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Beyond the Pages: The Significance of the Social Self Proposed in Jane Austen's
Persuasion

by

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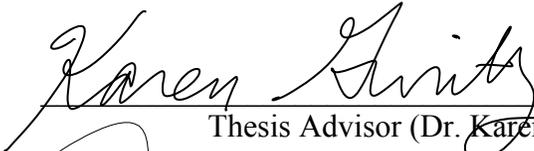
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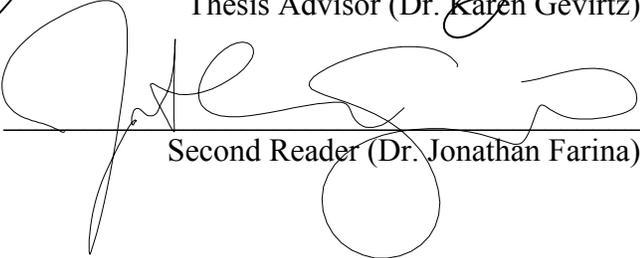
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Beyond the Pages: The Significance of the Social Self Proposed in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*

Introduction

Written in the years leading up to her death and published posthumously in 1817, Jane Austen's *Persuasion* is the subject of scholarship ranging from feminist to post-colonial to cultural studies approaches. Some feminist readings of *Persuasion* include Susan Fraiman's "Feminism Today: Mothers, Daughters, Emerging Sisters," Susan Morgan's *Character and Perfection in Jane Austen's Fiction*, Carol Singley's "Female Language, Body, and Self," and Claudia Johnson's *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*. Texts such as these discuss aspects of Austen's oeuvre, particularly *Persuasion*, in a feminist context. Other scholarly work with a focus on class and post-colonial readings include Monica Cohen's "Persuading the Way Home: Austen and Married Women's Professional Property," Maaja A. Stewart's *Domestic Realities and Imperial Fictions*, and Brian Southam's *Jane Austen and the Navy*. Each of these texts provides commentary and insight on Austen's depiction of certain classes and professions such as the aristocracy and the Navy. Many of these texts also explore the parallels between the treatment of the Navy and the treatment of women during Austen's time. It is through the cultural studies of *Persuasion* that many of these theoretical schools of thought come together. Works such as Alistair Duckworth's *The Improvement of the Estate*, Jan Fergus's *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, and Adela Pinch's

Strange Fits of Passion all focus on different aspects depicted in *Persuasion* and the way in which those aspects affect society.

A major debate amongst scholars concerns whether Jane Austen is a Romantic author. While some scholars argue that Austen is not a Romantic writer because her ideology aligns with eighteenth-century ideas more so than the Romantics, other scholars argue that she wrote during the Romantic period and regardless of her ideology, because of the time in which she was writing she is a Romantic. These debates lead to more questions and concerns not only regarding Austen but also the Romantic period as a whole such as what “romantic” means, how “romantic” is used, and what characterizes the “romantic” period. Focusing on *Persuasion*, this paper situates Austen against the Romantics on an ideological level.

In particular, Jane Austen’s novel *Persuasion* rejects the Romantic notion of the self defined by individualism and contends that such a notion of the self contributes to the breakdown of society. Instead of the Romantic self, with its emphasis on self-examination, retrospection, and emotion, Austen advocates for an older notion of the self, a view based in eighteenth-century notions of social networks, mutual responsibility, and the moral function of emotion. *Persuasion* links Romanticism’s self, which was popular at the time that Austen was writing, with the breakdown of society, arguing that not just social stability but much-needed social vitality depends on the interdependence and outward-looking self of early sensibility and sentimental fiction. Austen is aware of the way in which the self can break down or build a society and she uses *Persuasion* to criticize the way in which the Romantic self contributes to the destruction of society and to propose an alternative to the Romantic self—the social self.

Romanticism

When it comes to Romanticism, scholars continue to debate definitions of the period, from the starting and ending dates to the primary ideologies to the meanings of the word “Romanticism” for people in the past and present. Whereas some scholars give rough approximations of the Romantic period’s span, other scholars provide an exact range of years to define the era. In “Romanticism: The Brief History of a Concept,” Seamus Perry provides a general definition of the Romantic period. He claims it is “a literary-historical classification which labels certain writers and writings of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and the ideas characteristically found in those works” (3). Unlike Perry, Anne K. Mellor and Marilyn Gaull both choose specific, although different, years to capture the span of the Romantic period. Mellor does not explain why she chooses these specific dates, since her book is less concerned with describing Romanticism as it is discussing the relationship between romanticism and gender. In her introduction, she poses the question: “What happens to our numerous women writers who produced at least half of the literature published in England between 1780 and 1830” (*Romanticism* 1). In *English Romanticism*, Marilyn Gaull declares that the Romantic period began in 1789 with the storming of the Bastille: “The storming of the Bastille in 1789 and beheading a king signified the renovation of the entire world, the beginning of a reign of peace and prosperity” (4). She continues, “The collapse of the French Revolution in 1793 initiated a moral and intellectual crisis from which many never recovered, one that irrevocably altered the political ideals of English radicalism” (4). In addition she declares, “1837, the year Victoria ascended the throne unofficially ending the Romantic period” (285). Gaull’s choice of the word “unofficially” indicates that she subscribes to two definitions of the end of the Romantic period (285). The first end date is 1837, when Queen Victoria begins her reign, starting what scholars

declare the Victorian Era. However, Gaull's assertion also suggests that, in her opinion, Romanticism trickled into the Victorian period.

Regardless of these disagreements about time, scholars do agree on certain key interests of Romanticism. According to Gaull, Perry, and Jerome J. McGann in *The Romantic Ideology*, the interests of Romanticism include the Romantic self, interiority, experience, memory, and nostalgia. Unlike the eighteenth century, which valued the collective or social self of the Enlightenment, Romanticism valued the individual. Dror Wahrman's *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* explains the key differences between the two versions of the self and how the definition of the self changed over time. He refers to the phase of the eighteenth-century self, the period in which people subscribed to this notion of the self, as the "*Ancien Regime*," as opposed to the "Modern Regime of Selfhood" to which Romanticism belongs (xiii; 265). In describing the eighteenth-century self he notes, "The agency offered by masquerade characters, the role of clothing in constituting identity, the generic representation of a group of individuals, the absence of commitment to the depths of selfhood" all contributed to the pre-romantic self (181). The self was not defined by its inner depths but by the social and outside world. He continues:

Furthermore, even the letter form of a novel like *Pamela*, a form that latter-day critics have often read as offering intimate glimpses into individual psychology, was in fact, as Carol Kay has argued, not an unmediated window into personal inner depths but rather a *social* performance whose addressees stood for 'representative social authorities'. In short, the function of character in eighteenth-century literature and arts—what Lynch calls the '*pragmatics* of character'—was primarily not about depth but about 'legibility and replicability'. It therefore stood in sharp contrast—not continuity—with the

expanded inner lives of fictional characters in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (182; original emphases)

This social performativity was critical to the understanding of the eighteenth-century self, a self that the poetic Romantics outright reject. As Wahrman claims, the eighteenth-century self is very much concerned with sociability in terms of the development of relationships between people, interactions, and performances.

In contrast, the twentieth-century Romantic notion of the self was concerned with interiority (twenty-first century conceptions of the Romantic self shifted to a much more amenable social ideal). According to Wahrman, traits including “the characterization of self in terms of psychological depth; the emphasis on human difference and individuality; the rekindled interest in innate, intuitive, and instinctive traits or behaviors; the developmental perspective on human growth” were central to the development of Romantic notions of the self (290). Anne K. Mellor summarizes Romantic philosophy in “Why Women Didn’t Like Romanticism: The Views of Jane Austen and Mary Shelley.” She notes, “[W]e identify romanticism with the political doctrines of democracy and the rights of the common man, the assumption that every individual is born with an inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (“Why Women” 274-5). She then claims, “For the romantic poets, the assumption that the individual, rather than the state or society as a whole, was of fundamental significance meant that their poetry was concerned above all with describing the nature and growth of the individual” (“Why Women” 275). The Romantic poets’ perception and examination of one’s inner life as a way of advocating the philosophy of life, liberty, and happiness, does not do what it sets out to do. In other words, Romantic poets cannot advocate the values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness because they are consumed with what is beneficial for the individual self rather than

for a collective whole. The excess of interiority further separates these poets from socio-political and socio-economic concerns. Their excessive self-reflection becomes self-absorption, which leads to a society based on subjective morals and desires instead of moral truths and the building of a community.

The major male Romantic poets such as Byron, Walter Scott, Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Coleridge all helped construct a notion of—and the social value of—a self based on interiority, thus emphasizing the value of experience. Gaull writes:

The poets' concepts of imagination placed priority on subjective experience, the binding truths to be found in the inner life, the laws of growth, the demands of creativity, the individualism that comes from believing, as Wordsworth did, that all 'genuine liberty' is within. The evolving political theory, the people and events that generated it, were antithetical to such 'genuine liberty,' for the ideal of more freedom for more people involved systems that would ultimately deprive some people of the freedoms, the private freedoms they already had. (110)

She later writes, “[T]he exploration of memory and the inner life released the creative energy that was a genuine source of freedom in a deterministic world” (Gaull 289). However contrary to Gaull’s understanding, this so-called “freedom” that she mentions is idealistic (289). Through the authors’ concerns with their inner life, these poets produced nostalgic literature. They looked towards their past as “prisoners of ... history” (293). Their “[r]elief [was] found in recollection, in memory, [and] in the reconstruction of the past as an act of will” (293). The romantic characteristic of interiority contributed to a new notion and a particularly Romantic notion of the “self.”

Another characteristic of Romanticism that aligns with the internalization of experiences is memory. The recollection of memory becomes a kind of self-reflection that is prominent in Romantic works. By recollecting, memories become nostalgia. Nicholas Dames defines nostalgia as:

[A]n absence; what it lacks is what, after the formidably canonical psychologies and fictions of late nineteenth and early twentieth century, has come to be regarded as memory in its purest form....Nostalgia is as much self-definition as memory; it consists of the stories about one's past that explain and consolidate memory rather than dispersing it into a series of vivid, relinquished moments, and it can only survive by eradicating the 'pure memory,' that enormous field of vanished detail, that threatens it. (4)

Gaull acknowledges this use of nostalgia: "One common theme was nostalgia for the time in childhood before character was irrevocably established, when sensations were especially vivid" (293). Gaull's notion of nostalgia is very specific; she declares the recollection of childhood experiences as the primary kind of nostalgia. While childhood nostalgia was the primary form of nostalgia, nostalgia of other stages in one's life also surfaces in Romantic texts. Wordsworth, for example, recalls moments from his childhood as well as his adulthood.

Romantic interests surface in various ways throughout the period. A look at the titles of books published during this time serves as a primary example of the ways in which literature focused on interiority and the self. For example, Maria Edgeworth's *Practical Education* (1798), *Moral Tales* (1805), and *Ennui* (1809); Frances Burney's *Evelina: Or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) and *Camilla: Or, A Picture of Youth* (1796); Charlotte Smith's *Minor Morals* (1798); and Mary Brunton's *Self Control* (1811) and *Discipline* (1814) all

capture the focus on observation and reflection of behavior. With attention fixated on the development of the individual, as these titles show, there was more value placed on the individual self as opposed to the social self during the Romantic period.

Wordsworth's poetry capture Romantic values, especially the value of interiority, during this time. Throughout *The Prelude*, memories and the re-experiencing of memories provide a definition of the self for Wordsworth. For Wordsworth, nature is an important factor in drawing on and recalling memories in order to participate in the examination of the inner self. In his 1850 edition of *The Prelude* Wordsworth depicts a calming kind of penetration from the breeze, which appears natural. At the beginning of book one he writes, "O there is blessing in this gentle breeze, / A visitant that while it fans my cheek / Doth seem half-conscious of the joy it brings" (Wordsworth 1.1-3). A few lines later he writes:

[M]y body, felt within
 A correspondent breeze, that gentle moved
 With quickening virtue, but is now become
 A tempest, a redundant energy. (1.34-37)

The breezes are not only a way for one to experience feeling, both physically and emotionally as they are depicted as carrying emotion with them, but also they represent a kind of nostalgia and re-readability. The "breeze" constantly surfaces and the resurfacing of the breeze as a theme in *The Prelude* suggests continuous motion. Although breezes can move in all directions, the breeze of Wordsworth helps trigger memories of his past. Nostalgia naturally calls for re-readability as to reminisce requires going back and reflecting on one's experience, life, and words.

Wordsworth is concerned with his personal, internal history. In book one he states, "Remembering the bold primes of the past, / Would gladly grapple with some noble theme, ... /

Impediments from day to day renewed” (1.128-131) The words “remembering” and “renewed” both suggest continuous nostalgic feeling and the importance of memory (1.128;131). In book two, the breezes that he invokes are “internal breezes” as he concerns himself with sensations and feeling (2.122). This return and re-collection of memories and the anxiety of forgetting, intensifies his need to repeatedly look back that embodies the self of interiority prominent throughout the Romantic period.

Wordsworth emphasizes a need to go back and continuously reflect on oneself. He uses “breezes” in order to suggest a kind of reflection as breezes and winds can move in all different directions. Since Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* is entirely autobiographical, he is not necessarily concerned with making or creating meaning from his past events, but proving that these events are meaningful. He claims, “There are in our existence spots of time / ... such moments / are scattered everywhere” (12.208; 223-4). These “spots of time” are critical to understanding the Romantic self. It is these “spots of time” and memories that contribute to one’s identity and existence. One is defined not by his or her experiences, not by the social performances, but by memories of those moments. It is through the re-readability of one’s own life that one is able to exist. In book two he declares:

Hard task, vain hope, to analyse the mind,
 If each most obvious and particular thought,
 Not in a mystical and idle sense,
 But in the words of Reason deeply weighed,
 Hath no beginning. (2.229-232)

In other words, one cannot reason or make meaning of memories and experiences of the past. Meaning is not only synonymous with the memory but also existence is synonymous with and

dependent upon the memory as well. For Wordsworth, there is no such thing as too much self-reflection. Wordsworth believes that moments are meant to be recalled constantly, which in a way displays a drive for self-improvement. This desire for self-improvement is exemplified in his constant editing of *The Prelude*, resulting in four different editions. Wordsworth believes in re-readability for the sake of feeling and re-experiencing emotions. For Wordsworth, one comes to know oneself by going through a constant cycle of re-experiencing certain emotions.

Wordsworth is only one of many Romantic writers who perceive the self as individualized. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" captures the romantic notion of the individual and interior self. The subtitle introducing the poem, "Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment" states that the poem takes place internally—within the mind of the poet's subject. However, Coleridge indulges in this interiority as the subtitle notes. The poem consists of double interiority. It is a "vision"—something already not grounded in the material, external world (Coleridge). Yet because it is a "vision in a dream," Coleridge suggests the poem takes place in the "in" (Coleridge). The poem occurs not just within the interior, but also within the interior of the interior. Additionally, the note "a fragment" suggests that what is present in this poem are only bits and pieces—part of a whole (Coleridge). This poem is structured as a piece of a whole—a memory. The poem functions similarly to the "self" since the self is fragmented because the self is comprised of memories and experiences that are recalled and therefore re-experienced, just as Wordsworth suggests in *The Prelude* as well. The value of interiority is at the onset of the poem.

Throughout the poem, Coleridge's use of certain words also suggests his value of the self defined as an individual and interiority. He writes:

A damsel with a dulcimer

In a vision once I saw:

It was an Abyssinian maid
 And on her dulcimer she played,
 Singing of Mount Abora.
 Could I revive within me
 Her symphony and song.... (37-43)

The phrase “vision once I saw” displays a moment of recollection within the dream or hallucination (however one wants to interpret this episode) (38). The use of the word “revive” emphasizes the recollection and nostalgia, the interiority, which Wordsworth advocates in *The Prelude* (42). Like Wordsworth and many of his contemporaries, Coleridge also participates in the notion of an individual and interior self, a self that embodies the Romantic period’s assumptions regarding selfhood.

However, there are two primary conflicts with these ideas of the Romantic self. First, the focus on the notion of the self as individualistic and the emphasis on interiority did not relate to women well. In “Why Women Didn’t Like Romanticism: The Views of Jane Austen and Mary Shelley,” Mellor discusses reasons why women did not fit well with the notion of the Romantic self, causing them to create a different notion of the self. She claims, “In direct opposition to the romantic poets’ celebration of love, the leading women writers of the day urged their female readers to foreswear passion—which too often left women seduced, abandoned, disgraced...and pregnant, with only the career of prostitution remaining to them” (“Why Women” 281). Not only did women writers reject Romantic notions of the self but also those writers created alternative models of the self in their work. The second problem with the ideas of the Romantic self is that these ideas led to extreme versions, which is what many female Romantic writers seem to have rejected. Mellor notes, “In dialogue with these powerful male romantic voices we must now hear

other, female voices, voices that remind us that calm reason and the domestic affections may be necessary to preserve human society from a romantic idealism that might otherwise unleash, however unintentionally, a revolution with truly monstrous consequences” (“Why Women” 286). Mellor acknowledges that the excessiveness of Romanticism has negative consequences, although she does not go into detail about the specifics.

The excessive interiority, the overly self-reflective and nostalgic characteristics of Romanticism all contribute to the breaking down of society rather than maintaining or building up a society for the better as this paper will prove through the examination of *Persuasion*. In his discussion of Coleridge in his book *The Romantic Ideology*, Jerome J. McGann notes, “A most disturbing aspect of Coleridge’s later ‘allegorical visions’ is the fact that they are all self-absorbed and introspective works” (97). McGann’s use of the words “disturbing” and “self-absorbed” reveals his own view that the Romantic notion of the self as individualistic was also narcissistic as well. McGann continues, “One important feature of Romantic ideology...is the belief that poetical works can transcend historical divisions by virtue of their links with Imagination...central to this Romantic view is the idea that poetic vision is the *cor cordium*, the epipsyche, the final ground on which all other conceptual formations must depend” (100-1). With that being said, the poet’s consideration of the imagination and the parallel between being the ultimate poet and the ultimate creator is in itself narcissistic. Mellor says, “For the romantic poets, the creative powers of the human imagination are identical with the creative powers of the Infinite I AM; when inspired, the poet can imitate the works of God and create” (“Why Women” 275-6). It can be argued, then, that to align oneself with God is extremely narcissistic and egotistical. These extreme versions of Romanticism are due to the definition of the self as individualistic rather than a social self. With the self as a social being, comes the genuine care

and consideration of sociopolitical and socioeconomic concerns, rather than a closed-off and self-centered focus.

Sociability

The social self relies heavily on eighteenth-century philosophical debates regarding human nature and the role of government in society. Key contributors to these debates throughout the eighteenth century include Adam Smith and David Hume. Many of Smith's texts, especially *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, propose the idea that human beings are innately sensible, and that society and morality are based on humanity's innate sensibility. Smith's understanding and use of the word "sensible" is not synonymous with "sense" as in "common sense" or other words that suggest clarity "of the mind" such as "reason." Instead Smith understood human beings to be conscious of and dependent on their senses. Human beings sense things materially, emotionally, and physically. Smith and Hume's influences contribute to the development of eighteenth-century sensibility. In *Sentiment and Sociability* John Mullan claims that Hume, Smith, and like-minded philosophers "all are writers committed to the resource of a language of feeling for the purpose of representing necessary social bonds; all discover in their writings a sociability which is dependent upon the communication of passions and sentiments" (2). In other words, the development of sensibility focused on the involvement of emotions and feelings, but in a very specific way.

There are several components of sensibility significant to *Persuasion*. Sensibility is the notion that humans are conscious of themselves and the world. Morality is based on this sensibility. Because of their awareness of themselves and the outside world, human beings are innately sympathetic. This sympathy is the foundation for human society. Mullan writes, "Sympathy can be that which puts people 'beyond themselves' and which causes 'their very

looks' to be 'infectious'" (26). Sympathy is the concept that humans are capable of feeling what others are feeling even if they are not experiencing the same circumstances. Because human beings are sympathetic, they are able to connect with one another and create special social bonds.

Mullan continues:

Sympathy, which is the mutuality of 'affections', can bring people together, but there is always the risk that it can do so in the wrong way...The complexity of 'the society' alienates or confounds its members, who seek to satisfy their need for sociability by attaching themselves to partisan companies. The 'spirit of faction' stems from 'the abuse or irregularity of that social love and common affection which is natural to mankind'. (27)

As Mullan explains it, human beings are naturally sympathetic to one another, which is important because this sympathy and ability to understand one another's situations and feel what others are feeling helps build a society based on social responsibility and fosters a morally sound world. Although humans can genuinely care for one another, however, it does not mean that the world becomes a passive and non-confrontational place. Innate sympathy does not mean that people also do not have the ability to act maliciously or selfishly and it certainly does not mean that the world becomes a utopia. Instead, humans rely on their ability to sympathize in order to build society. Sympathy, which leads to the natural formation of social bonds, is the glue that holds society together. Mullan describes Hume's position: "[P]assions can represent not the divisive forces of private desires, but the very currency of sociability. Passion actually becomes interchangeable with a set of other terms—'feeling', 'affection', 'sentiment'—which constitute this currency" (24). Because sympathy allows people to relate to one another's situations, it influences others to act whether individually or on a social level. For example, the ability to

sympathize with a family friend suffering from cancer may lead someone to offer help or take them to their chemotherapy sessions. Sympathy in this situation leads to a very individualized response. However, sympathizing with a family friend who suffers from cancer may also lead to the development of an organization such as the American Cancer Society, which fundraises for cancer research. This kind of response based on one's sympathy has a social effect. According to sensibility and philosophers like Adam Smith, society depends on relationships and connections, which are developed through sympathy.

This understanding of human beings as sensible people generated sentimental fiction. Sentimental fiction reflects this view of human nature, but it also cultivates sensibility as well. In this regard, sentimental fiction can be considered didactic because it creates, evokes, and trains readers' emotions. Janet Todd notes in *Sensibility*:

The arousal of pathos through conventional situations, stock familial characters and rhetorical devices is the mark of sentimental literature. Such literature buttonholes the reader and demands an emotional, even physical response. The sentimental work reveals a belief in the appealing and aesthetic quality of virtue, displayed in a naughty world through a vague and potent distress. (2-3)

The "stock familial characters" include those whose actions are virtuous (Todd 2). For example, the depiction of characters helping others or behaving in a particular virtuous way are aspects of sentimental fiction that not only reflect the innate sensibility of human nature but also helps cultivate it as well. Todd continues, "In all forms of sentimental literature, there is an assumption that life and literature are directly linked, not through any notion of a mimetic depiction of reality but through the belief that the literary experience can intimately affect the living one. So literary conventions become a way of life" (4). In other words, reading a story about people acting in a

particular way influences one's behavior so that the readers in reality mimic the virtues and proper behavior of characters. Todd calls this influence "a kind of pedagogy of seeing and of the physical reaction that this seeing should produce, clarifying when uncontrolled sobs or a single tear should be the rule, or when the inexpressible nature of the feeling should be stressed" (4). Through the characterization of virtuous behavior in sentimental literature these types of behaviors inform readers and instill a desire within the reader to resemble or mimic that kind of behavior in reality, especially when displayed by the protagonist. One aspect of sensibility is the idea of sociability, which in simplest terms is the ability of people to contribute to society positively through contributing appropriately to social networks and reinforcing social bonds. Sociability is innate because human beings are innately sympathetic, which means they have the urge to form social bonds with one another. However, sociability is both a value and a skill. One must know how to behave in a group, how to take care of one's property, one's employees, one's family, and how to maintain a level of respect for oneself as well as others regardless of social position or occupation.

During the heyday of sentimental fiction, which according to Todd was between the 1740s and the late 1770s, novels focused on the sympathy and sociability of people and developing sociability as a skill and value (9). The later years of sentimental fiction and sensibility were overly performative and excessive. The focus of sentimental fiction shifted to an interest in the emotional life. Todd writes:

This fiction initially showed people how to behave, how to express themselves in friendship and how to respond decently to life's experiences. Later, it prided itself more on making its readers weep and in teaching them when and how much to weep. In addition, it delivered the great archetypal victims: the chaste suffering

woman, happily rewarded in marriage or elevated into redemptive death, and the sensitive benevolent man whose feelings are too exquisite for the acquisitiveness, vulgarity and selfishness of his world. (4)

This is not to say that sensibility and sentimental fiction initially were consumed with emotional excess. Rather, a later movement of sentimental fiction paid particular attention to the fascination with one's emotional life. This fascination manifests itself throughout the end of the eighteenth century and into the Romantic period. At this point the individualistic self counters the social self because late sentimental literature and even Romantic literature fostered the value of reflecting the self only and emitting excess emotion. Jane Austen's novels, particularly *Persuasion*, provide a reaction against the individualistic self. As this paper will show, Austen views this deeply self-absorbed self as detrimental to the building and development of society as a whole, whether that is economically or politically.

***Persuasion*: Austen's Critique and Rejection of the Romantic Self**

Throughout *Persuasion* Jane Austen criticizes and rejects certain aspects of Romanticism that she associates with the Romantic self, such as self-absorption, nostalgia, and interiority. Austen embodies these qualities in Sir Walter Elliot, who she introduces at the beginning of the novel. By opening the novel with a description of Sir Walter, Austen critically comments on the period. The novel begins, "Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch-hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the *Baronetage*; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one" (Austen 3). The *Baronetage*, which Patricia Meyer Spacks mentions in her footnote to be "presumably J. Debrett's *Baronetage of England* (1808)", is a book that catalogues the British nobility and provides both a genealogical and historical account of the family history for upper-class families (Austen 3). The *Baronetage of*

England essentially gives noble families an identity amongst others in society. Therefore, it can be associated with the social self that Austen seems to advocate throughout her novel. In addition, it includes the feudal mottoes belonging to a family with a coat of arms, and shows connections between families as well whether through marriages or other kind of relations.

However, Sir Walter's use of the Baronetage is self-gratifying. The way in which Sir Walter uses it for "his own amusement" suggests that he is less concerned with the social implications of the text and more concerned with the self-affirmation and pride that it gives him (3). In other words, the *Baronetage of England* reinforces a distinction between the common people of England and the upper class. According to Sir Walter, this distinction is something to be proud of. Austen, however, criticizes the obsession with lineage and the way Sir Walter uses the book. Sir Walter does not merely read it, he also adds to it. Austen writes, "but Sir Walter had improved it by adding, for the information of himself and his family" (3). Austen's use of the word "improved" suggests that Sir Walter not only finds the book insufficient but also is the only person who can accurately amend it (3). Austen finds no fault in reading the Baronetage per se, but she does criticize the way in which Sir Walter takes control and personalizes the book so that it is more about him. The way Sir Walter uses the Baronetage to create an image of himself reflects a self-absorbed man that is problematic for Austen. Sir Walter's pride in family genealogy is not about the obligations and duties that are associated with being an aristocrat. His pride is deeply personal. This very personal attachment to the book becomes evident as reading his pages are described as an "occupation" and even more so as "consolation," which suggests that Sir Walter's investment in and to an extent, obsession with the Baronetage is one of self-interest. It is interesting, then, that a book that displays a family's place within society fuels Sir Walter's self-absorption and pride.

Consequently, while Sir Walter's investment in the *Baronetage of England* looks like a social self, it is not. Instead, it is a way for him to indulge himself. His pride in his appearance is another extreme form of individualism. His pride and vanity go hand in hand. Austen writes, "Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and of situation. He had been remarkably handsome in his youth; and, at fifty-four, was still a very fine man. Few women could think more of their personal appearance than he did" (4). From the start, Austen describes Sir Walter in a way that suggests that the narrator and Anne find his behavior faulty. Sir Walter, on the other hand, thinks his behavior is exemplary: "He considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy; and the Sir Walter Elliot, who united these gifts, was the constant object of his warmest respect and devotion" (4). Sir Walter's vanity exemplifies a kind of narcissism and hypercriticism. Through the differing perspectives of virtuous behavior, which include Sir Walter's value in the overly self-absorbed and the narrator's criticism of such behavior, Austen challenges the way in which values of the Romantic self are perceived and shows them to be flaws instead.

Another way in which Sir Walter's pride in lineage looks like a social self but is not is in the way he judges others. For example, Sir Walter dismisses navy men because of the physical effects being at sea has on the body. He claims, "[A] sailor grows old sooner than any other man...[T]hey are all knocked about, and exposed to every climate, and every weather, till they are not fit to be seen" (15-6). It is true that the sun has negative effects on those who are constantly exposed to it and since sailors are constantly in the sun, Sir Walter's comments about a sailor's skin being affected are accurate. However, it is the attitude implied by his words that connote a negative judgment being passed. What he says is accurate of a sailor's life up until he says, "till they are not fit to be seen" (16). It is this statement that converts his statement from

observation to criticism. Claiming that sailors “are not fit to be seen” indicates that Sir Walter looks down upon the profession as a whole (16). Also he goes as far as supporting the refusal of their existence. Not being “fit to be seen” means one should not be seen, which means one is invisible (16). He does not just say that sailors are unattractive. He goes farther and criticizes their existence. What begins as a petty critique of appearance ends up being an attack on a sailor’s personhood. In addition, through his claim Sir Walter also poses himself as a contrast to the men in the navy. He is not damaged by the sun and is therefore worthy of being noticed. By introducing this kind of narcissistic character at the commencement of her novel, Austen leaves room for the deeper and more complex criticism she later provides of the development of narcissism and self-absorption through interiority and the notion of the Romantic self.

Austen uses Sir Walter’s relationship with the material aspects of his estate to display his self-absorption and its consequences. Admiral Croft says to Anne, “I have done very little besides sending away some of the large looking-glasses from my dressing-room, which was your father’s. A very good man, and very much the gentleman I am sure—but I should think, Miss Elliot...he must be rather a dressy man for his time of life. —Such a number of looking-glasses! oh Lord! there was no getting away from oneself” (90). This passage reveals how Sir Walter’s personality, as one who is self-absorbed, manifests in several ways. For example, the use of the word “some” and the phrase “such a number of looking-glasses” both suggest that there were more than one mirror in the dressing room; that Admiral Croft had to send away a good number and that there were still mirrors remaining within the dressing room and probably throughout Kellynch-hall (90). This overabundance of mirrors displays the extent to which Sir Walter is consumed with himself. Mirrors represent self-reflection and Sir Walter’s overabundance of mirrors represents an excessive form of self-reflection. This excessiveness of self-reflection

transforms into self-absorption and narcissism—it coincides with the Elliot vanity that the narrator describes early in the novel. In addition, Admiral Croft's use of the word "large" suggests that these particular mirrors were of large. Therefore, not only were "some of" the mirrors and "such a number of looking glasses" removed but also only the "large" ones were sent away. In other words, Sir Walter had many mirrors of varying sizes and Admiral Croft only mentions the ones that were in "my dressing-room" (90). The emphasis of the location along with counting words such as "some" and "number" capture the magnitude of Sir Walter's vanity. No matter where Sir Walter turns, the world can only reflect himself.

Admiral Croft's comments not only display Sir Walter's vanity but also how others perceive him as well. The use of em-dashes and an ellipsis when he says, "A very good man, and very much the gentleman I am sure—but I should think, Miss Elliot..." provides insight into how other people, such as Admiral Croft, perceive Sir Walter (90). The compliment of Sir Walter's gentlemanliness followed by an em-dash breaks the compliment. It suggests that although Admiral Croft does in fact perceive Sir Walter to be a gentleman, he also disapproves or finds faults with Sir Walter's lifestyle. The overabundance of mirrors suggests that Sir Walter is too busy looking at himself to take care of his estate. By keeping the mirrors within the house, Sir Walter either is oblivious to his social obligations or he outright dismisses it. This dismissal becomes apparent when Admiral Croft explains, "he must be a rather dressy man for his time of life" (90). Instead of stating that Sir Walter dresses well for his age, which would be a compliment, Admiral Croft calls him "dressy" (90). The use of "dressy" is somewhat condescending or critical since it places Sir Walter in a state of extravagance (90). Also, Admiral Croft's emphasis on Sir Walter's age, "for his time of life," also provides insight into Croft's opinion that Sir Walter should dress more age-appropriately.

Sir Walter is interested in select aspects of the social self—the exchange of compliments, his physical features in comparison to others, his social status—but he is not interested in other aspects such as his obligation to his family and estate, or generosity and politeness to non-aristocratic folk. For example, “The Bath paper one morning announced the arrival of the Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple, and her daughter, the Honourable Miss Carteret...for the Dalrymples (in Anne’s opinion, most unfortunately) were cousins of the Elliots; the agony was, how to introduce themselves properly” (104). By associating himself with the Dalrymples, he is able to gain higher status and personal recognition. Therefore, Austen uses Sir Walter as an example of how the interiority and self-interest-ness of Romanticism can lead to the breakdown of society, rather than improving it.

In addition to Sir Walter, other characters such as Mary Musgrove and Captain Benwick exemplify ways in which Austen rejects or criticizes aspects of the Romantic self such as nostalgia, self-absorption, or interiority. Like her father, Mary’s self-absorption leads her to neglect her social obligations and connections to other people. These obligations include knowing how to behave in society and knowing how to take care of one’s property and family. Her negligence can be seen in the way she is only interested in her emotional gratification. She finds no difficulty in exploiting Anne so that she can achieve what she wants out of a situation and she has no trouble neglecting her son as long as she feels good. When Captain Wentworth first arrives at Uppercross, Mary manipulates the situation so everyone eventually yields to her wishes to not take care of her son, little Charles. Instead Mary leaves her son with Anne as he recuperates from a broken collarbone. Mary says to Anne, “So, here he is to go away and enjoy himself, and because I am the poor mother, I am not to be allowed to stir; –and yet, I am sure, I am more unfit than any body else to be about the child. My being the mother is the very reason

why my feelings should not be tried. I am not at all equal to it. You saw how hysterical I was yesterday” (41). Mary’s lack of commitment to her role as a mother becomes evident when she refers to herself as the “poor mother” (41). Instead of using another adjective such as “concerned,” “worried,” or even “caring,” using the word “poor” to describe her position captures Mary’s self-deprecation in order to avoid her motherly responsibility. A few lines later she claims, “I hope I am as fond of my child as any mother—but I do not know that I am of any more use in the sick-room than Charles...I have not nerves for the sort of thing” (41). Her use of the word “hope” suggests that Mary is not fond of her child. According to Austen, Mary, as a mother, should not only feel obligated to stay with little Charles but also she should want to stay and care for him. Also, this declaration reflects her position as a mother because she compares herself to other mothers. She hopes she cares about her child the way others do, yet the break in that sentence by the em-dash and the conjunction “but” both display that Mary does not (41). The sociability of the eighteenth century involves not merely human interaction but an understanding of how to properly behave in groups and what social obligations are tied to different roles. Mary’s inability to properly adhere to the social requirements of a mother displays a contrast to Austen’s social self.

Mary’s self-absorption causes her to act differently in various social settings, but always in a way intended to secure her as much attention and pleasure as possible. In the instance of her son, Mary prefers to be at the party as opposed to her son’s sick room because all of the action and gossip takes place there. However, when Louisa has her accident in Lyme, Mary is adamant about wanting to stay there instead of returning to Uppercross. At first, it is decided that Anne will stay at Lyme to help out in any possible way with Louisa’s recovery. After all, Anne was the first person to take action when Louisa fell. Austen writes, “Anne, attending with all the strength

and zeal, and thought, which instinct supplied, to Henrietta, still tried, at intervals, to suggest comfort to the others, tried to quiet Mary, to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth. Both seemed to look to her for directions” (80). It is because of Anne’s utility that her presence is needed at Lyme. However, Mary takes offense to the preference of Anne over herself. Austen writes, “When the plan was made known to Mary, however, there was an end of all peace in it. She was so wretched, and so vehement, complained so much of injustice in being expected to go away, instead of Anne...the change of Mary for Anne was inevitable. Anne had never submitted more reluctantly to the jealous and ill-judging claims of Mary; but so it must be” (83). The word “jealous” suggests that Mary’s desire to be the center of attention is extreme as it evokes such a strong emotion. Mary does not care about whether or not she can be useful to the circumstances. She is more interested in being at the heart of the commotion. She does not want to be removed from all that is going on.

Although Mary is interested in society, it is only to maintain her image. This self-absorption stems from the pleasure she gets from receiving attention. Without an audience, she is no one. When Anne first arrives at Uppercross, Mary is excited because she has another person who can give her attention and she scolds Anne for not giving her the opportunity to do so earlier. Her first greeting to Anne is, “So, you are come at last! I began to think I should never see you. I am so ill I can hardly speak. I have not seen a creature the whole morning” (27). Rather than being animated to see her sister, who she has not seen in some time, Mary makes Anne’s arrival about herself. Her desire to interact with others comes from her own desire for attention. She later says, “Oh! Anne, I am so very unwell! It was quite unkind of you not to come on Thursday” (28). Rather than embracing her sister, Mary is already performing for her audience, Anne. Anne counters Mary’s scolding by saying, “My dear Mary, recollect what a

comfortable account you sent me of yourself! You wrote in the cheerfullest manner, and said you were perfectly well, and in no hurry for me” (28). With that being said, Mary switches topics so that is about herself again, which suggests that she really does not care what Anne or anybody has to say. Instead she only cares about the attention she receives in any social setting. Mary claims, “Oh! well...but you have never asked me one word about our dinner at the Pooles yesterday” (29). Mary relies heavily on the pleasure she receives from being if not the center of attention, at least involved with the subject of attention. In this instance with Anne, Mary thrives on her sister’s direct notice.

Just like her father, Mary is concerned with rank to the point where she strains her family relations. She is critical of Charles Hayter’s rank in society, deeming him unfit to marry Henrietta. Mary claims:

I cannot think him at all a fit match for Henrietta; and considering the alliances which the Musgroves have made, she has no right to throw herself away. I do not think any young woman has a right to make a choice that may be disagreeable and inconvenient to the *principal* part of her family, and be giving bad connections to those who have not been used to them. And, pray, who is Charles Hayter? Nothing but a country curate. A most improper match for Miss Musgrove, of Uppercross. (55; original italics)

By questioning Charles Hayter’s identity and declaring he is “nothing but a country curate,” Mary demeans Hayter’s profession. Ultimately she is saying that he is nobody because his rank in society is so common. Later Mary claims, “[B]ut it would be shocking to have Henrietta marry Charles Hayter; a very bad thing for *her*, and still worse for *me*” (55, original italics). Mary is concerned not only with the effect that marrying someone of a more common social status would

have on a Musgrove but also with the effect it has on the way people will perceive her. The italicized emphasis on “*me*” captures Mary’s self-absorption. Just like everything else, Mary turns every situation to reflect on herself.

In addition, the moment in which Mary scolds Charles for obtaining tickets to a play on the same night that they are to dine with the Elliots and Dalrymples displays Mary’s concern with rank. Mary says to Charles:

Good heavens, Charles! how can you think of such a thing? Take a box for to-morrow night! Have you forgot that we were engaged to Camden-place to-morrow night? and that we were most particularly asked on purpose to meet Lady Dalrymple and her daughter, and Mr. Elliot—all the principal family connexions—on purpose to be introduced to them? How can you be so forgetful?
(158)

The phrase, “particularly asked on purpose,” suggests that Mary feels a certain specialized invitation to the dinner event with the Dalrymples (158). She does not view such an occasion as a regular dinner, but one in which her presence was specifically requested. Mary’s point of view is reinforced as she says, “on purpose to be introduced to them” (158). This moment is also another instance in which Mary prefers one social setting to another because of her own self-interest. The party with her father and Lady Dalrymple consists of people of a higher class and she wants to look good and make an impression on them instead of spending time with the others in her party. She is ready to perform for a higher society. It is in this way that although it appears she cares about the social self, she does not. She is only interested in the way she can benefit from what society has to offer. Austen is critical of this deceptive and feigned social self.

Captain Benwick also resembles Sir Walter in the sense that Austen criticizes his response and management of the things he reads. Sir Walter reads as a means of reflecting his narcissism. Benwick reads in order to indulge in his own feelings. He serves as a critique of the excessiveness that accompanies the Romantic self. Austen writes that Benwick:

[H]ad rather the appearance of feelings glad to burst their usual restraints; and having talked of poetry, the richness of the present age, and gone through a brief comparison of opinion as to the first-rate poets, trying to ascertain whether *Marmion* or *The Lady of the Lake* were to be preferred, and how ranked the *Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*; and moreover, how the *Giaour* was to be pronounced, he showed himself so intimately acquainted with all the tenderest songs of one poet, and all the impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony of the other. (72)

The description of Benwick initially by his feelings already suggests that he is defined by his emotions. Even further, his “feelings glad to burst their usual restraints” indicates that his feelings are excessive (72). The fact that his feelings going to “burst” from “usual restraints” means that he invests more in his emotional and thus, interior life than the average person (72). In addition, the use of “glad” suggests that he finds pleasure in this over-indulgence (72). The degree to which Benwick is invested in Romantic poetry displays his desire to consume himself with his emotional state. Words such as “tenderest,” “impassioned,” “hopeless,” and “agony” further capture Benwick’s emotional fascination (72).

The fact that the protagonist of the novel recommends that Benwick read less poetry and more prose exemplifies Austen’s criticism of the way in which Benwick uses these Romantic texts to reflect his own emotional state. Austen writes:

[Anne] ventured to recommend a larger allowance of prose in his daily study; and on being requested to particularize, mentioned such works of our best moralists, such collections of the finest letters, such memoirs of characters of worth and suffering, as occurred to her at the moment as calculated to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts, and the strongest examples of moral and religious endurances. (73)

Anne's recommendations do not ignore the emotional life of individuals as she provides "memoirs of characters of worth and suffering," which clearly involves a set of feelings (73). However, the ways in which these emotions are managed are to educate rather than to provide a means of indulging: "best moralists" and "examples of moral and religious endurances" captures the purpose of Anne's suggestion (73). Austen does not criticize the reading of texts preoccupied with emotion, but rather she proposes that there are proper and improper ways of using such texts. After Anne makes the suggestion, Benwick's "shake of the head" and "sighs" display his excessively emotional self (73).

In addition, although it initially comes as a surprise that Benwick and Louisa Musgrove are engaged toward the end of the book, the narrator's description of Benwick and Louisa perfectly match the two characters together and captures the essence of Benwick's overly emotional self, especially in comparison to the emotions of other characters, excepting Louisa. Austen writes:

Captain Benwick and Louisa Musgrove! The high-spirited, joyous, talking Louisa Musgrove, and the dejected, thinking, feeling, reading Captain Benwick, seemed each of them every thing that would not suit the other... She was persuaded that any tolerably pleasing young woman who had listened and seemed to feel for him,

would have received the same compliment. He had an affectionate heart. He must love somebody...of course they had fallen in love over poetry. (117-118)

Both Louisa and Benwick represent the lack of emotional management. Although Louisa is described with specific emotional adjectives, Benwick is still described as “feeling” (117).

Benwick’s indulgence in emotion serves not only as Austen’s critique of the need for some kind of emotional management but also of the way in which a deep investment in one’s emotions is a form of interiority.

Austen’s use of Captain Wentworth differs from other characters such as Sir Walter, Mary, and Captain Berwick. Whereas these characters display ways in which the Romantic self is bad because of its inability to foster a morally sound society, Austen uses Wentworth in order to show how people can transform. She uses his transformation to make a case for her own ideology—even if one is a Romantic self, one can find value in the eighteenth-century social self and change. Initially, Wentworth has a Romantic self. One way that he displays characteristics of the Romantic self is through his constant comparison to the past. This turn towards the past emerges when he encounters the Musgroves for the first time. Mary declares, “Captain Wentworth is not very gallant by you, Anne, though he was so attentive to me. Henrietta asked him what he thought of you, when they went away; and he said ‘You were so altered he should not have known you again’” (44). Deeming Anne “so altered” indicates that he has a point of reference of who Anne was prior to this moment and he is comparing. Rather than taking her for who she is presently, he compares her to her past self (44). The fact that he says he “should not have known you again” also suggests that he is referring back to their history (44). He knew her once before and now that he sees her again, he sees that she is altered so tremendously that she is almost unrecognizable, which suggests that she is so far removed from the lover she used to be.

Wentworth's constant referral to the past is a kind of indulgence in past memories. This indulgence shows an excess of a particular kind of feeling and ability—the inability to let go or a grudge of ill feelings. His concern with himself displays an inability to manage his emotions in a proper way. Instead, his ill feelings and dependency on other's opinions unmasks his self-absorption. Often his comments are subtle references to his past with Anne as he converses with others. For example, when he is walking with Louisa he says, "It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on" (63). This statement shows that Wentworth is thinking about the past. Wentworth's comment comes from an inability to let go of the past. He does not seem to have an issue with someone who is persuadable, but rather with someone who is "too yielding and indecisive"—someone who is too easily persuaded (63). There is no doubt that his opinion of his broken engagement serves as an influence of this opinion. The allusion to Anne becomes apparent as his conversation with Louisa continues and Louisa informs him that Charles proposed to Anne and Anne rejected him. Louisa claims, "[P]apa and mamma always think it was her great friend Lady Russell's doing, that she did not...she persuaded Anne to refuse him" (64). The fact that Lady Russell appears to be the reason for Anne's refusal of Charles' hand, whether it is true, further enforces two things. First, it strengthens Wentworth's view that Anne is too easily swayed. Second, it reinforces Wentworth's value for people who are firm. Wentworth's use of others to nurture his grudge against Anne for breaking their engagement reveals his self-absorption. He is so consumed with Anne's rejection that everything he does reflects the sting of the broken engagement.

However, the end of the novel displays a transformed Captain Wentworth, one who no longer is a Romantic self but a social self. By the end of the novel he understands his own social

obligations and his inability to adhere to those previously, two of which includes upholding a genuine appearance and treating people fairly. Wentworth says to Anne:

But I too have been thinking over the past, and a question has suggested itself, whether there may not have been one person more my enemy even than that lady? My own self. Tell me, when I returned to England in the year eight, with a few thousand pounds, and was posted into the Laconia, if I had then written to you, would you have answered my letter? would you, in short, have renewed the engagement then? (174)

When Anne confirms that she would have resumed her engagement to Wentworth if he had returned and asked for her hand a second time, Wentworth says, “It is not that I did not think of it, or desire it, as what could alone crown all my other success. But I was proud, too proud to ask again. I did not understand you. I shut my eyes, and would not understand you, or do you justice” (175). By admitting that he did think of asking Anne again and by admitting that he was proud, Wentworth acknowledges that he was too consumed with his own hurt feelings, too self-absorbed to take action and bring happiness to both Anne and himself. When he “shut [his] eyes” and “would not understand” Anne, he not only closed himself off from future possibilities but also failed to consider Anne’s feelings (175). He realizes the limitations he placed on their future. He goes on, “Six years of separation and suffering might have been spared” (175). He is not just thinking of himself, but he is also thinking of Anne. He does not say that years of suffering could have been avoided for him or for her. Instead he is now focused on the big picture, on the relationship itself.

In addition, the fact that he learns to value Lady Russell as a person and her role in society as an older woman and close family friend of the Elliots also shows his transformation

from a Romantic self to an eighteenth-century social self. Austen writes, “Lady Russell, in spite of all her former transgressions, he could now value from his heart. While he was not obliged to say that he believed her to have been right in originally dividing them, he was ready to say almost every thing else in her favour” (177-8). The end of the novel does not suggest that Wentworth fully agrees with Lady Russell’s advice. Instead, Wentworth at least understands Lady Russell’s concerns as a valued figure with a very distinct social role in relation to Anne. His understanding of Lady Russell’s social value displays his transition from epitomizing the Romantic self-absorbed self to openness towards the social self that Austen advocates. Unlike the other characters that Austen uses to draw attention to problems with the Romantic self, Captain Wentworth shows the significance of the social self. That significance is the power that comes with upholding social responsibilities and the positive effects the social self has on society.

Austen does not criticize the Romantic self solely through the development of characters. She also executes her rejection and critique in the narrative structure of the novel through her use of free indirect discourse. According to *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, free indirect discourse is defined as “A mode of presenting discourse, the thoughts or statements of characters in a work, that blends third-person narration with the first person point-of-view. Free indirect discourse combines elements of direct discourse and indirect discourse to give the reader a sense of being inside a character’s head without actually quoting his or her thoughts or statements” (190). In “Austen’s *Persuasion*,” Louise Flavin explains, “In its most complex forms, free indirect speech shows the polyvocality or ‘dual voice’ of character and narrator” (21). She continues to explain, “Because it is at times unclear whether the words are the character’s own or the narrator’s rephrasing with selection and deletion, the content of free indirect speech

has an ambiguous quality: the character may seem to be speaking on his or her own, while the narrator may in fact be undercutting the character through the means of presentation” (21). In other words, free indirect discourse blurs the line between the third-person narrative voice and a character’s voice. Rather than writing, “Anne and Wentworth used to be close, but now they are just like strangers,” which represents a third-person narrative point of view and instead of depicting Anne saying, “Wentworth and I are no longer as close to each other as we used to be,” which indicates direct discourse through dialogue, Austen combines the two. This combination is free indirect discourse. Austen writes, “They had no conversation together, no intercourse but what the commonest civility required. Once so much to each other! Now nothing! There *had* been a time, when of all the large party now filling the drawing-room at Uppercross, they would have found it most difficult to cease to speak to one another” (46). There are several signals of free indirect discourse. The use of exclamation points where they would otherwise be periods suggests a representation of the character’s emotions and thoughts. The text captures Anne’s passion and thoughts without directly quoting her. Also, the emphasis on words such as “*had*” displays the use of free indirect discourse because it is almost as if Anne is directly speaking, although she is not (46).

Free indirect discourse can be perceived as a kind of self-absorption because it prioritizes one character’s interiority over another, usually the protagonist’s inner thoughts. In *Persuasion*, Anne’s experiences are constantly communicated via free indirect discourse. The privileging of one character’s emotional experiences itself is a form of self-absorption because on a structural level, the narrative provides the character a means to self-reflect, constantly. As Wordsworth’s poems and Sir Walter’s character suggest, too much self-reflection indicates self-absorption. It is in this way that free indirect discourse can appear to align with the Romantic self.

Persuasion: Austen's Alternative to the Romantic Self

However, although Austen utilizes this narrative structure, through free indirect discourse she poses an alternative use of interiority that is acceptable because it is not excessive. She finds a balance between interiority of characters and of the third-person narrative. The narrative provides opportunities for other characters' voices to be heard. Mrs. Smith has the chance to express her feelings regarding Mr. Elliot's character. Mrs. Smith says, "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 feelings for others" (Austen 140). Although the access of Mrs. Smith's thoughts and feelings is not accomplished through free indirect discourse, her direct dialogue with Anne is one of several moments in which free indirect discourse is countered by other narrative forms.

When Austen does use free indirect discourse, with Anne as the primary proponent, Austen submerges the free indirect discourse among other narrative tools. When Anne first hears of Captain Wentworth's reaction to seeing her for the first time in eight years, Austen places her free indirect discourse between direct dialogue and third-person narrative. Austen writes, " 'It is over! it is over!' she repeated to herself again, and again, in nervous gratitude. 'The worst is over!'" (43). Although Anne repeats this phrase "to herself," Austen captures her thoughts in direct quotation. This narrative structure is not free indirect discourse, but it does create an opportunity for free indirect discourse to follow, and it does. Austen writes:

Soon, however, she began to reason with herself, and try to be feeling less. Eight years, almost eight years had passed, since all had been given up. How absurd to be resuming the agitation which such an interval had banished into distance and

indistinctness! What might not eight years do? Events of every description, changes, alienations, removals,—all, all must be comprised in it; and oblivion of the past—how natural, how certain too! It included nearly a third part of her own life. (44)

This passage uses free indirect discourse because it expresses Anne’s train of thought without actually quoting her and without merely summarizing those thoughts. The built up emotion is captured through the various exclamation points. Also, the em-dashes mimic the way in which Anne is thinking because they stand in for the pauses before a burst of ideas flow to mind.

Another example of Austen’s use of free indirect discourse, couched between dialogue and third-person narrative is when she is at the play in Chapter XX. First Anne and Captain Wentworth have a brief interlude and then Austen describes:

Jealousy of Mr. Elliot! It was the only intelligible motive. Captain Wentworth jealous of her affection! Could she have believed it a week ago—three hours ago! For a moment the gratification was exquisite. But alas! there were very different thoughts to succeed. How was such jealousy to be quieted? How was the truth to reach him? How, in all the peculiar disadvantages of their respective situations, would he ever learn her real sentiments? It was misery to think of Mr. Elliot’s attentions.—Their evil was incalculable. (135)

Again, the exclamation points and em-dashes suggest that Austen is using free indirect discourse. But also, words such as “peculiar disadvantages” and “misery” exemplify Anne’s opinions (135). Even more so, the sentence “Their evil was incalculable” represents an extreme opinion—one that is too heavily invested in the character’s mind to be the narrator’s third-person perspective. Directly following this passage, the narrative switches into third-person narrative. By placing

Anne's thoughts within the context of other narrative structures, Austen proposes an alternative to what appears to be a self-absorbed narrative tool. Although free indirect discourse does provide access to Anne's interiority, it is the way Austen manages this structure that displays her ability to balance the narrative on a structural level. Just as Austen does not criticize Sir Walter for reading the Baronetage or Captain Benwick for reading poetry but does criticize their management of and use of these books, she mimics this criticism and presents an alternative on a structural level. As a result, the book provides insight not only into Anne's life but also into the lifestyles of many of the other characters.

Another way in which Austen proposes an alternative to the Romantic self is through Anne Elliot's character. Anne Elliot embodies the eighteenth-century social self and why this social self is significant to building a moral society. Some qualities that makes Anne represent the eighteenth-century social self include her acceptance of social responsibilities, her support for family members, friends, and community, and her ability to understand the importance of family rank without allowing her rank in society make her self-absorbed. Throughout the novel, Anne is constantly supporting her family. She makes up for Sir Walter and Elizabeth's lack of social responsibility. Whereas Sir Walter neglects the caring of his property, estate, and tenants, Anne displays her social responsibilities by taking care of the estate and following the proper protocol for moving away. Anne explains to Mary:

I have been making a duplicate of the catalogue of my father's books and pictures. I have been several times in the garden with Mackenzie, trying to understand, and make him understand, which of Elizabeth's plants are for Lady Russell...And one thing I have had to do, Mary, of a more trying nature; going to

almost every house in the parish, as a sort of take-leave. I was told that they wished it. But all these things took up a great deal of time. (29)

Although Anne must still care for her own personal duties such as preparing for her own private things to be packed and moved to Bath, she still finds the time to care for things that are technically the responsibilities of her sister and father. Sir Walter should be the one duplicating “the catalogue of my father’s books and pictures” in preparation for the move (29). They are, after all, his possessions.

Additionally, Anne displays characteristics of the social self through her support for her extended family members such as little Charles and Louisa. When her nephew breaks his collarbone, Anne is the one who stays with him as he recovers. She volunteers herself, “Leave little Charles to my care. Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove cannot think it wrong while I remain with him” (41). By taking care of her nephew, Anne displays her dedication to her extended family, another form of her social responsibilities. She is not his mother and yet she understands that someone must take care of him. Just as she compensates for the neglect and irresponsibility of Elizabeth and Sir Walter, Anne compensates for Mary’s lack of maternal responsibility as well.

Just as Anne takes care of little Charles in his time of need, Anne is also the one who takes action when Louisa has her accident and falls. Anne suggests, “Had not she better be carried to the inn? Yes, I am sure, carry her gently to the inn” (80). Her suggestion, which turns into an order as she switches from a question to a declarative statement, displays her ability to impact those around her. She is not consumed with her own fear or emotions from the accident. Instead she takes charge to ensure that Louisa is safe. She is able to manage her emotions and the situation by accepting her social responsibilities instead of giving into the chaos of the accident.

Anne not only displays her social obligations to her family but also to her family's dependents, including the extended community and tenants. She is the one who gives direction to the gardener, Mackenzie, at Kellynch-hall. This garden is not even Anne's but "Elizabeth's plants" (29). Anne's acknowledgement of these responsibilities and her ability to execute each responsibility displays her social self, a self that adheres to one's social roles. Also, even by taking the time to visit "every house in the parish" to properly say her good-byes extends Anne's understanding of her social role and dedication not just to her family life but also to her community (29). She does not neglect any of her responsibilities.

Other members of her community that Anne shows some kind of social obligation to are the Crofts. Whereas Sir Walter and Elizabeth remove themselves to Bath without maintaining some form of relationship to their tenants, Anne communicates with them often enough. When Anne visits the Crofts with Lady Russell, Lady Russell worries that Anne will suffer from seeing her home rented out by other people. However, Anne assures her that she is quite thankful. Austen writes, "[F]or she had in fact so high an opinion of the Crofts, and considered her father so very fortunate in his tenants, felt the parish to be so sure of a good example, and the poor of the best attention and relief" (88). The fact that Anne is able to speak so highly of the Crofts displays her willingness to get to know them and not automatically perceive them as inferior to her. She does not see them as beneath her because they are renting out their home from her. Instead, she is able to treat them as equals. Her ability to do so, displays her acknowledgement of her social responsibilities.

When it comes to rank, Anne differs from her father and sisters. Instead of being consumed with her image as part of a higher class, Anne is able to understand the importance of rank while at the same treating people fairly. For example, Anne does not dismiss her father's

dinner party, though she does admit that she would enjoy the play more. She balances out her desires with her social obligations. Anne says, "If it depended only on my inclination, ma'am, the party at home (excepting on Mary's account) would not be the smallest impediment. I have no pleasure in the sort of meeting, and should be too happy to change it for a play, and with you. But, it had better not be attempted, perhaps" (159). Her declaration that she has "no pleasure" in attending such dinner events and the fact that she states she would be "too happy" to alter her plans indicates that she has a strong opinion regarding the emphasis placed on being in the presence of people of a particular rank (159). And yet, Anne maintains composure and keeps her emotions in line. The excessiveness of being "too happy" is counterbalanced by her suggestion "it had better not be attempted" (159). Unlike her father, Mary, and Elizabeth who base their decisions on their own desires, Anne consults the rules of society. In this case, Anne believes in the importance of committing to original plans. Her ability to balance her emotions with her social responsibilities embodies her eighteenth-century social self as opposed to a Romantic self.

Anne's relationship with Mrs. Smith not only displays the way in which Anne adheres to her social obligations but also displays the way in which Anne embodies a social self that has a positive effect on society as a whole. When Anne makes plans to visit Mrs. Smith, she sticks to them regardless of her father's chastisement and criticism. He says, "Upon my word, Miss Anne Elliot, you have the most extraordinary taste! Every thing that revolts other people, low company, paltry rooms, foul air, disgusting associations are inviting to you. But surely, you may put off this old lady till to-morrow" (111). Anne responds, "I do not think I can put off my engagement, because it is the only evening for some time which will at once suit her and myself" (111). Anne's firm response to her father, declaring that she will visit her friend, who he thinks is too common to be associated with, displays her ability to treat others properly. She is not self-

absorbed and does not care about her rank, otherwise she would have cancelled her plans to visit Mrs. Smith to spend time with Lady Dalrymple. For Anne, adhering to original commitments is honorable, regardless of the rank of the person. One's obligation does not depend upon the person's status. Anne's social self allows her to break the barriers between social and economic statuses. In this way, Anne exemplifies the social self.

Although Anne may appear to be a push-over because she constantly takes care of others regardless of how she feels, she is not. She is not bullied into helping others. Instead, it is because she understands the importance of her social obligations that causes her to give aid and assistance, whether it is to her father's management of the estate or to her nephew and sister-in-law, Louisa. Anne's ability to manage the different aspects of her life makes her the ideal social self. Austen writes:

She was persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing—indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it. But it was not a merely selfish caution under which she acted, in putting an end to it. Had she not imagined herself consulting his good, even more than her own, she could hardly have given him up. —The belief of being prudent and self-denying principally for *his* advantage, was her chief consolation. (21)

Anne's decision, which was "not a merely selfish caution," and her willingness to put her own emotions aside and to consider what is best for Wentworth, displays her genuineness and concern for the way in which her behavior affects others (21). Her decision was not based on what was best for her but rather what was best for both of them. It is this consideration, the consideration of society as a whole and the effects that individual actions have on a community that Austen most values about the social self. Anne is able to consider how actions and attitudes

contribute to the moral development of society, through her consideration of other people and through her constant support to others.

Conclusion

Throughout *Persuasion* Austen suggests that the Romantic self causes people to create more division amongst one another. Just as Sir Walter demonstrates, the constant need for self-reflection becomes a narcissistic approach to life. In this sense, the world only reflects what the individual wants to see, his or her self. This narcissism builds walls between professions, family members, and socio-economic classes. The Romantic self withdraws from society and focuses only on the self and personal gain. Similarly, Mary's manipulation, self-centeredness, and over-concern for rank close her off from others as well. She is unable to contribute anything valuable to society. Instead, she helps to further segregate people from one another. Lastly, Austen's critique of the Romantic self through Sir Walter and Mary lead to the question of management. It is through her depiction of Captain Benwick that Austen addresses the challenges that the Romantic self faces. The over-indulgence and self-absorption of the Romantic self poses a threat to the moral development of society.

For Austen, it is the social self that allows for the possibility of a moral society. Social obligations are upheld, people tend to care about their property and family, and the barriers between ranks and professions are minimized. By advocating the eighteenth-century social self in *Persuasion*, Austen proposes an alternative to the cultural attitudes of her time. She is able to see the danger in an overly reflective society and amends the ideology, not completely ignoring or discrediting the significance of nostalgia but rather, she challenges the purpose and use of it and looking to the past. By rejecting the individualistic self of Romanticism, Austen recognizes

the sociological impact of the social self and how it helps move towards progress than destruction.

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