

PERSUASION: He has no feeling for others

In our effort to trace out the traits of transitionalism and radicalism in Jane Austen in respect of her last completed novel *Persuasion*, we may turn to Claudia Johnson. Claudia Johnson precisely points out that the turn that Jane Austen's career takes in its last phase:

Wistfully and romantically unfulfilled in the twilight of her life, the author Jane Austen grows tenderer on romantic subjects she had disparaged in the confidence and severity of her youth; with her own opening out into a new world of emotion, eighteenth Century 'objectivity' yields to nineteenth century 'subjectivity' (Johnson, 1988, 144).

Persuasion is her last completed novel and evinces this change clearly. It is actually a departure from her usual practice. Of all the novels that the author wrote, *Persuasion* is the farthest removed from the pressures of political controversy that animates the fiction of her time. What is strikingly different about *Persuasion* is that it shows how the improvident landowners, proving themselves unworthy of their station, have left England poised on the

bank of a new world dominated by the best and the brightest, the Royal Navy. Eventually, foolish and financially embarrassed landowners are made to appear in Austen novels. Sir Walter will resume Kellynch and yield it in the time-honoured way to his heir William Elliot who knows how to serve 'his own interest and own enjoyment' (250) and 'will lose his hold on the situation in which Providence placed him' (248). In *Persuasion* the landed classes are shown to have lost their prestige and their moral authority for the heroine. Lady Russell's 'prejudices on the side of ancestry' and 'value for rank and consequence' (11) are never allowed to be anything more than amiable but groundless articulations of self-interest.

Persuasion distinctively minimizes problems which had before been so momentous to the heroines. In this novel Jane Austen is free to explore female independence. Anne, like Emma is an autonomous heroine and *Persuasion* may reasonably be conceptualized as a debate between individualism and propriety. Anne's independence from traditional, paternal authority is also a pointer to the novelist's traits of radicalism as well. Again, the heroine's decision to break off her engagement, though it causes Sir Walter's paternal displeasure, does not at all

perturb her. On the contrary, it has everything to do with the advice, not the authority of a trusted friend, Lady Russell, to whom Anne does not owe the comparable duty of obedience. Such is Anne's filial disposition at nineteen. At twenty-eight she pays Sir Walter even less mind. While Sir Walter pursues Lady Dalrymple, Anne visits a 'nobody' and Mrs. Smith without as much as informing him. For Anne, no hard conflict between duty and inclination is implied by defying or simply ignoring her father. Indeed it is all to say; 'Anne kept her appointment; the others kept theirs' (158). Jane Austen has made Tilney in **Northanger Abbey** to be seen as an obstacle and his authority however limited, must be confronted and overcome. Similarly, Admiral and Mrs. Croft are shown not as gentry. Far from presiding over a neighbourhood, they live most contentedly at sea, unconcerned with the production of heirs or the reproduction of ideologically correct values through the cultivation of local attachment. From some points of view there are differences between Admiral Crofts and General Tilney. The former, to be sure, nowhere expresses or implies progressive opinion. But to Anne, the difference is great. The years which bring the Admiral into prominence are those which mark off the disparity between 'old English style' of the senior Musgrove and the 'new' English style

of their 'accomplished daughter' (40) and which have brought changes with them accounting for what William Elliot calls the 'unfeudal tone of the present day' (139). The causes and the processes of such transformation may however, be treated as the subject of *Persuasion*. Austen, throughout this novel tries to consider the psychological impact that social arrangements have on women and the apparent possibilities which the 'unfeudal tone of the present day' may hold out for them. Anyway, Lady Russell does not share the mindlessness typical of the squires, ladies and baronets in this novel. Much to Elizabeth's irritation, she is always reading 'the new poems and states of the nation that come out' (215). She aims her approval of William Elliot at Anne in such a way as to show Wentworth's boldness in what she considers to be the worst possible light:

He (William Elliot) was steady, observant, moderate, candid: never run away with by spirits or by selfishness which fancied itself strong feeling and yet with a sensibility to what was amiable and lovely, and a value for all the felicities of domestic life, which characters of fancied enthusiasm and violent agitation seldom really possess (146-47).

Lady Russell awards the prize for true, as opposed to 'fancied' feeling to the man whose sensibility evinces the most responsiveness to women—the 'amiable and lovely' and dismisses Wentworthian impetuosity as only fitful in its loyalties and subversive in its effects.

The action of *Persuasion* begins eight years before the opening of the novel, when Wentworth angrily spurns young Anne Elliot because he believes she showed 'feebleness of character' in relinquishing their engagement. Wentworth's anger deserves particular attention because it is anything but customary to fault women for diffidence, Wentworth, of course, does not appear to believe that the inconvenient modesty of the maiden will be redeemed by the submission of the wife or to value the 'feebleness' often held to be part of woman's duty as well as her charm. Conservative fiction and conduct literature tirelessly preach to women about the duty of submission. But a product of the period of transition, Jane Austen marks her departure from the caseless and unreasonable values. Like a true radical she projects her characters, particularly female ones, in the light of a new approach to life and values. Jane Austen's novels are particularly striking for their ability to excite female weakness and to promote the cult of

vulnerability. She was a believer, in the vein of a radical, in insisting on strength, rationality and autonomy in women—spontaneously reacting to social practices that restrained a woman's potential as an individual: 'But I hate to hear you talk so like a fine gentleman and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures' (94).

Considering that men and women had to operate within different economic parameters, Jane Austen seems to have let the man off too easily. Women who did not inherit money and were unable to marry were condemned to a life of destitution, whereas men could go out into work to seek their fortune—an option that the hero in *Persuasion* has been granted to take up. Moreover, that money is not an immutable quality like intelligence but an element that responds to individual endeavour, that it can be generated through trade and industry, is recognized in the novel under our active consideration. Anne Elliot knows the value of money like any male member of the time and has been shown by Jane Austen as capable of effective and detailed management of the household economy of an impoverished father. This surely is a step further to show that the novelist with her progressive bent of mind infused in her heroine the manly qualities. This can be regarded as a

symbolic assertion of a woman's will in a society where the ideology of capitalism sanctioned individual enterprise in the wider world. This assertiveness is firmly established in *Persuasion* where in the end Jane Austen lets Anne Elliot, the heroine, take the initiative in eliciting a response from the man. Wentworth overhears Anne's avowal of the constancy of a woman's love, at first perhaps by chance, but she decides to continue her declaration within his hearing and in effect confesses her love to him, thus inverting a social taboo:

That he was a sensible man, an agreeable man—that he talked well, professed good opinions, seemed to judge properly and as a man of principle...He certainly knew what was right and was rational, discreet, polished and cautious (172 - 173).

There is a constant tension between a woman's need to exercise choice in order to define herself as an individual and the society's demand that she should conform to. Jane Austen as a novelist however, could not set herself free from the tension. In handling the thematic scheme of her novels we find herself tossed between tensions. In most of her novels she is found not to have used foreign settings and the restrictive frame of England that she knew. We know

that she warned her niece Anna, who had literary ambitions, against the danger of following her fictional characters to an unknown territory:

You had better not leave England. Let the portmans go to Ireland, but as you know nothing of the manners there you had better not go with them (Life of Jane Austen 257).

However, elements of transitionalism and radicalism can be traced in this very tension. If Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* is lonely in her heightened consciousness, so is Anne in *Persuasion*. While for Anne the sea stands for expanding world of new experience and adventure, her baronet father is caught up in the self-reflexive world of mirrors and his anxiety to retain the class privileges that economic reality can no longer sustain. Sir Walter inhabits the past, refusing to face the fact that the balance of power is shifting from those whose rights are based on inheritance to those who are making Britain's fortunes at sea and in the colonies. In this novel, the year of the action, 1814, is very close to the year of composition—1816. *Persuasion* incidentally is the only novel of Jane Austen that has such an explicit historical context. While Sir Walter defensively shields himself from history,

concentrating on his complexion which can only be saved from the effects of age by insulation from sunlight and open space, his daughter has been keeping up with Britain's maritime achievements. When Admiral Croft is mentioned as a possible tenant for the Elliot family seat, which Sir Walter can no longer maintain, his quiet and unobtrusive daughter seems to have all the information about this war hero: 'He is the real admiral of the white. He was in the Trafalgar action, and has been in the East Indies' (p51). Sir Walter is completely indifferent to these facts, and merely speculates on the admiral's appearance: 'Then I take it for granted ...that his face is about as orange as the cuffs and cafes of my livery' (51).

The comic exaggeration of Sir Walter's traits are a device to freeze in a grotesque unreality of the class that refused to face the changing demands of history and geography. Although Anne Elliot's fate relegates her to a passive role amidst the smug and static men who cannot see beyond their own immediate context and young ladies living merely to be 'fashionable, happy and merry,' she hankers for the wider world of action where men and women have

mobility across the globe. Mrs. Croft's account of her travels, in the course of which she has

Crossed the Atlantic four times and ...been once to the East Indies and back again; and only once, besides being in different places about home Cork and Lisbon and Gibraltar (94).

Moreover, Mrs. Croft stands out in the crowd of bourgeois ladies in her assertion of physical sturdiness, defying the expected feminine qualities of frailty and dependence- 'Thank God! I have been blessed with an excellent health and no climate disagrees me' (95). She embodies a code of behaviour that challenges the much-hallowed ideas of the chivalric male and delicate lady. When her brother expresses his scruples about carrying women on board his ship because of their inconvenience, she admonishes him, 'I hate to hear you talking so, like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies instead of rational creatures.' (p94). This particular analysis of the text along with the relevant citation once again goes steps further to exemplify the fact that Jane Austen in her period, so remote from ours was no doubt a radical. We can also here refer to *Pride and Prejudice* wherein Elizabeth Bennet's insistence is that she is not an 'elegant female'

but a 'rational creature' (91). In her physical vitality Elizabeth too defies the code that values debility and frailty .One also recalls Jane Austen 's description of young Catherine Morland, who played cricket, rolled down slopes and hated confinement and cleanliness. Jane Austen seems to have an unarticulated image of a fully individualized woman who is physically and mentally unrestricted, more mobile, more aware, more herself than the fainting creature in need of male protection and totally without a mind, an image that the conduct books and popular fiction had combined to idealise Mr. Croft's regret,

I never went beyond the Streights--and never was in the West Indies. We do not call Bermuda or Bahama, you know the West Indies (94).

Even those who had never been to the West Indies could have financial interest there - a fact underlined in the subplot of Persuasion. Mrs. Smith's husband had brought a small estate in the West Indies, which since his death had been 'Under a sort of sequestration of the payment of its own incumbent' (208) and which the chivalrous Captain Wentworth restores to her by 'writing for her, acting for her and seeing her through all the petty difficulties of the case' (253). So by the end of the novel Mrs. Smith has an

'improvement of income' through an investment made in a distant colony. Jane Austen, however, does not even have recourse to the familiar fictional device of shifting the inconvenient characters off to the colonies. But a close study of the novel indeed upholds one very particular truth that here we find the sea having a major presence and seems to be very much on the very verge of widening out beyond the shores of the British Isles. Anne Elliot does not have a fixed home at the end of the novel but 'She gloried in being a sailor's wife' (253-254). The vitality of society is seen to have shifted, as it were, from the land to the sea. This aspect surely confirms in the author the very traits of her radicalism and transitionalism side by side.

Now let us come to dwell upon another very important issue viz., the question of class as faced by Jane Austen and examine it in terms of her last completed novel *Persuasion*. Her novels in fact, always focus on the upper middle class and the gentry. Like a true radical she never took her side with the aristocrats. Here is hardly any ambiguity about Jane Austen's position in this regard. In every confrontation between the aristocracy and the middle class she unerringly aligns herself with the latter. To exemplify this with reference to *Persuasion*, it would surely be not

out of track if we refer to the other very notable work by the novelist-Pride and Prejudice. In this novel the middle class Bennets and Gardiners compel the upper class Darcys and de Bourghs to take them seriously. Elizabeth suffers from no sense of inferiority on her first visit to Rosings because 'mere stateliness of money and rank she thought she could witness without trepidation' only 'extraordinary talents or miraculous virtue' (156). Later when Lady Catherine gives class difference as a reason why Elizabeth cannot marry Darcy, Elizabeth's spirited reply was, 'He is a gentle man, I am a gentleman's daughter, so far equal (161).

In Persuasion also the definition of a gentleman is the same. Sir Walter Elliot insists that only those who live on unearned income from inherited land without taking up a profession deserve this appellation. Reminded of a gentleman called Mr. Wentworth who had once lived in the neighbourhood, he responds, 'Wentworth? Oh ay! Mr. Wentworth, the curate of Monkford. You misled me by the term gentleman. I thought you were speaking of some man of property' (52).

In Persuasion the rising professional class is obviously privileged over the decadent aristocracy. All the titled

people, from Sir Walter to 'the Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple and her daughter, the honourable Miss Cartaret' are drawn with comic exaggeration. Anne's indifference to 'rank and connection' is clearly the normative position in this novel. Jane Austen at times, makes us see that the country's economy was expanding through overseas trade and development of the colonies and in most of her novels traditionally seen as depicting a stable, static and limited world - the pulls and pressures that enhance social mobility are not only visible but are woven into the plot with the novelist's masterly handling the theme itself. In the novel under our active consideration the dice are obviously loaded in favour of those who have risen through individual effort. Eight years before the beginning of the novel *Wentworth* was,

A young man who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexion to secure even his farther rise in that profession (55).

By the end of the novel 'Captain *Wentworth* with and five twenty thousand pounds and as high in his profession as merit and activity would place him' (250) is equal to

anyone in England and can marry, 'the daughter of a foolish spendthrift baronet' (250), with Jane Austen's blessing . In *Persuasion* the remarkable departure from the tradition is shown in the fact that the heroine marries outside her social class; she not only glories in being a sailor's wife but also happily becomes part of gradually expanding paternity of sea-faring people who do without the stability of a fixed home. Considering the importance of houses in Jane Austen's earlier novels, the relinquishment of a fixed home in the present novel seems indeed a major departure.

As a radical, Jane Austen is sometimes found to go against the waves. Although London and Bath often feature in Jane Austen's novels as settings for developments in the plot—serving to bring people together or to dislocate from the familiar context, with Jane Austen the important events and the final resolutions of the novels always take place in the countryside. To view the town and the country as morally opposing entities has indeed been an age-old literary convention. In Jane Austen's case the practice obtains further validation through her own emotional attachment to the countryside. We know that, like Anne Elliot, the heroine in *Persuasion*, Jane Austen 'persisted

in a very determined, though very silent disinclination for Bath' (149). She was miserable when, after spending the first twenty-six years of her life in the quiet rectory of Steventon in Hampshire, she had to move to Bath because of a sudden decision made by her parents. Anne Elliot, the heroine, created in Jane Austen's maturity, feels out of place in the social rituals of a fashionable resort and can only sigh that her father 'should feel no degradation' in changing his residence from the spacious country seat Kellynch Hall to a cramped place whose walls are 'thirty feet asunder'.

Change of location is thus a very important feature in Jane Austen in her thematic scheme. This is also very important an aspect for us to deal with the aspects of transitionalism in the author particularly with reference to this particular novel - *Persuasion*. Now let us examine it closely. The change of location thus is a pointer to the novelist's love for liberation. In *Persuasion* the sea is the liberating element. This novel contains more changes of location than any of her earlier novels. The motif of a house, so important in the other novels both as a concrete object and as a symbol of social stability, recedes into the background. Anne moves from Kellynch Hall to Uppercross and

then to the seaside resort of Lyme. Each of these places embodies a different set of values and Anne goes through the process of setting one against another eventually to sort out her own priorities. She also had to submit to another lesson of 'knowing our own nothingness beyond our own circle' (69). After the rigid formality and concern with surfaces at her father's house, the informality and confusion of Uppercross are a welcome change but the open friendliness of the naval officers in Lyme appeals to her most. Finally the inhabitants of all three worlds converge in Bath, giving Anne an opportunity to choose her orbit. Anne Elliot continues to have an emotional attachment to her ancestral home, Kellynch Hall, but at the end of the novel she marries a man without a house, whose fortune lies at sea. This indicates a radical shift in Jane Austen's position, because in her earlier writing a permanent abode is almost synonymous with a man's moral and social worth. But when Jane Austen wrote her *Persuasion* the Navy had recently brought glory to Britain through her victories in the Napoleonic Wars. The returning naval officers not only were affluent but also introduced a new code of behaviour, which valued loyalty and friendship above social rank and money. Unlike in the earlier novels, where men and women are seen as consumers and commodities respectively, in

Persuasion there is a greater emphasis on equality and partnership. It is this new sense of values that the novel celebrates, and the sea becomes an effective metaphor for mobility, openness and emotional release. All Jane Austen's other novels close in at the end. But **Persuasion** is the only novel that opens out at the end, moving away from enclosed space and rootedness. Anne 'gloried in becoming a sailor's wife'. we are told at the end of the novel that her happiness will not be 'centred on a fixed hearth in England,' as Mukherjee observes in her book **Re-reading Jane Austen** (88). Indeed **Persuasion** ends on a note of expansion rather than contraction. Tony Tanner has reasonably pointed out, 'there is an essential dichotomy in Jane Austen's novels between stability and rootedness on the one hand and a restless energy on the other' (1985,196).

Jane Austen's heroes generally tend to be sober and circumspect, with total command over themselves. The uncharacteristic intensity of Wentworth's language here can be explained in yet another way. It has often been pointed out that **Persuasion** was written at a time when Jane Austen's views on spontaneity and restraint, sense and sensibility, emotion and decorum were in a state of transition. While some of her earlier characters learn to be prudent through

experience, Anne Elliot makes the reverse journey, 'She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learnt romance as she grew older' (58). Wentworth's change from cautious reserve to unrestrained confession may be part of the same process. *Persuasion* also upholds Jane Austen's radical stand in the treatment of letters written by the women in her novels. Here in the novel under discussion Jane Austen is found to make Anne, the heroine take the initiative in effecting final reconciliation. This aspect is noteworthy in a society that strictly limited the circumstances in which women could write to men outside the family. Anne Elliot is shown to have managed to convey her feelings through theoretical discussion being more constant than man- 'It is perhaps our fate rather than our merit, unsettling him (Wentworth) enough to drop all his guards and his pen,' (236). Here Jane Austen's earlier scrupulous concern with language, as a moral metaphor seems to have been abandoned in her last novel.

A radical in the period of real transition (in the last half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth) Jane Austen was in the habit of going against whatever was unjust and partial. She lived at an age when pen was an exclusive male instrument for expressing inner

thoughts and ideas and women were denied of it. Jane Austen rose to the occasion and made an all out effort to bring the woman folk to the forefront. *Persuasion* is an example in this regard. The penultimate chapter in the novel is a relevant case for this. Here in this chapter Anne Elliot, the heroine says vehemently:

Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hand. I will not allow books to prove anything.

This sort of outburst is just an uncharacteristic adamancy that the novelist has put into her character. This is also an uncharacteristic reaction of a woman author at that period of time that the literary history of England has ever witnessed.

We have seen that even when the pen was in women's hand at the very initial stage, as had become increasingly common by Jane Austen's time, it had to conform to the norms set up by the dominant patriarchal culture. This kind of culture provided the inescapable context of publication. Women's texts were thus implicitly made to endorse certain assumptions. The motif of the frail, frightened and nubile

heroine who has to scuttle through a minefield of aggressive virility, illustrates two such interrelated assumptions; that woman is essentially the object of male sexual desire, and that chastity is the supreme female virtue. Another unspoken assumption was that a woman's primary function in life was to please men; her worth was to be measured by her ability to attract them. Jane Austen's predecessors and contemporaries, men and women alike repeat this motif with endless variations. In novel after novel we see that if the vulnerable heroines survive their ordeal, they find their reward in secure and profitable marriages, if not, they acquit themselves of the world's censure by dying martyr's deaths. But Jane Austen's steadfast rejection of this fictional style is evident from her earlier stories in 'Juvenilia,' where she repeatedly made fun of the victim heroine, to her last unfinished novel 'Sanditon' where Charlotte Heywood picked up a copy of Fanny Burney's *Camilla* only to put it down again because 'she had not *Camilla's* youth and had no intention of having her distress.' (ch.6). Jane Austen chafed against the approved codes of feminine conduct prevailing in her time. She put up resistance through her radical dissent as well. Even while mocking some aspects of the dominant ideology of her age she (Jane Austen) delineated her central female

characters by focusing on the point of transition between the freedom of childhood and the subservience of wifhood. At the same time by exposing the economic anxiety underlying the romantic show off of the courtship ritual, she also achieves a sort of ironic reversal. These internal tensions speak for her attitude to class also. The reprehensible Mr. Elliot, heir of Kellynch Hall, can almost be forgiven for marrying for money, but not for marrying beneath his rank. Revealing his dark past Mrs. Smith tells Anne, When one lives in this world, a man or a woman's marrying for money is too common to strike one as it ought' (208). Anne Elliot enquires,

But was she not a very low woman?' 'Yes; which I object to, but he would not regard. Money, money was all he wanted .Her father was a grazier, her grand father was a butcher, but that was all nothing...Not a difficulty or a scruple was there on his side with respect to her birth (208).

The following extract from *Persuasion* once again testifies to the fact of Jane Austen's progressive outlook in respect of female attitude to life in changed scenario. Anne Elliot accuses men of holding the pen exclusively, it being almost a male prerogative. But we also perceive that in another

part of the room Captain Wentworth has lost possession of his pen by this time; 'a slight noise called the attention to captain Wentworth's hitherto perfectly quiet division of the room. It was nothing more than that his pen had fallen down' (237). This reversal indirectly prepares us for Anne's decision to take the initiative herself, thus turning upside down the traditional gender pattern of pursuit. Finding Wentworth unable to take a stand, Anne resolves to make her feelings known to him. It remains a characteristically Austenian situation. While on one level Anne transgresses the feminine code of non-action, on the other she keeps arguing about the essential passivity of women's situation. She tells Captain Harville

All the privilege I claim for my own self, is that of living longest, when existence or when hope is gone. Women are trapped in a situation that encourages introspection (238).

Anne explains,

We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other to take you back into the world immediately (236).

This exchange between Captain Harville and Elliot is an overt gender debate in Jane Austen. This is just one example of how Jane Austen can manage to contain opposite sets of impulses. For interpreters of fiction Jane Austen's novels seem to exert an extraordinary magnetic power. No serious critic of the English novel has been able to bypass her work and the impressive roster of names includes Henry James, Virginia Woolf, E.M. Foster, F. Leavis, David Lodge, Marilyn Butler, Tony Tanner, Susan Gubar, Sandra Gilbert and so on. They have provided diverse and contradictory interpretations of her novels, turning her sometimes 'into a radical destabiliser of the status quo,' as observed by Mukherjee (1988, 140).

Re-reading Jane Austen's novels as entirely realistic and unequivocal records of life as the novelist knew, makes the reader aware of the various tensions in her work. The tensions are between subversive parodic strategies and mimetic representations of life; between stasis and spatial enclosure on the one hand and mobility and expansion on the other, between a woman's need to define her individual self and society's demand that she should conform to. In fine, it can be said unambiguously that Jane Austen's radical stand, so far as her last completed novel is concerned,

once again upholds a positive value. This positive value is best established by way of enunciating social and geographical mobility that Persuasion best exemplifies.

Again in the 21st chapter of the novel, Jane Austen projects her another radical trait by way of presenting her woman characters with the power of articulation, in the social, so long remarkably absent in most of the novels of her time. As an example we can turn to Mrs. Smith's account of Mr. Elliot's character:

Mr. Elliot is a man without heart or conscience, a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself; who for his own interest or ease, would be guilty of any cruelty, or any treachery, that could be perpetrated without risk of his general character. He has no feeling for others. (206)

Jane Austen, it is to be understood that, holds a society to be ideal one in which every individual must have the equal right to expression, irrespective of gender. When society is a place for the expression of sincere emotion, moral principle and tolerant attitudes, it has value. Manners are then important adjuncts to the individual's

life, part of a positive theme of social harmony. So we can analyse society in Jane Austen's novels by looking at the relationship between social structures and forms, on the one hand, and a set of personal values—including sincerity and Christian emotions such as compassion and forgiveness on the other. The above extract from the text adds strength to this argument. Various social issues are raised in the conversation between Anne and Mrs. Smith in *Persuasion*. Of them, the insistent theme is Mr. Elliot's lack of humane or Christian feeling and the consequent opinion that he is dangerous and destructive. Mrs. Smith's startling condemnation of Mr. Elliot is entirely in these terms. Evil is described as 'designing, wary, cold-blooded being that thinks only of himself' (ch. 21). Mr. Elliot is accused of being an enemy of society because society operates on an assumption of generosity or at least giving and taking. Mr. Elliot only takes and misuses society in order to do so. Jane Austen, like a radical deals with her characters and thereby makes Mr. Elliot an object lacking in the value of society. Like Mrs. Smith, the novelist also believes that the unfettered pursuit of self-interest is inimical to society just as the possession of 'heart or conscience' is necessary.

Jane Austen presents life as full of surprise and variety. Reality is open-ended and it is this openness she contrasts with the several portraits of closed thought systems that we amply find in her *Persuasion*. To exemplify the point we would better turn to the extract under consideration:

Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty and mind, to throw herself away at nineteen; involve herself at nineteen in an engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, "...Captain Wentworth had no fortune but he was confident that he would soon be rich—full of life and order, he knew that he would soon have a ship and soon be on a station that would lead to every thing he wanted. But Lady Russell persuaded (Anne) to believe the engagement a wrong thing—indiscreet, improper, and hardly capable of success and not deserving it. (56)

The novelist's narrative here is dynamic and her viewpoint is clear-cut and at times conveys a sort of opposition as well. Through Lady Russell Jane Austen actually gives vent to her own views on the matter. Lady Russell's opinion in this context is founded on the calculation of sex value. In

her view Anne Elliot has value because of her 'birth, beauty and mind,' while Captain Wentworth has no value—he is 'a young man, who had nothing but himself,' Lady Russell thinks about their inequality in terms of price and the values of the market place, so she calls the alliance 'a throwing away,' a phrase Jane Austen inserts underlying the commercial foundation of these ideas. Of course, from reading the novel we know that Captain Wentworth's optimism—'But, he was confident that he would be rich***that he should soon have a ship... that would lead to every thing he wanted,' (56), turned out to be justified. He did make a fortune quickly. Again, on the other hand, he acknowledges that his career was very much a subject of chance and on one occasion at least he was very nearly lost at sea. By presenting such powerfully opposing views, and also by highlighting Anne's suffering, Jane Austen reveals how open any true understanding of life's potential must be. The main thrust here is on Lady Russell's view on Anne's relationship with Wentworth. In this context Lady Russell's view is further emphasized when Anne is persuaded: the engagement is 'indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it.' Moreover, Lady Russell feels that the marriage would place Anne in 'a state of wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependence.' In this

context we should better turn to Anne's reaction. Anne herself holds that Lady Russell did 'err in her advice and she (Anne) believes that she was 'perfectly right' in her thought and action. Our interest in this analysis has been to highlight Jane Austen's attitude to the thought system about women and particularly about courtship and marriage which comes broadly under the heading of 'gender stereotyping.'

However, the theme of transitionalism takes a different form in each of the novels. Her underlying concept of change and how it develops in *Persuasion* is a theme of singular interest in this present discussion. The novel opens up picturing the dominance of economic change—the value of an agricultural estate being diminished. A new class of rich, successful, vigorous and virtuous naval officers figures prominently through the novel *Persuasion*. The rigid system of social rank and snobbery is shown to be obsolete because it does not reflect the real world. We remember Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* saying to Lady Catherine that the world will have 'too much sense' to condemn her marriage to Darcy. The idea that 'sense' will be the ultimate judge of forms and events brings us to another motif that is consistent in *Persuasion*. Jane Austen

tests traditional values against life experience and analyses them radically. We are shown situations where the morality and principles are sound but they have become powerless because they are not connected to any real life experience. Jane Austen observes that Elizabeth Elliot is as handsome at twenty-nine as she was at sixteen and comments that Sir Walter can therefore be excused for imagining that he and his daughter have not aged in thirteen years. The hope that change can be avoided by inactivity or hidden from by burying the head in contemplating an obsolete aristocracy is one that is shared between Sir Walter and Elizabeth. We should note that this view also influenced Lady Russell when she originally persuaded Anne to break her engagement to Frederick Wentworth. In *Persuasion* however, there is a theme of resistance to change which is presented as an absurdity. The vigorous energy and practical activity of the naval characters are in marked contrast to this and their frank sincerity is portrayed as refreshing:

Admiral Croft's manners were not quite of the tone to suit Lady Russell, but they delighted Anne. His goodness of heart and simplicity of characters were irresistible. (142)

As a product of the period of transition, Jane Austen is more than often found to shift her attitude from one plane to another in respect of the characters and manners of her heroes and heroines. This shift is best exemplified in her treatment of the theme in her novel *Persuasion* by way of contrasts. Captain Wentworth is 'a remarkably fine young man, with a great deal of intelligence, spirit and brilliancy' (55). He is still outstandingly good-looking seven years later, when Anne observes that the passage of time had added 'a more glowing, manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages' (86). He has the power of pleasing the people he meets and his effect on the two Mangroves remind us of how perfectly delighted they were with him, how much handsome, how infinitely more agreeable they thought him than any individual among their male acquaintance, (80). But Mr. Elliot contrasts with Wentworth. Anne observes his manners closely and concludes, that he was a sensible man, an agreeable man—that he talked well, professed good opinions, seemed to judge properly and as a man of principle... He certainly knew what was right , rational, discreet, polished and cautious' (172-3).

Now, faced with a contrast between Mr. Elliot and Wentworth, a reader of Jane Austen's works might expect

that the unrestrained, impetuous character of Captain Wentworth will end in wickedness. Anne would do better to trust the careful manners of Mr. Elliot, with his respect for propriety. Persuasion is not like the other novels. Here in the idea of 'openness' is of paramount importance. Anne worries that Mr. Elliot is not 'open' and explains her impression by saying that he is too much in control of himself- 'There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight,' so that 'she could not be satisfied that she really knew his character' (173).

So it is seen that the outward characteristics, the manners of heroes and villains seem to have been turned the other way round. In this novel, the hero has manners comparable to those of the three earlier villains; and the villain has manners more like those of the three previous heroes. We could conclude from this the simple wisdom that it is difficult to judge a man from his outward appearance; any appearance, any style of behaviour, may be deceptive. Only more intimate knowledge of a man's character will reveal the truth about him. In Persuasion Anne Elliot seems to go further, stating a preference for 'open' manners. She finds Mr. Elliot's self-control 'a decided imperfection,' and continues,

She prized the frank, the open hearted, the eager character beyond all others. Warmth and enthusiasm did captivate her still. She felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped(183).

The outcome of this shows that Anne's instinct was correct. Mr. Elliot is eventually described by Mrs. Smith as 'black at heart, hollow and black' (206) and he carried on an affair with Mrs. Clay while he was courting Anne. Jane Austen then, has finally written a novel in which the modern, lively man who is impulsive and unreasonably optimistic; is valued, while the man of caution and propriety turns out to be a hypocrite. Anne's statement that self-control is an 'imperfection' and that she can forgive careless or hasty behaviour for its sincerity, adds depth of meaning to this reversal in the structure of characters. In *Persuasion* it appears that the author's own assessment of men, their manners and the character those manners expose or cover, has undergone some change. This,

again, is in line with Jane Austen herself being a product of an age of transition.

Indeed, Jane Austen sets out the change of views Lady Russell has to confront at the end of *Persuasion* with a lucid emphasis on the word 'manners'. She (Anne) must learn to feel that she had been mistaken with regard to both; that she had been unfairly influenced by appearance in each that because Captain Wentworth's manners had not suited her own ideas,

she had been too quick in suspecting them to indicate a character of dangerous impetuosity ; and that because Mr. Elliott's manners had precisely pleased her in their propriety and correctness, their general politeness and suavity, she had been too quick in receiving them as the certain result of the most correct opinions and well regulated mind. (251)

We could possibly read this passage as an admission of error by Jane Austen herself, so thoroughly has she reversed the qualities of her heroes and villains. It is plausible to see Lady Russell as a gentle satire of Austen's own earlier novels and the distrust of popular

and dashing men they express. The idea of affectionate self-satire is strengthened by the deprecating humour with which the author admits that 'there is a quickness of perception in some, a nicety in the discernment of character, a natural penetration,' and that 'Lady Russell had been less gifted in this part of understanding' (251). We can imagine Jane Austen writing these lines with her own change of mind in any field is just a matter of time. This is more so with regard to the thematic structure of *Persuasion*. Time, indeed, has a curious effect in the novel. The past was a time of openness and truth returns to redeem the present. The present is a time of oppression, error, hypocrisy and absurdity, which needs to be redeemed by the past. The events of the novel itself are emotionally joined to a time seven years before, a time when Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth expressed their feelings openly and truly; a time which is still the underlying pattern for the present reality. Captain Wentworth insists (in chapter 23) that he has 'loved none but her (Anne)' but he is forced to explain 'that he had been constant unconsciously, nay unintentionally.' He mentions being 'angry' and 'unjust' and meaning 'to forget her' (244). So time - the passage of those seven years of separation - has obscured the basic reality of his feelings. His love has

been hidden, buried beneath his resentment, during all of that time. The revival of Anne's beauty is also remarked on by several characters. Mr. Elliot admires her in passing, at Lyme, and Sir Walter comments that she is 'less thin in her person, in her cheeks; her skin, her complexion, greatly improved---clear, fresher' (p 158). Anne's renewed bloom and Wentworth's rediscovery of his love, and Mrs. Smith's connective narrative, draw a resolving strength from the past to bring about the happy denouement. Jane Austen emphasizes the importance of this process several times. For example, when Mr. Elliot admires Anne at Lyme, Wentworth gives a look which says: 'even I at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again,' (125) and later, when they are declared lovers for the second time, he declares that 'to my eye you could never alter' (245).

So, the connection between the present and the past is interpreted quite rationally. First, there is a rational response to the chance which brings Anne and Captain Wentworth into each other's company again. Anne thinks it 'absurd' to feel or expect anything.

What might not eight years do? Events of every description, changes, alienations, removals—all

must be comprised in it the oblivion of the past
- how natural, how certain too (85).

Captain Wentworth comments on the coincidence which brings them their second chance at happiness: Anne was 'thrown in his way' (244) and Anne finds his apparent indifference 'of sobering tendency' because it helps her to control the 'folly' of her hopes when they meet again. Rationally, then, seven or eight years are a long time, and a great deal of change will have taken place. Their meeting again is mere chance: no expectations can be built upon it. Jane Austen treats romantic idealism with her radical stand as is found in the 21st chapter of the novel:

Frettier musings of high wrought love and eternal constancy, could never have passed along the streets of Bath, than Anne was sporting with from Camden Place to Westgate Buildings. It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way. (p 200)

The author's amusement suggests the paradox and absurdity that a subjective emotion might be strong enough to purify the aggravating chaos. In *Persuasion* the theme of time has overtones of irrational absurdity. The workings of chance

bring the past to refresh the present and Jane Austen hints at a further transformation of life. Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth have an opportunity to relive their lives, to correct their mistakes. *Persuasion* actually puts forward Jane Austen's disavowing something of her earlier writings. It is through change of mind Lady Russell had been 'pretty completely wrong' (251). By such an examination we come to know that Austen changes her assessment of manners in an individual so radically. This very fact has very nicely been enunciated in her earlier novel *Mansfield Park*. Jane Austen writes about subjective experience in her *Persuasion*. She continues to do it beautifully. Anne's nervous impatience, her acute state of suspense is beautifully countered within her own consciousness by her mature knowledge that she and Captain Wentworth must eventually make their feelings known.

The strong contrast between worldly vanity on the one hand and an exemplary train of thought on the other, is quite as marked in *Persuasion* as in *Mansfield Park*. Anne's pain at the vanity, selfishness, and inutility of her father and sister have to be lightly touched upon. This is because a daughter's denunciations would hardly be in good taste. But Jane Austen's severe handling of the baronet comes as near

to social criticism as anything she ever wrote . The comparison, she makes between an idle, useless 'gentleman' proud of his rank, and the eminently useful sailors, has been a notable example of Jane Austen's willingness to be a radical.

In her last years, Jane Austen was very much ready to find fault with the aristocracy and she was touched by Evangelical influence. The Evangelicals were dedicated critics of moral backsliding among the governing classes. The two most powerful intellectual movements of Jane Austen's times were Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism .The movements, though antipathetic in some areas, are essentially of the middle class. The movements see the individual's life in society as rightly active and useful and therefore dislikes the idleness implicit in a pastime like play-acting, or in a life like Walter Elliot's. It is true that Evangelicals also recommend that individuals should inwardly experience a change of heart, in order to arrive at a private spiritual state which is elevated and intense. But this is certainly not meant to apply doubt of the value of a life led effectively in society. On the contrary, it is meant to enable society's natural leaders to do their duty better. Jane Austen's plots express a

typical middle-class ethic of the day. When her principal characters experience an inward reform-as, in each of the novels, some of them do-it is so that they can see their way to a marriage promising continued self-discipline and a higher commitment than ever before to service to the community. Those marriages that conclude the Austen novels imply a great deal more than the routine comic resolution. This is because in all the maturer novels there is a morally dominant partner e.g., Anne to guarantee that the life to come is to be one of duty and service. If Fanny Price's inner life is a silent rebuke to Sir Thomas Bertram's failed leadership, or Anne's to her father's, the form of each novel makes it clear that Jane Austen looks to a new generation of leaders who are on the point of redeeming the mistakes of the old.

Jane Austen's is domestic fiction of private lives, whose 'truth' lay in its aesthetic and moral realism, its ironic, unsentimental acceptance that 'man's inhumanity to man' can take place between two women in a Regency drawing-room as cruelly and destructively to the human spirit as the actual wounding and cruelties of the man's world of real conflict and aggression. In Jane Austen's art (novel) there is the reconciliation of the greatness of her achievement

with the minuteness of her fictional scene—its tight focus on the middle-class gentry, predominantly the lesser country gentry; its persistent 'commonplaceness' in the context of the everyday facts of every day life. Sir Walter Scott found Jane Austen involved in creating fiction which imitates ordinary, verifiable reality, which succeeds in remaining faithful to the characters, events and situations in 'the current of ordinary life' and where the 'dramatis personae conduct themselves upon the motives and principles which the reader may recognize as ruling their own and most of their acquaintances'. Jane Austen is anti-romantic in the fact of her realism. Scott identified in Jane Austen the 'modern novel.'

In *Persuasion* critics have fastened upon human qualities and have also explored their feeling that in telling the story of Anne's suffering in love, her endurance, disappointment and resignation, Jane Austen was drawing upon experiences of her own. In this light, of the six novels, *Persuasion* is seen as the most intensely personal and the one closest to the author's inner world of emotion. Virginia Woolf regarded *Persuasion* as a transitional work, a stepping away from her established style of fiction, and

also a movement away personally from former stance of reticence:

There is an expressed emotion in the scene at the concert and in the famous talk about woman's constancy which proves not merely the biographical fact that Jane Austen had loved, but the aesthetic fact that she was no longer to afraid to say so (1987, 138).

Austen from the outset took on the materials which political controversy endowed with such importance, without inviting or aggravating partisan impulses. During a time when all social criticism, particularly that which aimed at the institution of the family in general and the place of women in particular, came to be associated with the radical cause. Austen defended and enlarged a progressive middle ground that had been eaten away by the polarizing polemics born of the 1790s.

Jane Austen's reputation has been secure since the mid nineteenth century. She has remained one of the great anomalies of literary history. She, actually, appears to us in a number of contradictory guises—as a great artist

oblivious to her times, as a self-effacing good aunt, unconscious of her art,' (Claudia L. Johnson, 1990,XIII).

The fact that Austen is a female novelist has made assessment of her artistic enterprise qualitatively different from those of her male counterparts. Because of it, she has been admitted into the canon on terms which cast doubt on her qualifications for entry and which ensure that her continued presence there be regarded as an act of gallantry. In fact, a consciousness of how the private is political, and a sensitivity to the problems women writers encounter living and writing in a male-dominated culture, can provide us with special grounds for a historical understanding of Austen's work. However, the special brilliance of *Persuasion* depends partly on its combined focus on the private experience of a sharply imagined individual and the social actualities that necessarily inform individual experience. Indeed, behaving like the very model a well-bred spinster, Jane Austen nonetheless vibrates with passion and like a true radical in the perspective of a changing society preserves a will of her own.