Architecture of the Mind and Place in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*

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Abstract

The ability to control where and how any given space will be occupied is a coveted but elusive privilege for the heroines of Jane Austen's novels. Though blessed with an admirable blend of independence of mind, spirit and moral fortitude, they are women for whom the privilege of space is often either an intangible desire or an oppressive reality. In *Persuasion*, Austen deliberately creates a problem with space. She purposefully contradicts what is expected in public and private behaviour by presenting a heroine who is at first constricted by her place; who begins to expand the number of spaces she is able to occupy; and then, finally, begins to defy her place. This article explores how this use of physical and psychological space in *Persuasion* evolves and how Austen involves her heroine in the discourse of social change through both narrative description and a new accessibility of psychological landscape.

The gendering of rooms in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was a product of patriarchal ideas about domestic and public spaces. Women in the period learned their place and the proper use of space through the tutelage of their fathers, brothers and guidebooks (often written by men) specifically designed to school them on how they should occupy space physically, socially and psychologically. The 'tiresome perfection' of English 'conduct-book clichés'[1] is first ridiculed by Jane Austen, Nancy Armstrong suggests, in *Pride and Prejudice* when Mary Bennet mindlessly parrots patronizing ideas about female behaviour and social place. *Sermons for Young Ladies* by the Reverend James Fordyce, an early wellspring of derision for Austen, also makes an appearance in *Pride and Prejudice.* His ideas

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about how women occupy their mental space are typical and are presented in his third sermon entitled 'On Female Reserve: Shamefacedness' in a manner which metaphorically suggests a strict adherence to the confining physical spaces, morals and manners of the period: 'Their favourite walks are not in those places of public entertainment, now so fondly frequented by so many women. She loves the shade. There she finds herself most secure from the blights of calumny, and the heats of temptation'.[2] A man's space might define his character, but a woman's space was defined for her by the men with whom she resided. It was unlikely for a woman of the late eighteenth century, as Virginia Woolf so aptly observes in *A Room of One's Own,* 'to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room … unless her parents were exceptionally rich or very noble, even up to the beginning of the nineteenth century'.[3] This was an idea not lost on Jane Austen as she began crafting the physical and psychological landscapes of her novels. Indeed, Austen was in life, as much as in her novels, aware of the freedom and serenity that the sole possession of a good deal of space could bring even if only for a couple of hours at a time. Her recognition of her own physical circumstances is clear in a letter written from Godmersham in June 1808 when she exclaims, 'I enjoy my apartment very much, & always spend two or three hours in it after breakfast. – The change … is material as to Space'.[4] Visits to Godmersham provided Austen with an escape from the near poverty, and at this time, unsettled quarters she shared with her mother and sister. The value of such an escape is often evidenced in her novels in which the ability to control where, when and how any given space will be occupied is a coveted but somewhat elusive privilege for her female characters. Though blessed with an admirable blend of independence of mind, spirit and moral fortitude, for them the privilege of space is either an intangible desire or an oppressive reality. There is little they can do to choose or define the place they occupy.

Theirs is a perplexing dilemma. On the one hand, Jane Austen has created women of great moral and emotional strength, while on the other there is a sense that such qualities are best only in small controlled settings; in a larger world, Austen reminds us, they have very little value. Though they begin with a sense of autonomy, the heroines of Austen's novels often find themselves surprised to find how limited they really are or they begin to regret the boundaries they have unintentionally created for themselves. These regrets drive them, or persuade them, to change and learn to value their place and

their ability to control the spaces they occupy in a more reasonable and rational way. Austen uses space to define the emotional and intellectual limits of her heroines as well as to suggest the extent of the world in which they may move. Her physical spaces are not only used to illustrate the dichotomy between public and private interaction, but also to demonstrate a contrast between her heroine's psychological place on the one hand and her physical situation on the other. The thoughts, impressions and desires that these women hold close are contrasted with their ability and opportunity to communicate and have these ideas valued.

Because this article focuses on Austen's literary landscape in her final novel *Persuasion*, it is important to note the evolving nature of Austen's use of space in her novels as a whole. Austen's experiences changed the way in which she viewed the places she was familiar with and coloured the way in which she organized and reflected on space in her novels, just as she also experienced her world differently as a young country girl, comfortable in the warm embrace of her family and home at Steventon, and then as a mature woman living first in Bath, then in Southampton and, finally, Chawton. Moving, as she did, so precipitously from the only home she had ever known was as significant to her literary growth as it was to her emotional and social maturity. It is possible that we see in *Persuasion* a realization of sorts of the impact of this momentous move as well as the evolving nature of how space itself began to be occupied in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In 'Gendering Rooms: Domestic Architecture and Literary Acts', Cynthia Wall focuses on the changing nature of the domestic use of rooms in fiction as the eighteenth century came to a close, particularly the move from large public entertainment spaces to smaller, gender specific spaces. She explains that in *Pride and Prejudice* 'the central characters all work to define, protect, and resist the boundaries of inhabited space, although the actions and reactions of each are shaped by the changing dimensions and significations of her domestic interiors'.[5] This shaping of domestic space explored by Wall is predicated on one significant change in domestic interiors:

> where the dining-room had dominated the floorplan in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when men and women tended to co-occupy its space in shared entertainment, by the end of the eighteenth century the division into gendered space between the dining and drawing-rooms corresponded to altered proportions: the drawing-room became the usually symmetrical counterpart to the dining-room, both architecturally and socially.[6]

This change is also reflected in the effort made by Austen's heroines to understand the spaces they occupy and is demonstrated in all of Austen's novels, but it is in *Persuasion* that the maturity of her narrative style provides a unique view of the emotional, psychological and gendered social use of space in the early nineteenth century.

In *Persuasion,* Austen deliberately creates a problem with space. She purposefully contradicts what is expected in public and private behaviour by presenting a heroine who is at first constricted by her place; who begins to expand the number of spaces she is able to occupy; and then, finally, begins to defy her place. Austen crafts her narrative so that the way in which Anne Elliot sees her world and her place in that world at the beginning of the novel can be contrasted with both her father's unfaltering and rigid understanding of place and her own impressions of space as she matures and shakes off the grief that has consumed her for eight years. Austen does this through a precise organization of physical space. She is very careful in describing spaces in this novel in a way that contrasts past and present social models as well as involving her heroine in the discourse of social change through both narrative description and a new accessibility of psychological landscape.

When the novel opens, Anne is utterly isolated psychologically, often detached physically, and, most surprisingly from the pen which also created the likes of Elizabeth Bennet, silent, particularly in crowded, enclosed or confined spaces. She is what Tony Tanner calls the 'lonely figure of emotional constancy living in a society of "changes, alienations, removals"'.[7] Yet, at the same time, Anne finds herself drawn into uncomfortable familiarities and conversations, unable to escape into her usual silence and physical detachment, or more precisely, from her regrets and self-doubts, when she is in crowded or in public and open spaces. In gatherings of friends and family, there is a sense that Anne yearns for escape and privacy; she generally chooses silence, physical distraction in her duty to her sister and her nephews, or to be alone when no private space is available. Yet, Anne Elliot discovers that through growth and change she can understand the spaces she occupies, learn to properly inhabit them, and no longer run from them.

Austen's widening perspective is clear; the women of the novels written prior to the start of the nineteenth century occupy space with less introspection than do the women of those written while Austen was at Chawton. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne, whose

'imprudence and want of thought'[8] is well known by her sister Elinor, certainly does not reflect deeply on the social transgressions of her outings with Willoughby. Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* is similarly in want of thought when she approaches Pemberley for the first time. Her emotions are high, she feels 'perturbation' and 'a high flutter'.[9] She is so much emotionally agitated that she can only feel 'that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!',[10] but she does not spend time thinking about what that actually means. When Catherine Morland enters the ballroom at Bath for the first time in *Northanger Abbey*, she is so in awe of her new circumstances and physically overwhelmed by the crush of the crowds, that she must gain a view of the dancers from the top of the highest bench before she can '*feel* herself at a ball'.[11] She, like Marianne and Elizabeth, is too consumed by her feelings and her 'mind [is] too full for conversation'[12] to think clearly about her physical circumstances. Marianne, Elizabeth and Catherine are less aware of the limits of their private sphere and are often youthfully oblivious to the restrictions of public spaces. They define space by the person who occupies it. A house properly situated on the land so as to seem a part of the landscape rather than an intrusion, not too gaudy or messy, with well looked after space, is reflective of an honest, kind, refined and proper character in the person who occupies that space. In this it is clear that people who properly value a family home or estate are more likely to meet with narrative approval than those who will not settle down or who only view a home as a means for social mobility. In the later novels, this sort of analogy of character and place remains intact, but the need for narrative approval is silenced by the introduction of the gradual though deliberate, natural, physical and social alteration of spaces, and at times, the sudden loss of place. In *Persuasion,* Austen has mastered the unique skill of marrying character with place, and she demonstrates an ability to introduce a new, deeper psychological landscape by illustrating ingeniously the ways in which character is both a product and purveyor of place.

At Kellynch, because she goes unnoticed, Anne remains intractable in her grief and very rarely takes part in conversation. When she does, Austen makes it clear how difficult a battle she must wage against the habit of that grief. She is imprisoned in her thoughts when she is surrounded by those she does not value and who do not value her. William Deresiewicz, in exploring the influence of the Romantic poets on Austen's work, delves into the contrast of Anne's perpetual

mourning with that of her father, suggesting that while she is 'stuck in a state of mourning'[13] at the start of the novel, she is the 'exception to [the] principle of sterile repetition'[14] exhibited by Sir Walter and Elizabeth in their own grief for a past social place that has begun to elude them in their retrenchment. Austen's narrative mirrors Anne's struggle in this place of 'perpetual regret'.[15] Anne only speaks twice in the first three chapters of the novel. On these occasions, the dash between her brief, measured words suggest a habit of inflexibility. Should she speak? Will she be heard? After all, she is 'only Anne' and it is 'her convenience […] always to give way'.[16] Her first words, a response to Mr Shepherd's suggestion that the navy might be a good place from which to draw a tenant for Kellynch Hall, are a bit of a tortured reflection on the things that have been uppermost in her mind for eight years as she defends the navy, social advancement through merit, and domestic comfort: 'Here Anne spoke – "The Navy, I think, who have done so much for us, have at least an equal claim with any other set of men, for all the comforts and all the privileges which any home can give"'.[17] Home and place are a privilege for those who earn it. That she realizes she is alone in this assessment suggests that Sir Walter and Elizabeth are indeed determined to repeat the past, and is also reflected in the lack of freedom Anne feels in speaking as well as in the clarity of this remark despite the hesitation which precedes it.

The results of this first speech are negligible. Austen presents in Anne's and her father's opposing views of home the contrast between the subjective and the objective. Sir Walter's view of Kellynch is based purely and repetitively on his vanity and a concern for appearances. In their retrenchment, Sir Walter does not want to live in the neighbourhood of Kellynch as Anne suggests (through Lady Russell) because he is afraid that his dignity will not support such a descent. Because his view of this place is from the inside looking out, he cannot see it as others do. In the greater world, even that just outside their front door, ideas about who and what the Kellynch family are may be very different from what Sir Walter thinks they are. Society is changing and the old modes, tellingly tarnished in the unflattering characterization of Lady Dalrymple, are not viewed in the same myopic way in a larger society.

This subjective/objective opposition between Anne and her father is suggestive of the difference between being the subject of a painting and the painting's viewer. The dominating subject of pre-Romantic era landscape painting is the landowner, the title holder, the king or

queen intent upon presenting a certain idea about his estate. Thomas Gainsborough's iconic painting of Mr and Mrs Robert Andrews completed in 1750 suggests the way in which Sir Walter imagines his place and the place of Kellynch Hall. The Elliots and Kellynch are like the subjects of Gainsborough's painting; they dominate the landscape and suggest the fashionable, affluent and enlightened epitome of eighteenth-century genteel society. Preceding the trend for 'open air' painting, this is an image created in a studio and constructed, most likely, through the very specific direction of the subjects. There is no evidence of the dirty, messy hard work that is necessary in maintaining such an estate, the poverty of those who work the land and serve Mr and Mrs Andrews, or the fortune received and spent to create this perfect image. Are the Andrews living beyond their means in order to sustain a certain name and place like Sir Walter? Is their money old or new, hard-earned or inherited? Sir Walter's view of his aristocratic country home is idealized with nostalgic reflection on the past as the model of moral integrity and social refinement, but he, perhaps, forgets that the ideal country house, as Ben Jonson's 'To Penshurst' informs us, is 'not … built to envious show, / Of touch or marble, nor canst boast a row / Of polished pillars, or a roof of gold'.[18]

As Sir Walter struggles to maintain the crumbling façade of Kellynch, he is adamant that no one know the amount of decay he is hiding, but Anne's view of Kellynch is even more subjective. She inhabits Kellynch from within, and she too is limited because she cannot observe this place objectively and see its flaws. At Kellynch, Anne is accustomed to escaping to the gardens for solitude when, emotionally, she is unequal to the task of communicating with those closest to her, but this habit has only served to isolate her and perpetuate the idea that she has nothing to contribute to her family. Not only does Anne not speak much prior to the move to Uppercross, but her lengthy reminiscence in Chapter Four of Volume One in which she details the rescinded engagement to Frederick Wentworth, has the effect of returning her eight years to the past rather than moving her forward. When she volunteers to care for the injured little Charles, it could be said that she is selflessly stepping in where her own sister, a bad mother and difficult spouse, cannot, but Anne is not selfless in this. Instead, she is self-indulgent: 'she was left with as many sensations of comfort, as were, perhaps, ever likely to be hers. She knew herself to be the first utility to the child; and what was it to her, if Frederick Wentworth were only half a mile distant, making

himself agreeable to others!'[19] Were she and her father to look at their familial landscape from another perspective, it would perhaps be difficult to maintain certainty in its (or their own) perfection.

While Austen cannot have been unaware of the evolution of the objective and artistic observation of architecture and landscape prevalent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, she only rarely interjects some of the elements common in this Romantic movement into her novels. In Anne's amity with the natural world and nostalgic connection with landscape, Austen embraces this new understanding of space. Anne's observations of her place are a direct contrast to that of her father, just as those of the Romantics were in direct contrast to those of the Enlightenment. Because her father is not a reliable judge of his place, Anne, similarly, cannot be trusted to recognize how much she is perpetuating her own loneliness. Walking with her sister, the Musgroves and Captain Wentworth, Anne ensures that she goes unnoticed by falling behind and instead of engaging in conversation, she decides that,

> the pleasure of a walk must arise from the exercise of the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical lines extant of autumn, that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness, that season which has drawn from every poet, worthy of being read, some attempt at description, or some lines of feeling.[20]

Absent here is the community of family and friends. Here the influence of the Romantics on Austen's work, though certainly more overt than elsewhere in her novels, suggests that Anne is willing to accept the ambiguity of place resulting from social, economic and perhaps even political changes, because it gratifies her need to subconsciously perpetuate her grief. In making Anne both excruciatingly self-aware and, at the same time, deliberately and obstinately ignorant of the possibility for change, Austen muddies her once clear associations of character and place and creates for Anne a dilemma as she must begin to work out how to find a place somewhere away from these two extremes. Although it is clear exactly what retrenchment and the loss of this space means to both Anne and to her father, the difference is so great that neither gets complete narrative approval. For them, only the change from this space to another is likely to suggest another way of viewing themselves and their home.

For Anne, a removal from the familiar family circle to the less familiar Uppercross is only the first step she must take to occupy space with the appropriate amount of both subjective and objective knowledge. When she arrives at Uppercross, which is only three miles from Kellynch, her impression of her importance does little to suggest that much growth and recovery is at hand. Though she is content to realize what she calls 'our own nothingness beyond our own circle',[21] she has not been further than those three miles in some time and cannot yet see the alteration which is needed in herself in order for her to recognize her value to others. What is her place now, after all? Does she belong with that ancient name and family synonymous with Kellynch Hall? Does she belong to Uppercross with its confusion of style and jumble of the past and present? There are moments in which Anne is aware that she, at least, is wanted at Uppercross, but she uses the confidences of the Musgroves to avoid acknowledging her own feelings of loneliness and rejection and instead merely listens rather than becoming too involved with their petty dramas. Anne seems to occupy a space somewhere between Kellynch and Uppercross; it is her predilection towards subjectivity and isolation in the Romantic style which perpetuates this place. Deresiewicz suggests this same thing in discussing the natural progression of grief reflected in *Mansfield Park*: 'the acceptance and even embrace of diminished expectations, is better than its alternative, the pursuit of one's true objects of desire'.[22] This assessment of Fanny Price can easily be applied to Anne Elliot's grief as well. Anne can do nothing to disabuse her family of the notion that she should no longer be expected to dance or marry because it means she does not have to confront her own part in the dissolution of her engagement to Wentworth and move forward.

Yet, it is Anne's move to Uppercross which provides her with her first opportunity to view her place differently. Uppercross Great House, a place of jovial chaos and alteration, makes this difficult for her, however. This space confuses Anne. She approves of the 'the old-fashioned square parlour, with a small carpet and shining floor',[23] reflective of past exact modes of interior design, but she also approves of 'the proper air of confusion … the present daughters of the house were gradually giving by the grand piano forte and a harp, flower-stands and little tables placed in every direction'.[24] Paradoxically, she judges it as disorderly, an 'overthrow of all order and neatness',[25] and something by which the ancestors on the walls of the parlour in the

'brown velvet' and 'blue satin' should be astonished. Anne negates the positive impression of Uppercross when she passes negative judgement on the way in which this family occupies its space. The older Musgroves, while old fashioned, are considered good by other members of the community. Their children, enthusiastic in their youth and new ideas, are accepted and, judging by the parlour, even encouraged by their parents. Why would Anne want to turn them back to the days of 'brown velvet' and 'blue satin' for the sake of order if modernity seems to agree with them? Anne vacillates because she begins to doubt the elegant manners of the past which as an Elliot she sees repeated again and again. By doing nothing to assert herself, and instead silently judging this warm, inviting home as somehow improper, Anne perpetuates the idea that she is unimportant and invisible.

Her habit of turning inward, of avoiding engagement in the good-humoured social shift evident in the parlour at Uppercross and hiding behind claims of duty and usefulness, inhibits her ability to improve in both spirit and self-knowledge. As she becomes comfortable, even complacent, in her role as devoted, sensible spinster sister and aunt at Uppercross, Anne becomes stagnant. Weighed down by regret, she has closed herself off to the possibility of change. Austen conveys this not only in Anne's continued relative silence, but also in a moment which is emblematic of Anne's psychological restraint. After some weeks of avoiding direct interaction with Captain Wentworth, Anne finds herself briefly alone with him in a very small drawing-room at Uppercross Cottage while tending to her injured nephew. Anne, deprived of the opportunity to escape the small room by the entreaties of her young charge, kneels in front of the invalid, essentially closing herself off from the rest of the room and from the necessity of speaking to Wentworth. Though both Charles Hayter and the rambunctious young Walter enter the room, Anne remains with her back to them. Despite the best efforts of Walter to entice her into play and interaction, Anne remains silent and preoccupied by the sick child until 'she found herself in the state of being released from him [Walter]'[26] without a word by Captain Wentworth. The construction of this action, including Austen's use of the passive verb, reflects the passive way in which Anne moves away from Kellynch, the past and her grief, and into a new understanding of her place in the wider world.

And indeed, Anne must move further afield than Uppercross because it is experience in the greater world which will teach her that she is only perpetuating her own grief and subjectivity. Anne's first

tentative steps out of the confining circle of Kellynch and Uppercross are to a place that is wholly unfamiliar. At Lyme Regis, Anne is far more open to the possibility of new experience because the town itself, open to the sea, lends itself to inspiration as 'its old wonders and new improvements … are what the stranger's eye will seek'.[27] Anne even quickly overcomes her astonishment at the smallness of Harville's temporary lodgings to be 'lost in pleasanter feelings which sprang from the sight of all the ingenious contrivances and nice arrangements'.[28] Uppercross Great House's state of alteration was something Anne felt to be imprudent, but here Anne finds something just right because she is ready to experience a new type of space. How can she not start to understand that she must also make an effort to change in such a place? Anne's physical, emotional and psychological changes help her to realize that she has indeed been improved by the fine sea air, an outside and unfamiliar force. When she begins to be assured of the return of Captain Wentworth's affection for her after he notices the clear interest that she has sparked in Mr Elliot, she no longer belongs in the past. Captain Wentworth may indeed 'see something like Anne Elliot again',[29] but Anne is not the Anne Elliot he knew then, she is something more, something better. Now, she begins to be able to seek out company instead of walking away. The 'animation of eye'[30] that Captain Wentworth notices is demonstrative of a new animation of spirit as well. She has become a woman of strength who, following the dramatic fall of Louisa on the Cobb, will demonstrate a significant alteration in her knowledge and understanding of her place.

In this pivotal scene, the choice of place and organization of people within the space are profoundly evocative. Austen takes pains to place her characters, though ('it was all done in rapid moments'),[31] so that the place which just hours earlier had been the inspiration for both physical and psychological growth for Anne, is now the place of affirmation in the guise of tragedy. Anne's reaction to Louisa's fall and the choices she makes following this event mark a turning point for her. While all of her companions on the Cobb are either swooning, flapping about or immobilized with despair, Anne responds with a thoughtful and calm energy, directing the actions of the others while supporting Henrietta. Most remarkably, both Charles and Captain Wentworth turn to Anne in this moment. She becomes bold where she knows she is appreciated and even loved. She is no longer loath to speak, but accepts that she can defy what had once been her place and choose the place which makes the most objective sense.

Understanding what she must do following this terrible moment, and how she must exert herself beyond what she might have done in the past, allows Anne to take the steps (both literal and figurative) necessary to make her place in her world and to surround herself properly with those who value her. Whisked off to Uppercross and then to Bath before the shock of the events at Lyme have had a chance to truly sink in, Anne finds herself marvelling at her father's choice in a new home at Camden Place. By the time Anne arrives in Bath, she has seen enough of the Elliot family's insignificance in the wider world that she must wonder that her sister cannot feel how the change from Kellynch to Camden Place has sunk them. She marvels at Elizabeth's satisfaction, even elation, as she guides Anne through the house. She is amused and somewhat baffled by the self-importance with which both her father and sister covet the 'cards left by people of whom they knew nothing'[32] while revelling in the space of their new home despite the fact that the 'walls [are only] perhaps thirty feet asunder'.[33]

As much as she had previously lamented this return to Bath, Anne feels a certain amount of freedom here. Rather than the imprisonment she anticipated, Bath is a place of new-found self-determination and release. She is free to visit with Mrs Smith, Lady Russell or the Musgroves at their lodgings as frequently as she desires. When she encounters Admiral Croft, just arrived in Bath for his health, engrossed at a print shop window, Anne must both touch and speak to him to draw his notice. She makes her presence known; she no longer accepts the idea that she is nothing because she knows that people with sense and kindness do value her. In advocating for herself in this moment, Anne both expands the physical space that she occupies and begins to populate that space with people of value to her. She also begins to know her place. Yes, she is an Elliot, but it is proper for her to speak to Admiral Croft in public, not because she is superior and must condescend to demonstrate some sort of magnanimity, but because kindness and friendship demand it. This is something new for Anne. Even Admiral Croft is surprised and gratified by her gesture to engage him because 'this is treating [him] like a friend'.[34]

Quickly on the heels of this encounter is a significant moment that is also an uncharacteristically and deliberately symbolic use of space for Austen. Anne knows that in attending an evening's concert there is a good chance that she will meet Captain Wentworth. While she attends the event with her family, their motive for attending is very different from Anne's because, for them, it represents an opportunity

to repeat the past in the great social triumph of acceptance by Lady Dalrymple. Again the tableau is set as Sir Walter and Elizabeth wait anxiously for a chance to cling to a literal translation of the crumbling façade of the social past in the guise of the elderly viscountess. Anne stands near her family, but looks away from them. The door opens and Captain Wentworth walks in and, 'Anne was the nearest to him, and *making yet a little advance*, she instantly spoke'.[35] The depiction suggests that Anne is no longer the 'lonely figure of emotional constancy'[36] and informs the reader that she speaks in spite of the 'formidable father and sister in the back ground'.[37] In fact, the pressure of the past is now literally behind her, and 'their being in the back ground [is] a support to Anne; she knew nothing of their looks, and felt equal to everything which she believed right to be done'.[38]

Anne begins 'penetrating forward'[39] in her thoughts as well after the news of Mr Elliot's deception is broken by Miss Smith. While surprised, she is not disappointed; instead, she feels relieved because knowing Mr Elliot's true character means she can encourage Captain Wentworth with a clear heart. Even the language changes after this revelation. Anne is no longer silent and withdrawn; instead she laughs and moves with quickness. This new openness in Anne is evident when, silently encouraged by Captain Harville to join him at the window at the White Hart, she goes to him without hesitation. What ensues is perhaps the greatest love scene in all of literature in which the hero and heroine never speak and never touch. How clever is Austen in constructing this pivotal scene. The room is not large, but the three groups that occupy it are distinct: 'The window at which he [Captain Harville] stood, was at the other end of the room from where the two ladies [Mrs. Musgrove and Mrs. Croft] were sitting, and though nearer to Captain Wentworth's table, not very near'.[40] When Anne and Captain Harville speak, the two ladies, engrossed as they are in their own activities and conversation, cannot hear them; however, Captain Wentworth is an attentive listener. He is near enough to catch the murmurs of those he desperately wishes to hear, and Anne is surprised to discover that he is indeed quite near.

This conversation (or debate really) on the constancy of the sexes is important to Anne's intellectual and emotional growth, and is reflected in the organization of the space presented. Captain Harville talks of waiting and of hope, and there is a sense of expectancy in the attentiveness of the at first unnoticed listener as Wentworth drops his pen and Anne tries to convince herself he could not have heard the

conversation. They are so close, yet Austen suggests that the proximity in this moment is something more intimate, even more intimate than when Wentworth lifted the child from her back, because now the narrative is firm in its language: 'She had only time, however, to move closer to the table where he had been writing, when footsteps were heard returning'.[41] She knows he is there and she is not afraid to open her heart. In fact, when he leaves the room, she goes directly to the table at which he sat. Is she hoping that he has left something behind for her? When he returns, it is his turn to figuratively turn his back on the past in 'instantly crossing the room to the writing table, and standing with his back towards Mrs. Musgrove'.[42]

Anne's growth in *Persuasion* is nothing short of astounding. She is the one character of all Austen's creations who makes a clear and total physical, emotional and social transformation. In making Anne able to step forward where once she would have cowered or evaded notice, Austen is suggesting the revolutionary idea that it is the individual who will carry society forward, not class or rank, not gender or family hierarchy. While the suggestion that Austen was a feminist is belied by some of her earlier titles (*Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*), which suggest a more middle-of-the-road approach to social issues, Anne Elliot's change is a remarkable exception. Not only does she take a small step forward for herself when she steps forward to greet Captain Wentworth at the Assembly or when she expectantly steps toward that writing table, she also takes an important step for mankind (and womankind) toward a future in which patriarchy, class and rank are no longer the lone arbiters of social advancement, and in which she, Anne Elliot, *can* take her proper place.

Notes

1. Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 108.

2. James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women* (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1809), 45; accessed on 20 June 2014, http://books.google.com/books?id=EPvotQIhvH8C&printsec=frontcover&dq=sermons+to+young+women&hl=en&sa=X&ei=YEN2VILECcj4igLTzIHwBQ&ved=0CCAQ6wEwAA#v=onepage&q=sermons%20to%20young%20women&f=false

3. Virginia Wolf, *A Room of One's Own* (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1929), ch. 3; accessed on 1 March 2014, http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200791.txt

4. Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 20 June 1808, in *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre La Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 128–32.

5. Cynthia Wall, 'Gendering Rooms: Domestic Architecture and Literary Acts', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 5, 4 (1993), 350.
6. Wall, 'Gendering Rooms', 350.
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