The Romanticism of *Persuasion*

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Most readers will define the difference between *Persuasion* and Jane Austen's other novels as arising from a new concentration on "feelings", on the emotional rather than the moral life of the heroine. As Reginald Farrer strikingly phrased it in a centenary essay, "Though *Persuasion* moves very quietly, without sobs or screams, in drawing-rooms and country lanes, it is yet among the most emotional novels in our literature."[1] Recently, A. Walton Litz, in a collection of studies to mark the bicentenary of Jane Austen's birth, defined more precisely the peculiarly "modern" appeal of *Persuasion.* Locating it at first in the "almost obsessive" metaphor of "the loss and return of [Anne's] bloom", he speaks of "the deeply *physical* impact of *Persuasion*", and quotes passages from Volume One in which Jane Austen makes a "poetic use of nature as a structure of feeling, which not only offers metaphors for our emotions but controls them with its unchanging rhythms and changing moods."[2] Here, where Anne is the receptive consciousness to the phenomena of nature, whether at Kellynch, Uppercross, or Lyme, Jane Austen displays a subtle Romanticism more integral to her work than the passing half-satirical comments about contemporary taste in poetry (both Anne's and Captain Benwick's).

But it is necessary to go further than Walton Litz's conclusion: "The first half of *Persuasion* portrays Anne Elliot against a natural landscape, and it is there that Jane Austen's new-found Romanticism is concentrated."[3] Although there is clearly a division, in the manner of Coleridge or Wordsworth, between the country scenes of Volume One and the claustrophobic atmosphere of the Bath setting of Volume Two, most readers would, I think, instinctively reply that the novel has an emotional unity, a consistent impulse from beginning to end concentrated on Anne's rediscovery of love. *Where* this takes place does not

1 Reginald Farrer (*Quarterly Review,* July 1917), in *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion: A Casebook,* ed. B. C. Southam (London 1976), p. 149.

2 "*Persuasion:* Forms of Estrangement", in *Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays,* ed. John Halperin (Cambridge 1975), pp. 223, 224. (Volume One ends with chapter xii.)

3 *Ibid.,* p. 227.

greatly matter — and it is arguable that Kellynch Hall and Uppercross Cottage (with Mary, Charles, and Mrs Musgrove all bringing their complaints of each other to Anne) are as claustrophobic as the more obvious "prison" of Bath. That is, Jane Austen's point is that it is people, not places, which are the essence of Anne's emotional life: and the way people impinge on each other's consciousness and create the atmosphere in which we have our being is a perception conveyed through the new physical emphasis in the prose.

One of the means by which this is established is a metaphor cluster which is consistent throughout the novel and which greatly contributes not only to its "physicality" but also to its impression of structural unity. The cluster is based on the contrast "warm/cold", and includes, on the "warm" side, the words "bloom", "blush", "glow", as applied to the physical and emotional manifestations of the characters. These are basically metaphors drawn from the natural world, and here we may pick up Walton Litz's formulation that the novel is about "the loss and return of [Anne's] bloom", and add to it the observation that the story takes place between the beginning of autumn and the very end of winter. Like the productive farmer, Jane Austen as author is "counteracting the sweets of poetical despondence, and meaning to have spring again" for her heroine.[4]

Anne was just five years too early to enjoy the greatest Romantic celebration of Autumn, Keats' "Ode" — its perceptions of "ripeness" and fruitfulness might perhaps have given her unconscious hope. But it is the Keatsian sensibility, Keats' apprehension of the natural world and more importantly of physical life, which is most akin to Jane Austen's Romanticism in *Persuasion.* For whereas the first generation of Romantics held a rather stern view of man (and very definitely *man,* not woman with her domestic instincts) alone in communion with the great goddess Nature, self-transcendent, almost disembodied, Keats in his great Odes saw the temptation of an escape from the world of human society, "here, where men sit and hear each other groan", and rejected it, knowing that it meant death. A complementary positive impulse makes his poems full of a palpitating physicality, in which the words "blush", "glow", and "warm[th]" are constant terms. So striking is Keats' use, in par-

4 *Persuasion*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford 1923: 3rd edn., repr. 1969), p. 85. All further page-references incorporated into the text are to this edition.

ticular, of the phenomenon of blushing, that Christopher Ricks has written a study of it (*Keats and Embarrassment*, Oxford, 1974), stressing its place in nineteenth-century psychology and physiology. Although the main thrust of Ricks' argument is related to Keats' deliberate inducing of "a hot tingle and discomfort"[5] — terms which do not apply to the cooler creative sensibility of Jane Austen — his observations on the subject are of great help in defining the peculiar "physicality" of *Persuasion*.

Ricks begins his study by noting, "The point is not, of course, that nobody previously blushed, but that blushing and embarrassment came to be thought of as crucial to a great many social and moral matters. In 1839 Thomas H. Burgess published his rich and various book on *The Physiology or Mechanism of Blushing; Illustrative of the Influence of Mental Emotion on the Capillary Circulation; With a General View of the Sympathies, and the Organic Relation of those Structures with which they seem to be Connected*." He quotes from its opening paragraph: "Who has not observed the beautiful and interesting phenomenon of BLUSHING? . . . When we see the cheek of an individual suffused with a blush in society, immediately our sympathy is excited towards him; we feel as if we were ourselves concerned, and yet we know not why."[6] It is on this response, I suggest, that Jane Austen is playing when she makes the heroine of her last novel one who undergoes a transformation from having "hoped she had outlived the age of blushing" (though "the age of emotion she certainly had not" — p. 49) to the frequently-blushing woman of Volume Two. Burgess, again, pinpoints the matter: "the irrepressible blush . . . clearly demonstrates the impossibility of the *will* ever being able to overcome or control the *genuine* emotions of the soul."[7] So Anne, who at the beginning of the novel is rationally determined to accept the emotional "imprisonment" (p. 137) resulting from her prudent decision of

5 *Keats and Embarrassment*, p. 103. It is only fair to quote the rest of Ricks' summary of his argument about Keats: "the effect is neither simple nor trivial, since it compacts a necessary struggle within the sympathetic imagination: its recognition, when confronted by the physicality of others (and especially of those loved by others), of a generosity to be attained without sentimentality (that is, without the pretence that there is no possibility of distaste or embarrassment) and without morbidity (which is fixated upon those possibilities)." (pp. 103-4)

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 19.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 209-10.

eight years earlier, is increasingly betrayed, by her own bodily responses, into a state of high-wrought emotional awareness. The blush is one of the most important means by which Jane Austen indicates, with perfect decorum, the thrill of sexual attraction between Anne and Captain Wentworth.

A survey of Jane Austen's use of the metaphor-cluster associated with the idea of "warmth" will clarify this point. In Volume One, Anne, when she first hears of Wentworth's possible return into the country, has to "seek the comfort of cool air for her flushed cheeks" (p. 25) — the word suggests a hectic discomfort, the first flush of a disturbing dawn. Elsewhere in this volume it is emphasized almost obsessively, as Walton Litz remarks, that Anne has lost the "bloom" of her complexion (pp. 6, 28, 61), while her father and elder sister retain theirs by the vanity of a selfish life and the liberal use of "Gowland" (Sir Walter wishes that Lady Russell "would only wear rouge" so that she would be fit to be seen by such a judge as he — p. 215). It is only in the critical last chapters of Volume One, at Lyme, that Anne begins to regain her looks, to blush and thus become an object of "admiration" to men (Mr Elliot in particular): "She was looking remarkably well; her very regular, very pretty features, having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind which had been blowing on her complexion, and by the animation of eye which it had also produced" (p. 104). This fortuitous effect of a change of place, the natural fresh sea air, on the imprisoned Anne, becomes, some pages later, an internal and vital response to the sailor Captain Wentworth: " 'You will stay, I am sure; you will stay and nurse her'; cried he, turning to her and speaking with a glow, and yet a gentleness, which seemed almost restoring the past. — She coloured deeply . . ." (p. 114).

In Volume Two Anne's blushes are frequent; they may all be classified as arising from the consciousness of a re-awakened sexual life:

> Anne, smiling and blushing, very becomingly shewed to Mr. Elliot the pretty features which he had by no means forgotten. (p. 143)
> Anne heard her [Lady Russell on the possibility of Anne's marriage with Mr Elliot], and made no violent exclamations. She only smiled, blushed, and gently shook her head. (p. 159)

> Anne sighed and blushed and smiled, in pity and disdain, either at her friend or herself [as Lady Russell looks fixedly at drawing-room curtains instead of the egregious Captain Wentworth]. (p. 179)
> A sudden recollection seemed to occur, and to give him some taste

> of that emotion which was reddening Anne's cheeks and fixing her eyes on the ground. (p. 182)
>
> "Your countenance perfectly informs me that you were in company last night with the person, who you think the most agreeable in the world, the person who interests you at this present time, more than all the rest of the world put together."
>
> A blush overspread Anne's cheeks. She could say nothing. (p. 194)
>
> "I assure you Mr. Elliot had not the share which you have been supposing, in whatever pleasure the concert of last night might afford: — not Mr. Elliot; it is not Mr. Elliot that —"
>
> She stopped, regretting with a deep blush that she had implied so much. (p. 197)

Wentworth, too, blushes on seeing Anne in Bath after his release from Louisa: "He was more obviously struck and confused by the sight of her, than she had ever observed before; he looked quite red" (p. 175). But the blush which has the most detailed physiological description is also the one in which Anne's emotions are most plainly expressed — to herself as well as the reader: "No, it was not regret which made Anne's heart beat in spite of her self, and brought the colour into her cheeks when she thought of Captain Wentworth unshackled and free. She had some feelings which she was ashamed to investigate. They were too much like joy, senseless joy!" (pp. 167-8).

The blushes of uncertainty, of unacknowledged desire, are replaced as Volume Two draws towards its happy conclusion by the favourite Jane Austen word "glow" — a word suggesting a steady, healthy warmth of spirits (even, on occasion, righteous anger — pp. 204, 227). It is used in Volume One twice only, to suggest the attractiveness of Captain Wentworth's character and personal appearance: in the crucial passage at Lyme quoted above (p. 114), and at his introduction, in a comment which stresses his place as the masculine principle of fertility in the novel's seasonal myth: "the years which had destroyed her youth and bloom had only given him a more glowing, manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages" (p. 61). Anne begins Volume Two thinking sadly of the probable marriage of Louisa and Captain Wentworth, "all that was glowing and bright in prosperous love" (p. 123); but after the climactic blush of joy, the "glow" is hers and Wentworth's. At the concert he talks to her "with renewed spirit, with a little smile, a little glow" (p. 181) — causing Anne to sit through the first half of the concert with bright eyes and glowing cheeks (p. 185). In the climactic moments of Chapter 23 (Vol. II, xi), Captain Went-

worth places his letter before Anne "with eyes of glowing entreaty" (p. 236). His "cheeks which had been pale now glowed" when he overtakes Anne and Charles Musgrove in the street and reads his acceptance in her eyes (p. 240). Anne, at that evening's party, is "glowing and lovely in sensibility and happiness" (p. 245).

"Glow" as a metaphor has associations of both brightness and warmth; it is "warmth" which is the basis for the whole image cluster, relating it conclusively to the seasonal change on which the story is structured. As Anne begins to "blush" and "glow" again, so autumn passes into winter and spring. The Anne who was "dreading the possible heats of September in all the white glare of Bath, and grieving to forego all the influence so sweet and so sad of the autumnal months in the country" (p. 33), becomes one who hopes "that she was to be blessed with a second spring of youth and beauty" (p. 124), and who rejoices in the company of the Musgroves and their "roaring Christmas fire" (p. 134). On the last page she is seen in the "sunshine" of happiness.[8]

By contrast, Anne's unfeeling elder sister Elizabeth is a Snow Queen, unchanged after "thirteen winters' revolving frosts" (p. 7); when she and Sir Walter enter the warm hotel sitting-room of the Musgroves, they "seemed to give a general chill. Anne felt an instant oppression, and, wherever she looked, saw symptoms of the same. The comfort, the freedom, the gaiety of the room was over, hushed into cold composure, determined silence, or insipid talk, to meet the heartless elegance of her father and sister" (p. 226). The underlying suggestion of this passage — and indeed of the whole characterization of Sir Walter and Elizabeth — is that they are virtually inhuman ("heartless"), having cultivated an evil power which enables them to cast a blight on the community.

"Warmth" is the metaphor Jane Austen most constantly uses in *Persuasion* to denote simple goodness; a "cold" heart or manner indicates the forces of evil which work against the establishment of a society based on the care of human beings for each

8 In this context, it is interesting and suggestive that Ricks sees Keats also connecting the seasonal cycle with human sexuality: he speaks of "To Autumn" as containing in the last stanza "Keats's greatest blush. . . . The erotic life of nature, like that of other people, is both warming and chastening to contemplate." Such contemplation is one of the functions of art. (*Keats and Embarrassment,* pp. 209-10)

other — the sort of care that the Harvilles display in immediately opening their tiny home to the stricken Musgrove family. The "warmth" of both Anne's and Wentworth's feelings is continually stressed (pp. 27, 29, 31, 61, 91); the Musgroves, for all their sillinesses, are warm people (pp. 52-3, 220); Louisa, like her author, is "convinced of sailors having more worth and warmth than any set of men in England" (p. 99). Other examples, even excluding the more neutral adverb "warmly" attached to the utterance of an opinion, are too many to enumerate; but Mr Elliot presents an interesting case of Jane Austen's discrimination in her use of the epithet. Lady Russell, that influential force, on renewing her acquaintance with him at Bath, "could not seriously picture to herself a more agreeable or estimable man. Everything united in him; good understanding, correct opinions, knowledge of the world, and a warm heart" (p. 147). But the long eulogistic paragraph, with its specious plethora of Austenian value-terms, is followed by a quiet reflection from Anne, which puts the reader on his guard about Lady Russell's judgment of Mr Elliot's "warmth": "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, nothing to require more motives than appeared, in Mr Elliot's great desire of a reconciliation." And in the next chapter she is allowed expression of her own judgment of him — an equally long paragraph ("Though they had now been acquainted a month, she could not be satisfied that she really knew his character") followed by:

> Mr. Elliot was rational, discreet, polished, — but he was not open. There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the evil or good of others. This, to Anne, was a decided imperfection. Her early impressions were incurable. She prized the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character beyond all others. Warmth and enthusiasm did captivate her still. She felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped. (p. 161)

Although one may read between the lines that Mr Elliot does not measure up to the ideal embodied for Anne in Captain Wentworth, the fact remains that this is a general observation; and here, in raising "warmth and enthusiasm" above the "rational, discreet, [and] polished", Anne is most truly a woman of Charles Dickens' nineteenth century, willing to found human relationships

and base her ethics on "sincerity" rather than decorum. This commitment forms part of the substance of her climactic speech on constancy in love — "God forbid that I should undervalue the warm and faithful feelings of any of my fellow-creatures" (p. 235) — where the invocation of the deity's name (reserved in Jane Austen for moments of great significance) indicates the emotional and spiritual importance of the declaration. That this "romanticism" is approved by Jane Austen, as opposed to her earlier satirical critiques of eighteenth-century "sensibility", is shown in the novel's basic strategy: in the fact that Anne's moral discrimination and her emotional judgment are at one; she is a heroine who has little to learn except confidence in her own heart.

By this standard, Anne's family, including Mr Elliot, are beyond the pale: throughout the novel "cold" towards everyone, in the last chapter's summing-up of Anne's move from one "set of people" to another, they are categorically dismissed as unworthy to belong to the human community: "there was little to distress [Anne and Captain Wentworth] beyond the want of graciousness and warmth. — Sir Walter made no objection, and Elizabeth did nothing worse than look cold and unconcerned" (p. 248). Jane Austen even suggests, by a curious drop into present-tense narration and a tone of considerable acerbity, that she, the creator of the world of this novel, condemns the Elliots and Mrs Clay to a hell of frustration and petty deception:

> It would be well for the eldest sister if she were equally satisfied with her situation, for a change is not very probable there. She soon had the mortification of seeing Mr. Elliot withdraw; and no one of proper condition has since presented himself to raise even the unfounded hopes which sunk with him.
> ... Mrs. Clay ... has abilities, however, as well as affections; and it is now a doubtful point whether his cunning, or hers, may finally carry the day; whether, after preventing her from being the wife of Sir Walter, he may not be wheedled and caressed at last into making her the wife of Sir William. (p. 250)

Anne's story ends with her only dissatisfaction "the consciousness of having no relations to bestow on him which a man of sense could value ... She had but two friends in the world to add to his list, Lady Russell and Mrs. Smith" (p. 251). It is fitting, therefore, that Mrs Smith, that worldly-wise woman with her everyman surname, her lack of "family", should share the last paragraph with the heroine in the special value-terms that the novel has established: "Her *spring* of felicity was in the *glow*

of her spirits, as her friend Anne's was in the *warmth* of her heart."[9]

A brief consideration of Jane Austen's earlier novels demonstrates that whatever their other similarities to *Persuasion*, they do not use metaphor — this "organic" cluster in particular — in a way that has structural significance, the way that marks this novel with a strong streak of Romanticism. *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park* particularly come to mind as novels whose heroines are like Anne, apparently passive and retiring. In *Sense and Sensibility*, a novel a third longer than *Persuasion*, there is only half the number of occurrences of the "blush, bloom, glow, warmth, cold" complex, despite the notable "warmth" and emotionalism of Marianne and the obviously sexual nature of the blushes which Willoughby's presence evokes. The point is, of course, that Elinor is the true heroine, and the later Anne Elliot combines the sensibility of a Marianne (their raptures on autumn are very similar) with the sense and stoic reserve of an Elinor. We are, I think, more moved by the foreshadowing of Anne's experience at this crucial moment — "Elinor could sit it no longer. She almost ran out of the room, and as soon as the door was closed, burst into tears of joy, which at first she thought would never cease"[10] — than by all Marianne's agonies, sincere though they are.

In *Mansfield Park*, a novel which is almost twice the size of *Persuasion*, there is roughly the same number of occurrences of "blush, glow, warmth, cold" ("bloom" does not occur at all in *Mansfield Park*). Fanny blushes most frequently during Henry Crawford's courtship of her; her blushes clearly signal not sexual warmth, but maiden modesty, the decent shame occasioned to her by his overt sexuality — often (even more indecently) conveyed through his sister's lack of decorum:

> "My dear child," said she laughing, "what are you afraid of? Do you think Henry will claim the necklace as mine, and fancy you did not come honestly by it? — or are you imagining he would be too much flattered by seeing round your lovely throat an ornament which his money purchased three years ago, before he knew there was such a throat in the world? — or perhaps — looking archly —

9 My italics. I am aware that "spring" here is primarily used in the sense of "wellhead"; but I suggest that Jane Austen, in rounding off her novel about the recovery of Anne's "bloom", is deliberately employing a pregnant ambiguity.

10 *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford 1923: repr. 1974), p. 360.

> you suspect a confederacy between us, and that what I am now doing is with his knowledge and at his desire?"
>
> With the deepest blushes Fanny protested against such a thought.[11]

The driving force behind *Mansfield Park* is a profound moral earnestness, such as is indicated in the careful wording of this passage of narratorial description:

> He [Henry Crawford] was in love, very much in love; and it was a love which, operating on an active, sanguine spirit, *of more warmth than delicacy,* made her affection appear of greater consequence, because it was withheld, and determined him to have the glory, as well as the felicity, of *forcing* her to love him.[12]

These discriminations are echoed in the clergyman Edmund's comment, "Crawford's *feelings*, I am ready to acknowledge, have hitherto been too much his guides" (p. 351); and in the whole story of Edmund and Mary Crawford. This suggests that "feelings" (even though Fanny is full of them) must be subordinate to the novel's concern for "principle, active principle".

In *Mansfield Park*, as in *Emma*, unprincipled people let their selfish impulses overtake them on certain hot summer days (at Sotherton or at Box Hill), but the seasonal cycle, as such, is not used as a basis for the fable. In *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*, with their extrovert heroines, there is very little occurrence of blushing (except, occasionally, with embarrassment over some blunder), though "warmth" remains a constant indicator of goodness; for if a blush is, as we have seen, a means of communication between shy potential lovers, then Emma and Elizabeth, with their ready conversation, have no need of it (it is Jane Fairfax, unable to communicate openly with her lover, who blushes often with "consciousness", and sometimes "a smile of secret delight"[13]). In *Persuasion* the actual dialogues between Anne and Captain Wentworth are distressingly few — they are forbidden, by the decorum imposed by their own past actions, to engage in any but the most conventional remarks; and "Anne did not wish for more of such looks and speeches. His cold politeness, his ceremonious grace, were worse than any thing" (p. 72).

"Looks", like blushes, are a form of silent bodily communication — indeed, *OED* gives the original meaning of "blush" as

11 *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford 1933: repr. 1973), p. 259.

12 *Mansfield Park,* ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford 1923: repr. 1973), p. 326 — my italics.

13 *Emma,* ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford 1923: repr. 1971), p. 243. Cf. pp. 220, 242, 293, 294, 348, 349.

"To cast a glance, glance with the eye, give a look." Jane Austen makes vital use of "eye-contact" in *Persuasion* as a partial replacement for the dialogue of the earlier novels, and as part of her new emphasis on the physical. The increase in the looks between Anne and Wentworth parallels the development of their reunion. At their first meeting, Anne's physical sensations mirror her emotional distress: "Her eye half met Captain Wentworth's; a bow, a curtsey passed; she heard his voice . . . the room seemed full — full of persons and voices . . ." (p. 59). After the "cold looks" and constraint of their Uppercross meetings, Captain Wentworth is first startled into re-acknowledging Anne's physical attractiveness by Mr Elliot's look of "earnest admiration": Captain Wentworth "gave her a momentary glance, — a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, 'That man is struck with you, — and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again' " (p. 104). His emotional dependence on her is signalled soon afterwards on the Cobb — "Captain Wentworth's eyes were also turned towards her" as Charles Musgrove cries "Anne, Anne . . . What, in Heaven's name, is to be done next?" (p. 111).

The two begin to move towards a new understanding, but are hampered still by Anne's family situation (particularly by Mr Elliot, as an accepted part of that family). This is crystallized at the concert: "her eye could not reach him (p. 186) . . . she would rather have caught his eye (p. 188) . . . She could not quit that room in peace without seeing Captain Wentworth once more, without the interchange of one friendly look" (p. 189). As the crisis approaches, Captain Wentworth is "looking and listening with his whole soul . . . the last words brought his enquiring eyes from Charles to herself" (p. 224) on the vital matter of Mr Elliot's importance to Anne. That problem disposed of, it only remains for the lovers to acknowledge what they mean to each other, and again it is done first through the silent communication of looks: "at the same moment that her eyes instinctively glanced towards the distant table, Captain Wentworth's pen ceased to move, his head was raised, pausing, listening, and he turned round the next instant to give a look — one quick, conscious look at her" (p. 231). He leaves her his letter "with eyes of glowing entreaty", and finally, coming up to her in the street, mutely asks his fate: "Anne could command herself enough to receive that look, and not repulsively" (p. 239). (Significantly, Jane Austen used almost exactly the same strategy of looks in her first version of the reconciliation: "His colour was varying —

& he was looking at her with all the Power and Keenness, which she believed no other eyes than his, possessed . . . [he] looked, with an expression which had something more than penetration in it, something softer; — Her Countenance did not discourage. — It was a silent, but a very powerful Dialogue; — on his side, Supplication, on her's acceptance" — p. 263.)

Clearly, bodily attributes and responses are used to impel this story in a way quite unlike the unfolding of events of the earlier novels (which depend more on the unravelling of deceptions of one sort or another). But there is one physical image which has always been a constant in Jane Austen's work — dancing. As Henry Tilney light-heartedly remarks in *Northanger Abbey*, dancing is an "emblem of marriage"[14]; and the author takes his point seriously. As a countrywoman, she was presumably aware that dancing is based on courtship rituals; those who dance well together, indicating their youthful vitality and sense of harmony, will make a good marriage. Thus two of the most significant moments in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* respectively are when Elizabeth, having asserted to her mother, "I believe, Ma'am, I may safely promise you *never* to dance with him", finds herself taken "so much by surprise in his application for her hand, that, without knowing what she did, she accepted him"[15] (the comment has a delightful ambiguity — out of context, both marriage and dancing are possible referents); and when Emma at the Crown Ball, having admired from a distance Mr Knightley's fine manly figure, replies to his question, "Whom are you going to dance with?" — "With you, if you will ask me."[16] But these moments of harmonious physical contact are no longer available to Anne Elliot: "she was sure of his having asked his partner whether Miss Elliot never danced? The answer was, 'Oh! no, never; she has quite given up dancing. She had rather play. She is never tired of playing!' " (p. 72). She has willingly taken on the role of spinster aunt, mechanically providing music for the young ones to play out their courtship rituals — "though her eyes would sometimes fill with tears as she sat at the instrument, she was extremely glad to be employed, and desired nothing in return but to be unobserved" (p. 71).

14 *Northanger Abbey*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford 1923: repr. 1969), p. 76.
15 *Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 20, 90.
16 *Emma*, p. 331.

Since her heroine has decided that life has passed her by, Jane Austen has to arrange for her alternative, apparently fortuitous moments of physical contact with her lover, in order to give both Anne and the reader the sense that she still belongs to the world of sexual activity. The moments are carefully graded: early in their reacquaintance, when they are still extremely constrained with one another, Captain Wentworth, in a beautifully symbolic act of unconscious care for Anne, lifts the obstreperous Musgrove child from her back. The language of this brief paragraph reminds us of the novel's persistent metaphor that life with her family is for Anne an imprisonment — "she found herself in the state of being released from him" — and more importantly, it enacts, in the progression of her perceptions — "she found herself ... someone was taking him ... she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it" — the overwhelming and unlooked-for fact that it is Captain Wentworth who is to be her rescuer. It is equally significant that "her sensations on the discovery made her perfectly speechless", and that Captain Wentworth studiously avoids speaking to her or "hearing her thanks"; for what occurs here is, along with the blushes and looks already discussed, one of the first and finest examples of this novel's "body language"; its Romantic acknowledgement that ordinary speech is insufficient to express the complex feelings of the isolated ego in its desire to communicate with another human being. The utter confidence of the witty intercourse of Elizabeth and Darcy, Emma and Mr Knightley — already heavily criticized in the Crawfords — is simply not available to Anne and Captain Wentworth.

Jane Austen reinforces the impression of silent bodily communication with a similar episode, not many pages later, when Captain Wentworth, "without saying a word, turned to [Anne], and quietly obliged her to be assisted into the carriage" (p. 91). Here Anne's response indicates (already) a much greater consciousness of the action's sexual and emotional implications: "Yes, — he had done it. She was in the carriage, and felt that he had placed her there, that his will and his hands had done it, that she owed it to his perception of her fatigue, and his resolution to give her rest." Finally in Volume One, following on Captain Wentworth's emotional request that "Anne" (not "Miss Elliot") should stay and nurse Louisa, Anne is in a closed carriage for three hours with Henrietta, and Captain Wentworth "between them"; when the distraught Henrietta sleeps, Anne feels "great pleasure" in his brief, trusting appeal to her judgment as to what

they together should do about telling Louisa's parents of the accident at Lyme.

The volume ends with Captain Wentworth once again physically separating himself from Anne to be beside Louisa, but the two have obviously come closer; and it is only the interference in Volume Two by Mr Elliot — who is regarded by all their acquaintances in Bath as Anne's natural escort, even with "a touch on her shoulder" physically dragging her away from Wentworth's company at the concert (p. 190) — that keeps these two most suitable people apart. The two versions of the dénouement show Jane Austen emphasizing two different aspects of the reunion of the lovers. In the first, cancelled version, not only did Jane Austen use the clumsy comedy of Admiral Croft as *deus ex machina*, she also kept Anne passive, as looks ("on his side, supplication, on hers acceptance") give way to "a hand taken and pressed — and 'Anne, my own dear Anne!' " (p. 263). Considered objectively, this is a much more realistic reconciliation, with the lovers awkward and mute and the man taking the initiative of physical contact. But the revised ending, as all readers acknowledge, is much more artistically satisfying, and I suggest it is because we are asked to attend to the protagonists in their *symbolic* roles, each alone in the room full of people, each speaking out of an isolation that it seems impossible to break down. The atmosphere is almost that of that epitome of late Romanticism, Pater's Conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1873):

> Experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.[17]

— almost, but not quite; for Anne is heroic enough to speak out, to speak for all women and for herself, on the faint chance that someone out there might hear and understand her. She uses the pronoun "we", generalizing, until her emotion overcomes her, the pronoun changes to "I", and finally her speech becomes so passionately lyrical that what she is saying verges on the ineffable: " 'All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone.' She could not immediately have uttered another sentence . . ." (p. 235).

17 W. Pater, *The Renaissance* (London 6th edn., 1901), p. 235.

Captain Wentworth's response to this bespeaks an equal sense that language is inadequate to express his deep passion. Reduced, by the profundity of their social separation, to putting words on paper, he can only find expression in the theatrical language of melodrama: "You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. Tell me not that I am too late. . . . Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman . . . You alone have brought me to Bath. For you alone I think and plan . . ." This is undoubtedly deeply moving, but the point is that Captain Wentworth, a "doer" by profession rather than a talker, does not, in the normal affairs of life, *talk* like this — and he does not write, at this critical moment, "Anne, my own dear Anne!"

The symbolic, and essentially Romantic, point made, the lovers are allowed to subside into privacy and normality. Now they are permitted the physical contact that Jane Austen gives all her successful lovers — a quiet walk, arm-in-arm, with "the power of conversation" restored to them, "heedless of every group around" (p. 241). Their sufficiency for each other in this uncertain new world is thus amply demonstrated. Indeed, their walk is a sort of secret dance — like those public ones of the lovers of the earlier novels — "with smiles reined in and spirits dancing in private rapture."

In Chapter 1 of *Persuasion*, the heroine is introduced as "nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight . . . she was only Anne" (p. 5). In the novel's final paragraph, she has become a new *being:* "Anne was tenderness itself" — a truly Cinderella-like transformation. If the facts of Anne's being rescued from her hidebound family and saved from loneliness by a seemingly impossible marriage, a marriage which is based on "warmth" and physical response as well as on a high regard for each other's character — if the pattern of this story and the thread of imagery suggest an emergent Romanticism in Jane Austen, it might be wise, finally, to remind ourselves of the linguistic texture of the rest of the novel. Particularly in the first and the final chapters (and the end of Chapter 23) — that is the novel's "frame" — the traditional words which give a serious, even religious, perspective are in constant and emphatic use. The ironical use of eighteenth-century abstractions in the opening description of Sir Walter — "occupation, consolation, faculties, admiration, respect, contemplating, pity, contempt" — becomes, by the fourth paragraph, a critical reference in the author's vocabulary to religion itself as perverted by Sir Walter's inhuman

pride: "*Vanity* was the *beginning and end* of Sir Walter Elliot's character . . . He considered the *blessing* of beauty as inferior only to the *blessing* of a baronetcy; and the Sir Walter Elliot, who united these gifts, was the constant object of his *warmest respect and devotion*" (p. 4, my italics). Compare Anne's final state, which includes a genuine spirituality: "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" (p. 240). "An interval of meditation, serious and grateful, was the best corrective of every thing dangerous in such high-wrought felicity; and she went to her room, and grew steadfast and fearless in the thankfulness of her enjoyment" (p. 245). So, too, Anne's and Wentworth's last recorded conversation ranges seriously and joyfully over notions of "judgment, conscience, duty, charity"; Wentworth posits not only a judging but a gracious God when he concludes, "I must learn to brook being happier than I deserve" (p. 247). Such a faith implied by the author-creator gives the reader a fairly solid ground of comfort despite what Walton Litz identifies as the Romantic "openness" (one recalls *Villette*) of the novel's actual ending.