Captain and Mrs. Harville reconcile themselves to the idea of Captain Benwick, who was so recently engaged to Fanny Harville, now marrying Louisa Musgrove: “Louisa is a great favourite with both. Indeed Mrs. Harville and I quite agree that we love her the better for having nursed her” (165). We can believe that Mrs. Harville, who has done a good deal of nursing of Louisa, has come to feel affection for her. We do not believe that Mary has done any nursing at all.

Mary believes what she says about herself. In Jane Austen's fiction, hypochondriacs think that they are ill. Selfish people think that they are selfless. Bad people think that they are good. Remember Mrs. Norris in the first chapter of *Mansfield Park*, possessed above all other desires by the desire to save money.

Under this infatuating principle, counteracted by no real affection for her sister, it was impossible for her to aim at more than the credit of projecting and arranging so expensive a charity; though perhaps she might so little know herself as to walk home to the Parsonage after this conversation, in the happy belief of being the most liberal-minded sister and aunt in the world. (8–9)

Self-delusion in Austen's fiction is exactly what allows characters to behave badly while firmly maintaining a necessary self-regard.

Yet it is not just bad or even foolish people. Anne Elliot too is a self-deluder, and the special experience of reading *Persuasion* is the inhabiting of her self-delusions. Here is part of the extraordinary seventh chapter of the novel, in which she and Captain Wentworth meet again after eight years apart. Mary has reported to her sister what Captain Wentworth has apparently said to Henrietta.

"So altered that he should not have known her again!" These were words which could not but dwell with her. Yet she soon began to rejoice that she had heard them. They were of sobering tendency; they allayed agitation; they composed, and consequently must make her happier. (61)

It is a sample of what some have complained of as Anne's masochism. She is trying to convince—to delude—herself that it is a good thing that he has said this and a good thing that she has heard it. Hope must be crushed. The words "must make her happier." They must, but of course they do not. That "must" bears all the pressure of Anne's effort and self-deceit.

Jane Austen's *musts* are wonderful things, the signs of a certain kind of free indirect style, as a character reasons with herself, which often means deluding herself. Emma Woodhouse is up to it all the time. Here she is just after she has told Harriet Smith that she approves of her hopes that an unnamed man who has done her a recent "service" might one day propose marriage to her: "more wonderful things have taken place" (*E* 342).

Harriet kissed her hand in silent and submissive gratitude. Emma was very decided in thinking such an attachment no bad thing for her friend. Its tendency would be to raise and refine her mind—and it must be saving her from the danger of degradation. (342)

“[I]t must be saving her from the danger of degradation”: how delicious is the self-importance of Emma’s thinking in the last part of that sentence. And how doubly delicious is that “must” when we know that the man of whom Harriet is thinking is not Frank Churchill but Mr. Knightley. And there is Emma, unknowingly encouraging Harriet’s ambitions.

My longstanding favorite *must* is from *Pride and Prejudice*, just after Charlotte Lucas has accepted Mr. Collins’s proposal—a proposal that she has assiduously and rapidly encouraged. As yet her friend Elizabeth knows nothing, but the reader witnesses her responses to her own successful tactics: “Her reflections were in general satisfactory. Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband” (122). We seem to watch Charlotte from the outside, perhaps appalled, and so we do. But those little words—“to be sure” and “must”—let us into her thoughts. We seem to catch her, ever rational, reasoning with herself: the “attachment” to her he professes “must” be imaginary because he was professing such an attachment to another woman only a couple of days earlier. That “must” is Charlotte determinedly acknowledging reality.

So, when we hear, as it were, the effort of Anne’s thoughts, we know that though she is surrounded by self-deluders, she too—with her self-punishing heroism—is one of these. Here she is as she waits alone at Uppercross to be picked up by Lady Russell to be taken to Bath.

If Louisa recovered, it would all be well again. More than former happiness would be restored. There could not be a doubt, to her mind there was none, of what would follow her recovery. A few months hence, and the room now so deserted, occupied but by her silent, pensive self, might be filled again with all that was happy and gay, all that was glowing and bright in prosperous love, all that was most unlike Anne Elliot! (123)

You can hear the very catch of Anne’s thoughts in the redundant parenthesis of “to her mind there was none,” as if she were making an effort to banish the doubts about likely outcomes into which she is tempted. She is in error—the error into which four of Austen’s heroines fall: the belief that the man they love is going to marry another woman. But in Anne’s case, the error takes on the quality of self-mortification and self-persuasion.

Every Austen novel has its own diction, and there are a few words that are used in *Persuasion* but not in any one of Austen’s other novels. One of these is indeed *self-delusion*. It appears for the only time in all Austen’s *oeuvre* when Anne, newly arrived at Uppercross, is reflecting on the fact that the

huge affair of the Elliots' departure from Kellynch hardly excites any interest among the Musgroves. We should not think that things matter to others just because they matter to us: "She could only resolve to avoid such self-delusion in future, and think with heightened gratitude of the extraordinary blessing of having one such truly sympathising friend as Lady Russell" (42). Resolving to avoid self-delusion is not, of course, the same as doing so. But forming resolutions is certainly in Anne's nature. She likes to teach herself lessons: "she must now submit to feel that another lesson, in the art of knowing our own nothingness beyond our own circle, was become necessary for her" (42). Another of Anne's *musts*. Of course, Anne perceives something real, but she turns it into something self-punishingly extreme: "nothingness."

*Nothingness*—it is an unusual word that has, as we will see, cropped up earlier in the novel. If each one of Austen's novels has its own special vocabulary, its singular group of keywords, then in *Persuasion*, quite as much as in *King Lear*, one of these is *nothing*. Our first *nothing* comes in the first chapter of the novel, when we hear that Sir Walter had not—even in her bloom—found much to admire in Anne's features: "there could be nothing in them now that she was faded and thin, to excite his esteem" (6). That *nothing* is the echo of his stupid and unfeeling dismissiveness. Soon, in the same chapter, we are hearing *nothing* with even greater emphasis, as we follow the preoccupations of his eldest daughter: "Such were Elizabeth Elliot's sentiments and sensations; such the cares to alloy, the agitations to vary, the sameness and the elegance, the prosperity and the nothingness of her scene of life" (9). "Elegance" and "prosperity" might sound good, but in a deadly chiasmus they are bracketed by "sameness" and "nothingness." All these words for Elizabeth's life tumble into vacuity.

*Nothing* is the word for social performances, performances in which Anne is involved once she arrives in Bath, as when she has to endure all that empty talk among the Elliot and Dalrymple party in the interval at the concert: "a period of nothing-saying amongst the party" (189). (This "nothing-saying" is a new coinage, and the only use of this compound noun recorded in the *OED*.) *Nothing* resounds again when Elizabeth arrives at the White Hart to hand out invitations to her soirée to the company: "After the waste of a few minutes in saying the proper nothings, she began to give the invitation which was to comprise all the remaining dues of the Musgroves" (226). *Nothingness* is Elizabeth Elliot's milieu, confirmed by that shocking thing that Anne overhears her say "in a sort of whisper" to Mrs. Clay: "She is nothing to me, compared with you" (145). A life of *nothings* is what Elizabeth has embraced.

But Anne too is made to know what *nothing*-ness feels like. The experience is forced on her by Captain Wentworth's reappearance. "Alas! with all her reasonings, she found, that to retentive feelings eight years may be little more than nothing" (60). Nothing is the word that here shows her that her previous art of self-delusion is useless. All that she thought insulated her from the sharpness of her feeling, all that she told herself, becomes "nothing." The very word haunts her: "Once so much to each other! Now nothing!" (63). Those exclamation marks indicate the dramatization of her thoughts. What is left to her is now "nothing." Being in Captain Wentworth's company and sitting down to the same table as him "was become a mere nothing" (99).

*Nothing* is the word for what is insignificant, what does not matter. So, it is the word for that extinction of sound and vision that Anne experiences as her hopes begin to come back to life, firstly, when, looking out through a Bath shop window, she catches sight of Captain Wentworth: "For a few minutes she saw nothing before her. It was all confusion. She was lost" (175). Then, in the very next chapter, after their "almost too interesting conversation" (184) before the concert at the Assembly Room, "Anne saw nothing, thought nothing of the brilliancy of the room" (185). She starts really knowing what *nothing* means, even using Elizabeth's turn of phrase to declare a version of her true feelings to Mrs. Smith, when interrogated about Mr. Elliot: "he is nothing to me. . . . [U]pon my word, he is nothing to me" (196).

In Anne's thoughts, mixed in with self-delusion is *agitation*, the effect of hidden emotion. When she meets Captain Wentworth again, "agitation" is the word she uses in her thoughts for the feelings of the past. "How absurd to be resuming the agitation which such an interval had banished into distance and indistinctness!" (60). At key moments, "agitation" shapes the narrative. In that Bath shop, Molland's, or in the Assembly Room, perception is blotted out under the pressure of emotion. The effects of this are peculiar to *Persuasion*. The emotions themselves are so powerful as to be unclear, a stirring of opposite feelings, as when Captain Wentworth has just helped Anne into the Crofts' carriage: "it was a proof of his own warm and amiable heart, which she could not contemplate without emotions so compounded of pleasure and pain, that she knew not which prevailed" (91). As she acknowledges her emotions, she is bamboozled by them, as in the episode in Molland's: "Still, however, she had enough to feel! It was agitation, pain, pleasure, a something between delight and misery" (175). Or later, in the crowded room at the White Hart, with Captain Wentworth present: "She was deep in the happiness of such misery, or the misery of such happiness, instantly" (229).



All this “agitation” is for the reader alone. The narrative enacts Anne’s separation from the social world. Confirmation of this separation is provided by the wonderful—if occasionally opaque—account of the word use of Jane Austen’s main characters by the Australian academic J. F. Burrows. Which novel has the lowest proportion of dialogue? *Persuasion*, with 35%. Compare this with the proportions for *Emma* (49.8% dialogue), followed by *Pride and Prejudice* (46.7%). The *Persuasion* statistic is highly significant, I think. For it is a novel where much talk is turned into reported speech, which is not heard but filtered through Anne’s consciousness.

Anne’s fate is to listen. When she goes to Uppercross, she is doomed to be “too much in the secret of the complaints of each house” (44). Charles grouses to her about Mary; Mary grouses to her about Charles. Mrs. Musgrove moans to her about Mary; Mary moans to her about Mrs. Musgrove. The novel gives us slabs of direct speech from the complainers but, as if in imitation of Anne’s receptive role, not an actual word of her responses: “She could do little more than listen patiently, soften every grievance, and excuse each to the other” (46). While it still seems uncertain which Musgrove girl Captain Wentworth might prefer, “Anne had to listen to the opinions of her brother and sister, as to which was the one liked best” (75). She had to because they are determined to talk about it—but also, we can infer, as a kind of torment. This is her doom, she seems to think.

We often attend less to what is being said than to Anne’s thoughts as she listens. At Uppercross, Captain Wentworth talks of his naval exploits and Anne is almost surprised to find herself spoken to by Mrs. Musgrove: “From thus listening and thinking, she was roused by a whisper of Mrs. Musgrove’s, who, overcome by fond regrets, could not help saying . . .” (64). Most importantly and helplessly, she listens behind that hedge as Captain Wentworth and Louisa Musgrove speak to each other with such meaning. Again, the painful business of listening seems her destiny. She must be the helpless auditor of others’ self-delusions: “The listener’s proverbial fate was not absolutely hers; she had heard no evil of herself,—but she had heard a great deal of very painful import” (89). She also has to listen in a different way when she is in Bath. When her father and sister speak highly of Mr. Elliot, “Anne listened, but without quite understanding it” (140). After that encounter with Captain Wentworth in that Bath shop, she has to hear Mr. Elliot speaking to her: “She had never found it so difficult to listen to him” (178).

We share the limitations of Anne’s perceptions. When she does not hear something, we do not either, as when, on that autumnal walk, Louisa takes

her sister aside and “seemed to be arguing the matter warmly” (86), or when, at the end of that walk, “Captain Wentworth cleared the hedge in a moment to say something to his sister” (91). What is that something? We and Anne soon find out that it must be to do with her being tired and needing a ride in the Crofts’ carriage. As Anne sits in it, and the Crofts talk, she stops hearing, and so do we: “They had travelled half their way along the rough lane, before she was quite awake to what they said” (91–92). The narrative too has been overwhelmed by Anne’s agitation, stunned into a kind of deafness.

More than once we are told that the words of dialogue printed on the page only might have been those actually spoken. Here is Charles Hayter speaking after Captain Wentworth has lifted the toddler off Anne’s back: “She had a strong impression of his having said, in a vexed tone of voice, after Captain Wentworth’s interference, ‘You ought to have minded me, Walter; I told you not to teaze your aunt’” (80–81). But only an impression. On coming down to breakfast on her first morning in Bath, “She could imagine Mrs. Clay to have said . . .” (145), and we must imagine with her. On Mr. Elliot’s insinuating sentences at the concert about having heard of her before meeting her—“Such she believed were his words” (188)—but she has more important concerns. Sometimes she just—as we say—zones out.

In the room at the White Hart, she listens to the conversation between Mrs. Musgrove and Mrs. Croft about the undesirability of a long engagement and feels a “nervous thrill” to hear Mrs. Croft saying that a couple should not wait until they have sufficient means. She sees that Captain Wentworth is “listening” too, and something happens. The ladies carry on talking, but “Anne heard nothing distinctly; it was only a buzz of words in her ear” (231). A little while later, when she has just read *that* letter, Charles, Mary, and Henrietta come back into the room, and some kind of conversation takes place, but “[s]he began not to understand a word they said” (238). Speech becomes inaudible to her and therefore to us. As she becomes un-self-deceived about Captain Wentworth’s feelings, her agitation confuses her perceptions.

She is often alone in company, and we with her. The most extraordinary and brilliant example of our sharing Anne’s confused perceptions is much earlier, when she and Captain Wentworth have their first meeting for eight years.

And it was soon over. In two minutes after Charles’s preparation, the others appeared; they were in the drawing-room. Her eye half met Captain Wentworth’s; a bow, a curtsy 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 shewed himself at the window, all was ready, their visitor had bowed and was gone; the Miss Musgroves were gone too, suddenly resolving to walk to the end of the village with the sportsmen: the room was cleared, and Anne might finish her breakfast as she could. (59–60)

No actual dialogue, none of the words that are spoken, just the rapid blur of Anne's impressions. "She heard his voice"—as if it were a distant and indistinct sound, but he is in the same room.

Anne's consciousness shapes the narrative but remains concealed from the novel's other characters. When, in the company of Elizabeth and Mrs. Clay, Anne sees Captain Wentworth coming up the street, "[h]er start was perceptible only to herself" (175). The "start," usually a physical reflex, is entirely interior. As it takes up her habits of thinking, the narration develops odd verbal tics. We can sense the snagging of Anne's thoughts in verbal repetitions, as when she is observing the Musgrove sisters in company with Captain Wentworth and Charles Hayter:

while she considered Louisa to be rather the favourite, she could not but think, as far as she might dare to judge from memory and experience, that Captain Wentworth was not in *love* with either. They were more in *love* with him; yet there it was not *love*. It was a little fever of admiration; but it might, probably *must*, end in *love* with some. (82, emphasis added)

This is pragmatic observation on Anne's part: behave as if you might be in love, and you will end up in love. But it is also self-torment. She stabs at herself with that repeated word *love*. That "must" ("might, probably must"), revealing the pressure of her thoughts, is the clue, as so often, of Austen's use of free indirect style. It is Anne's "must," as she persuades herself of what tortures her.

This is one of a number of examples of a syntactic trick specific to this novel, as the narrative catches, usually three times, on a certain word. Here is Anne contemplating the imminent arrival of Captain Wentworth: "But a week must pass; only a week, in Anne's reckoning, and then, she supposed, they must meet; and soon she began to wish that she could feel secure even for a week" (53). *A week* is said three times, imitating Anne's excited but apprehensive sense of the closeness of the much-desired, much-feared meeting. The same trick shapes her flurried reflections on his likely feelings about the unavoidable encounter.

She would have liked to know how he felt as to a meeting. Perhaps indifferent, if indifference could exist under such circumstances. He must be either indifferent or unwilling. Had he wished ever to see her again, he need not have waited till this time. (58)

“Indifferent,” “indifference,” “indifferent.” Echoing her painful anxiety, the narrative cannot help repeating the word for what she most fears, agitated and self-deceiving by turns. And once they have met, and find they have to be in company together, it has to repeat the word for what is worst about this unintimate proximity: “Now they were as strangers; nay, worse than strangers, for they could never become acquainted. It was a perpetual estrangement” (64).

These peculiar triads are a distinctive feature of the novel, dramatizing Anne’s habits of thinking, or of trying to control her thoughts. And they allow us to glimpse her tricks of self-delusion. Here she is reflecting on the melancholy and bereaved Captain Benwick: “He is younger than I am; younger in feeling, if not in fact; younger as a man. He will rally again, and be happy with another” (97). We get the word “younger” three times, finding out that actually he perhaps is not younger than she is. But the repetition of the word reflects Anne’s sense of herself as prematurely old, lost to the possibility of happiness. Her peculiar loneliness is inescapable, as when she is about to leave Uppercross: “She was the last, excepting the little boys at the cottage, she was the very last, the only remaining one of all that had filled and animated both houses, of all that had given Uppercross its cheerful character. A few days had made a change indeed!” (123). The narrative keeps telling us that she is the last one, because this simple fact is also made, by Anne, into a measure of her desolation.

The others returned, the room filled again, benches were reclaimed and re-possessed, and another hour of pleasure or of penance was to be set out, another hour of music was to give delight or the gapes, as real or affected taste for it prevailed. To Anne, it chiefly wore the prospect of an hour of agitation. She could not quit that room in peace without seeing Captain Wentworth once more, without the interchange of one friendly look. (189)

Being in Anne’s consciousness, however, does not only mean living through her pain. She is also sometimes amused. When she is in the carriage with Admiral and Mrs. Croft, there is her “amusement at their style of driving” (92). Or when she has had her long conversation with the grieving Captain Benwick, she finds herself “amused at the idea of her coming to Lyme, to preach patience and resignation to a young man whom she had never seen before”

(101). In both cases, the reader shares her perception of what is comic, but no other character can do so. "Amusement" can mean entertainment or diversion but has a special use for the private—we might even say secret—relish of others' absurdities. It means finding funny things that no one else is finding funny. Here is Elizabeth Bennet, at Netherfield, witnessing the *manoeuvres* of Miss Bingley.

Elizabeth took up some needlework, and was sufficiently amused in attending to what passed between Darcy and his companion. The perpetual commendations of the lady either on his hand-writing, or on the evenness of his lines, or on the length of his letter, with the perfect unconcern with which her praises were received, formed a curious dialogue. (*PP* 47)

Emma Woodhouse is always finding herself amused, as when Mr. John Knightley has warned her that she seems to be encouraging Mr. Elton: "she walked on, amusing herself in the consideration of the blunders which often arise from a partial knowledge of circumstances, of the mistakes which people of high pretensions to judgment are for ever falling into; and not very well pleased with her brother for imagining her blind and ignorant, and in want of counsel" (*E* 112). This amusement is a special kind of self-deception.

Anne's "amusement" is a solitary kind of experience. When she meets Lady Russell once again to travel to Bath, she receives her friend's "compliments" on her appearance and "had the amusement of connecting them with the silent admiration of her cousin, and of hoping that she was to be blessed with a second spring of youth and beauty" (124). The amusement is based on Lady Russell's ignorance. When Anne reaches Bath and is introduced to Mr. Elliot at her father's rented house, she "instantly saw, with amusement at his little start of surprise, that he had not been at all aware of who she was" (143). She is a connoisseur of these moments of inadvertency. She alone catches some of the ironies of which the author would like us to be aware. Working out that Louisa Musgrove must have fallen for Captain Benwick's sonorous poetry recitation, she notes how pleasingly ironic this outcome is: "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" (167).

Living—or reading—inside Anne's head allows us to share such perceptiveness, but also to share her imperceptiveness. Her special activity of self-delusion involves her not letting herself think things. Is this perhaps what Austen meant when she told her niece Fanny Knight that this latest heroine was "almost too good for me" (23–25 March 1817)? Anne's self-suppression

is there in the novel's weird habit of avoiding naming Captain Wentworth when she is thinking of him most earnestly. Thus, when she is introduced to Mr. Elliot, "his manners were so exactly what they ought to be, so polished, so easy, so particularly agreeable, that she could compare them in excellence to only one person's manners" (143). Or when Mr. Elliot recalls their passing encounter in Lyme, "[h]e gave her to understand that he had looked at her with some earnestness. She knew it well; and she remembered another person's look also" (148). Equally, even as Lady Russell "bewitches" her with a vision of her as the future Lady Elliot, she knows that she cannot accept Mr. Elliot because "her feelings were still adverse to any man save one" (160).

The narrative follows her habit of repression so faithfully that we sometimes hardly notice it. A small, but beautiful, example comes just after we have been told that, though Anne plays the piano well, no one in Uppercross can appreciate her musical talents: "[E]xcepting one short period of her life, she had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to, or encouraged by any just appreciation or real taste" (47). On a first reading we might hardly notice that "one short period of her life." It must refer to the time of her courtship, when she played for Captain Wentworth, but as she can hardly bear to think of it, the narrative can hardly bear to be explicit about it.

Anne is a good deal more perceptive than those who surround her, but some of Anne's apparent perceptiveness is in fact mortification. When Captain Wentworth first visits Uppercross, it is arranged that he meets Charles for breakfast at his father's house: "Anne understood it. He wished to avoid seeing her" (59). Is that it? Does she know what he wishes? When he performs his second act of kindness to her, helping her into the Crofts' carriage, she turns her flustered gratitude into self-persuading analysis.

Yes,—he had done it. She was in the carriage, and felt that he had placed her there, that his will and his hands had done it, that she owed it to his perception of her fatigue, and his resolution to give her rest. She was very much affected by the view of his disposition towards her which all these things made apparent. This little circumstance seemed the completion of all that had gone before. She understood him. He could not forgive her,—but he could not be unfeeling. (91)

"She understood him." Does she indeed?

We all know about the playing on those words *persuasion* and *persuade* in the novel. One use of *persuasion* is to mean *misconception*, as when Anne worries

about Captain Wentworth's evident belief that she is attached to Mr. Elliot: "she feared from his looks, that the same unfortunate persuasion, which had hastened him away from the concert room, still governed" (221). Persuasion can involve self-delusion. Austen is the great recorder of people not knowing themselves, and Captain Wentworth is, naturally, another such person. Let us end with his consciousness and a brilliant example of how Austen both gives and declines to give his feelings. We are back in Molland's, taking shelter as the rain falls on Bath. After procuring a lift in the Viscountess Dalrymple's carriage for Elizabeth and Mrs. Clay, Mr. Elliot returns to the shop where Anne is talking with Captain Wentworth, who has just offered his umbrella: "I have equipped myself properly for Bath already, you see" (177). Mr. Elliot whisks Anne away, and suddenly, weirdly we find that we have been left in the shop. We are with Captain Wentworth and are listening, with him, to the dialogue of the unnamed ladies of his company.

"Mr. Elliot does not dislike his cousin, I fancy?"

"Oh! no, that is clear enough. One can guess what will happen there. He is always with them; half lives in the family, I believe. What a very good-looking man!"

"Yes, and Miss Atkinson, who dined with him once at the Wallises, says he is the most agreeable man she ever was in company with."

"She is pretty, I think; Anne Elliot; very pretty, when one comes to look at her. It is not the fashion to say so, but I confess I admire her more than her sister."

"Oh! so do I."

"And so do I. No comparison. But the men are all wild after Miss Elliot. Anne is too delicate for them." (177-78)

Of what he is feeling or thinking, Austen gives us not a word. Of course not—she knows that she does not have to.

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