In Defense of Sensibility

Every reader of Jane Austen senses immediately that *Persuasion* differs in several ways from her other writings. Indeed the differences are so marked, and so tempting to explore, that I had better begin by saying what this last completed novel has in common with the earlier ones. *Persuasion* attacks egoism again, rewarding Anne Elliot's persevering unselfishness with a Captain Wentworth who comes gradually to qualify his emotional intensity and finally learns to see himself clearly. Through the theme of the novel, then, Jane Austen proposes the same values that she has championed from *Sense and Sensibility* on, and we shall find her relying on the same techniques that she has employed before. But *Persuasion* has its singularities. The most noticeable is its pervasive atmosphere, the atmosphere identified in one critic's description of the story as "purely a cry of feeling," and in the remark of another that the book contains Jane Austen's first sympathetic use of the word *romantic*.¹ *Persuasion* also diverges from the previous novels in that it vindicates completely what can only be called Anne Elliot's major intuitions, those regarding Captain Wentworth and William Elliot; it vindicates, that is, a mode of apprehension essentially emotional and intensely subjective. Finally, Jane Austen creates in Captain Wentworth a hero more vigorously emotional and more dominated by feeling than any other who appears within her work.

In its basic narrative *Persuasion* develops along the simplest lines. Captain Wentworth returns to Anne's neighborhood some seven years after she has been persuaded to break off her engagement to him, and he takes up with Louisa Musgrove, the first movement of the novel coming to a close with Louisa's
injury in the scene on the Cobb and Captain Wentworth's re-
awakening to Anne. In *Persuasion*'s final movement William
Elliot comes forward for a time to pay his attentions to Anne,
but she and the Captain at last reach an understanding and
renew the pledges given up in the past. The essential drama of
the story arises from Captain Wentworth's slowly altering feel-
ings toward Anne and resides in the gradual drawing together
of hero and heroine. He is, in fact, the only character in the
novel who undergoes any change. And for the most part we see
him, as we see the other figures and events in *Persuasion*, from
the perspective of a heroine who never changes fundamentally.

Both the qualities of Anne as a person and Captain Went-
worth's role as hero exert interesting pressures on Jane Austen's
handling of the point of view in this novel. Generally speaking,
of course, the author works here much as she has before, es-
ablishing many of the characters when they first put in an ap-
pearance, and taking over from Anne every now and then to
comment impersonally or ironically on the action. But we can
observe something unusual going on when Jane Austen intro-
duces the Captain. Plainly he must be a firmly sympathetic
character to have attracted Anne in the past, and he must be
kept so if they are to be finally united. Thus on our first sight
of him, the author is at great pains—even to the degree of
violating Anne's point of view—to qualify an apparently insult-
ing remark by him which has been reported to Anne, "You were
so altered he should not have known you again" (p. 60):

Frederick Wentworth had used such words, or something like
them, but without an idea that they would be carried round to
her. He had thought her wretchedly altered, and, in the first mo-
ment of appeal, had spoken as he felt. He had not forgiven Anne
Elliot. . .

He had been most warmly attached to her, and had never seen
a woman since whom he thought her equal; but, except from
some natural sensation of curiosity, he had no desire of meeting
her again. Her power with him was gone for ever. (p. 61)

If Jane Austen does not justify the offense she at least palliates
it. Clearly Captain Wentworth has spoken so vehemently be-
cause of his past (or present) feeling for Anne. Not until the author has spelled out this winning motive does she retreat from omniscience—at the "but" in the next to last sentence—to the dramatically ambiguous words of her close, which may tell the truth or mark Captain Wentworth's self-deception. Throughout the novel, however, his main fault lies in reacting so violently to having lost an Anne fully worth his love. And she herself can never be allowed to change in essentials, for it might cast some shadow over her original behavior in giving in to Lady Russell's persuasions against Captain Wentworth. Thus the chief characters severely limit Jane Austen's possibilities for a dramatic narrative. She does what she can by keeping Captain Wentworth himself pretty much in the background, except for speeches that refer only indirectly to Anne, and by confining us largely to the heroine, whose feelings are used by the author to obscure the reality of Captain Wentworth.

Jane Austen exploits the nature of Anne, especially, to create the modicum of suspense in *Persuasion*—and to lay the groundwork for the ambiguities that we will notice later on in what Captain Wentworth says. For instance, Anne interprets his reported refusal to breakfast at the house where she is staying as an absolute desire on his part "to avoid seeing her" (p. 59), even though she has earlier jumped at the chance to avoid him because of her own intense sentiment about their past, and even though his plans do necessitate a stop at her home. If Captain Wentworth relieves her of a bothersome child without comment, Anne cannot feel that he is as embarrassed as she is, but that "he meant to avoid hearing her thanks, and rather sought to testify that her conversation was the last of his wants" (p. 80). And when he maneuvers her into the carriage of the Crofts, the act must show a wholly negative kindness: "He could not forgive her,—but he could not be unfeeling" (p. 91). Such are the shifts which Jane Austen is put to in order to sustain the major drama in *Persuasion*, the breach between Anne and Captain Wentworth. The examples should suggest the very real technical difficulties that arise when the point of view is located in a heroine whose misinterpretations, necessary to keep the story going,
must never invalidate her significant intuitions, and when the main moral/emotional conflict is relegated to a hero in the middle distance.

The conflict of Captain Wentworth, at least the resolution of it, we shall come to in the final section of this chapter, where some dialogues saturated with metaphoric indirection will again be our main concern. But first we need a clearer understanding of Anne's nature, and this will involve us in looking at a number of the other figures in the novel.

The central issue of *Persuasion*, I take it, is the appropriate quality of feeling in the individual. This seems to me the point explored, for example, in Jane Austen's contrast between Captain Wentworth and William Elliot as rivals for Anne; or in the pitting of Anne against the field during the scene on the Cobb; or in the author's indications that the Captain does learn to judge his earlier behavior through courting Anne for the second time. It is Anne herself who provides the rich, the continuing instance of this appropriate feeling, much of the novel being devoted to recording her wonderfully sensitive responses to the world around her, and Jane Austen brings out Anne's nature by juxtaposing the heroine with several groups of characters of very different personal capacities.

One group consists of Anne's immediate family, or, to put it more accurately, that travesty of a family: her father—Sir Walter—and her two sisters, Elizabeth Elliot and Mary Musgrove. None of them pays the slightest attention to Anne as a person, for all three are obsessed with the matter of rank. Sir Walter may speak a trifle more sharply than the two daughters would when he propounds his case against the navy, but they rate the claims of social position—and of beauty, apparently its correlative—just as highly as he does:
I have two strong grounds of objection to it. First, as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of; and secondly, as it cuts up a man's youth and vigour most horribly; a sailor grows old sooner than any other man. A man is in greater danger in the navy of being insulted by the rise of one whose father, his father might have disdained to speak to, and of becoming prematurely an object of disgust himself, than in any other line. I shall not easily forget Admiral Baldwin. I never saw quite so wretched an example of what a sea-faring life can do—they are all knocked about, and exposed to every climate, and every weather, till they are not fit to be seen. It is a pity they are not knocked on the head at once, before they reach Admiral Baldwin's age."

Sir Walter's generalizations and particular terms, expressing his preoccupation with rank and his contempt with whatever does not fit in with his ideas, could easily be matched in the speeches of Elizabeth and Mary.

But it is more important to note that the concern of them all with social status is not the effect of even so dubious a motive as the love of tradition for its own sake. Rather, they are obsessed with rank because they are obsessed with themselves. In Sir Walter and Elizabeth, feeling seems almost to have atrophied, but what little remains, instead of flowing out, circles endlessly about the sense that each one has of personal superiority. Both of them retain just enough discretion, when speaking of themselves, to erect the slimmest façade of propriety. Thus Sir Walter will pretend that the ladies of Bath might have been admiring the features of his walking companion rather than his own (p. 142). In the same fashion, when it is suggested to Elizabeth that William Elliot has been begging for an invitation because he feels attracted to her, she pretends—toward the middle of her reply—that his regard is for her father:

“Oh! I have been rather too much used to the game to be soon overcome by a gentleman’s hints. However, when I found how excessively he was regretting that he should miss my father this morning, I gave way immediately, for I would never
really omit an opportunity of bringing him and Sir Walter together. They appear to so much advantage in company with each other! Each behaving so pleasantly! Mr. Elliot looking up with so much respect!"

. But, upon my word, I am scarcely sensible of his attentions being beyond those of other men.” (p. 213)

By using Sir Walter as a surrogate for herself, Elizabeth can attribute to William Elliot the intense emotion and the attitude of reverence which she believes define his reaction to herself. At the same time, especially in the first and last sentences, she declares her own detachment, that is, her superiority to William Elliot. For Elizabeth and Sir Walter, indeed, and in a sense for Mary as well, the appearance that they present to the world—or the appearance presented by anyone else—is the reality.

The feelings of Mary have not stagnated to quite the degree that those of her father and sister have, but they revolve as exclusively around her social position and herself. Her rhythms usually sound more relentlessly demanding than Sir Walter’s or Elizabeth’s. Yet her heritage reveals itself, when she tells Anne about going to a party, in Mary’s utter commitment to the appearances of rank, in her snobbish generalizations expressing private convictions, and in her disdainful particulars:

“One always knows beforehand what the dinner will be, and who will be there. And it is so very uncomfortable, not having a carriage of one’s own. Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove took me, and we were so crowded! They are both so very large, and take up so much room. . So, there was I, crowded into the back seat with Henrietta and Louisa.” (p. 39)

In short, Mary is as self-absorbed as her father or Elizabeth, as incapable of taking any personal account of Anne. All of them consider Anne merely as some sort of appendage to themselves, a fact sufficiently illustrated in Mary’s comment when her parents-in-law do not turn up immediately to greet Anne at Uppercross Cottage: “They ought to feel what is due to you as
my sister' (p. 40). In their emotional callousness, these Elliots differ from the sensitive Anne as night from day.

No one could complain that feeling does not flow in the Musgroves, the family into which Mary Elliot has married. They come on stage in force after Sir Walter and Elizabeth have departed for Bath, and they make up another group of figures used to differentiate Anne. For the Musgroves, though genial enough and far more warmhearted than the Elliots, are all rather self-centered, and the ladies, particularly, are prone to sentimentality. The real ruling passion of Charles Musgrove, the husband of Mary, seems to be sport, for it determines many of his judgments, even some of those in his other area of special interest, property and finance. He confidently decides, for example, that his cousin will not 'value' a new living "as he ought" because he is a man "too cool about sporting' (p. 217). Another of the financial opinions offered by Charles Musgrove reveals in a slightly different way his inability to get outside himself, for he speaks with the consciousness of being "an eldest son" in his own right when he approves of a marriage between his sister Henrietta and his cousin, Charles Hayter:

"It would not be a great match for Henrietta, but Charles you will please to remember, that he is the eldest son; whenever my uncle dies, he steps into very pretty property. I grant you, that any of them but Charles would be a very shocking match for Henrietta, and indeed it could not be; he is the only one that could be possible" (p. 76)

And if Charles Musgrove protests that his views are really uncolored by his private concerns—to Anne, of all people, who has just defended Captain Benwick as "an excellent young man"—the rest of the speech explodes his protest by showing him astride the hobbyhorse of sport again:

"Nobody doubts it; and I hope you do not think I am so illiberal as to want every man to have the same objects and pleasures as myself. I have a great value for Benwick" We had a famous set-to at rat-hunting all the morning, in my father's great
barns; and I have liked him the better ever since.” (pp. 218-19)

These quotations not only suggest the reasonably good-hearted egotism of Charles Musgrove; they also reveal a tendency in him toward emotional extravagance, in that some of the phrases seem more heightened than the local situation warrants.

His sisters are as generally well-disposed as he is, and similarly engrossed in themselves, but their talk sounds shriller than his, their high spirits bubbling out in one verbal extreme after another. In the following passage, Henrietta speaks of Lady Russell with lavish praise, but she is imagining how the interests of her own fiancé might be furthered by that lady:

“I have always heard of Lady Russell, as a woman of the greatest influence with everybody! I always look upon her as able to persuade a person to any thing! I am afraid of her quite afraid of her, because she is so very clever; but I respect her amazingly, and wish we had such a neighbour at Uppercross.”
(p. 103)

In the same fashion Louisa, caught up within her liking for Captain Wentworth, proclaims vehemently to him how highly she values the power of love: “If I loved a man, as she loves the Admiral, I would be always with him, nothing should ever separate us, and I would rather be overturned by him, than driven safely by anybody else” (p. 85). The instance that Louisa lights on to prove herself at the close is rather absurd, making the whole flood of feeling seem disproportionately energetic, in excess of what the context requires. The identical point is conveyed by her action during the scene on the Cobb, when Louisa childishlly indulges in her affection for the Captain by insisting that he jump her down the steps again—and falls when he misses his grip on her.

The same sort of sentimentality—the same excess of feeling, that is, relative to the occasion—crops up in some of the elder Mrs. Musgrove’s remarks and behavior. For instance, after Mrs. Croft has described her anxiety during one winter with Admiral
Croft away at sea, Mrs. Musgrove ejaculates: “There is nothing so bad as a separation. I am quite of your opinion. I know what it is, for Mr. Musgrove always attends the assizes, and I am so glad when they are over, and he is safe back again’ (p. 71). And surely the affair of her lamentations for “poor Dick” Musgrove—the worthless son, long dead, who had served with Captain Wentworth—is intended to emphasize the sentimental tendencies in Mrs. Musgrove. Although Jane Austen’s notorious attack on her “fat sighings” is indefensible (p. 68), and although the author handles the whole business about the mother and the dead son tastelessly, still the essential fact seems to be that Mrs. Musgrove’s present grief is disproportionate, and not simply to the character assigned “poor Dick.” For he has apparently popped into her mind only as a result of her hearing the name of Captain Wentworth, and we are told that her subsequent “reperusal” of her son’s letters has “thrown her into greater grief for him than she had known on first hearing of his death” (p. 51). A final point about Mrs. Musgrove: absorbed in her feelings for her son, she a little forgets what is due Captain Wentworth—for example, in calling him “such a good friend” of Dick’s (p. 66)—just as she has earlier neglected the claims of Mrs. Croft to press forward with her own in the italicized “I” of the quotation given above. Both the self-centeredness of Mrs. Musgrove and her self-indulgence are foreign to Anne’s nature.

Admiral Croft and his wife, whom we may take as roughly typical of the naval characters in *Persuasion*, mark another boundary of the story’s main issue. In terms of the narrative, their renting of Sir Walter’s home supplies Captain Wentworth with the chance to become reacquainted with Anne. As persons in their own right, however, the Crofts are neither so hard-hearted as the Elliots, nor so inclined to sentimentality as the Musgroves, but fundamentally sensible and bluffly emotional. With them the channels of feeling may be a bit crude, but the current runs straight, for the Crofts respond immediately to the claims of everyone, from the Elliots to the Musgroves. There is a touch of the parochial, of course, in their instinctive reliance on
naval figures of speech: “We none of us expect,” says Mrs. Croft, “to be in smooth water all our days” (p. 70). And though it happens to be the Admiral who speaks the words that follow, his wife often exhibits the same emotional vigor expressed here by his particular terms: “Here I am, you see, staring at a picture. But what a thing here is, by way of a boat. What queer fellows your fine painters must be, to think that any body would venture their lives in such a shapeless old cockleshell as that” (p. 169). Perhaps the robust feelings of the Crofts come through most clearly in their frequent generalizations, which declare their love for a way of life and for each other. “Never was a better sloop,” avows the Admiral, “than the Asp in her day.—For an old built sloop, you would not see her equal”; and after a moment he goes on, “What should a young fellow, like you, do ashore, for half a year together?—If a man has not a wife, he soon wants to be afloat again” (p. 65). Mrs. Croft affirms the same sort of convictions just as positively:

“When you come to a frigate, of course, you are more confined—though any reasonable woman may be perfectly happy in one of them; and I can safely say, that the happiest part of my life has been spent on board a ship. While we were together, you know, there was nothing to be feared.” (p. 70)

But this hearty openness should not suggest that we are to regard the Crofts as mere figures of fun, for their emotions do not prevent them from generalizing sensibly. Mrs. Croft can decide against “uncertain” engagements on perfectly practical grounds (thus to some extent validating, incidentally, Lady Russell’s original persuasion of Anne against Captain Wentworth, though Lady Russell was motivated by social prejudice as well): “To begin without knowing that at such a time there will be the means of marrying, I hold to be very unsafe and unwise, and what, I think, all parents should prevent as far as they can” (p. 231). And the Admiral, even though he has hoped that Captain Wentworth would marry Louisa Musgrove and has far more affection for him than for Captain Benwick, yet defends
the right of Louisa to change her mind: "If the girl likes another man better, it is very fit she should have him" (p. 172). In contrast both to the Elliots and to the Musgroves, the Crofts personify uninhibited sympathy and basic good sense.

Lady Russell is the final member we must notice at present of the human background against which Anne is displayed. In character, Lady Russell takes her place somewhere between the Elliots and the Crofts, for she is influenced on the one hand by a prejudice of her own for rank and on the other by a genuine attachment to Anne. After her first speech of the book, in which Lady Russell tells Anne that Sir Walter must rent his home to pay his debts even though moving will pain him, we cannot doubt her essential integrity: “...though a great deal is due to the feelings of the gentleman, and the head of a house, like your father, there is still more due to the character of an honest man” (p. 12). But, given the self-assurance with which Lady Russell generalizes here—as everywhere in the novel—and given her concern for what is “due” to a “gentleman,” it is only a short step for her from a sensible judgment like this to the undiscerning allegiance to tradition that is revealed when she encourages the Elliots to make up to their insipid cousins, the Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple and the Honourable Miss Carteret: “Family connexions were always worth preserving It was very desirable that the connexion should be renewed, if it could be done, without any compromise of propriety on the side of the Elliots” (p. 149). This is the kind of social bias, mixed with her real regard for Anne’s future, that has once led Lady Russell to talk Anne out of her engagement to Captain Wentworth, and the same combination of motives reappears when she urges Anne to think favorably of William Elliot as a suitor: “A most suitable connection every body must consider it—but I think it might be a very happy one” (p. 159). Through most of Persuasion, Lady Russell’s prejudice for rank is in the ascendant, keeping her from acting up to her capacities as a person. But by the close of the story, when Anne and Captain Wentworth have come to terms with each other, Lady Russell’s affection for Anne has affirmed itself as her dominant impulse:
"if her second object was to be sensible and well-judging, her first was to see Anne happy. She loved Anne better than she loved her own abilities" (p. 249). What she lacks, according to Jane Austen's final dictum, lacks even in her most sensible moments, is "a quickness of perception a nicety in the discernment of character, a natural penetration which no experience in others can equal," for "Lady Russell had been less gifted in this part of understanding than her young friend" (p. 249). What she lacks, in a word, is Anne's intuition, the product of an extraordinary emotional sensitivity.

All these minor characters, illustrating certain varieties of emotional experience, serve to throw the nature of Anne into high relief. I mean the image to suggest the rather static quality of Persuasion, for the story seems less to move narratively than to accumulate an overwhelming impression of Anne's being. She is a creature of sensibility, but triumphantly so. Her insight, so much more precise and penetrating in important matters than that of any other figure in the novel, comes from an instinctive, refined rightness of feeling. For all its rightness, her feeling remains intensely subjective in a way that Fanny Price's never does, and Anne shows an openheartedness, a warm compassion for everyone, alien to the heroine of Mansfield Park. Anne's rightness of feeling is grounded, of course, in a traditional morality. Jane Austen certifies the fact by calling attention to Anne's sense of duty again and again, as in these sentences: "Every emendation of Anne's had been on the side of honesty against importance. She wanted more vigorous measures, a more complete reformation a much higher tone of indifference for every thing but justice and equity" (p. 12). But something more than a traditional morality informs the words of Anne when Captain Wentworth lifts an apparently lifeless Louisa from the Lower Cobb and Anne herself is burdened with a fainting Henrietta: "Go to him, go to him for heaven's sake go to him. I can support her myself. Leave me, and go to him. Rub her hands, rub her temples; here are salts,—take them, take them" (p. 110). The repeated "him," referring to the man she believes she has lost to Louisa, dramatizes the flood of selfless
feeling, the total sympathy, which enables Anne alone to take
firm charge of the entire situation. On a lesser scale, her rush of
feeling may disclose itself in so typical a reaction to the sight of
Captain Wentworth as this: "she instantly felt that she
was the greatest simpleton in the world, the most unaccountable
and absurd! For a few minutes she saw nothing before her. It
was all confusion. She was lost" (p. 175). But it is the same
extreme sensitivity, delicate and basically reliable, which under­
lies Anne's every action—which marks, too, a shift in emphasis
from Jane Austen's other novels.

Anne's being is exactly rendered in her conversation. For one
thing, it proves her acutely responsive to the particulars of ex­
perience in her own right, yet at the same time fully— and de­
corously—conscious of their effect upon others. When Lady
Russell hesitantly proposes a call on the Crofts in Anne's former
home, Anne's reply takes account both of the adjustment that
she herself has made to the "change" and of the influence on
Lady Russell of such a visit: "I think you are very likely to suffer
the most of the two; your feelings are less reconciled to the
change than mine. By remaining in the neighbourhood, I am
become inured to it" (p. 125). But Anne's awareness of the par­
ticular does not keep her from generalizing. On the contrary, it
is the source from which many of her generalizations spring. At
one point, for instance, after Captain Harville has testified to the
sentiment that continues to bind him and the fiance of his
dead sister together by declaring that he and Captain Benwick
now "cannot part," Anne supports him with, "No that I
can easily believe to be impossible; but in time, perhaps—we
know what time does in every case of affliction, and you must
remember that your friend may yet be called a young
mourner" (p. 108). Anne's sympathies are stirred in part be­
cause she herself has endured a broken attachment, and, when
she generalizes about what "time" will do for Captain Benwick,
she is uttering a conviction based on her experience with Cap­
tain Wentworth (it is a claim she returns to in the climactic
dialogue of the novel): that men, unlike women, can eventually
recover from such disappointments. The great majority of
Anne's generalizations have their origin in her sensibility, and the fact that they are not therefore invalid will remind us again how far we are from Marianne Dashwood, or from Emma, for that matter. If Anne speaks the clearest sense, she is as likely as not to appeal explicitly to emotion: "Nursing," she tells Mary, "does not belong to a man, it is not his province. A sick child is always the mother's property, her own feelings generally make it so" (p. 56). And even when she directs—without real cause—a moral generalization against herself, her vigorous phrasing shows her to be in emotional possession of it: "What wild imaginations one forms, where dear self is concerned! How sure to be mistaken!" (p. 201). All of these generalizations express reason saturated with Anne's personal feeling, thus becoming a verbal echo, as it were, of that union of innate sense with emotional sensitivity which I have called her intuition.

It is Anne's intuition, I take it, that has been at work some seven years before the story proper begins, firmly assuring her of the young Captain Wentworth's value even though she allows herself to be persuaded to give him up. Within the novel, her intuition exercises itself most strikingly in her distrust of William Elliot. Some readers have felt that Anne's estimate of him is too arbitrary, a sign to them that Jane Austen has failed to assimilate William Elliot into the fabric of Persuasion, but it appears to me that the author intends, at least in part, to present us here with an instance of Anne's active intuition. Not only does Anne's nature suggest as much, but the point seems confirmed by such passages as these (the italics are mine):

Still, however, she had the sensation of there being something more than immediately appeared, in Mr. Elliot's wishing, after an interval of so many years, to be well received by them. (p. 140)

He certainly knew what was right, nor could she fix on any one article of moral duty evidently transgressed; but yet she would have been afraid to answer for his conduct. She saw that there had been bad habits, and, though he might now think very differently, who could answer for the true sentiments
of a clever, cautious man, grown old enough to appreciate a fair character? (pp. 160–61)

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 (p. 161)

All of these quotations insist that Anne is uneasy about William Elliot well before Jane Austen rings in Mrs. Smith to tell us what a villain he is; (after these disclosures, Anne's instinct about him is brought up again on pages 200, 207, and 249). And the kind of decision referred to in the italicized phrases can only be described as intuitive.

The conversation of William Elliot will allow us to make our own judgment of him, however. And, since he has verbal habits in common with Mrs. Clay—the lady who flatters Elizabeth, pursues Sir Walter, and ends up with William Elliot himself—we might as well take the two characters up at the same time. We can move toward them via Anne's claim, just noted, about William Elliot never saying "a careless or a hasty thing," for the remarks by him and by Mrs. Clay always have an air of contrivance, the effect of slight incongruities in the local verbal manner. Mrs. Clay, for instance, seems almost to make a fetish of reasoning carefully in the speech that follows, proceeding from generalizations about "sailors," supported by her own experience, to a detailed survey of "other professions"; but all this operates to pay a prodigious—if slightly oblique—compliment to Sir Walter on his features:

"The sea is no beautifier, certainly; sailors do grow old betimes; I have often observed it; they soon lose the look of youth. But then, is not it the same with many other professions, perhaps most other? Soldiers. The lawyer. the physician. the clergyman. In fact it is only the lot of those who are not obliged to follow any [profession], who can live in a regular way, in the country on their own property it is only their lot, I say, to hold the blessings of health and a good appearance to the utmost: I know no other set of men but what lose something of their personableness when they cease to be quite young." (pp. 20–21)
The same sense of incongruity arises when William Elliot praises Anne for her translation, offered with apologies, of an Italian song. At first he speaks in a fashion technically more oblique than Mrs. Clay's, though he points his irony so heavily that no one can miss his meaning:

"I see you know nothing of the matter. You have only knowledge enough of the language, to translate at sight these inverted, transposed, curtailed Italian lines, into clear, comprehensible, elegant English. You need not say anything more of your ignorance.—Here is complete proof." (p. 186)

But, after Anne modestly distinguishes between his courtesy and her ability, he goes on to a prodigious compliment of his own:

"I will not oppose such kind politeness; but I should be sorry to be examined by a real proficient."

"I have not had the pleasure of visiting in Camden-place so long," replied he, "without knowing something of Miss Anne Elliot; and I do regard her as one who is too modest, for the world in general to be aware of half her accomplishments, and too highly accomplished for modesty to be natural in any other woman." (p. 187)

To my ear, his showy exhibition of Anne by generalizing seems out of tune with the cultivated indirection of his previous speech—and of course his close strikes a jarring note in the context of Anne's delicate reply. Whichever the mode he uses here, William Elliot sounds a little too extravagant, and the words of Mrs. Clay leave us with the same impression.

This tendency toward overstatement on the part of them both is a very different thing from the verbal extremism of the Musgroves, whom we heard simply venting their personal feelings unself-consciously. The touch of extravagance in the comments of William Elliot and Mrs. Clay seems a deliberate verbal maneuver, and thus of a piece with the dominant effect created by all their speeches. Whatever they say appears consciously designed for the particular situation and the particular audience, a façade of words behind which the speaker intrigues for private
ends. The most obvious example is the response of Mrs. Clay when it suddenly comes out that she has been seen in secret conference with William Elliot. Momentarily startled, she nevertheless has a verbal manner ready—one very different from her previous pose as a careful reasoner—which permits her to hide her real motives behind a spate of assumed emotion and to refer the interest of Mr. Elliot to Elizabeth:

"Only think, Miss Elliot, to my great surprise I met with Mr. Elliot in Bath-street! I was never more astonished. He wanted to know how early he might be admitted to-morrow. He was full of "to-morrow;" and it is very evident that I have been full of it too or my seeing him could never have gone so entirely out of my head." (p. 228)

A more subtle production than this is the speech in which William Elliot undertakes to counter Anne's objections to Lady Dalrymple. His aims in it are two: first, to persuade Anne to his own opinion about the high value of rank, and second, to ally himself with her—since he is laying a groundwork for courting her—in any way that he can. Anne has told him that her cousins do not measure up to her own "idea of good company," which she defines as "clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation." William Elliot begins his reply with generalizations that set forth his own view, though smoothing over his disagreement with Anne by the joke about "a little learning," which both takes account of her view and indirectly compliments her on her taste:

"Good company requires only birth, education and manners, and with regard to education is not very nice. Birth and good manners are essential; but a little learning is by no means a dangerous thing in good company, on the contrary, it will do very well. . My dear cousin, (sitting down by her) you have a better right to be fastidious than almost any other woman I know; but will it answer? Will it make you happy? Will it not be wiser to accept the society of these good ladies in Laura-place, and enjoy all the advantages of the connexion as far as possible? You may depend upon it, that they will move in the first set in
By the middle of the speech, he turns to Anne more directly. After the open compliment on her “right to be fastidious,” William Elliot tries to gain her emotional assent to his propositions about “good company” through the series of rhetorical questions—none of which, incidentally, would evoke the desired answer from Anne. In the last sentence, he reverts to his earlier generalizations with “as rank is rank,” and he makes one final attempt to win Anne to his position—and to associate himself with her personally—by the shift from “your family” to “our family.” What all this adds up to is simply the fact that William Elliot keeps using his discourse to manipulate Anne, which implies that he remains, like Mrs. Clay, fundamentally detached. And his detachment would seem to be part and parcel of that insincerity, that lack of openness about him, which Anne has intuited.

If her distrust of William Elliot is the most striking instance of Anne’s intuition, its major triumph is her continuing attachment to Captain Wentworth. Appropriately enough, given the qualities of the heroine, he is a person who feels powerfully. Jane Austen tells us as much by introducing him as a man of “warmth”—and of “wit” as well. Yet Captain Wentworth’s wit, frequently revealed in the light surface of his conversation, is not a device for the manipulation of others: it does not mark the detachment of a William Elliot, but the Captain’s conscious restraint. Both the wit and the warmth show up side by side in a number of his generalizations through the first half of the story, generalizations that betray his feeling for Anne even while he intends them to keep him at a distance from her. In the following passage, he talks with a group including the Musgroves, the Crofts, and Anne; and the naval assignment he speaks about has covered the months—though only he and Anne realize the fact—immediately after the severance of their engagement:
“The admiralty...entertain themselves now and then, with sending a few hundred men to sea, in a ship not fit to be employed. But they have a great many to provide for; and among the thousands that may just as well go to the bottom as not, it is impossible for them to distinguish the very set who may be least missed.” (p. 65)

The Captain exhibits his self-possession in his mode of generalizing, in the witty exaggeration of his plight as the commander of a leaky ship. And by the irony of his last clause, which points covertly to the broken engagement, he sets himself well apart from Anne. At the same time, however, the whole speech reflects how deeply Captain Wentworth has been involved with her. His description of his dangers is a somewhat cruel, though not entirely intentional, reminder to Anne of his lot on being dismissed by her. And he has got to discuss his lot so unconcernedly in order that Anne may have no reason to think him distressed over their parting. Yet how seriously she has in fact distressed him comes clearer in his next sentences: “I felt my luck” in getting a command, he tells Admiral Croft; “It was a great object with me, at that time, to be at sea,—a very great object. I wanted to be doing something.”

As the previous quotation will have suggested, when Captain Wentworth speaks only with warmth, not with wit, he still disciplines his words so that they avoid too specific a notice of Anne and of what has happened between them. In part this is a matter of preserving decorum, and in part his verbal control seems the Captain’s way of assuring himself that he has come to terms with his past, has put it well behind him. Yet whenever he talks with fervor, Anne is likely to be imbedded in his thoughts, even though his references are too oblique to be caught by his listeners (except Anne), and even though the Captain himself is perhaps less conscious than the reader of Anne’s influence on his remarks. In the course of the dialogue we have just been looking at, he reminisces:

“Ah! those were pleasant days when I had the Laconia! How fast I made money in her.—A friend of mine, and I, had such a
lovely cruise together off the Western Islands.—Poor Harville, sister! You know how much he wanted money—worse than myself. He had a wife... I shall never forget his happiness. He felt it all, so much for her sake.” (p. 67)

To most of his hearers this sounds merely like an expression of the Captain’s sympathy for his friend. But the association of money with marriage, especially in company with the phrase “worse than myself,” proves his lingering sensitivity to what Anne has deprived him of. Even when, later on in the novel, he addresses Louisa Musgrove earnestly—so earnestly that Anne, who overhears them, thinks him deeply interested in Louisa—Captain Wentworth’s generalizations still have their source in his feelings for Anne, in his resentment that she should once have allowed herself to be persuaded against him:

“It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on.—You are never sure of a good impression being durable. Everybody may sway it; let those who would be happy be firm... My first wish for all, whom I am interested in, is that they should be firm.” (p. 88)

All of these speeches reveal that Captain Wentworth, though he may often succeed in controlling his words, cannot escape his sense of the past, much as he wishes to. And the quality of his reaction to the past is very different from Anne’s. She has suffered as deeply as he, and is at least as intensely alive to their history, but in a completely selfless fashion. What we have heard from the Captain so far, however, implies that he remains trapped within feelings that regard himself, anger at the broken engagement and bitter disappointment with Anne, those same feelings betrayed in his many scornful allusions to “persuasion.” It is this version of self-centeredness, which often becomes self-righteousness in the first half of the novel, that Captain Wentworth must fight his way beyond as the story develops. He begins his breakthrough in the scene on the Cobb. The scene is absolutely central to the novel’s theme, not only in illustrating Anne’s strength of character, but in providing an almost pa-
rodic counterpart to the incident from which the whole narrative springs, that persuading of Anne for which Captain Wentworth has never forgiven her. In the little drama on the Cobb, a lover’s resolution does carry the day, as it did not in the case of Captain Wentworth and Anne; yet the firmness of Louisa, which the Captain has been moved to admire as the opposite of the weakness he imagines in Anne, expresses itself here in Louisa’s sheerly willful demand to be jumped down the stairs again. And Captain Wentworth is the one who surrenders to persuasion now—yet merely to indulge Louisa. The scene issues, of course, in near disaster. But the injury to Louisa shocks Captain Wentworth into seeing Anne more objectively than he has before and into accepting his responsibility with regard at least to Louisa. He reproaches himself immediately for what has happened, and he continues to judge himself harshly some hours after the event:

“Don’t talk of it, don’t talk of it,” he cried. “Oh God! that I had not given way to her at the fatal moment! Had I done as I ought! But so eager and so resolute! Dear, sweet Louisa!” (p. 116)

Yet exclamations so passionate as these suggest that Captain Wentworth, while recognizing his guilt, is still caught up within his private response to the experience—remains dominated, that is, by his sense of personal anguish. What he must ultimately learn in the course of rediscovering Anne is to moderate the personal element in his feelings, though without blunting them, and to integrate this refined emotion, as Anne has done, with a total acceptance of responsibility—his responsibility to Anne and for their past. This is no easy job for the Captain. The differences between him and Anne are still apparent far along in *Persuasion*, well after his interest in her has been rekindled, as two dialogues will show.

Prior to the first of these interchanges (pp. 182–84), Captain Wentworth and Anne have been talking over the day of Louisa’s accident at Lyme, and, when he broaches the subject of Louisa’s engagement to Captain Benwick, Anne replies with: “But it
appears—I should hope it would be a very happy match. There are on both sides good principles and good temper.' Her shift from "it appears" to "I should hope" vividly dramatizes Anne's native delicacy of feeling. She retreats from the authoritatively impersonal to the modestly personal, either to avoid deciding on the "match" with a greater certainty than she can properly claim, or—even more graciously—to keep from speaking with assurance about the happiness of a "match" that may pain the Captain deeply (for she still cannot be sure how much he has felt for Louisa). Whichever Anne's motive, she closes by saying all that can safely be said. Captain Wentworth, however, is by no means so constrained:

"Yes . . but there I think ends the resemblance. With all my soul I wish them happy They have no difficulties to contend with at home, no opposition, no caprice, no delays.—The Musgroves are behaving like themselves . . only anxious with true parental hearts to promote their daughter's comfort."

"With all my soul" attests to his joy at being released from Louisa, a feeling which merges immediately into another: his distress, so near the surface of his sentences commending the behavior of the Musgroves, over the interference that once cost him Anne. Aware that he treads on dangerous ground, Captain Wentworth tries to beat a retreat toward sense, starting out a new speech by measuring the capacities of Louisa against Captain Benwick's:

"I confess that I do think there is a disparity, too great a disparity, and in a point no less essential than mind.—I regard Louisa Musgrove as a very amiable, sweet-tempered girl but Benwick is something more. He is a clever man, a reading man—and I confess that I do consider his attaching himself to her, with some surprise. It seems . . to have been a perfectly spontaneous, untaught feeling on his side, and this surprises me. A man like him, in his situation! With a heart pierced, wounded, almost broken! Fanny Harville was a very superior creature; and his attachment to her was indeed attachment. A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman!—He ought not—he does not."
But his reasoning dissolves in the exclamations and the violently particular terms describing Captain Benwick's past—to say nothing of the fact that Captain Wentworth's subject has shifted completely from "mind" to "heart." And by the close, when he attempts to pull his case together, the Captain's explosive generalizations are based entirely on feeling, his own feeling for Anne.

It is no wonder that their conversation comes to a halt for a few moments, until Anne hits on the somewhat safer topic of Lyme. When she mentions that she would like to visit the place again, however, Captain Wentworth responds with:

"Indeed! I should not have supposed that you could have found any thing in Lyme to inspire such a feeling. The horror and distress you were involved in—the stretch of mind, the wear of spirits!—I should have thought your last impressions of Lyme must have been strong disgust."

"The last few hours were certainly very painful," replied Anne: "but when pain is over, the remembrance of it often becomes a pleasure. One does not love a place the less for having suffered in it, unless it has been all suffering, nothing but suffering—which was by no means the case at Lyme. We were only in anxiety and distress during the last two hours"

Again charged particular terms mark the Captain's intensity, and again his limitations, for, as his last sentence about "disgust" makes unmistakably clear, he is still confined within a private reaction to the event, his consciousness of how he must have appeared to Anne. Her generalizations, on the other hand, dramatize a much more inclusive response to the affair, and they also bear the indelible imprint of Anne's emotional maturity. Although they derive from experience as intensely personal as his, they transcend the particular details which he cannot escape. And in thus assimilating the experience within a larger context, especially in repudiating his vision of unalloyed suffering, Anne demonstrates—most movingly, I think—her genuine greatness of spirit.

The previous dialogue has shown Anne's feelings to be more
profound than Captain Wentworth's. The following interchange, which occurs very late in the novel (pp. 244–45), shows that her sense as well is profounder than his. The Captain has touched on the matter of ‘persuasion’ in telling Anne how he feared that she might be influenced a second time—to marry William Elliot—as she had earlier been influenced against Captain Wentworth himself. This latent reproach, largely unintentional on the Captain's part, spurs Anne to defend herself in an antithetic rhetoric very untypical of her (I have italicized the phrases central to three main antitheses):

“You should have distinguished You should not have suspected me now; the case so different, and my age so different. If I was wrong in yielding to persuasion once, remember that it was to persuasion exerted on the side of safety, not of risk. When I yielded, I thought it was to duty; but no duty could be called in aid here. In marrying a man indifferent to me, all risk would have been incurred, and all duty violated.”

The passage also sounds untypical in that Anne rests her distinctions so explicitly on moral and rational grounds, rather than unobtrusively on her emotions. And her final generalization, almost fiercely decorous, strikes a tone of aggressive certainty quite unusual for her. Anne is compelled to speak so unequivocally, of course, because the issue which Captain Wentworth has raised—the validity of her former ‘persuasion’—is of crucial importance to her (and to our understanding of the novel). When the Captain replies, he is just as unequivocal, but differently so (again the italics are mine):

“Perhaps I ought to have reasoned thus but I could not. I could not derive benefit from the late knowledge I had acquired of your character. I could not bring it into play: it was overwhelmed, buried, lost in those earlier feelings which I had been smarting under year after year. I could think of you only as one who had yielded, who had given me up, who had been influenced by any one rather than by me.”

Here ‘ought’ and ‘reasoned’ are explicitly vanquished by the Captain's emotion, which pours out the three groups of triplets
as well as the particular terms, and which culminates in his last, passionately personal generalization. In short, he does not yet give the impression of having appropriately subdued his private feelings, come to terms with the "persuasion," or done full justice to Anne. But we shall put off examining the final ordering of his emotions, his ultimate recognition of himself and his responsibility, until the close of the next section.

Persuasion supplies us with the most convincing evidence, among Jane Austen's novels, of how basic the technique of metaphoric indirection is to her artistic method. For one thing, such dialogues turn up over and over here, as will have been suggested by the number of Captain Wentworth's speeches that refer obliquely to Anne, whether she is a member of his immediate audience or not. During the scene in which we have already heard him talk with the Musgroves of his naval career, for instance, he gets involved in a verbal tussle with the Crofts when he objects to the presence of women aboard ship; and it is perfectly plain to the reader that the Captain, though he apparently imagines himself taking a high naval line, actually reveals his resentment over losing Anne at every stage of his rather petulant argument (pp. 68–70). Not only does the technique appear frequently in the novel, but Jane Austen entrusts several highly significant scenes to it, including the one briefly quoted from earlier in which Louisa professes her "firmness" of character and the Captain applauds the trait, speaking all the while from his sense of Anne's irresolution and not realizing that she overhears the conversation (pp. 87–88). This dialogue is important, first, because it prepares the way for the multiple ironies of the scene on the Cobb and, second, because it provides the sharpest contrast to the climactic dialogue of Persuasion, the one overheard by Captain Wentworth in which Anne, the true heroine of the novel, defends woman's emotional sensitivity and
endurance—in short, herself—against the claims of Captain Harville. This climactic scene, itself a fine example of metaphoric indirection, proves decisively Jane Austen's commitment to the technique. For it makes up the major part of the only extensive revision by Jane Austen that we possess, and what she has done is to substitute a dialogue that works obliquely for the clumsy apparatus by which she initially reconciled Captain Wentworth and Anne.

In her first attempt at bringing them together, Jane Austen took her cue from a passage in Sense and Sensibility. There, as we may recall, Elinor was forced to act in behalf of an embarrassed Colonel Brandon in offering Edward Ferrars the living that would allow Edward to marry Lucy Steele. In the canceled chapter of Persuasion, Captain Wentworth finds himself in a predicament like Elinor's, for Admiral Croft—who has heard that Anne plans to marry William Elliot and that she would like to live in her family home—commissions the Captain to tell Anne that the Crofts stand ready to surrender their lease whenever she wishes. The Captain's offer of Kellynch-hall brings on Anne's denial that she is engaged to William Elliot, which leads the Captain himself to propose. Jane Austen's handling of this first version is epitomized in Anne's response to the offer of her home: "You are misin—the Admiral is misinformed" (p. 258). As if to insure that we have understood the Captain's feelings and do understand Anne's, the author allows her heroine to violate momentarily—by the direct reference to "You"—the fiction so far maintained on the surface of the dialogue that the Admiral is the really interested party. No such violation occurs in the revised version, where Anne speaks as generic woman, and to this extent in a formally discreet manner, for her private feelings reveal themselves only indirectly through her claims about the sex as a whole. Moreover, the new scene is wholly oblique in its conception, since here Anne talks only with Captain Harville, never with Captain Wentworth, who sits composing a letter in another part of the room. But of course he does not miss the import of what she says, and by the end of the dialogue he writes his proposal to her.
Near the start of the conversation between Captain Harville and Anne is an exchange that sets out the fundamental contrast between them developed throughout the scene (pp. 232-35). He is deploring the fact that Captain Benwick, in becoming engaged to Louisa Musgrove, has so quickly forgotten the dead Miss Harville. And Captain Harville's lament for his sister, full of affection as it is, nevertheless bears the marks of an emotional extremism and of a personal urgency that may remind us a little of the Musgrove family, or even of Captain Wentworth. "Poor Fanny! she would not have forgotten him so soon!" claims Captain Harville after a series of abrupt sentences informed by his love for his sister, and in a moment he goes on addressing Anne with:

"It was not in her nature. She doated on him."
"It would not be the nature of any woman who truly loved."

The brief declarative rhythm and the intensive "doated" show Captain Harville's warm feelings ruffling the surface of his talk. Anne, on the other hand, affirms the value of Fanny Harville, indeed increases it, by associating her with the admirable class of women "who truly loved." And the generalization reveals something more about Anne's nature: she speaks as she does because she is remembering her own experience with Captain Wentworth, yet clearly she is not imprisoned within her reaction to that experience—she cannot be, inasmuch as her remark itself pays unselfish tribute to Fanny Harville and the very making of it shows Anne's consideration for the feelings of Captain Harville.

Perhaps he is unaccustomed to so penetrating a sensibility as Anne's; at least he puts her generalization in question, smiling, as much as to say, "Do you claim that for your sex?" and she answered the question, smiling also, "Yes. We certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. 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, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions."

Meeting his challenge with perfect tact, Anne nevertheless firmly advances her convictions about women in general, convictions which again have been thoroughly tested, of course, in her private experience. Her distinction between "fate" and "merit" is especially graceful, Anne refusing to boast about her sex at the same time that she voices her deepest claim, a characteristically emotional one, for woman's sensitivity. And her tone remains completely unassuming throughout her generalizations contrasting woman's condition with man's—a comparison which looks back on Anne's history with Captain Wentworth, to be sure, but which also lays out for the benefit of Captain Harville the evidence supporting her claim about women.

Her more impulsive opponent, however, is not to be won over by the argument she has developed. At first Captain Harville makes out that he objects to it on purely rational grounds, pointing with a flourish to the fact that Anne's generalization about men being absorbed in "business" cannot apply to Captain Benwick, who has been living in seclusion with the Harvilles. Anne readily acknowledges her lapse—admitting that she "did not recollect" the case of Captain Benwick, though without explaining that she forgot him because she was remembering Captain Wentworth—but she then presses on with exact logic to show where Captain Harville's reasoning leads: "If the change be not from outward circumstances, it must be from within; it must be nature, man's nature, which has done the business for Captain Benwick." Now the essential quality of Captain Harville's reaction to the stand that Anne has been taking becomes clearer, his answer no longer striking so logical a note. Rather, his words seem to issue from a context of feelings which relate to the self more narrowly and much more directly than do Anne's, and he speaks with an aggressive intensity such as she never allows herself:

"No, no, it is not man's nature. I will not allow it to be more man's nature than woman's to be inconstant and forget those
they do love, or have loved. I believe the reverse. I believe in a true analogy between our bodily frames and our mental; and that as our bodies are the strongest, so are our feelings; capable of bearing most rough usage, and riding out the heaviest weather.”

The repeated “I’s” suggest that under emotional pressure Captain Harville conceives of the whole argument in far more exclusively personal terms than has Anne (despite her memories of Captain Wentworth), and his relatively crude “analogy” between the “bodily” and the “mental” implies that the sensibility which he brings to bear on the argument is somewhat less refined than hers. That Captain Harville is caught up within a dominantly personal response is proved, I think, by his recourse to naval language at the close of his speech.

Anne’s reply to him points up, in effect, the limitations of Captain Harville, for it reveals her to be both in control of her claims (rather than trapped within them) and capable of an utterly outgoing emotion. She starts off by capitalizing on his analogy, drawing out the logical consequences of what he has said:

“Your feelings may be the strongest but the same spirit of analogy will authorise me to assert that ours are the most tender. Man is more robust than woman, but he is not longer-lived; which exactly explains my view of the nature of their attachments. Nay, it would be too hard upon you, if it were otherwise. You have difficulties, and privations, and dangers enough to struggle with. You are always labouring and toiling, exposed to every risk and hardship. Your home, country, friends, all quitted. Neither time, nor health, nor life, to be called your own. It would be too hard indeed” (with a faltering voice) "if woman’s feelings were to be added to all this."

But after two sentences she turns, with the characteristically deep sympathy of “Nay, it would be too hard upon you,” to the four swelling series which soften the impact of her reasoning. This rhetorical intensity would indicate that she is thinking of Captain Wentworth, even if the cited details did not recall the stories he has told in her presence. Still, it is typical that Anne,
at a moment when she is engaged in defending herself, should yet take into account most generously the situation of another, even that of a Captain Wentworth who has caused her so much distress. She exhibits a total selflessness here quite beyond the capacity of Captain Harville—or of Captain Wentworth himself, so far in the novel—at the same time that she forcefully maintains her side of the local debate.

Although her words do not convince Captain Harville, they appear to have told on Captain Wentworth, for "a slight noise" from his quarter of the room makes Anne aware that he is listening intently, and the dialogue breaks off momentarily. It resumes when Captain Harville observes:

"Well we shall never agree I suppose upon this point. No man and woman would, probably. But let me observe that all histories are against you, all stories, prose and verse. I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men."

Certainly the Captain's tone sounds a good deal more moderate in some of these sentences, his tentative "probably" and 'perhaps' showing real consideration for Anne. But something of his earlier extremism still lingers in his "all's" and 'ever.' And at the risk of being fanciful, I would suggest that the whole speech leaves us with a sense that Captain Harville is straining for evidence, insomuch as his citation of the fictional seems a little out of tune with the impression conveyed by the earlier exchanges that real experience, deeply felt, lies more or less immediately behind his remarks and Anne's.

Evidently Captain Harville's pursuit of the topic embarrasses Anne, who has been "startled" to discover that Captain Wentworth can overhear what they say, for she now attempts to wind up the controversy as quickly as possible. Her first maneuver—graciousness itself—consists in her pretending to be as willful as Captain Harville imagines her, thus throwing the debate to her opponent:
“Perhaps I shall.—Yes, yes, if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing.”

In striking this exaggerated pose—note her switch from “Perhaps” to the overly intensive “Yes, yes” and that final, unusually demanding “I will not allow”—Anne deliberately resigns all claim to the good sense with which she has countered Captain Harville throughout the dialogue. When he continues to press, however, she takes another tack in order to close off the discussion, and her reason for wanting to end it—her consciousness of the man at the desk—becomes unmistakable:

“But how shall we prove any thing?”

“We never shall. We never can expect to prove any thing upon such a point. It is a difference of opinion which does not admit of proof. We each begin probably with a little bias towards our own sex, and upon that bias build every circumstance in favour of it which has occurred within our own circle; many of which circumstances (perhaps those very cases which strike us the most) may be precisely such as cannot be brought forward without betraying a confidence, or in some respect saying what should not be said.”

Anne’s allusion to the “cases which strike us the most” and her talk about discretion leave no doubt that her thoughts are centered on Captain Wentworth, to whom she must not give herself away. Thus she tries to conclude the argument with Captain Harville by insisting that it cannot be settled. Even here, though, Anne’s profound integrity is dramatized, for the generalization starting out with “We each begin” shows her encompassing the very processes of bias at work in their conversation—shows her transcending, that is, the limitedly personal.

Captain Harville’s answer to her, moving as it is, yet proves him to be of lesser stature: though his sincerity cannot be questioned, neither can his partiality. Apparently he hopes, by
speaking impersonally of "a man" in what follows, to formulate a claim powerful enough in its generality to climax his argument and carry the day with Anne:

"Ah! . . . if I could but make you comprehend what a man suffers when he takes a last look at his wife and children, and watches the boat that he has sent them off in, as long as it is in sight, and then turns away and says, "God knows whether we ever meet again!" And then . . . the glow of his soul when he does see them again; when, coming back after a twelvemonth's absence perhaps, and obliged to put into another port, he calculates how soon it be possible to get them there . . . all the while hoping for them twelve hours sooner, and seeing them arrive at last, as if Heaven had given them wings, by many hours sooner still! If I could explain to you all this, and all that a man can bear and do, and glories to do for the sake of these treasures of his existence! I speak, you know, only of such men as have hearts!" pressing his own with emotion.

But his lingering attention to particulars, and the speech is weighed down with them, indicates that Captain Harville is much nearer to voicing an intensely personal experience than an authoritative generalization. If further evidence is needed that he is wrapped up in his immediate feelings, we have only to view his final gesture.

Anne realizes his situation, we must suspect, for his outburst calls forth her finest generosity:

"Oh! . . . I hope I do justice to all that is felt by you, and by those who resemble you. God forbid that I should undervalue the warm and faithful feelings of any of my fellow-creatures. I should deserve utter contempt if I dared to suppose that true attachment and constancy were known only by woman. No, I believe you capable of every thing great and good in your married lives. I believe you equal to every important exertion, and to every domestic forbearance, so long as—if I may be allowed the expression, so long as you have an object. I mean, while the woman you love lives, and lives for you. All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone."
It is a totally magnanimous reply. In its first stages, such intensive phrases as “God forbid” and “utter contempt” express Anne’s fervently sympathetic response to Captain Harville’s experience. As her answer develops, the repeated “I believe you” declares her firm conviction that her opponent is sincere. And at the culmination of her speech, in that fully emotional generalization about the single “privilege” belonging to her “own sex,” Anne reveals—in the very act of betraying her personal distress—her ultimate unselfishness by minimizing the “privilege” and by insisting on woman’s capacity to love when no return is imaginable. It is little wonder that so poignant a reply should indeed climax the dialogue with Captain Harville and also persuade Captain Wentworth to propose.

Nor, with this example of Anne in front of him, is it surprising that Captain Wentworth should finally come to know and to judge himself in the last conversation of the novel (pp. 246–47). The only surprise is that no such dialogue occurred in the conclusion originally drafted by Jane Austen, which thus left Captain Wentworth’s development incomplete and omitted the most penetrating analysis of “persuasion.” But the revision supplies these deficiencies with an interchange which Anne begins. Again we should be alert to her utter decorum—in refusing to judge anyone but herself, in taking her stand on what is “right” although she has “suffered from it,” and in saying all that can be said for Lady Russell while pointing out that her friend’s “advice” was questionable, if not wrong:

“I have been thinking over the past, and trying impartially to judge of the right and wrong, I mean with regard to myself; and I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it, that I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend whom you will love better than you do now. To me, she was in the place of a parent. Do not mistake me, however. I am not saying that she did not err in her advice. It was, perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides; and for myself, I certainly never should, in any circumstance of tolerable similarity, give such advice. But I mean, that I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have
suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience. I have now, as far as such a sentiment is allowable in human nature, nothing to reproach myself with; and if I mistake not, a strong sense of duty is no bad part of a woman's portion."

How deeply engrained in Anne's nature this allegiance to decorum is becomes evident, toward the close of the passage, when she discriminates between the distress of breaking off the attachment and the pain of breaking with authority. Even her conduct of the speech itself shows Anne's innate propriety, for it is only after she has verbally acted out this entire commitment to the demands of "conscience"—demands which she has characteristically apprehended through feeling—that she permits herself the luxury of the moral generalization with which she ends, one which modestly justifies her earlier behavior.

And Captain Wentworth is at last ready to meet her on equally fundamental grounds, though he pretends for a moment that Anne has merely been pleading with him to approve of Lady Russell:

"Not yet. But there are hopes of her being forgiven in time. I trust to being in charity with her soon. 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 if, 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 renewed the engagement then?"

"Would I!" . . .

"Good God! . . . you would! It is not that I did not think of it . . . . 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. This is a recollection which ought to make me forgive every one sooner than myself."

The witty detachment with which he teases Anne about Lady Russell in the first sentences serves as a guarantee, I take it, of Captain Wentworth's objectivity when he turns his attention to "My own self." Surely he views himself with open eyes
throughout the second speech. Here he firmly judges his earlier behavior, a far cry from the almost hysterical self-reproaching by which he indulged his personal anguish when talking with Anne on a previous occasion about Louisa's accident. And here —instead of the passionately personal generalization about Anne's having betrayed him that the Captain was driven to utter when he last discussed "persuasion" with her—here the generalization he comes out with is explicitly moral and explicitly takes account of others besides himself. All this is to suggest that he seems finally to have transcended the sheerly personal element in his feelings, and in doing so has become capable of fully accepting his responsibilities in relation to Anne and to the matter of the "persuasion." Having learned to see himself so clearly, Captain Wentworth has earned the right to evaluate his past and future with charming impudence in his closing words to Anne: "Like other great men under reverses . . . I must endeavour to subdue my mind to my fortune. I must learn to brook being happier than I deserve."

A few more sentences and I shall have done with *Persuasion*. It seems to me imperative that we do not interpret this last conversation as a desperate attempt by Jane Austen to put the best face she can on an incident which she really disapproves of, but without which the story could not exist. On the contrary, this exchange between Anne and Captain Wentworth is the climactic expression of the novel's theme, celebrating the triumph of the more than personal over the merely personal in feeling. For the dialogue insists that Anne, at the crisis brought on by Lady Russell's "persuasion," has felt the pull of her love for Captain Wentworth as well as the pull of duty and has found the latter more compelling, though without therefore ceasing to care for the Captain. One mark of Anne's special quality, indeed, is precisely this ability to live with, to assimilate, the contrarieties of experience without seeking impatiently to dissolve the tensions engendered by them. Thus she can go on loving Captain Wentworth although she has rejected his suit; she can retain all her affection for Lady Russell although she has come to question Lady Russell's advice; she can believe
herself justified in having followed the counsel although she disagrees with it. And her loyalty to Lady Russell, her continuing regard for the authority exercised by her adviser, Anne's respect, even, for the prudence contained in the advice itself, all of these indicate that she willingly allies herself with the society she lives in, having worked out an adjustment of her own to its values—which is to say once more that she reveals her commitment to something beyond the self. As for Captain Wentworth, we have seen how the dialogue shows him moving beyond the intense involvement in himself traceable through all his previous speeches. Furthermore, in judging his earlier behavior and in recognizing his responsibility to Anne, the Captain approaches the sort of integration typical of her, for he mediates between the self and the claims of another. In brief, the theme of *Persuasion*—as of the previous novels—is essentially moral, the only difference being that feeling, suspect in the earlier works that vindicated "sense," is here the trustworthy agent of moral perception.

1. Reginald Farrer makes the first observation ("Jane Austen," p. 29), and the second belongs to Mary Lascelles (Jane Austen, p. 183).

2. The fact that Captain Wentworth is the only developing character in the novel makes for one of my reservations about Mark Schorer's suggestive commentary on *Persuasion* in "Fiction and the 'Matrix of Analogy.'" He perhaps implies, though I am not sure about this, that Anne herself alters in some way when he writes that "The problem of the novel is" in part "to increase her value" (p. 541), or when he describes her condition in terms of "a stock that has a debased value" (p. 543). It seems to me, however, that Anne's actual worth remains the same from start to finish. According to Schorer, "The novel explicitly asks, what is 'the value of an Anne Elliot' and where is the man who will 'understand' it?" (p. 543); the second question appears to me rather different from the first, for it points less to a possible shift in Anne's "value" than to a change in the capacities of Captain Wentworth. I feel similarly uneasy about the implications when the critic observes: "... at last Anne's character is 'fixed on his mind as perfection itself,' which is to say that, like a currency, it has been stabilized" (p. 542). Schorer's figure may suggest that Anne's own worth has been shifting about, but the phrase from the novel occurs in a passage which makes it clear that the feelings of the Captain are what have been "stabilized" (p. 241).

Maybe I have been twisting Schorer's comments on Anne into mean-
ing something that he does not intend. Yet I also have some reservations about his acute verbal analyses of *Persuasion*. His main purpose is to search out its "dominant metaphorical quality," which he finds in "a stylistic base derived from commerce and property" (p. 540), and in general he rates the intrinsic significance of dead metaphors much higher than I would think safe. Some of his particular readings seem to me rather strained. For instance, *credit* derives from *credere*, and I would suppose that the word refers to "belief" or "faith" quite as readily as to accounting, even in such a phrase as "take all the charms and perfections of Edward's wife upon *credit* [a little longer]" (p. 541). Surely "prospect" implies nothing but a "looking forward" in "all the precious rooms and furniture, groves, and prospects" or in "the prospect of spending two months" (p. 541). Can the "figure" in "a face not materially disfigured" really call to mind "arithmetic," one of "the two large areas of metaphorical interest" in the novel (p. 541)? And I suspect that the critic himself is inventing the pun on "interest" in what follows: "When Anne's blighted romance is called 'this little history of sorrowful interest,' we hardly forget that a lack of money was the blight. Is 'a man of principle' by any chance a man of substance?" (p. 542). That last remark appears to me especially misleading, for few novelists can have taken such pains as Jane Austen to define "principle."

But I should add that Schorer's essay—though it strikes me as distorting *Persuasion* somewhat in various particulars—gives valuable evidence to confirm one's general sense of Jane Austen's hardheaded practicality.

3. That the Captain alters has been suggested by Mary Lascelles, who describes the "principal pattern" of the story as "formed by the change in Wentworth's feelings towards Anne"; and Miss Lascelles goes on to identify Anne as our point of view: "... of the progress of this change we are allowed to judge only from a train of incidents which comes under her observation" (*Jane Austen*, p. 203). Indeed the critic takes issue with Jane Austen for departing on a couple of occasions from Anne's point of view, and one of these I take up in my text after a moment.

4. Mudrick has written that Anne is "unsubjected to the temper of Jane Austen's irony" (*Jane Austen*, p. 222). Yet we must not be led by his comment to think that Anne and her emotional sensitivity are never exposed to the irony of the author. Several relatively trivial examples might be cited, but irony crops up when Anne is under real stress. The following quotation, for instance, describes her reaction on overhearing the Captain praise the enthusiasm of Louisa Musgrove (the italics are mine): "*Anne could not immediately fall into a quotation again. The sweet scenes of autumn were for a while put by—unless some tender sonnet, fraught with the apt analogy of the declining year, with declining happiness, and the images of youth and hope, and spring, all gone together, blessed her memory*" (p. 85). The italicized words are too studied, I think consciously so, to permit us to submerge ourselves in Anne's feelings; and "blessed" underlines the irony, for Anne—however submissive—can hardly be expected to gain exquisite relief from any sugges-
tion that the Captain is lost to her. In this next passage, Anne has been exhilarated by some evidence that Captain Wentworth still loves her (once more the italics are my own): "Prettier musings of high-wrought love and eternal constancy, could never have passed along the streets of Bath, than Anne was sporting with . . . . It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way" (p. 192). Mudrick takes the sentences as an expression of "the author's overt sympathy," a "burst of affection" (Jane Austen, p. 226). My own feeling is that the phrases in italics are again too strained to ask for our total belief. Certainly the figure in the last sentence, if intended seriously, is wholly out of line with Jane Austen's usual practice, though it might be answered that this is a different sort of novel than she has written before. Still, the word "sporting" certainly undermines the emotional intensity of the passage, thus compelling the reader to disengage himself to some extent. By all this I do not mean that we are really to question Anne in any way; my point is only that Jane Austen still treats her heroine with some irony, if a gentle one.

5. Mary Lascelles considers this omniscient perspective at Captain Wentworth's introduction an "oversight" on the part of the author (Jane Austen, p. 204), and she may be perfectly right. I am only voicing a hunch when I say that the passage does not strike me as carelessly conceived. Perhaps the lines would have been revised if Jane Austen had lived. But one can see how they came to be written—which is not to claim that they are artistically defensible.

6. Mudrick—who finds the relationship between Mary and Charles Musgrove figuring a larger "conflict" in Persuasion "between the feudal remnant . . . and the rising middle class" (Jane Austen, p. 232)—characterizes this speech as a "hypnotic bourgeois incantation of advancement and property" (p. 233). But I wonder if the critic's phrase may not attribute too pure an economic motive here to Charles Musgrove, whose words are conditioned in part by his sense of his personal status. Incidentally, the one outburst by Mary's husband against rank is not fired by class enmity, but merely by his wish—thoroughly typical—to have his own way in going to the theater (pp. 223–24).

7. Certainly Jane Austen treats Mrs. Musgrove very shabbily in the first part of Persuasion, but I do not agree with Mudrick that the author, perhaps relenting, presents us in the second half of the novel with "a different Mrs. Musgrove from the one already demolished" (Jane Austen, p. 213). For one thing, a harmless enough self-interest seems to have conditioned the warm welcome she tenders Anne when they meet at Bath, for in the passage quoted by Mudrick, Jane Austen writes: "... Mrs. Musgrove's real affection had been won by her usefulness when they were in distress" (p. 220), when Anne had helped out with the injured Louisa. And later on, even the gentle heroine shudders a little at the impropriety of Mrs. Musgrove when, full of Henrietta's engagement, she goes into all the details of the marriage settlement with Mrs. Croft: "Minutiae which, even with every advantage of taste and
delicacy which good Mrs. Musgrove could not give, could be properly interesting only to the principals” (p. 230).

8. Mary Lascelles and Marvin Mudrick feel that Jane Austen handles Mrs. Clay and William Elliot arbitrarily in dismissing them to an affair with each other at the end of Persuasion. I agree with the general claim of the critics, though on the grounds that the behavior reported of the two characters at the end of the novel is inconsistent with their earlier performances. The suggestion that Mrs. Clay’s feeling for William Elliot has had its way with her, and that his feeling for her may have its way with him (p. 250), simply does not jibe with the detachment, the control, that both of them have shown everywhere else. This seems to me a major case of sabotage in comparison with, say, Jane Austen’s management of the Crawfords at the close of Mansfield Park, for the Crawfords do reveal a minimal consistency in their final actions.

9. Mudrick uses this speech to document Captain Wentworth’s bourgeois interest in money: “Even as a sailor, loving battle and glory, he is still frankly a businessman” (Jane Austen, p. 235). I cannot be sure how much the critic means to imply by this, but certainly the Captain is not concerned here with money for its own sake. His interest in it is a derivative of his interest in Anne.

10. Margaret Kennedy has pointed out—in Jane Austen (London, 1950)—how Anne’s awareness of Captain Wentworth is projected in the speech which I have just quoted in my text: “‘The pen has been in their hands,’ she [Anne] says, so turning the phrase unconsciously because in her mind is the picture of the man sitting behind her with a pen in his hand” (p. 89).