



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

**Jane Austen's *Persuasion*:**

Major and minor characters

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Ragnildur Nielsen

September 2008

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## Abstract

This essay will be looking into characterisation in the Jane Austen novel, *Persuasion* and how it depicts the views and beliefs of the main characters. Austen cleverly shapes the reader's opinion regarding the characters through their actions and thoughts. Whether it be with their thoughtless actions towards our heroine or their vanity and snobbery, Austen manages to create some very memorable characters but it can be said that some of them are flawed, or if they are as Austen intended them to be, at least it could be said that these characters are very much different from Austen's previous characters. The reader gets to know Anne Elliot's family, as Austen depicts some wonderful characters in Anne's father and sisters. Through their vanity and selfish acts as well as glimpses into Anne's mind and thoughts, negatives and absences in the novel, our heroine becomes one of Austen's most whole and completed character in any of her novels.

Some of the minor character have been thought to be somewhat shallow in characterisation and lacking which could have been do to the fact that the novel was published after Austen's death and therefore one cannot say if the author would have rewritten some of the scenes which have been criticised. But overall *Persuasion* is a joy to read, flaws or not, and perhaps because of these flaws the novel can inspire a new reading and understanding each time it is read.

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## **Introduction**

*Persuasion* is Jane Austen's last completed novel, published after her death. In the novel we follow Anne Elliot and her immediate family through some hardships as her father, the baronet Sir William, stands to lose their home, Kellynch Hall. During this time Anne becomes reacquainted with the man with whom she fell in love eight years earlier, only to reject his proposal after being persuaded that he lacks social status and money. Different from Austen's earlier novels with regard both to the heroine's maturity and the fact that there is greater concentration on the inner person and the self-made man than there is on rank or nobility, *Persuasion* is a fascinating novel with a heroine whom we watch grow into maturity. We see both her failings and her strengths. We follow the people around her and through glimpses into Anne's thoughts, the reader sees how absurd some of the people in Anne's immediate circle really are.

## **Only Anne**

From the very beginning of *Persuasion*, it is clear to the reader that our heroine is not a person of great esteem. She is simply 'only Anne' (5<sup>1</sup>). Even her name could be viewed at the beginning as slightly inferior to her sisters' names as stated in the 'book of books': 'with all the Marys and Elizabeths they had married' (4), and with no mention of the 'Annes' in the family. Despite her 'noble' upbringing, Miss Anne Elliot seems perfectly content on being the person in everyone else's lives that is expected to handle matters that come up, who could be seen as a servant of sorts to all and sundry. Could it be that she has settled for something less than her sisters? Her elder sister serves as mistress of the house and a companion to their father, while the younger is married with children of her own. Despite their rather higher

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<sup>1</sup> Austen, Jane. *Persuasion*. New York: Vintage Books, 2007.

station in life, Anne is the only one of the sisters with whom the reader sympathises. The portrayal of her sisters is damaging from the outset, especially by the manner in which they treat Anne. There are times when they do not even want her with them. For example, the thought of Anne accompanying the family to Bath is simply inconceivable to Elizabeth: ‘for nobody will want her in Bath’ (32) much to the disappointment of Lady Russell:

[...] but Lady Russell was almost startled by the wrong of one part of the Kellynch Hall plan, when it burst on her, which was, Mrs. Clay’s being engaged to go to Bath with Sir Walter and Elizabeth, as a most important and valuable assistant to the latter in all the business before her. (ibid.)

So Anne, perking up the spirits of their ever-complaining sister Mary, seemed just the right thing for all the parties concerned as she was not particularly eager to go to Bath or to leave behind the ‘autumnal months in the country’ (31) while Mary is desperately in need of the company.

Despite the information we are given on the sisters, Austen could easily have used Elizabeth’s unmarried status and her acting as a substitute for her mother to gain the reader’s sympathy. Although only two years older than Anne, Elizabeth ‘felt her approach to years of danger’ (7) and had had no real prospect of gaining a husband, except perhaps her cousin, William Walter Elliot, who eventually married a woman of lesser birth and greater fortune. Besides, Austen makes it clear from beginning of the novel that Mr. Elliot has not been forgiven for certain things he did in the past. Austen might have played more heavily on Elizabeth’s status as an unmarried woman; with no real hope of playing any other role than their vain father’s companion. Indeed, she might even have gone as far as to say that poor Elizabeth had sacrificed her own future in order to keep her father company. Instead she leaves the reader with no other choice than to see her as less favourable than her sister, Anne, selfish and often ignoring other people’s feelings.

Anne's younger sister, Mary Musgrove, formerly Elliot, admits to having 'slight' health problems. She also has unruly children, an inattentive husband (who originally preferred to marry a different woman), and in-laws who mistreat her. Nevertheless, we have little sympathy for her. She is presented as a shallow, vain woman, lacking in both motherly love as well as her affection towards her husband. In fact, all of Anne's family is described as being shallow, snobbish and vain. Sir Walter also comes under attack throughout the novel, He is described early on as being vain from beginning to end in manner and in appearance ('few women could think more of their personal appearance than he did' p. 4). Austen portrays him as a shallow and snobbish character, fortified by his overwhelmingly superior attitude, impressed first and foremost by people's ranks. He is, later seen to be quite quick to change his opinion of people when it suits him. His often comical objection to the people around him makes for an amusing reading but does not in any way improve the reader's opinion of him: For example, he is quite surprised and shocked that Anne chooses to go and see her friend Mrs. Smith instead of accepting the invitation of an evening with Lady Dalrymple, their Irish relative:

A widow Mrs. Smith, - and who was her husband' One of the five thousand Mr. Smiths whose name are to be met with every where. And what is her attraction? That she is old and sickly. - Upon my word, Miss Anne Elliot, you have the most extraordinary taste! Every thing that revolts other people, low company, paltry rooms, foul air, disgusting associations are inviting to you. (155)

In fact, Austen has left only a handful of people for the reader to sympathize or connect with on any level in Anne's close family circle. Among them is her deceased mother's best friend, Lady Russell and the fellow sufferers of her family, the Musgroves. Lady Russell is described with considerable respect in *Persuasion*, certainly more respect than Sir Walter:

She had a cultivated mind, and was, generally speaking, rational and consistent – but she had prejudices on the side of ancestry; she had a value for rank and consequence, which blinded her a little to the faults of those who possessed them. (10)

The description gives us a glimpse into the high opinion in which Lady Russell is held and her status as somewhat of a mother figure to Anne, although Austen does not omit showing us her negative side.

The Musgroves are likewise described affectionately, although with a touch of irony since Anne thinks of them as ‘the happiest creatures of her acquaintance’ but who would nevertheless ‘not have given up her own more elegant and cultivated mind for all their enjoyments; and envied them nothing but that seemingly perfect good understanding and agreement together [...] of which she had known so little herself with either of her sisters’ (39). Conversely, Anne seems to fit in very well with the Musgroves. She has very little say in what goes on in her family. She is an almost invisible character, yet someone the rest appear to rely upon heavily, to do the work most of them try to avoid—a kind of Cinderella figure. The reader is led to understand that she is at least appreciated by the Musgroves if not by her own family. It seems that Anne is more than useful to the Musgroves, acting as somewhat of a buffer between her sister and the family. They also value her as a friend and an equal which is hardly the case within her family, and she is also appreciated for her talents as a pianist, for someone has to play while others dance.



## **Absence and understatement**

John Wiltshire brings up an interesting point in his summation of *Persuasion* when he refers to Anne as ‘without power in her family circle,’ adding that she emerges as a heroine for the reader through ‘negatives, absences, understatements, merely the cadences and phrasing that shape her introspections, not through an assertive or dramatic voice’ (Wiltshire 76). Austen thus gives us an insight into the characters and helps us form our opinions of them often by telling us both they think about each other. A good example of this is when the admiral is describing the changes he has made to Kellynch Hall:

[...] A very good man, and very much the gentleman I am sure – but I should think, Miss Elliot’ (looking with serious reflection) ‘I should think he must be a rather dressy man for his time of life. – Such a number of looking-glasses! oh Lord! there was no getting away from oneself. So I got Sophy to lend me a hand, and we soon shifted their quarters; and now I am quite snug, with my little shaving glass in one corner, and another great thing that I never go near’ (126)

As Norman Sherry points out, in this short description of the admiral, Austen manages to do two things. She emphasises yet again Sir Walter’s vanity and underscores the admiral’s lack of vanity (Sherry 130). He furthermore goes on to add that in Jane Austen’s novels, ‘the heroines are left to make up their minds about the people around them’ from a number of different reports’ (130), possibly by observing and making up their minds ‘according to their nature’ (ibid.).

Yet there is a difference between Anne Elliot and some of Austen’s other heroines. Anne can be seen as the one of the most level-headed of them all. As Sherry points out, Marianne, Emma and Elizabeth are somewhat hasty (131) and quick to judge, while Anne is more sensible, perhaps more like Jane Bennet and Elinor Dashwood<sup>2</sup>. Admittedly older than

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<sup>2</sup> These are other Austen heroines, Jane and Elizabeth Bennet appear in *Pride and Prejudice*, Emma Woodhouse is the heroine in *Emma* and Elinor and Marianne Dashwood play the same role in *Sense and Sensibility*.

most of them, she has reached a level of consistency that some of the others miss (131). For example, there is never any real chance of the Captain losing Anne's affections, whatever his behaviour. She remains steadfast in her affections, even approving in a way in his pursuit of the Musgrove sisters, however painful it may be for Anne to watch.

### **Snobbery**

Two of the most monumental 'snobs' in the story are Anne's father and her sister Mary. The author goes out of her way not to include one ounce of sympathy for either of them. They are displayed as vain and silly people who regard their status in the world as more important than anything else in life. The view of the Musgroves is that of simple natured people--a 'good sort of people; friendly and hospitable, not much educated, and not at all elegant' (39). It fits in very nicely with the author's plan to show Mary in a disagreeable light, never letting them forget that she is above them in ranking.

[...] but I wish any body could give Mary a hint that it would be a great deal better if she were not so very tenacious; especially, if she would not be always putting herself forward to take place of mamma. Nobody doubts her right to have precedence of mamma, but it would be more becoming in her not to be always insisting on it. (44)

Austen's opinion of the Musgrove sisters shines through though as slightly foolish but, if nothing else, the Musgrove girls have become a good tool for the author to tie Captain Wentworth to Anne Elliot yet again so many years later, as well as to give Wentworth an opportunity to measure Anne against the others and ultimately choose her. Marilyn Butler notes that '[m]orally the Musgroves are not nearly as censurable as the Elliots. If we feel that there is a great deal wrong with them, it is largely because they are stupid and indiscriminating about Anne' (Butler 276). Yet again, Austen appeals to our subconscious, although that may not be obvious at first. The Musgroves seem quite oblivious to the fact that

Anne is an unmarried woman of standard who could be considered endangering their hopes of the Captain marrying one of their daughters. Although he does not show direct interest in her while they are staying there, the idea simply does not seem to enter their heads. Could it not be possible that Anne would make a good wife for the Captain? Do they consider Anne as being already unmarriageable, unable to attract a possible spouse, a helpmate whose only job is to make their lives easier? Or is it just that they consider their daughters more worthy of the Captain's attentions? How does she appear to the reader? Is Anne a meek person whom others control easily? Has she simply given up, having already lost both her mother and the man she fell in love with, and now content to be ordered around? And where does she find the courage to suddenly rise up and pursue her own happiness, or at least open up the possibility of romance by finding herself so often in Captain Wentworth's company. Is it simply because of what she had observed in the people around her or is there a critical point or an event that has caused her to have better hopes for her future?

### **Rising up in the world**

Sir Walter Elliot, the widowed father of three girls, is proud of his title as baronet and of his status in the community but as noted above, he gains little sympathy from the reader who soon learns of his distaste for the navy, a social status Austen here uses as a contrast to the nobility. The navy, according to Sir Elliot, has '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 that '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' (19). We have in him the exact opposite of Captain Wentworth, who has risen to fortune. As Juliet McMaster states 'Sir Walter is enraptured by the prestige of his position, but neglects the responsibilities' (119) as he has to put up his home for rent. She goes on to say that the navy is remarked as honourable

and is used in *Persuasion* as a 'model of a system of promotion by merit, to contrast with the old-world system of heredity that Sir Walter Eliot considers sacred' (121).

The ultimate dishonour is hinted upon by Admiral's Croft's overtaking of Kellynch Hall and thus saving the family from ruin. Although, it must be said that Sir Walter is quick to change his opinion to what suits him best and matters of principal do not hinder or delay his sudden change of heart as he quickly decided that 'I have let my house to Admiral Croft' (24) would sound better than if he had let the house to anyone of lesser standard.

Edward Copeland remarks on the backwards status which concludes *Persuasion* and unlike the heroines in Austen's earlier novels Anne marries into the 'hard-working and prosperous pseudo-gentry rank' (144). In his opinion these partnership marriages become a keynote of the new economic arrangement presented in *Persuasion*, and as an example of those marriages he mentions the Harvilles and the Crofts, resting on two assumptions: 'that the future holds prosperity for the British economy' and that a person must pay his bills to uphold 'the character of an honest man' (144). Jane Austen obviously, and perhaps best seen in *Persuasion*, was very fond of the navy, and most likely therein played the fact that two of her brothers were officers in the Royal navy, rising to some distinction (Pinion 332).

McMaster notes that Austen seems to favour the navy over the army as can be seen by the notice she takes of their uniforms (122), seen in the descriptions in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*. The difference between the sailors in *Persuasion* and the men from the military in *Pride and Prejudice* will perhaps be more noticeable to those who have read the other Austen novels. In *Persuasion*, some of the finest characters are in the navy: Captain Wentworth, Admiral Croft and their friends, Harville and Benwyck. In *Pride and Prejudice* on the other hand, trouble seems to follow the army around and Kitty and Lydia Bennet find out the hard way (as McMaster puts it; that there is often 'a sense of sexual threat' from the army men (p. 122)).

## **Economical women**

Although we have seen strong women before in Austen's *Emma*, Elinor and Elizabeth, the women in *Persuasion* reach a new level when it comes to fiscal responsibility (with the possible exception of perhaps Elinor who does her best to explain their dire financial situation to her mother and sister). Anne and Lady Russell are instrumental in persuading Sir Walter Elliot in giving up his home, and thus being able to keep up his lifestyle. Copeland notes that even Lady Elliot was the first of many women managers in the novel (144). The key women who are portrayed as sensible in the novel all have some economic management skills, often skills that surpasses those of their husbands. Mrs. Smith even manages to live on very little income after the financial ruin of her husband, caused of course by one of the 'villains' in our story. But these women survive; Anne and Lady Russell manage to save Sir Walter from ruin almost without him realizing his poor state or who can be to blame for his misgivings. It seems to be through the women the men survive, even Elizabeth Elliot plays some part in this as she struggles to spend less as she proposes to her father her ideas of retrenching:

[...]finally proposed these two branches of economy: to cut off some unnecessary charities, and to refrain from new-furnishing the drawing-room; to which expedients she afterwards added the happy thought of their taking no present down to Anne, as had been the usual yearly custom (10)

Copeland goes on to state: 'It is as if Austen has single-handedly revised the economic priorities of her society: a higher credit line for the pseudo-gentry Wentworths, and a lower one for the baronet Elliots' (144). She seems to be giving credit (or money) where credit is due, to the people who have worked for it. Perhaps it is one of the differences that can be credited to her own mature condition, or growth, and the fact that this is her last completed novel.

## Anne and Captain Wentworth

The relationship between Anne and Captain Wentworth is somewhat built on old feelings and yearlong regrets. We soon learn of the Captain's feelings and thoughts are for Anne:

He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She has used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she shewn a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decide, confident temper could not endure. She has given up to oblige others. It had been the effect of over *Persuasion*. It had been weakness and timidity. (59)

His steadfast opinion of her doesn't waver in the first volume of the book but as Anne sees it: 'He could not forgive her, - but he could be not be unfeeling. [...] it was an impulse of pure, though unacknowledged friendship' (89). He finds it extremely difficult to forgive Anne for having taken the advice Lady Russell offered, being persuaded to turn his offer of marriage down due to his uncertain prospects in life, however their feelings were. Their relationship after so many years apart is largely built on overheard conversations, that is to say their opinions of each other and therefore the structure of their relationship. Captain Wentworth is adamant of finding a wife of strong character, with a 'strong mind, with sweetness of manner' (60). One of the speeches Anne overhears is the talk Wentworth has with Louisa Musgrove about a nut. Although he has gone on about Louisa's firmness of character the metaphor he chooses to stress his point is that one of a nut.

Here is a nut,' said he, catching one down from an upper bough. 'To exemplify, - a beautiful glossy nut, which, blessed with original strength, has outlived all the storms of autumn. Not a puncture, not a weak spot any where. [...] My first wish for all, whom I am interested in, is that they should be firm. (85)

So adamant is he in maintaining this opinion that he seems to be targeting it almost exclusively against Anne as Galperin observes when going over the accident scene on the

Cobb. (229). He there criticises Louisa's supposed firmness as being the element that caused the accident as well as Wentworth's ability to be persuaded that Louisa was able to jump. Was Wentworth right in criticising Anne for her decision so many years ago? 'Is there no one who can help me?' were the first words which burst from Captain Wentworth' (107), does not indicate a man of spectacular firmness after Louisa has her accident. On the contrary it is Anne who takes the matters in her own hands and gives out orders as well as has the presence of mind to call for a surgeon for the girl. At this point in the story the characters undergo a transition that can perhaps answer the question above as to where Anne finds the strength to hope for better things in her future. Her inner strength bursts forth, while the other characters, who often seem more dominant, expose their weakness in the face of unfamiliar danger. As Marilyn Butler explains, it is with Wentworth the novel takes a familiar course to Jane Austen's readers (276). His eyes are opened and his heart is softened by the incident in Lyme in which Anne takes complete control of the situation. He undergoes a change of mind similar to that which number of Jane Austen's heroines has been put through, for example Emma and Elizabeth Bennet, in *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*. But as Butler puts it there is a problem with that change of heart that is unique for *Persuasion*, and that is that Wentworth is not the central character as Emma and Elizabeth were, although a protagonist (276). The central character stays true to her self and her emotions. As Wentworth softens towards Anne, her strength of character increases, she rediscovers herself as an object of admiration with Mr. Elliot and she makes her own decision as to whom she should visit, regardless of her family's disapproval, all the way staying as stated true to her self, only with greater belief in her abilities.

## **Inner and outer life**

It is thought that *Persuasion* is a novel about the inner and the outer life (Wiltshire 76).

Anne is without power in her family circle as she is at first without dramatic prominence in the text, but the narrative becomes gradually suffused with her presence, idioms, and approach. Yet it is through negatives, absences, understatements, merely the cadences and phrasing that shape her introspections, not through an assertive or dramatic voice, that Anne Elliot becomes for the reader a presence in her world. (76.)

You feel the absences in which she should be a part of, should fill up, in her family, by the bond shared by sisters, and even the fact that Wentworth is openly seeking for a wife ties the reader's thoughts to Anne.

Sometimes Austen manages to have the reader sympathise with our heroine by recording slight observations on her past rather than openly describing her mood.

She knew that when she played she was giving pleasure only to herself; but this was no new sensation: excepting one short period of her life, she had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to, or encouraged by any just appreciation or real taste. (45)

Wiltshire states the above example of such an observation, here in one sentence we grasp the loss of her mother as well as another loss (Wentworth) and experience the painfulness of both losses. We have brief insights on her inner thoughts and life but there is no dwelling on them, only a hint that is 'at once suggestive and understated'. (77) So much on how we become to know Anne is through her own passing thoughts, 'it is over! it is over!' she repeated to herself again, and again, in nervous gratitude. 'The worst is over!'" (58) The reader can feel the tension relax from Anne as she realises she is still standing after having been in the same



room as Wentworth so many years later. Marilyn Butler claims that this ‘inward interest’ of *Persuasion* and its access to Anne’s feelings is what has given the book such high standard in the modern world. (279). But although that may be the case, Austen’s descriptions of character play a huge role in placing her among the highest ranking novelists, and it is through her descriptions that we come to accept the slight changes in character in the second volume of the book. We also accept their ending up together, for after all it is Wentworth whom strays away from his earlier beliefs, and showing that firmness can be mistaken for stubbornness and unwillingness to change.

John Bayley believes that many characters in Austen’s novels are used to excite humour (25). Humorous descriptions of vital characters in *Persuasion* have a way of reeling in the proper response from the reader, and are often used to show them in a lesser light, such as in the case of Sir Walter and Mary Musgrove for instance. Irony is not as much used as in *Emma* or even in *Pride and Prejudice* but the novel is not lacking in humour, as Sherry remarks (p. 113), in the conversations between Mrs. Croft and Mrs. Musgrove:

[...] But I neve went beyond the Streights – and never was in the West Indies. We do not call Bermuda or Bahama, you know, the West Indies.’ Mrs. Musgrove had not a word to say in dissent; she could not accuse herself of having ever called them any theing in the whole course of her life.

### **The curious Mrs. Smith**

We have already established that there is no room for empathy with either of Anne’s sisters or her father, but although they have no common ground with reader, there are characters in *Persuasion* whom one feels have something missing from their description. We do not have enough information about them in order to form an opinion and thus ‘taking sides’ with or against them. One of those characters is Anne’s friend from the past, Mrs. Smith, who

incidentally is a pivotal entity in bringing our heroine together with her loved one. However, considering Mrs. Smith's dire economic condition and frail health as well as her role in the novel, her character is remarkably lacking. We know of her husband's death and the state he left her in regarding their financial state but there is little else we know. Described as 'poor, infirm, helpless widow' (151) and found by Anne to have 'good sense and agreeable manners which she had almost ventured to depend on, and a disposition to converse and be cheerful beyond her expectation' (151). Compare this description to the one of Mrs. Croft you find the first one considerably lacking:

Mrs. Croft, though neither tall nor fat, had a squareness, uprightness, and vigour of form, which gave importance to her person. She had bright dark eyes, good teeth, and altogether an agreeable face [...] Her manners were open, easy, and decided, like one who had no distrust of approach to coarseness, however, or any want of good humour. (47)

Norman Sherry finds Mrs. Smith's narrative the greatest fault in the structure of the novel (86). He even ventures that perhaps Austen's illness prevented her to put more into the character for we know that she did rewrite the ending and thus creating a more credible and intimate reuniting of the two heroes. He describes Mrs. Smith's allegations and story as 'necessary, but clumsily contrived' (86). But Sherry also insists that Mrs. Smith's character is one of Austen's few characters to be taken straight (104). For him Mrs. Smith has 'all the virtues' and we should accept them at 'face value'. John Wiltshire suggests that Mrs. Smith could be seen as a 'reflective consciousness' of the novel (78) but as stated above I believe the credibility is lacking which is a shame. William H. Galperin disagrees on the general view of Mrs. Smith. While some critics view the character as straight forward and flawed in structure, Galperin sees a 'manipulative and mendacious person' and that her main goal is to retain her West Indies property (232). Are we to believe that it was Austen's intention to create a

character who so shamefully sets out to use our heroine or that Anne never is the wiser? But when pointing out those characteristics that we find so absent, we might almost be convinced. The way she so admiringly talks of Mr. Elliot when she thinks he is the man Anne wants to marry. Later, the tables are turned entirely and Mr. Elliot is depicted as the villain he is. Would a true friend not have warned Anne had she really thought she was going to marry the man Mrs. Smith knew to be amoral and ruthless? Is it Austen's intention to make us believe that of all the characters in the novel, and the woman mentioned in the end as being still her friend, the most duplicitous? 'She had but two friends in the world to add to his list, Lady Russell and Mrs. Smith. To those, however, he [Wentworth] was very well disposed to attach himself' (248). In the end, if we are to believe Galperin's interpretation of Mrs. Smith, this traitorous woman fools both Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot, after having benefited from the Captain's help in securing her plantation in the West Indies. This seems out of character for Austen herself or we could accept what some of the others critics say, and that is simply that the structure of the character Mrs. Smith is flawed, which is an opinion that seems more credible.

### **The heir himself**

The reader not getting a sense of Mrs. Smith, affects our opinion of Mr. Elliot, and produces another slight problem with character. The reader is quite definitely led to believe in the very beginning of the novel that Mr. Elliot should not be trusted both because he marries beneath himself for money and also because of the way he had spoken of the family upon his wife's death. And although his explanations of the past seemed adequate to Sir Elliot and Elizabeth in Bath, Anne's acceptance of him doesn't come across as believable.

He was quite as good-looking as he had appeared at Lyme, his countenance improved by speaking, and his manners were so exactly what they ought to be,

so polished, so easy, so particularly agreeable, that she could compare them in excellence to only one person's manners. (140-141)

Whether Austen intended this character to be set up as Wentworth's rival for Anne's affections is probably very clear, but it seems to be only the appearance of a rival. As Marilyn Butler points out there is definitely not the same chemistry between Anne and Mr. Elliot as was seen with Elizabeth and Wickham and Emma to Frank (280). Certainly there is nothing there to compare the pair to Marianne and Willoughby. So seemingly, it is just in the eyes of others that it is believable that Anne is entertaining the thought of marrying Mr. Elliot and not as believable for the reader. Although she found him to be 'steady, observant, moderate, candid; never run away with by spirits or by selfishness' (144) she also thought that 'his value for rank and connexion she perceived to be greater than hers' (145) and thus Austen has aligned him with Sir Elliot and his other two daughters. Anne 'saw nobody equal to him' (145) in Bath and it feels like a flaw for her character and quite unlike her, as having been shown to be a good judge of character before. So in knowing Anne to be both a good judge of character and a person who is not quick to judge or change her mind about people, the turnaround after seeing the damaging evidence with Mrs. Smith is difficult to believe. Mr. Elliot, according to Norman Sherry, comes out as a cardboard villain in the novel, reminiscent of the eighteenth-century popular novel (86), much through the descriptions given by Mrs. Smith.

Butler says that 'the manoeuvre by which Mr. Elliott is disposed of, his *affaire* with Mrs. Clay, seems decidedly undermotivated and inconsistent with the worldly wisdom which has hitherto been his leading characteristic (280).' This view seems quite credible. The 'easy' way in which the two seemingly cunning characters are withdrawn does not measure up with other parts of the novel. This consequently leads us to another character that does not quite measure up, and that is Mrs. Clay. Although it is made clear from the beginning that

Anne does not like Mrs. Clay on account of her being a danger to her father's single state, the claim seems to be a little out of place for Anne. She herself had contemplated marriage to a sailor with nothing to his name. The presence of Mrs. Clay forms the beginning and the end of the novel, and Anne's disapproval seems to grow in between although there seems to be no evidence of Mrs. Clay having set 'her claws' in Sir Elliot or is in any way attempting to do so. Is it fear of another woman coming in her mother's place? A role her sister has effectively played since the death of their mother. Or is there something specific about Mrs. Clay that rubs Anne the wrong way, asserting in this description of the poor woman:

Mrs. Clay had freckles, and a projecting tooth, and a clumsy wrist, which he [Sir Elliot] was continually making severe remarks upon, in her absence; but she was young, and certainly altogether well-looking and possessed, in an acute mind and assiduous pleasing manners, infinitely more dangerous attractions than any merely personal might have been. (33)

Austen may have intended to make Mrs. Clay more of a threat than she turns out to be but given the fact that so little is shown of her threatening ways and that she had not really much to gain but the title, Anne's hostility towards her and blindness towards Mrs. Smith does give one pause to wonder what Austen's intentions were.

F.B. Pinion claims that although some critics have claimed that: 'Lady Russell is inadequately or unconvincingly portrayed; that Mrs Smith and her story are no more than a conventional piece of stagecraft; and that the diamond-cut-diamond ending between Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay lacks probability' (128), a closer reading makes some of the criticism less valid. He goes on to state that it was necessary to keep the secondary characters within 'restricted bounds' in a two-volume novel. There simply is not enough rationalisation behind these statements of Pinion in my opinion. It seems that the novel would perhaps have been more compact with these influential characters more believable. Although I do not have the same

view of Lady Russell I do share the opinion he claims the critics wrongly have of these characters.

## **Conclusion**

Although far from perfect, *Persuasion* gives one plenty of occasion to enjoy it each and every time it is read. The manner in which she deals with some of her main concerns, such as rank, snobbery, honesty and insights into the central character's thinking is different from many of Austen's other novels. The honest and steadfast affection our heroine feels for Wentworth and her sincerity in caring for those around her is a pleasure to observe. She may lack Emma's tongue, Elizabeth's wit or Marianne's charm, but she has more ability to make things happen than Jane or Elinor, although it takes a considerable amount of time. Would the novel have benefited from deeper layers on some of the characters? Perhaps, or perhaps we are content on not having Anne hurt by Mr. Elliot or Mrs. Smith, although both possibly have the capacity to do so. In earlier novels Marianne for one was deeply hurt by Willoughby, and seemed to lack the same passion with Colonel Brandon. Even so the reader is content and takes some pleasure in noticing that there really has never been an alternative when seeking out their life partners for neither Anne nor Wentworth. Any attempts have been futile and so useless and so the reader never really believed the seriousness behind Wentworth's pursuit of the Musgrove sisters for instance.

But although there may be something missing from some of the lesser characters there certainly are enough layers in the novel itself so it can be read over and over, with possibly a new interpretation each time, and perhaps that was the author's intention all the way, for Anne is one of Austen's whole and completed characters.

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