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"Her happiness was from within": Anne Elliot's Bliss of Solitude and Self-Reliance in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*

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Abstract

Likely Jane Austen's most solitary, abject heroine, Anne Elliot suffers from indifference from her family circles and often has to supply useful employment to those around her. However, even though Anne Elliot may be Austen's most alone if not the loneliest heroine, she not only relishes her solitude the most but thrives in it. Through frequent solitary observation and reflection, Anne acquires critical faculty, moral discernment, and self-reliance, which attest to her superiority over her family, and eventually over Lady Russell and Captain Wentworth.

Although Anne marries Captain Wentworth happily in the end, the looming doom of being a sailor's wife, uncertain of future wars and casualties, reveals that Anne's self-reliance is of the utmost importance in securing her own happiness. In Persuasion, the narrator deprives the reader of that gratifying, proverbial conjugal felicity at the fictional conclusion and suggests that Anne, as a sailor's wife, will have to be alone much, take care of most things herself, and be prepared for her husband's and her own volatile happiness and uncertain fate. Austen movingly and sympathetically embeds her advocacy for female solitude and self-reliance in the quiet, pensive, ignored, yet self-enlightening character of Anne Elliot.

Keywords: Solitude, Self-reliance, Female Autonomy, Persuasion, Anne Elliot

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Anne Elliot is probably Jane Austen's most solitary, abject heroine despite her quiet kindness, intelligence, and shrewd observation. Without Elizabeth Bennett's charm and sparkly wit, Emma Woodhouse's confidence and social supremacy, Catherine Morland's happy, loveable naivety, or Marianne and Elinor Dashwood's romantic beauty and domestic significance, Anne Elliot suffers indifference from her family circles and often has to supply useful employment to those around her. Anne "was nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way;--she was only Anne" (Austen, 2004: 11).[1] Anne's usefulness, in forgoing the trip to Bath to keep her sister, Mary, company, in getting things prepared before the family leaves Kellynch Hall, and in taking care of Mary's children so as Mary could go to a dinner party, is not only taken for granted but unappreciated, like spinster sisters functioning as "unpaid housekeepers to their bachelor brothers" (Neubauer, 2015: 130). Although Fanny Price's inferior background means that she is often sidelined like Anne Elliot, Fanny at least has Edmund Bertram's adoration for her adamant moral convictions. By contrast, Anne Elliot's lot is a pathetic one, because even her beloved Captain Wentworth faults her for having been persuaded to end their engagement due to her "feebleness of character," "weakness and timidity" (Austen, 2004: 54). Some critics (not this one) seem to endorse her family's perception of Anne's unworthiness as well: Anne passes "for the most part ignored" (Knox-Shaw, 2004: 222) and "loss and diminution define her" (Greiner, 2010: 903).

However, even though Anne Elliot may be Austen's most solitary if not the loneliest heroine, she not only relishes her solitude the most but thrives in it. She prefers her own company to that of most other characters. She ruminates constantly and is often able to gain productive, interesting, and enlightening insight into herself and others. To privilege Anne's interiority, Austen often allows only the narrator and reader to witness the inner drama and fruitful meditations of Anne's capacious mind, subordinating most other characters to a lesser function in the plot, similar to the way they ignore her in the story. How the narrator highlights Anne's interiority at the expense of other characters' ordinary blur of opinions by rendering them insignificant indicates where the narrator's

[1] All textual references are to the Oxford World's Classics edition of 2004 and are cited parenthetically.

sympathy and approval lie. Anne's "elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding" (Austen, 2004: 11), since her appreciative mother's death, is imperceptible to and intentionally excluded from her family circles, except for Lady Russell, due to their mediocrity and lack of moral stamina. Through frequent solitary observation and reflection, Anne obtains critical acumen, moral discernment, and self-reliance, which attest to her moral and intellectual superiority over her family, and eventually over her surrogate mother Lady Russell and Captain Wentworth.

Although Anne marries Captain Wentworth happily in the end, the looming doom of being a sailor's wife, uncertain of future wars and casualties, reveals that Anne's self-reliance is of the utmost importance in securing her own happiness. This self-reliance is remarkable because in no other novel than *Persuasion* does Austen come close to hinting at female independence even from marriage. Austen's other novels bring enlightened heroines and reformed or improved husbands together at the close of the stories.[2] However, in *Persuasion* the narrator deprives the reader of that secure, proverbial conjugal felicity at the end and suggests that Anne, as a sailor's wife, will have to be alone much, take care of most things herself, and be prepared for her husband's and her own volatile happiness and uncertain fate. Yet through the course of the novel and Mrs. Croft's example, the narrator also reassures the reader with a healthy dose of assurance that Anne Elliot would be and could be up for any challenge should the need arise. Austen's portrayal of Anne Elliot as independent and competent and her suggestion of marriage as providing volatile security for women is extraordinary in that it not only subverts Austen's reception as a novelist of the marriage market but also upends the long tradition of valorizing marriage and family in womanhood. In addition, Anne's solitude and self-reliance also signals a break from the eighteenth-century veneration for the general opinion and a shift to honor the merit of the individual along

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[2] Witness, for example, the joyous unions of Marianne Dashwood and Colonel Brandon, Elinor Dashwood and Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park* (1814), and Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightly in *Emma* (1815), and Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* (1818). None of these marriages is overshadowed by any future unpredictability or impending disaster.

the lines of the romantic writers. In this study, I will argue that Austen champions female solitude and self-reliance in *Persuasion* through Anne Elliot's distancing herself from family, savoring the bliss of solitude, and attaining self-contained composure and happiness.

1. Distancing herself from family and comfort zone

From the beginning of *Persuasion*, the narrator informs us of Anne's pitiable insignificance in her family circles, but the narrator also leaves clues that Anne quietly and unnoticeably seeks to distance herself from them, which reveals her sense of superiority over them. Although Anne's superiority is distinctive, she does not arrogantly parade it or slight others' opinions but only quietly recognizes others' inferiority to herself. Anne's conscious distancing herself from family signals a departure from old, established social institutions, such as the family, as well as attests to Austen's investment in the Enlightenment spirit of independence and autonomy.[3] Furthermore, Anne's distance from her inferior family contributes to safeguarding her emotional well-being, sparing her embarrassment, and enhancing her personal liberty. Sir Walter, Elizabeth Elliot, and Mary Musgrove's class-bound superficiality, arrogance, selfishness, and extravagance literally bankrupt themselves, making it necessary for them to relocate from their grandiose ancestral home, Kellynch Hall, and ushering in their replacement by a new class of self-made seamen such as Admiral Croft and Captain Wentworth. Anne's emotional affinity and moral alignment with this new class of self-made men refreshingly heralds in a new set of value system which, in the morally-bankrupt character William Elliot's words, may disrespectfully represent "the unfeudal tone of the present day" (Austen, 2004: 113),[4] when in fact it is the old system

[3] Terry Castle, in her talk "Becoming An Orphan: Estrangement and Education" presented on February 28, 2011 at the University of South Dakota, aptly calls this self-extrication from home "self-orphaning," through which many eighteenth-century novel heroes and heroines eventually achieve maturation and self-fulfillment.

[4] Claudia Johnson also discusses "the unfeudal tone of the present day" and argues convincingly that Austen explores how the new social climate delineated in *Persuasion* impacts women psychologically and what "apparent possibilities" become available to them (1990: 148).

that the narrator portrays as decadent and depraved.

Realizing that "the art of knowing our own nothingness beyond our own circle was become necessary for her" (Austen, 2004: 39), Anne Elliot is reconciled to her insignificance, but her nothingness actually disguises her distaste for her family. Not only is Anne on her own or left alone most of the time, she enjoys, whenever possible, not having to meddle with her incorrigible family and their petty annoyances. For instance, when driving with Lady Russell to Bath to be with her family, Anne does not share Lady Russell's feelings of cheerfulness but "persisted in a very determined, though very silent, disinclination for Bath" (Austen, 2004:110). The prospects of reuniting with her family dishearten and stifle Anne, as she enters her father's new house in Camden-place "with a sinking heart, anticipating an imprisonment of many months, and anxiously saying to her self, 'Oh! When shall I leave you again?'" (Austen, 2004:111). Anne's home, instead of being a seat of comfort and consolation, is a constant source of tribulation and embarrassment, because she "must sigh that her father should feel no degradation in his change; should see nothing to regret in the duties and dignity of the resident land-holder" (Austen, 2004: 112). Finding it difficult to comprehend Sir Walter's and Elizabeth's perfect enjoyment of their new house in Bath and "boasting of their space" when in fact Camden-place is much smaller in scale and lesser in grandeur than Kellynch Hall, Anne psychologically distances herself from her family's sentiments as she "must sigh, and smile, and wonder too" at their self-delusion (Austen, 2004:112). Ironically, the home, which is supposed to be a haven of refuge and solace, turns out to be devoid of comfort for Anne. In Anne's home with her biological family, there is "a sense of home as claustrophobic, stifling confinement" (Lau, 2006: 96); while "exile from home proves liberating" (Lau, 2006: 98). Anne generally feels more "at home" when with her own chosen friends such as the Crofts, the Harvilles, Captain Benwick, and Mrs. Smith than with her own biological family.

Another instance which exemplifies Anne's conscious estrangement from her family is when she tries to bring to Elizabeth's attention the dangers of inviting Mrs. Clay to go to Bath with the family. Worried that Mrs. Clay's company might develop into a romantic intimacy with Sir Walter, Anne feels that "she could not excuse herself from trying to make it perceptible to her sister" (Austen, 2004: 33). Accurately expecting indignation and rebuttal from Elizabeth, Anne feels relieved when the ordeal

is over: "Anne had done—glad it was over, and not absolutely hopeless of doing good" (Austen, 2004: 34). Anne's contempt for her sister is only thinly disguised and her estrangement from family proves necessary for protecting her own emotional well-being.

When staying with her sister Mary Musgrove and brother-in-law Charles in Uppercross, Anne's intentional self-exclusion of her relatives also reveals her sense of superiority in addition to preserving her personal calm. Seeing Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove as "some of the happiest creatures of her acquaintance; but still, saved [. . .] by some comfortable feeling of superiority from wishing for the possibility of exchange, she would not have given up her own more elegant and cultivated mind for all their enjoyments" (Austen, 2004: 38). Anne also avoids going to a party at Mr. Musgrove's at the Great House in order to shun Captain Wentworth and to "escape from being appealed to as umpire" to settle different opinions among the family," and this "added to the advantages of a quiet evening" (Austen, 2004: 66). Melissa Sodeman's argument that "Anne remains an isolated figure throughout most of the novel" and that "her attempts to reach out [. . .] do little to relieve her loneliness" (2005: 794) fails to account for Anne's intentional self-exclusion from family circles. Anne relishes her solitude, something which is more enjoyable than her family's company of lesser mental strength and maturity and which might be misconstrued as her loneliness.

In addition to extracting herself from family circles, both physically and psychologically whenever possible, Anne also withholds important information from them, which indicates her distrust of her family circle's judgment and their inability to respond sensibly to the news. Anne's reservation of key knowledge to herself helps protect her integrity and confidence in herself. For example, Anne decides not to disclose to her family her visits to Mrs. Smith, a former school friend who had comforted her when Anne was mourning her mother's loss and who now is "a poor, infirm, helpless widow" (Austen, 2004: 124). Anne "mentioned nothing of what she had heard, or what she intended, at home" because it "would excite no proper interest there" (Austen, 2004: 124). The family will not try to understand her motivation or appreciate her act of requiting Mrs. Smith's former kindness towards her, so she bars them from this knowledge and any discussion that might arise from the occasion. Anne's exclusion of her family from such meaningful communication implies her rejection of family and

its supposed symbolic function as the foundation of human interaction and society. Anne, however, shares this information with Lady Russell because she can appropriately enter "thoroughly into her sentiments" (Austen, 2004: 124) and thus is worthy of Anne's confidence. Up till now Anne still venerates Lady Russell's judgment.

Nevertheless, Anne eventually breaks from Lady Russell, her surrogate mother, mentor, and friend as well, because Lady Russell's "prejudices on the side of ancestry" and her "value for rank and consequence" (Austen, 2004:15) impair her judgment of those who possess them and those who do not. When Anne finds out, to her chagrin, about William Elliot's repulsive and depraved character from Mrs. Smith, she decides to again delay her revelation of this critical knowledge to Lady Russell, who has thought very highly of Mr. Elliot and even eagerly encourages Anne to accept his hand in marriage. Anne's control of this secret knowledge betrays her intellectual superiority over Lady Russell, and it is only due to Anne's deference to Lady Russell that her superiority does not look like contempt. Through the narrator's free indirect discourse, we get little filtered access to Anne's mind: "It was now some years since Anne had begun to learn that she and her excellent friend could sometimes think differently; and it did not surprise her, therefore, that Lady Russell should see nothing suspicious or inconsistent [. . .] in Mr. Elliot's great desire of a reconciliation" (Austen, 2004: 119). Lady Russell is "drastically wrong about Sir Walter's heir" (Claudia Johnson, 1990: 149) and eventually excluded from Anne's crucial information. The way Anne withholds significant news from family and friends is similar to the way Samuel Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe determines to die a virtuous death and stops eating anything after the rape in that they are both symbolic ways to psychologically sever ties with the benighted family and world in Clarissa's case. The refusal to communicate crucial information or accept nourishment is also an important mechanism to protect one's selfhood and integrity in blocking detrimental, contaminated input, be it an inconsiderate opinion or food, from affecting one's mental and physical self. Since Anne's family and Lady Russell prove themselves beneath Anne's vision of a deserving family, Anne simply bars them from the communication of her thoughts and feelings. Anne's moral and intellectual superiority in distancing herself from family illustrates the benefits of being closed to her unenlightened family, who cannot appreciate Anne properly and deserves her ignoring them.

2. Anne Elliot's Bliss of Solitude

While ignored and left to pursue her own fancy, Anne often abandons the company of her indifferent family circle to find retreat and calm in the seclusion of her room, the corners of big sitting rooms, and outdoors away from people, where she can watch, observe, and reflect. Anne is able to solve problems and sort out confusion through her solitary rumination. I use the phrase bliss of solitude not to mean that all of Anne's meditations are of happy thoughts, feelings, and experiences, but that Anne is able to make her solitary contemplation joyfully productive by reaching helpful, self-enlightening insights or decisions. She is constantly performing acts of hermeneutics, dissecting and interpreting her own and others' words, deeds, and feelings and enabling herself to reach insight into herself and people around her. Because the narrator's voice, through Austen's deployment of free indirect discourse, often blends into Anne's contemplation, the reader feels as if s/he lived inside Anne's head. As Robyn Warhol argues rightly, Anne Elliot functions "as the central consciousness through which the story gets transmitted" (1992: 6).[5]

Anne Elliot's solitary rumination follows closely in the footsteps of major Enlightenment thinkers and is all the more politically significant for the gender specificity which Austen gives it. John Locke's idea of the individual born as *tabula rasa*, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, meant to garner and develop knowledge from experience and perception encapsulates what Anne Elliot performs brilliantly throughout the novel. For example, after Anne discovers belatedly that it was Captain Wentworth who helped take away the child Walter Musgrove from her back while she was busy taking care of the ill little Charles Musgrove, she is too agitated to stay in the room and requires "a long application of solitude and reflection to recover her" (Austen, 2004: 69). Together with another incident where Captain Wentworth assists Anne into the carriage after the long walk to Winthrop to relieve her exhaustion, Anne's contemplation finally makes her understand why Captain Wentworth acts so

[5] Several other critics have also highlighted Austen's "pioneering the novel with a central consciousness or filter and a more reticent narrator" (Nelles, 2006: 119) and the "distinctiveness of *Persuasion* [. . .] in Jane Austen's mode of dramatizing the consciousness of the heroine, Anne Elliot" (Wolfe, 1971: 687).

kindly towards her even though she knows "[H]e could not forgive her" for the dissolution of their engagement: "he could not see her suffer, without the desire of giving her relief. It was a remainder of former sentiment; [. . .] a proof of his own warm and amiable heart" (Austen, 2004:77). Realizing that Captain Wentworth still cares for her gives her great joy, but the narrator decorously tells us Anne reaches this understanding with "emotions so compounded with pleasure and pain, that she knew not which prevailed" (Austen, 2004: 77). The pain arises from the reality of their estrangement and the pleasure comes from her realization of his lasting affections for her. Anne's analysis of Captain Wentworth's action clarifies for her his estimation of her, a valuable understanding to come out of her meditation. Making sense of Captain Wentworth's and her own actions and feelings helps Anne get a clear grasp on where she stands in relation to her former betrothed and prepares her psychologically for future possibilities with him.

Anne's solitary contemplation on the flagrant and almost scandalous flirtation between Captain Wentworth, Henrietta, and Louisa Musgrove also sheds light on the seeming seriousness of their group courtship. Judging "from memory and experience," Anne "could not but think that [. . .] Captain Wentworth was not in love with either": "They were more in love with him; yet there it was not love. [. . .] He was only wrong in accepting the attentions—(for accepting must be the word) of the two young women at once" (Austen, 2004: 69-70). Anne coolly watches the romantic development of the threesome from the sidelines and seems to retain some hope for Captain Wentworth until his hazelnut speech about how he wishes people to be firm in character tells her that he still resents her infirmity in succumbing to Lady Russell's powers of persuasion and ending their engagement. Lagging behind the walking party near Winthrop, Anne feels the need to think things over: her "spirits wanted the solitude and silence which only numbers could give" (Austen, 2004: 75). Though still with the crowd, Anne is able to distance herself mentally from them and avail herself of solitary contemplation. This detachment transforms "the crowd of bodies that at Uppercross overwhelm her [. . .] paradoxically" into "more space in which to be alone" (Sodeman, 2005: 790).[6] What

[6] Daniel Gunn has also noted in Anne Elliot "an immense gulf between interiority and social intercourse" and correctly terms Anne's negotiations between self and society her "struggle to

Anne's detached rumination permits her to see is "how her own character was considered by Captain Wentworth" (Austen, 2004: 75). What is extraordinary about Anne's reflection is that she seems to be the only character who is able to achieve this level of insight into herself and others, until she is joined much later by Captain Wentworth, who only starts to contemplate the (poor) suitability of his liaison with Louisa after her nearly fatal fall from the Cobb in Lyme.

What Anne accomplishes in her solitude is exactly what Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Samuel Johnson, Adam Smith, and Dennis Diderot also advocate—self-sufficient, atomistic, autonomous individuality. Rousseau's idea in *Émile* of educating children in nature, away from society, to avoid corruption by social practices and to prepare children to form independent thoughts and make independent decisions illustrates how Anne often does her thinking away from people. Although Rousseau intends this liberal education for male children, Austen does not exclude women from this autonomous individuality. As Francis Hart posits rightly, "the affinity of Rousseau and Austen" is striking and for Austen the private self is "to be restored by temporary retreat to a space where the person can 'collect' or 'compose' herself" (1975: 309, 310), much in the way Anne often restores herself.

Anne's honest reflection about herself and others also falls in line with Adam Smith's notion of the impartial spectator, which postulates that "we must view ourselves [. . .] not so much according to that light in which we may naturally appear to ourselves, as that in which we naturally appear to others" and that to act "so as that the impartial spectator may enter into the principles of his conduct [. . .] he [. . .] must humble the arrogance of his self-love" (1791: 141). This is where Anne parts company with her father and sisters, who are almost solely defined by their self-love, in the form of narcissism in the case of Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot and in the manner of hypochondriac insecurity with Mary Musgrove. Being able to face her own advantages and weaknesses squarely, Anne gains a level mental and psychological maturity unparalleled by any other character in *Persuasion* in that through her solitary meditation

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bridge the gap between her alienated life and the dutiful social conduct to which she feels herself called" (1987: 415-6). I do not see Anne's efforts to placate social demands on her as her struggle, but rather as her ability to maintain selfhood in social circumstances.

she becomes her own advisor and buttresses her own self-esteem and confidence.

Johnson and Diderot's privileging of solitude over social mingling also resonates with Anne's temperament and accentuates her self-contained individuality. Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* "lays bare the principle of insincerity upon which society is based and demonstrates the loss of personal integrity and dignity that the impersonations of social existence entail" (Trilling, 1972: 31). This explains why Anne needs to retreat to her, albeit sometimes relative, privacy to ponder her questions or allay her agitation. Although Johnson attacks "solitude from the standpoint of duty" for preventing high officers of society from demonstrating good public examples (Havens, 1954: 257), he also places great importance upon the acquisition of solitude: "The love of retirement has [. . .] adhered closely to those minds, which have been most enlarged by knowledge, or elevated by genius," who soon find "themselves unable to pursue the race of life without frequent respirations of intermediate solitude" (Samuel Johnson, 2003: 22). In addition, for those who "are born to think [. . .] knowledge is to be gained only by study, and study to be prosecuted only in retirement" (Samuel Johnson, 2003: 22).[7] That Austen singles out Anne Elliot to exemplify the Enlightenment ideals of self-sufficient and self-fulfilled individuality attests to Austen's investment in female autonomy.

Anne Elliot's need of solitude towards the closing romantic fruition of the novel, after realizing that she has regained and secured Captain Wentworth's love, signals her emotional superiority over communal intercourse, in addition to contributing to her proper ladylike manners. Nevertheless, her preference of solitude over society in moments of ecstasy reveals more about her own appropriate appreciation of the sentiments than about showing proper shyness with the confirmation of love. For instance, after a meaningful discussion and exchange of genuine feelings about what had taken place in Lyme with Captain Wentworth at the concert, Anne is so delighted that she is "in need of a little interval for recollection" (Austen, 2004: 149). Furthermore, after reading Captain Wentworth's final, wholehearted confession of love

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[7] George Watson's comment that "Johnson seems indifferent to the joys of a solitary mental life" fails to account for Johnson's emphasis on privacy and solitude as sources of happiness and mental composure.

in a secret letter, Anne is so thrilled that "Half an hour's solitude and reflection might have tranquilized her," but she only has ten minutes "before she was interrupted" again by the Uppercross crowd: "Would they only have gone away, and left her in the quiet possession of that room, it would have been her cure" (Austen, 2004: 191-2). Eventually she says "in desperation [. . .] she would go home," because "her heart prophesied some mischance, to dampen the perfection of her felicity" (Austen, 2004: 192). Not allowing any alloy of lesser appreciation from family and friends to adulterate her exquisite joy, Anne protects both her full enjoyment of happiness and selfhood in her solitary possession of romantic bliss. Solitude and reflection allows Anne "to escape from social stupidity, noise, and nothingness" (Carson, 2004: 3) and her isolation allows her to attain "moral and cognitive individuality" (Lynch, 1998: 242).[8] Anne's solitude and reflection rank above social intercourse for her, enabling her self-fulfillment and self-sufficiency.

The reader is privileged in Anne's solitude and contemplation, and the privilege encourages the reader to savor and experience Anne's sentiments vicariously and to appreciate Anne's mental workings and often fruitful results. Readers are invited to involve themselves in "active interpretation and judgment" (Fiedler, 2004: 1) of Anne's thoughts and feelings. Not only is Anne free and at ease in her solitude, she is also free from the imposition of those near her to accommodate their needs and whims, such as petty demands from her sisters and others. As readers, we get to know Anne "in a way the heroine's world can not" (Lynch, 1998: 213). One of the most luxurious treats the reader gets is the privilege to be tagging along with Captain Wentworth and Anne on their walk back to Camden-place after she has given him a very meaningful look, with glowing cheeks, in acceptance of his love. The lovers have chosen "the comparatively quiet and retired gravel-walk, where the power of conversation would make the present hour a blessing indeed and prepare for it all the immortality which the happiest recollections of their own future lives could bestow" (Austen, 2004: 193). The reader cannot help but bask in the joy of the couple's mutual love and consolation.

Anne's bliss of solitude, in addition to her physical separation from crowds of

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[8] Thomas Wolfe also comments properly on Anne's ability to retain "a private integrity, some inviolable core of self" by detaching herself from a crowd even while in it (1971: 693).

people, also arises from mental solitude—that ability to develop independent thoughts and confident convictions which help one understand and engage with the world without being subject to the dominant views of the day at the expense of selfhood and moral integrity. This also resonates with what Samuel Johnson advocates: "That every man should regulate his actions by his own conscience, without any regard to the opinions of the rest of the world, is one of the first precepts of moral prudence; justified not only by the suffrage of reason [. . .] but by the voice likewise of experience" (2003: 62). Through practicing mental solitude and self-communion, Anne is able to heal her own hurt feelings when necessary, collect her mind, and ensure her own well-being. For instance, Anne at first feels guilt-ridden about terminating her engagement with Captain Wentworth, blaming her own "feebleness of character," "weakness and timidity" (Austen, 2004: 54) for not being able to resist Lady Russell's persuasion. However, later Anne is able to turn this guilt around and convince herself and Captain Wentworth, not out of self-delusion or rationalization, that her submission to Lady Russell on the side of duty and conscience was the right decision after all, because she "should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than [. . .] in giving it up" and because "a strong sense of duty is no bad part of a woman's portion" (Austen, 2004: 198). Looking back at Lady Russell's advice, Anne admits that she herself "certainly never should, in any circumstance of tolerable similarity, give such advice" (Austen, 2004: 198), considering the pain taking the advice has caused her. However, Anne also does not conceal her opinion that Lady Russell did "err in her advice" simply because "she was in the place of a parent" (Austen, 2004: 198). Anne's reconsideration of "the past, and trying impartially to judge of the right and wrong" (Austen, 2004: 198) enables her to get over this regret, instead of fixating on a past sorrow and engulfing herself in self-pity.

Another instance of wisdom gained through Anne's mental solitude is to reflect back on past distress and to bring lessons away from it in addition to regret and loss. After Louisa Musgrove's frightening fall from the Cobb and the subsequent uncertainty of her recovery, the entire plot is plunged into a dark abyss of misery and trepidation. A general gloom descends and dims all characters' perspectives, especially Anne's because she foresees her diminishing hopes with Captain Wentworth and because "There could not be a doubt [. . .] of what would follow Louisa's recovery" (Austen, 2004:100) from the fall.

However, Anne is able to come away with a rewarding and transcendental conclusion which elevates both Captain Wentworth and herself above the lingering trauma from the accident. When Captain Wentworth asks Anne, after they meet again in Bath, whether she has recovered from the shock of Louisa's fall, Anne admits that "the last few hours were certainly very painful [. . .] but when pain is over, the remembrance of it often becomes a pleasure" (Austen, 2004: 148). Instead of lamenting the accident or blaming oneself for causing it like Wentworth does, faulting his own infirmity in giving in to Louisa's determination, Anne teaches herself a lesson that her former persuasion by Lady Russell might not have been all that bad or cowardly on her part and that Wentworth's resoluteness can lack sound consideration, as Louisa's fall sadly demonstrates. Even though the aftermath of the fall places a great strain on all present, Anne is ready to get over it and feels grateful for having weathered through the ordeal. Right after Louisa's accident, Anne wonders "whether it ever occurred to him [Captain Wentworth] now, to question the justness of his own previous opinion as to the universal felicity and advantage of firmness of character" and whether "a persuadable temper might sometimes be as much in favour of happiness, as a very resolute character" (Austen, 2004: 97). Looking back, Anne is poised to forgive, forget, and move on. For her, careful reflection on the past is conducive to obtaining wisdom, which contributes to Anne's protection of the self and generosity towards others. As Wolfe argues convincingly, "the variously tender and painful past" can be summoned up "to inform and enrich the life of the present" (1971: 700). In sharing her thoughts on the accident in Lyme, Anne also magnanimously gives solace to Wentworth, demonstrating again her moral superiority and psychological maturity over him.

What Anne observes and learns from visiting Mrs. Smith most prominently illustrates her bliss of mental solitude. Mrs. Smith's pathetic living condition, failing health, and poverty immediately evokes Anne's sympathy: Mrs. Smith's "past kindness and present suffering" are the "two strong claims" she has on Anne's attention (Austen, 2004: 123). Unfortunately, with Sir Walter, Mrs. Smith's situation excites instant contempt and loathing when Anne's visits are made known to him: "and who is Miss Anne Elliot to be visiting in Westgate-buildings? [. . .] And what is her attraction?" (Austen, 2004:127).

However, Anne is able to rise above the surface of Mrs. Smith's material poverty

and deduce the source of Mrs. Smith's self-content even in her deplorable state:

> How could it be?—She watched—observed—reflected—and finally determined that this was not a case of fortitude or resignation only. [. . .] here was that elasticity of mind, that disposition to be comforted, that power of turning readily from evil to good, and of finding employment which carried her out of herself, which was from Nature alone. It was the choicest gift of Heaven. (Austen, 2004: 125)

Anne seems to have an epiphany moment where she attains invaluable insight that if a sick room can be full of joyful lessons then her own self-consciousness and insignificance need not and should not impede her enjoyment of life. Mrs. Smith's ability to accept her dire condition, to benefit from Nurse Rooke, who teaches her how to knit and "is sure to have something to relate that is entertaining and profitable," and to regard weathering through past ordeals as doing her good, all brings Anne to the illuminating conclusion that "A sick chamber may often furnish the worth of volumes" (Austen, 2004: 125-6).[9] It still takes nothing less than Anne's philosophical, pensive nature to discern that wonderful, self-comforting gift in Mrs. Smith, to which the likes of Sir Walter and Elizabeth are blind because of their self-centeredness and narrow-mindedness. Nurse Rooke and Mrs. Smith are Austen's "portraits of two further resilient women" who function as independent, self-sufficient female exemplars and help to widen "the perspective on self-reliance" for Anne (Knox-Shaw, 2004: 237). Through solitary rumination, Anne is able to achieve inner peace and self-enlightenment. Her happiness from within is a result of Anne's retreat to her inner self.

3. Anne Elliot's Self-Reliance

Despite her being underrated in the family circles, Anne is perhaps the most

[9] Jon Spence posits rightly that Mrs. Smith's "tranquil center is not the self" for she "perceives something beyond the transitory world which takes her out of herself" (1981: 634).

self-reliant female character of her class in the novel, surpassing even Captain Wentworth. Her composure, collected mind, and crisis management enable her to offer invaluable assistance when necessary, which impresses Captain Wentworth and reignites his adoration of her. Anne's independence attests to her autonomy and self-contained pleasure.

After Louisa's fall from the Cobb (and from grace with Captain Wentworth), all except Anne simply panic and stand around clueless about how to help Louisa. Anne alone rises to the occasion and acts as the emergency requires: "Anne, attending with all the strength and zeal, and thought, which instinct supplied, to Henrietta, still tried, at intervals, to suggest comfort to the others, tried to quiet Mary, to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth" (Austen, 2004: 92-3). She is the only one who "had the presence of mind to suggest that Benwick would be the properest person to fetch a surgeon" and both Charles and Captain Wentworth "seemed to look to her for directions" (Austen, 2004: 147, 93). Anne's command of the situation and her quick, correct responses to the most pressing demands in saving Louisa's life instantly alleviates everyone's terror and enhances Louisa's chances of survival. To his credit, Wentworth is generous enough to recognize and honor Anne's remarkable merit in the handling of the emergency when they meet up again in Bath, and through his eyes "we see her transformed [. . .] from a self-effacing drudge to a paragon of steadiness and resolution" (Knox-Shaw, 2004: 228). Anne's "sturdiness and her forwardness to take control after the catastrophe at Lyme (Claudia Johnson, 1990: 151)" exemplifies Austen's tribute to female strength and self-reliance.

In addition, Anne is also self-reliant in her choice of friends. Her enjoyment of the sailors' company and cultivation of their friendship is self-procured in that she autonomously decides and develops the relationship and community she desires regardless of what her family may think of the sailors' lowly beginnings. Aside from distancing herself from family, Anne also detaches herself from her family's class-conscious social circles. In choosing her own group of true and meritorious friends, Anne is also symbolically relinquishing biological ties which comprise the unfeeling, superficial, and arrogant relatives and friends in her family circles.

Anne derives great pleasure from observing and appreciating the sailors' group, such as the Crofts, the Harvilles, and Captain Benwick. The navy's open-mindedness,

egalitarian camaraderie, sincerity, and warmth so mesmerize Anne that she "always watched them [the Crofts] as long as she could; [. . .] or equally delighted to see the Admiral's hearty shake of the hand when he encountered an old friend, and [. . .] Mrs. Croft looking as intelligent and keen as any of the officers around her" (Austen, 2004:136). That Mrs. Croft mingles comfortably and effortlessly with the Admiral's fellow sailors highlights the navy's egalitarian, horizontal inclusiveness, as opposed to Sir Walter's alignment with the "vertical hierarchy of rank and ancestry" (Morris, 2017: 144). Mrs. Croft's Wollstonecraft-inspired feminism in declaring that "Women may be as comfortable on board, as in the best house in England" and that she knows "nothing superior to the accommodations of a man of war" (Austen, 2004: 60) resonates with Anne's prompt alertness and resolute command in her handling of the crisis in Lyme. The fact that Austen renders a sea-worthy Captain Wentworth dumbfounded and clueless after Louisa's fall highlights Austen's emphasis of female agency through Anne's composure, competence, and decisiveness.

The Harvilles' small but intriguing and warm house gives Anne tremendous pleasure as she reflects on what she sees and what it means. Anne's hermeneutical feat leads her to see and enjoy with gratification "the picture of repose and domestic happiness" the house presented: Aside from the necessaries, there are "some few articles of a rare species of wood, excellently worked up, and with something curious and valuable from all the distant countries Captain Harville had visited, [. . .] connected as it all was with his profession, the fruit of its labours, [and] the effect of its influence on his habits" (Austen, 2004: 83). The picture of domestic happiness is not complete without Captain Harville and Benwick's show of handicraft skills and ingenious improvements around the house, such as Harville's pretty book shelves for Benwick, Benwick's toys for the children and netting needles and pins. Seeing the navy engaging in what is usually designated the feminine realm of domesticity supplies Anne with such tremendous gratification that she thought "she left great happiness behind her when they quitted the house" (Austen, 2004: 83).[10]

Together with Anne's visits to Mrs. Smith to avoid her family and Mr. Elliot,

[10] Knox-Shaw also posits rightly about Austen's interesting reversal of gender roles in this scene by putting "the navy in its domestic guise" (2004: 240).

Anne's conscious affinity with the navy and Mrs. Smith clearly illustrates Anne's break both mentally and physically from her family. Anne's choice of friends may not be expansive, but it is definitely exquisitely select. Austen celebrates the ideal union of a small group of "like-minded companions [. . .] with the rest of the crass, cold world shut out" (Lau, 2004: 264).[11] With Anne's newly defined community of friends, with whom she has more meaningful and rewarding interaction than with her own family, we see a relocation of domesticity from the old "terms of household and kinship" to "more companionate and egalitarian structures such as the marriage of Anne and Wentworth and the circles of friends whom they draw near" (Sodeman, 2005: 793).

Anne's determination to reject Mr. Elliot indicates a break even from Lady Russell, who has been a surrogate mother, friend, and confidante to her. Although up to this point Anne has mostly relied on Lady Russell's advice, intellectual company, and moral support, Anne decides for herself this time to firmly resist Lady Russell's persuasion for her to marry Mr. Elliot and become "the future mistress of Kellynch, the future Lady Elliot" (Austen, 2004:129). Anne's rejection of Mr. Elliot, together with her re-acceptance of Captain Wentworth's love, function as her declaration of independence, with which she slowly but surely steers her own course of life. Developing a selfhood "independent of Lady Russell," Anne downgrades Lady Russell's status "from dominating mother to subordinated friend" (Swanson, 1981: 8, 1).

In Anne's debate with Captain Harville over men's and women's nature, she also takes the initiative to make her views and feelings known to Captain Wentworth, even though she has to resort to general language to disguise her confession of continuous love for Captain Wentworth.[12] Her expression of thoughts and feelings for Captain Wentworth eventually seals her happiness with him, and him for her. Refuting Captain Harville's stereotypical gender perception that "as our bodies are the strongest, so are our feelings; capable of bearing most rough usage, and riding out the heaviest weather," Anne confidently retorts, within Captain Wentworth's earshot: "Your feelings may be

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11 Beth Lau compares Austen's novels and Romantic poems and points out convincingly their shared preference of "solitude and self-affirmation" over "a broad communal vision" (2004: 264).

12 Janice Swanson also comments aptly on how "Anne must borrow a bit of disguise to convey the truth of her own experience so she cloaks her speech in generalities" (1981: 17).

the strongest," but "ours are the most tender" (Austen, 2004: 187-8). Furthermore, Anne's emphasis that "All the privilege I claim for my own sex [. . .] is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone" (Austen, 2004: 189) finally brings her intent to fruition and prompts Captain Wentworth to write that ecstatic yet anxious love letter to Anne. Captain Wentworth confesses fervently: "You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. [. . .] I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own, than when you almost broke it eight years and a half ago" (Austen, 2004: 191). Anne gradually achieves maturation both through "her self-determination and self-possession" of "masterful poise and effectiveness in speaking" (Swanson, 1981: 2), and also through her careful and rewarding observation, reflection, and self-enlightenment.

Anne's self-reliance is so remarkable that even though the narrator does not guarantee a happily-ever-after marriage in the revised and final conclusion of the novel, the reader comes away with a sense of assurance that Anne could weather through anything, given Captain Wentworth's precarious safety as a sailor and consequently her own volatile happiness. The novel's conclusion is an unsettling mixture of connubial happiness and looming doom:

> His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish that tenderness less; the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance. (Austen, 2004: 203)

Austen's accolade for the sailor's wife, rather than the sailors, reveals that these women are the ones holding fort alone with their independence and self-reliance when their men are gone on high seas. And should the men not be fortunate enough to return home, it is still the sailor's wife who has to accept the tragic outcome and carry on. The implication is a "radical transformation and devaluation of all the normal sources of stability and order" (Tanner, 1995: 237). Jon Spence's interpretation that at the close of *Persuasion* that "Anne nevertheless inhabits a world in which all happiness and comfort are forever at the mercy of nature – of chance and accident" (1981: 636) is

unconvincing. This is because although everyone is subject to chance and accident Anne at least is well (if not better)-prepared and –equipped with her excellent mental strength, self-empowering rumination, and wisdom than any other character to cope with potential crises and tragedies. Anne's psychological preparedness and self-reliance indicates her ultimate retreat to female autonomy where variable factors, such as loathsome family and the uncertainty of marital felicity, which can threaten one's happiness and serenity are made as irrelevant as possible.

In *Persuasion*, Austen celebrates Anne Elliot's bliss of solitude and self-reliance in a quiet yet dramatic and intriguing way, through fascinating delineation of her solitary observation and reflection of herself and the people and world around her. Although the narrator sets Anne up as an underdog underrated and ignored by her close family circle, there are textual instabilities which suggest that Anne not only does not approve of her family but actively distances herself from them. Through her solitary rumination, Anne is able to collect herself in agitation, to come to important, critical resolutions and understanding, and to think and act properly and autonomously. Anne's bashfulness and humble temperament belie her bliss of solitude and self-reliance. That Austen highlights the significance and valor of Anne's role as a sailor's wife at the conclusion of the novel attests to Austen's subtle advocacy for female independence from marriage given the uncertainty of a sailor's security. The narrator and the reader's access to Anne's interiority allows us to witness her self-contained pleasure and enlightenment, a privilege of which most of Anne's world is deprived. In the solitude of perusing *Persuasion*, the reader is richly rewarded and encouraged to enjoy solitude and achieve self-reliance like Anne does.

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"她的快樂源自於內"：珍．奧斯汀《勸說》裡安．艾略特孤單的幸福與獨立自主

林宜蓉*

摘　要

安．艾略特可能是珍．奧斯汀作品中最孤單、卑微的女主角，不僅受到家人冷漠的對待也常得對週遭的人提供協助。然而，雖然安．艾略特也許不是奧斯汀最孤單、最寂寞的女主角，她不僅最享受孤獨而且如魚得水。透過經常的單獨思考與省思，安得到判斷的能力、敏銳的道德辨識力、以及獨立自主的能力，也證實了她優越於自己的家人、羅素夫人、以及溫特沃斯船長。

雖然安最後和溫特沃斯船長有情人終成眷屬，但身爲水手之妻始終籠罩在未來不可知的戰爭、傷亡的陰影下，也因此突顯出安的獨立自主才是她保障自身幸福最重要的關鍵。在《勸說》中，敘事者剝奪了讀者在小說結局經常會得到令人滿意的完美幸福婚姻，且暗示安，身爲水手之婦，得習慣孤單、獨自處理大小事、並隨時爲自己和丈夫無常的幸福和不確定的命運做好準備。奧斯汀動人且感性地透過安、艾略特其安靜、深思、被忽略、但能自我開導的角色倡議女性的孤獨與獨立自主。

關鍵詞：孤獨、獨立自主、女性自主、勸說、安、艾略特

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