

## from “‘He looked quite red’: *Persuasion* and Austen’s New Man of Feeling”

[Taylor Walle’s article reconsiders the status of sensibility and the “man of feeling” in Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* by examining the novel’s “blushing hero,” Frederick Wentworth. The novel, Walle argues, shows that sensibility and masculinity are compatible and demonstrates Austen’s own desire to realign middle-class values with “fellow-feeling” and sympathy.]

Captain Frederick Wentworth in *Persuasion* (1818) is arguably Jane Austen’s manliest hero. A valiant leader, with “a great deal of intelligence,”<sup>1</sup> and famously “the handsomest and best hung of any in Bath” (195),<sup>2</sup> Wentworth exhibits masculinity through his appearance, demeanor, class position, and profession. As an emblem of the wholesome middle class and an agent of the British Empire, Wentworth is clearly distinguished from the corrupt and Frenchified aristocracy, whose weakness is often figured (in the novel, as in the period) in terms of effeminacy.<sup>3</sup> Yet, even in light of this unambiguous masculinity, Wentworth occasionally exhibits so-called feminine somatic responses, such as readers might expect from the protagonists of eighteenth-century sentimental literature but not from an officer of the Royal Navy. Although he never weeps, Wentworth blushes and blanches as if he were Henry Mackenzie’s notorious “man of feeling,” betraying a keen sensibility that defies the traditional opposition between sentiment and manliness. In *Persuasion*, the selectiveness with which Austen deploys the blush makes it significant as a ledger of sensibility: Wentworth is one of only two characters who blushes throughout the novel (the other is his love interest, and the novel’s heroine, Anne Elliot). If we include “glowing” and

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1 Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Janet Todd and Antje Blank (1818; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 28. References are to this edition.

2 Lady Russell uses this phrase to describe a set of curtains, but Jill Heydt-Stevenson argues that Lady Russell is actually referring to Wentworth. For more on this and other bawdy puns in Austen, see Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 194.

3 See Michèle Cohen’s discussion of effeminacy in *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996).

“blushing,” Anne blushes at least twelve times during the course of the novel and Wentworth at least four, while the face of every other character remains conspicuously unmarked.

Despite significant attention to Austen’s rosy-cheeked heroines, scholars have written little about the blushing heroes of Austen’s novels.<sup>1</sup> Even literary critics who discuss masculinity in Austen do not have much to say about the significance of these changing male complexions.<sup>2</sup> Wentworth is not the only blushing man in Austen’s corpus: Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*; Colonel Brandon, Willoughby, and Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility*; and Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* blush as well.<sup>3</sup> These men all display versions of Wentworth’s bashful manliness, but *Persuasion* stands out for both the relative rareness of blushing throughout the text and for its pairing of hyper-masculinity with unusual sensitivity. Wentworth’s blushes align him with the sensibility of Austen’s heroines—but not to the point of discrediting him with effeminacy—and thus participate in the larger reorientation of sentiment that *Persuasion* enacts. The novel rescues sensibility from its affiliation with the aristocracy and instead marks feeling as an important component of middle-class virtue.

## Austen and the Sentimental

Austen sits right at the crossroads of eighteenth-century sentiment and Romantic feeling, and her writing reflects both her youthful reading habits—especially her appetite for eighteenth-century

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1 Male blushing is sometimes mentioned, but rarely examined. See Mary Ann O’Farrell, “Austen’s Blush,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 27 (1994): 130, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1345817>; Alan Richardson, “Of Heartache and Head Injury: Reading Minds in *Persuasion*,” *Poetics Today* 23, no. 1 (2002): 157, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/03335372-23-1-141>; and Kay Young, “Feeling Embodied: Consciousness, *Persuasion*, and Jane Austen,” *Narrative* 11 (January 2003): 89, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/narrative/v011/11.1young.html>.

2 See especially Michael Kramp, *Disciplining Love: Austen and the Modern Man* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007); and Jason Solinger, *Becoming the Gentleman: British Literature and the Invention of Modern Masculinity, 1660–1815* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

3 Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye (1817; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 257; Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Edward Copeland (1811; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 75, 364, 407; and Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Pat Rogers (1813; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 278. References are to these editions, cited as *NA*, *S&S*, and *P&P* respectively.

novels—and her awareness of contemporary literary trends.<sup>1</sup> *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) provides the perfect example of these colliding (and imbricated) paradigms: Marianne’s storyline exemplifies the perils of overwrought, Romantic emotion, while Eliza’s tragic cautionary tale—lurking in the background and relayed to the reader via Colonel Brandon—not only harks back to the eighteenth-century sentimental novel but also establishes a parallel between these two genres. This example illustrates the significant overlap between the terms “sentiment” and “sensibility,” which both denote a sometimes dangerous, sometimes virtuous capacity for feeling and a readiness to display that feeling.

As in *Sense and Sensibility*, the sentimental usually appears in Austen’s work as a warning: recall, for instance, Austen’s early composition “Love and Freindship” (1790), where her characters’ exaggerated inclination to swoon and weep portends their humorous doom.<sup>2</sup> Austen takes particularly sharp aim at these physical manifestations of sensibility: what the sentimental novel depicts as an indication of authentic emotion (fainting, crying, blushing), Austen represents as performance, exposing these ostensibly feeling characters as overreacting frauds. For these reasons, some scholars label Austen’s writing as anti-sentimental: critics tend to portray Austen as a beacon of realism in an era overcome by the gothic, and they most often compare her writing to the notably unsentimental Samuel Johnson.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, the sentimental novel brazenly defies realism, as its exquisitely sensitive heroes and heroines weep over the bodies of suffering strangers.

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1 See Deidre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

2 Critics point out that Austen habitually deploys sentimental conventions in order to critique them. Claudia Johnson, for example, notes that in *Sense and Sensibility* Austen “refuses to indulge” the sentimental novel’s pernicious romanticization of female frailty. Johnson, “A ‘Sweet Face as White as Death’: Jane Austen and the Politics of Female Sensibility,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 22, no. 2 (1989): 164, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1345801>. Robyn Warhol argues that *Persuasion* reverses the sentimental gaze such that women become the spectators and male bodies the spectacle. Warhol, “The Look, the Body, and the Heroine: A Feminist-Narratological Reading of *Persuasion*,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 26, no. 1 (1992): 5–19, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1345602>.

3 Isobel Grundy, “Jane Austen and Literary Traditions,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). See also Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 144–45.

Although Austen's earlier work shows a wariness of emotional sensitivity, *Persuasion*, her final and most mature novel, exhibits a subtler engagement with this concept. Just as Anne Elliot reconsiders a youthful attachment, Austen reconsiders her own youthful rejection of sensibility, rehabilitating it for the hero and heroine alike. In *Persuasion*, sensibility (albeit, a moderate sensibility) emerges as the foundation of social harmony: unselfish compassion and consideration—what Adam Smith called “fellow-feeling”—sustains and nurtures the strongest relationships in the novel, including those between Wentworth and Captain Harville, Anne and Mrs Smith, Admiral and Sofia Croft, and Anne and Wentworth. As Natalie Taylor points out, the idea that sensibility promotes social stability is one that spans the eighteenth century and the Romantic period,<sup>1</sup> but the crucial role of sensibility in bolstering the emergent middle class has gotten short shrift in readings of *Persuasion*.

Smith's notion of fellow-feeling is crucial to both my reading of Austen and to a broader understanding of sentiment in the period. Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) emphasizes the importance of affect in civil society, but he cautions that society only benefits from the right kind of emotions, what Smith calls the “social” passions. Social passions elicit sympathy from an observer, causing him or her to respond to and participate in the emotions of another person. This ability to imaginatively reconstruct a fellow human's experience is, according to Smith, the *sine qua non* of civil society: “If you have either no fellow-feeling for the misfortunes I have met with ... or no indignation at the injuries I have suffered, we can no longer converse upon these subjects. We become intolerable to one another. I can neither support your company, nor you mine. You are confounded at my violence and passion, and I am enraged at your cold insensibility and want of feeling.”<sup>2</sup> Insofar as it facilitates relationships, Smith's fellow-feeling represents sensibility at its best. Echoing Smith's distinction between social and unsocial passions, Austen's novels uniformly elevate fellow-feeling while condemning selfishness and emotional excess.

Before Austen, Smith's fellow-feeling is taken up—rather hyperbolically—by eighteenth-century sentimental novels, which insist that sympathy is (or ought to be) the bedrock of society. Accordingly,

- 1 Natalie Taylor, “‘Mistaken Notions of Female Excellence’: Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of Virtue,” in *Called to Civil Existence: Mary Wollstonecraft's ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,’* ed. Enit Karafil Steiner (New York: Rodopi, 2014), 93–112.
- 2 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie, vol. 1 of *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 21.

characters are divided between the feeling and the unfeeling, and their capacity for sympathy is measured by the physical manifestations of their emotion (especially tears). Smith himself was skeptical about the sentimental novel's utility, which he thought affirmed readers' morality without encouraging social reform (140). Indeed, the distinction between "social" and "unsocial" begins to break down in these novels, as sympathy gives way to sentimental excess. Although emotion facilitates the hero's relationships via sympathy, the often-frenzied pitch of this emotion threatens to exclude the hero from his wider social context, marking him as an outsider. Consider how this paradox operates in Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*, the paradigmatic sentimental novel of the period.<sup>1</sup> As Harley, the hero, ventures into the world, he encounters various scenes of distress—a tragic woman in a madhouse, a disgraced woman of quality in a brothel, and a penniless soldier—and his extraordinary sensitivity to his fellow human beings manifests in his affective responses to these scenes. Although Harley's sympathy restores social bonds (as between the disgraced woman and her father) and sometimes leads to meaningful friendships (as with Edward, the penniless soldier), the expression of sympathy mostly results in sadness and isolation for Harley himself. The novel represents Harley as a rare example of sensibility in a world overcome by greed, and Harley, too sensitive for this world, dies as a result of his own generosity. Thus, even though Harley, as a man guided by his fellow-feeling, represents a moral ideal, he also exemplifies the dangers of excessive sensibility.

The problematic aspects of sensibility come into even sharper focus around the issue of gender. As George Starr and others have pointed out, death is often the only option for a sentimental hero, whose transgression of gender norms—via tears and other displays of sensibility—is so egregious that there is no possibility of him being assimilated into society. A woman of feeling, by comparison, "was much less anomalous and paradoxical than that of a man of feeling, for it tended to reinforce rather than subvert common assumptions about femininity."<sup>2</sup> From Mary Wollstonecraft's perspective, however, these "common assumptions about femininity" were equally vexed. Concerned about the potential for emotion to corrupt and discredit women, Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) cautions against an overzealous embrace of sensibility:

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1 Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, ed. Maureen Harkin (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005).

2 George Starr, "Sentimental Novels of the Later Eighteenth Century," in *The Columbia History of the British Novel*, ed. John Richetti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 195.

[Women's] senses are inflamed, and their understandings neglected, consequently they become the prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling. Civilized women are, therefore, so weakened by false refinement, that, respecting morals, their condition is much below what it would be were they left in a state nearer to nature ... All their thoughts turn on things calculated to excite emotion; and feeling, when they should reason, their conduct is unstable, and their opinions wavering—not the wavering produced by deliberation or progressive views, but by contradictory emotions.<sup>1</sup>

Women, Wollstonecraft argues, will gain equal standing only when their education privileges reason over emotion.<sup>2</sup> Thus, for Wollstonecraft's women, as for the sentimental hero, a reduction of sensibility (and its attendant effeminacy) is crucial to improving their position in society. *Persuasion*, however, shifts the emphasis and thereby demonstrates that the persistence of sensibility, even when one has "outlived the age of blushing" (52), is essential to both romantic love and social harmony.

Austen's revival of the sentimental involves some pointed departures from the eighteenth-century form, especially with regard to emotional excess. In a thoroughly characteristic move, Austen takes great care to disentangle sympathy from hysteria. This affective distinction is most evident in the differences between the three Elliot sisters, who exemplify the various modulations of Austenian emotion: indifference, hysteria, and sensibility. Elizabeth (the eldest) is in no danger of being mistaken for a sentimental heroine; the picture of impassivity and selfishness, she cares more about her reputation and appearance than about any of her friends or relations. Meanwhile, Mary (the youngest) displays all the emotional hyperbole of the

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1 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 5 of *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 129–30.

2 Wollstonecraft reconsiders her view of sensibility in later texts such as *Maria* (1798). Published posthumously, *Maria* parses emotion in a manner similar to Smith: although, like *Rights of Woman*, it highlights the problems with emotional excess, it also points to the socially productive aspects of emotion, as female friendship and love for her child sustain Maria despite her prolonged suffering. Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman; Or, Maria*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 1 of *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*. See Taylor, "Mistaken Notions of Female Excellence"; and Taylor, *Rights of Woman as Chimera: The Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

sentimental novel, but none of the compassion that Austen prizes: “any indisposition sunk her completely,” and she “was very prone to add to every other distress that of fancying herself neglected and ill-used” (39). Mary is frequently “hysterical” (60), but never empathetic: she feels strongly—“nobody knew how much she should suffer” (51)—but feels only for herself. A character like Mary is representative of Austen’s deployment of Smithian distinctions, as Mary’s emotions are powerful but notably “unsocial.” In his illuminating history of the sentimental mode, James Chandler points out that the term “sentiment” connotes both reason and feeling, meaning “thought” on the one hand and “moral sense” on the other.<sup>1</sup> Austen takes up this duality of sentiment, and, by that logic, Mary is precluded from Austenian sensibility through both her failure to demonstrate consideration for others and her complete lack of reason. The antithesis of her sister Mary, Anne (the middle child) epitomizes Austen’s dualistic sensibility. Both rational and sensitive, “with an elegance of mind and a sweetness of character” (6), Anne is “sensible” in more ways than one. A character like Anne confounds simple dichotomies and demands that we entertain the possibility of reason and emotion coexisting within a single person (and, indeed, within a single novel). . . .

In the eighteenth-century novels to which Austen responds, the blush is a highly feminized signifier, indicating the presence of traits especially prized in women, like modesty, chastity, and sensibility.<sup>2</sup> . . .

Austen’s application of the blush to both Anne and Wentworth, however, indicates a marked departure from this highly feminized view of blushing (and of sensibility),<sup>3</sup> especially since Wentworth is not one of the highly effeminate “equivocal beings” against whom Wollstonecraft warns, but a strong, rational, and virile man.<sup>4</sup> Anne’s

1 James Chandler, *An Archaeology of Sympathy: The Sentimental Mode in Literature and Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 1–4.

2 See O’Farrell, *Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); and Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Fictions of Modesty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

3 Evidence indicates that Austen would have been familiar with the conventional, eighteenth-century significations of the blush. [James] Fordyce, for example, is mentioned briefly in *Pride and Prejudice*, 76; and, in *Searching for Jane Austen*, Emily Auerbach implies that Austen would have read [John] Gregory. Auerbach, *Searching for Jane Austen* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 44. [Statements about feminine blushing from Fordyce’s and Gregory’s writings are quoted in an earlier portion of the article omitted here.]

4 The term “equivocal beings” can be found in *Rights of Woman*, 208. See also Claudia Johnson’s discussion of the implications of this term in *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

and Wentworth's mutual blushes, then, point to a movement away from a gender essentialist perception of sensibility: appearing on Anne's and Wentworth's bodies alike, the blush (and the emotion it denotes) is neither male nor female, but simply human. ...

## The Blushing Hero

... Without negating his manly qualities, Wentworth's blushes indicate his heightened sensitivity to the feelings and behavior of those around him. In one such example, Wentworth blushes in embarrassment when Mary "very audibly" whispers, "Only think of Elizabeth's including every body! I do not wonder Captain Wentworth is delighted! You see he cannot put the card out of his hand" (246). Anne, observing Wentworth at this moment, "caught his eye, *saw his cheeks glow*, and his mouth form itself into a momentary expression of contempt" (246, emphasis added). Certainly Wentworth's glowing cheeks express embarrassment on his own behalf, but his blush also conveys concern for Anne and embarrassment for Mary. Expounding on the manifestations of fellow-feeling, Smith writes that "we blush for the impudence and rudeness of another, though he himself appears to have no sense of the impropriety of his own behaviour" (12). Austen frequently uses blushing in this way, signifying one character's awareness of another's transgressions—Elizabeth Bennet with her sister Lydia, or Elinor Dashwood with Lucy Steele—and this instance places Wentworth squarely within that tradition, only here we are given a blushing hero rather than a blushing heroine.

Throughout the novel, Austen allows Wentworth to reveal sensibility without sentimental histrionics, in brazen defiance of the traditional opposition between sensibility and masculinity. ...

As represented by Wentworth, Austen's rehabilitated sensibility posits a solution to the crisis of masculinity that began to emerge at the end of the century. Occasioned by a host of changes—including the reform of inheritance laws, the exchange of a patriarchal social structure for a more fraternal one, the demise of the aristocracy and rise of the bourgeoisie, and the ascendancy of commercial capitalism—traditional masculinity underwent significant revisions in the late eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The "economic man" generated particular uneasiness, as G.J. Barker-Benfield argues, as a result of the unavoidable connection between commercialism and the pursuit of pleasure:

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1 See G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 37–103; and Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage, England 1500–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

“To let loose fantasies and appetites ... that is, to pursue passions and to be victimized by them, was traditionally seen as female.”<sup>1</sup> It was the figure of the aristocrat,<sup>2</sup> however, who posed the greatest threat to masculinity: excessive and indulgent, the aristocrat typified the effeminacy in the period, “oppos[ing] and subvert[ing] vaunted ‘manly’ characteristics—courage, aggression, martial valor, discipline and strength—that constituted patriotic value.”<sup>3</sup> These shifting ideas of masculinity—and the socioeconomic forces behind these shifts—are on full display in *Persuasion*, as the profligate and aristocratic Sir Walter impugns the seemliness of a self-made fortune (21), while the wealthy and upwardly mobile Admiral Croft questions the masculinity of a man with so many mirrors in his house (138). Among these competing modes of masculinity, Wentworth emerges as the model of the new man who will lead Britain, and this new man—as his blushing suggests—is emphatically a man of feeling. ...

### The New Man of Feeling

Wentworth’s sensibility and his status as a reimagined man of feeling are most evident in his response to Louisa’s nearly disastrous tumble from the wall in Lyme. Indeed, this scene, more than any other in the novel, reads like an episode in a sentimental novel, putting the injured body of an innocent young woman on display: “Louisa fell on the pavement on the Lower Cobb, and was taken up lifeless! There was no wound, no blood, no visible bruise; but her eyes were closed, she breathed not, her face was like death.— The horror of that moment to all who stood around!” (118). Austen’s language imitates sentimental tableaux of distress—the fall incites “horror,” and Louisa is “lifeless” with a “face like death”—and the use of exclamation points further exaggerates the dramatic tone of the narration, a detail we might be tempted to interpret as irony were it not for the wide range of characters who respond to this incident with sobriety. In addition to making Louisa’s body into a tragic spectacle, the passage also stages sentimental responses from the characters who witness Louisa’s fall:

Captain Wentworth, who had caught her up, knelt with her in his arms looking on her with a face as pallid as her own, in an agony

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1 Barker-Benfield, 104.

2 This vain, indulgent, aristocratic figure was epitomized by the Prince Regent, later George IV.

3 Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 187.

of silence. "She is dead! she is dead!" screamed Mary, catching hold of her husband, and contributing with his own horror to make him immovable; in another moment, Henrietta, sinking under the conviction, lost her senses too, and would have fallen on the steps, but for Captain Benwick and Anne, who caught and supported her between them ... Charles hung over Louisa with sobs of grief, and could only turn his eyes from one sister, to see the other in a state as insensible, or to witness the hysterical agitations of his wife, calling on him for help which he could not give. (118–19)

In classic sentimental form, each character displays a somatic response to Louisa's suffering: Wentworth goes pale, Mary screams and falls into "hysterical agitations," Henrietta faints, and Charles Musgrove (Louisa's older brother) "sobs" over her inanimate body. Aside from Anne's characteristically pragmatic response—not only catching Henrietta, but also retaining self-control throughout the episode—this passage exemplifies the same sentimental conventions that Austen satirizes in juvenilia such as "Love and Freindship."

Unlike the uniformly ridiculed characters in "Love and Freindship,"<sup>1</sup> Austen allows those who witness Louisa's fall to maintain their dignity even while they demonstrate sensibility: most notably, Wentworth, whose emotional response to Louisa's fall garners more narrative attention than any of the other characters' reactions. In addition to the passages quoted above, we are told that Wentworth exclaims, "Is there no one to help me?" in a "tone of despair, and as if all his own strength were gone" (118); and, similarly, "Captain Wentworth, staggering against the wall for his support, exclaimed in the bitterest agony, 'Oh God! her father and mother!'" (119). Wentworth's "despair" and "agony" are met with narrative sympathy, not disdain, as Anne—the moral and narrational center of the novel—directs Captain Benwick, "Go to him, go to him ... for heaven's sake go to him" (118). Anne's position as an observer of this scene creates a kind of double spectacle: Wentworth responds to the tragic figure of Louisa, while Anne responds to the tragic figure of Wentworth. Moreover, in her role as spectator, Anne stands in for the reader—also an observer of this scene—and Anne's response to Wentworth functions as a kind of didactic cue: when faced with the suffering of a worthy character, respond with kindness. The legitimacy of Wentworth's suffering is further signaled when he maintains his good sense even in

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1 Austen's satirical novella features characters, both male and female, who faint at even the smallest obstacle and whose sensibility Austen depicts as incompetence.

the midst of his agony: "As to the wretched party left behind, it could scarcely be said which of the three, *who were completely rational*, was suffering most, Captain Wentworth, Anne, or Charles" (119, emphasis added). This insistence on Wentworth's rationality forecloses any satirical dismissal of his sentimental response to Louisa's accident, troubling the simple dichotomy between reason and emotion.

Wentworth's reconfigured masculinity is further accentuated by the strong contrast between Wentworth and a host of less masculine—and less compassionate—male characters, especially Sir Walter Elliot, Captain Benwick, and Sir Walter's heir, Mr Elliot. Austen uses the alternative masculinities that these characters represent to levy a critique consistent with her realignment of social value on the basis of fellow-feeling. Sir Walter furnishes an example of the archetypal feminized aristocrat, and his vanity metaphorically represents what Austen perceives as the aristocracy's selfishness: just as Sir Walter is completely absorbed by his reflection in the mirrors that pervade Kellynch-hall—"Such a number of looking-glasses!" says Admiral Croft, "oh Lord! there was no getting away from oneself"—so too is the aristocracy wholly preoccupied with its own concerns (138). Importantly, it appears that Austen's sticking point with Sir Walter is not his femininity or alterity, but specifically his self-interest. This example further reveals Austen's refusal to generalize with regard to gender: much as she extends emotion to both men and women, she similarly extends selfishness. These characteristics defy gender: for every Mary Musgrove, there is a Sir Walter.

In addition to the vain aristocrat, Austen also expresses skepticism about the Harley-esque "man of feeling," despite the many ways in which she aligns Wentworth with this type. The sad, bookish Captain Benwick delineates the limits of Wentworth's affinity with the sentimental man of feeling, making it clear that Wentworth represents a new kind of masculinity rather than a recapitulation of a familiar type.<sup>1</sup> Certainly Benwick displays something like sensibility, but it is hardly the fellow-feeling that *Persuasion* endorses; rather, Benwick's sensibility is more closely aligned with the excess, sentiment,

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1 Benwick is also representative of the Byronic man of feeling; he explicitly mentions three of Byron's poems: *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Like the Harley-esque man of feeling, the Byronic man of feeling is also a social outsider; although his emotions might be fashionable, they still preclude or complicate his participation in civil society. In stark contrast stands Wentworth, whose sensibility both facilitates his relationships and distinguishes him as a leader of the very society against which a Byronic man of feeling rebels. For more on *Persuasion* and Byron, see Peter Knox-Shaw, "Persuasion, Byron, and the Turkish Tale," *RES* 44 (February 1993): 47–69, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/518442>.

and selfishness of Mary or Sir Walter. Where Wentworth manifests his feelings almost reflexively, Benwick performs his; as such, where Wentworth's expressions of emotion add nuance and depth to his character, Benwick's poetic effusions reduce him to a caricature. For instance, Benwick is "intimately acquainted" with "all the tenderest songs of one poet, and all the impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony of the other" (108). Similarly, "he repeat[s], with such tremulous feeling, the various lines which imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness" (108). Austen's superlatives—"all the tenderest," "hopeless," "such tremulous"—indicate the irony of this passage and imply that Benwick's distress is more comic than tragic. Moreover, where Anne responds with concern to Wentworth's grief, Benwick is met with amusement and didacticism, as Anne attempts to correct what she perceives as a propensity for self-indulgence. A veritable parody of the "man of feeling," Benwick is most definitely not Wentworth. Engulfed in his own sadness and intent on remaining so, Benwick's feelings absorb him to the point of selfishness, much as Sir Walter's mirrors absorb him.

The substitutability of the object of his affection is proof enough of Benwick's self-interest: moving quickly from Fanny Harville to Louisa Musgrove, he, like the "man of feeling" he emulates, is intent on being in love, though it does not much matter with whom. Though Wentworth "believed it impossible for man to be more attached to woman than poor Benwick had been to Fanny Harville, or to be more deeply afflicted under the dreadful change" (104), the easy transference of his affections within a period of only a few months belies the depth of both his attachment and his grief. Wentworth, by contrast, remains faithful to Anne for many years; as he says, "A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman!—He ought not—he does not" (199). The comparison between Benwick and Wentworth allows Austen to distinguish the "man of feeling" from what we might call her "man of sensibility," while at the same time distinguishing those who perform feeling from those who truly feel. Fellow-feeling is—must be—authentic, and perhaps this fundamental authenticity explains Austen's choice to signal sensibility with the blush: as an involuntary physical response, the blush is a dependable barometer of authentic feeling.

Finally, Wentworth must be compared to the novel's man without feeling, Mr Elliot. At first, Mr Elliot seems like a suitable match for Anne and a formidable rival for Wentworth. Not only is Mr Elliot "good looking" (155), "rational, discreet, polished" (175), and the heir to Kellynch-hall, but he reminds Anne of Wentworth: "His manners were so exactly what they ought to be, so polished, so easy, so

particularly agreeable, that she could compare them in excellence to only one person's manners. They were not the same, but they were, perhaps, equally good" (155). The novel invites this comparison on a number of levels: Mr Elliot and Wentworth have "equally good" manners, both men capture Anne's attention, and both occupy the position of heir apparent—Elliot to the old world and Wentworth to the new. Elliot and Wentworth are nearly equivalent, in all ways but one: Mr Elliot has no capacity for feeling. Soon after Anne's initial encounter with Mr Elliot, the novel begins making this point repeatedly and insistently. Mrs Smith (Anne's childhood friend) describes Mr Elliot as "a man without heart or conscience"; he has, she says, "no feelings for others" (215). After hearing Mrs Smith's account of Mr Elliot, Anne comments, "Mr. Elliot is evidently a disingenuous, artificial, worldly man, who has never had any better principle to guide him than selfishness" (225). Finally, even before Anne learns of Mr Elliot's mistreatment of her friend, she observes this key difference between Elliot and Wentworth:

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 hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped. (175)

In this quotation, Anne gives a description of Austen's rehabilitated sensibility: unselfish and "open-hearted," Anne privileges the reflexive emotional candor of the sentimental novel at its most characteristic. In her description of a person who "sometimes *looked* or said a careless or hasty thing," we find a subtle nod to the blushing hero, whose somatic displays of emotion vouch for his worthy character.

Describing the "pleasure of mutual sympathy," Smith writes that "nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast" (13). Repeatedly describing moments when Anne and Wentworth observe fellow-feeling in one another, Austen not only embraces Smith's notion of the pleasure of mutual sympathy, but also represents this mutual sympathy as the foundation of a strong relationship. A passage near the end of the novel foregrounds the reciprocity—and equivalence—of Anne and Wentworth's fellow-feeling, as signaled by the ever-telling

blush: “He [Wentworth] joined them; but, as if irresolute whether to join or pass on, said nothing—only looked. Anne could command herself to receive that look, and not repulsively. *The cheeks which had been pale now glowed*, and the movements which had hesitated were decided. He walked by her side” (260, emphasis added). The blushing cheeks of this passage are strangely autonomous, detached from their implied body; and although Austen’s synecdochical phrasing demands that the reader imagine a body, it does not indicate the gender of that body. The now-glowing cheeks could easily belong to either Wentworth or Anne (or both), and the complete similitude of Anne and Wentworth in this moment reveals the triumph of Austen’s dismantled binary. Finally, Anne and Wentworth’s mutually blushing cheeks attest to the radical potential of Austen’s reconfigured sensibility. As Anne and Wentworth’s marriage proclaims a shift in the social order, away from aristocratic power structures and towards the rising middle class, it is significant that this shift is enacted by two characters who also represent a realignment of social value on the basis of fellow-feeling rather than gender.

(2016)