

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 protegee 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 soiree 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. Musgroves, 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 tease 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 curtsey passed; she heard his voice--he talked to Mary; said all that was right; said something to the Miss Musgroves, enough to mark an easy footing; the room seemed full--full of persons and voices--but a few minutes ended it. Charles 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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