

Matriarchal Assertiveness in Jane Austen's Persuasion

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Abstract

*In Jane Austen's **Persuasion** Anne Elliot develops as this individual of her own as well as shifts from passive to active. She finally marries Wentworth at the end of the novel, the marriage is not needed to complete her because she has already made her emotional transformation independent of the marriage proposal. Persuasion is Austen's more radical novel, because it account for and endorses a philosophy where action is based up on emotion, instinct and interest for one's own personal happiness. In **Persuasion**, Austen dramatically shifts from creating her heroine as governed by propriety and reason to being permitted and encouraged to respond and act based up on emotion and instinct and assertion virtually unheard of in the male dominated sphere of polite society. Anne's character serves to elucidate and cement this shift in Austen's tone and feminist worldview. Among the heroines of Austen Anne receives different*

*cognitive qualities with in her. She is also compared with **Elizabeth Bennet** in **Pride and Prejudice** that Elizabeth is representative of women being capable and worthy to reason in the world of men, whereas Anne's individualism gives women something even more important in Austen's assertion of the validity and worth of female emotions. Persuasion represents the maturity of Austen's work and more than her other Novels.*

Introduction

Jane Austen wrote "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story". Moers reveals, "Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. Now women seized the pen; and female self – consciousness brought heroinism to literature. As literary women have always been grateful to say, it all went back to the first heroine of letters, Samuel Richardson's Pamela, not because of her virtue but because; as she says herself. I have got such a knack of writing, that when I am by myself, I cannot sit without a pen in my hands". Margaret

Kirkham points out that, together with Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen inherited a common tradition of feminist development". In the canon of British literature Jane Austen occupies a high rank among novelists. She is a realist and a practitioner of the domestic novel. Among her novels **Persuasion** represents the maturity of her vision and portrayal of her female protagonists.

Predicaments of Austen's Heroine

Persuasion is a story about the Elliot's family. Anne Elliot, the protagonist of **Persuasion**, is witty, clever and considerate. At the age of nineteen Anne Elliot's had fallen in love with Frederick Wentworth, but Anne disapproved to marry him by accepting the words of Lady Russell. Later Anne feels for her submissiveness to Lady Russell. This should not be regarded as a weakness of character. She acted passively no doubt, but as she later explains she thought it part of her duty to act in accordance with the advice of a woman whom she regarded as her mother. Though Anne is on the whole a passive type of girl, she is capable of taking initiative when faced with a crisis.

Sir Walter's wife, the mother of Anne, died fourteen years ago and left him with three daughters. Sir Walter is a

spendthrift, who lavishly over spends and he has brought the family into great debt. By contrast Anne is completely free from the snobbery which afflicts her father and her sister Elizabeth. Anne's judgments are correct because they are the outcome of earlier experience, and experience which has involved her in much personal suffering. Moreover although she is ignored, she does not sit there feeling sorry for herself.

Portrayal of the Challenges in Persuasion

Jane Austen's final novel, **Persuasion**, is an insightful portrayal of the challenges faced by women in the 1800s. The Story seen through the eyes of the heroine, Anne Elliot. Her character changes from passive to active over the course of the novel. She holds both traditional and modern ideals to her character. Anne can be seen as the typical 'sentimental core', but at the same time she is very headstrong. She can be seen as the emotional centre of the family. However she is not always caring, she can also take on a more masculine role in certain situations. This paper argues that Anne Elliot overcomes conventions as well as shifts from passive to active. Through the novel, Anne develops as this individual on

her own, and by the time she finally marries Wentworth at the end of the novel.

Austen heroine she will make a conscious effort to reject an inadequate father, who is, in essence, a representative of authority. Gilbert and Gubar also maintain that this heroine will be fulfilled and a conclusion to the plot will be achieved when the girl becomes a daughter to a husband whereas becoming a man means relinquishing achievement and accommodating oneself to men. By a brief exploration of Jane's Austen's *Persuasion*. Anne Elliot seeks make approval in an attempt to complete a circle that will bring her from her ineffectual and effeminate father to realising her relationship with Captain Wentworth. Miss Elliot conforms to Gilbert and Gubar's profile of a submissive female trying to survive, this survival is dependant on gaining male approval and protection. *Persuasion* offers us such a heroine but one who acts submissively not only out of a sense of duty but also unconsciously. Lady Russell, although misguided at times, is allowed to truly dominate those around her, especially Anne. Though *Persuasion* dramatises a female's herself for survival, it does allow for a sense of quiet rebellion.

Anne Elliot, the protagonist of ***Persuasion***, is, like most Austen heroines,

witty, clever, and considerate. Austen referred to her in one of her letters as "a heroine who is almost too good for me". Though Austen very frankly notes that the bloom of youth has left Anne, and that she is not the prettiest of the young ladies in the novel. Anne becomes most decidedly more attractive when her better qualities are noted. Anne is proud of her appearance, and she is deeply hurt after overhearing that Captain Wentworth thinks her appearance much changed for the worst. Unlike her father, Anne also takes pride in practicality, intellect, and patience. Anne is feminine while possessing none of what Austen clearly sees as the negative characteristics of her gender. Anne is neither catty, flighty, nor hysterical. On the contrary, she is level-headed in difficult situations and constant in her affections. Such qualities make her the desirable sister to marry; she is the first choice of Charles Musgrove, Captain Wentworth, and Mr. Elliot.

That Anne has her own mind is clear from the way she rebels against the vanity of her father and elder sister. But Anne is not one to avoid her responsibility and duty as a member of the upper class. She understands and respects the importance of making a "suitable" match, and is offended by the prospect of someone as low as Mrs. Clay entering into her family through

marriage. She is conscious of the social structure in which her relations operate, and through she may seek a bit more flexibility, she by no means wishes to seriously challenge notions of class.

In the end, Anne concludes that she is right to have been persuaded by Lady Russell, even if the advice itself was misguided. The conclusion implies that what might be considered Anne's flaw, her ability to be persuaded by others, is not really a flaw at all. It is left to the reader to agree or disagree with this. But overall, she must be highly regarded; for in her respect for duty and with an independent mind, Anne balances passion and practicality.

However, Anne is not always caring. She can also take on a more masculine role in certain situations. When Louisa falls from the wall, Anne is the most calm out of everyone in the party. She is the most rational, ordering the stunned crowd to help Wentworth and ordering Captain Benwick to get a surgeon for Louisa because "he knows where a surgeon is to be found" better than anyone else there. Everyone begins to ask her "what is to be done next"? and looks up to her as if she were a man ordering people around. This shows Anne pushing against the boundaries of her sphere and breaking into

a more masculine than woman normally did in that time.

MATRIARCHAL ASSERTIVENESS IN JANE AUSTEN'S PERSUASION

Persuasion has rightly been described as a serious comedy. The serious problem for Jane Austen lay in managing the psychological terms on which the lovers could come together again. Anne, who was responsible for breaking off her relations with Wentworth, must play an active part in the healing of the breach. It is in this light that the cancelled chapter in **Persuasion** must be seen. Jane Austen found something wrong in the way she had brought the lovers together in that chapter. In it there is rather artificially contrived incident when Admiral Croft compels Captain Wentworth to give Anne a message which assumes that she is to marry Mr. Elliot. This message naturally makes it necessary for her to tell Wentworth that she has no intention to marry Mr. Elliot, and Wentworth thereupon does the rest. Thus only an external circumstance compels her to play even the small part that she does play in bringing about her union with Wentworth. Her role is completely passive.

In the revised chapters 22 and 23 she plays an active role. The problem was

how to clear his misunderstanding without the breach of decorum involved in telling him of her for him. The problem is solved by Anne's making a statement, easily overheard in the crowded room, of her ideals of unchanging love and the belief that women continue to love even when hope is gone. The statement is almost a confession of her love for Captain Wentworth and he understands her meaning. Obviously she could never have spoken like this if she had been thinking of marrying Mr. Elliot. By openly declaring her faith in woman's constancy in love, she plays an active part in getting her lover back.

She acted passively no doubt, but as she later explains she thought it part of her duty to act in accordance with the advice of a woman whom she regarded as her mother. Anne's subsequent regret had, for a long time, marred every enjoyment of youth. The result of this depression had been an early loss of bloom and spirits. At the age of twenty-seven, Anne thought very differently from what she had been made to think at nineteen. She did not blame Lady Russell and she did not blame herself for having been guided by her; but she felt that if any young person, in similar circumstances, were to ask her advice, she would have been a happier woman in maintaining her engagement with Frederick

Wentworth than she had been in the sacrifice of it. "She had been forced into prudence in her youth; she learned romance as she grew older." But, although she had lost her youthful bloom, she yet maintained her striking looks as is clear from the fact that Mr. Elliot, on first seeing her, was deeply attracted towards her.

Anne is completely free from the snobbery which afflicts her father and her sister Elizabeth. She feels happy to meet her old school-mate, Miss Hamilton (who afterwards became Mrs. Smith). Miss Hamilton had been useful and good to her at school when Anne had gone there as a motherless girl of fourteen, and she could never remember Miss Hamilton without some feeling. Her father taunts her on her visiting a poor widow (that is, Mrs. Smith), but she feels no embarrassment in the matter. If she were inclined to make a retort, she could have reminded her father of his association with an inferior person like Mrs. Clay.

She does not permit Captain Harville to cite the testimony of literature regarding women's fickleness, because stories of women's fickleness have chiefly been written by men, "All the privilege I claim for my own sex, she says, "is that of loving longest, when existence or when

hope is gone". It is this conversation with Captain Harville that serves as the final incentive to Captain Wentworth's spirit and compels him to renew his proposal of marriage to Anne. She experiences an overpowering happiness when she goes through Captain Wentworth's letter making that proposal. Anne's Judgments are correct because they are the outcome of earlier experience, an experience which has involved her in much personal suffering.

She has learnt through suffering the true values of life and can appreciate them, objectively, when she observes them in the sea-going community with which she is brought into contact. Anne has only one thing to learn to have more confidence in herself, to acknowledge that she might yet arouse love. Except for this, she does not go through the educative process of the other heroines." But Anne is like the more vital heroines in having her own quiet decision of character, her own independence of outlook and of choice, and an ability to express herself forcefully when the situation requires it:

Anne's character serves to elucidate and cement this shift is Austen's tone and feminist worldviews. Among the heroines of Austen, Anne receives different cognitive qualities within her. Anne's individualism

gives women something even more important in Austen's assertion of the validity and worth of female emotions. Thus Anne is a rational lady and an enlightened woman.

CONCLUSION

In persuasion, Austen appears to have shifted to a perspective where she values the coverage to identity and act upon personal values and instincts. Elizabeth for in *Pride and Prejudice* for recognizing are vastly different from the things she holds as true for Anne in persuasion. Elizabeth in debt and quick to see through the haughtiness foolishness and misguided ideals of her society and she is a genuinely kind individual who admires the same in others. Anne on the other hand is eventually, able to see the worth of her own instincts and emotions, and to value her duty to herself and her own happiness above what society says she owes to her family and class. The narrative tone of Anne's voice in persuasion reveals a reassessment by Austen of the innate value of a heroine's emotional life.

Norman remarks that Anne, like Fanny and Emma and Elizabeth Bennet is the 'eye' of the novel-the events that take place are witnessed and commented upon by her, but she is not the misguided heroine

treated ironically by fate; she is the heroine who judges rightly.”

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