

from “Domestic Mobility in *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*”

[In this article, Melissa Sodeman analyzes Austen’s late fiction in terms of evolving concepts of the domestic. The excerpt below is focused on *Persuasion*, and on Anne Elliot’s movements: initially settled at home on the family’s landed estate, she transitions to a more itinerant life, first in Bath and then as a Naval officer’s wife. Sodeman argues that this increased mobility reflects a larger movement in which private and domestic relationships are increasingly bound together with larger public and national concerns. For Anne Elliot, this opening up of physical and psychological space is a positive development away from a comparatively cloistered domesticity.]

From the mention of watering places, may the author be allowed to suggest a few remarks on the evils which have arisen from the general conspiracy of the gay to usurp the regions of the sick; and from their converting the health-restoring fountains, meant as a refuge for disease, into the resorts of vanity for those who have no disease but idleness?

This inability of staying at home, as it is one of the most infallible, so it is one of the most dangerous symptoms of the reigning mania. It would be more tolerable, did this epidemic malady only break out, as formerly, during the winter, or some one season.

—Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Education: With “A View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent among Women of Rank and Fortune”*¹

Hannah More’s 1799 indictment of her culture’s increasing mobility and its attendant “mania” for leaving home rests upon a conviction that travel, while possessing a curative value for the ill, actually endangers the healthy—so much so that travelers whose health is not imperiled have been diseased with idleness and infected with an

1 Hannah More, *A View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent among Women of Rank and Fortune*, in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education with “A View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent among Women of Rank and Fortune”* (1799; rpt. New York and Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1995), p. 145. The old-style “s” and “f” have been silently updated. [Footnotes have been modified to include full references to the material reprinted here.]

“epidemic malady,” an “inability of staying at home.” This “inability” proves disabling, but this disability, rather than imposing limitations upon one’s range of movement, comes from one’s moving too much. Travel, in other words, is both a cure for and a symptom of disease.

Though here admonishing members of both sexes by pathologizing fashionable travel, More elsewhere rebukes women more particularly for abandoning their domestic duties. “Could it be foreseen,” she bristles, “that when a fine lady should send out a notification that on such a night she shall be at home, these two significant words (besides intimating the rarity of the thing) would present to the mind an image the most undomestic which language can convey?”¹ In their quests for social pleasures, More suggests, refined Englishwomen have lost the domestic characters that once distinguished them.² Her fear that women, and fashionable people more generally, have abandoned their domestic responsibilities engages with and indeed almost presages a number of concerns that preoccupy Jane Austen in her two last works, *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*.³

1 More, pp. 140–1.

2 This equation of female virtue with domestic incarceration has been viewed by historians influenced by Jurgen Habermas as instituting a domestic ideology based upon separate spheres. Some of the most notable proponents of the doctrine of separate spheres include Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York and San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979) and Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850*, *Women in Culture and Society* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987). Such a clearly demarcated division (masculine public sphere/feminine private sphere) has been discredited recently by many scholars. Important contributions to the public/private debate include Amanda Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History,” in *Historical Journal* 36, 2 (June 1993): 383–414, and her introduction to *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1998). pp. 1–12; Lawrence E. Klein, “Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure,” *ECS* 29, 1 (Autumn 1995): 97–109; Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, introduction to *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations, and Responsibilities* (London and New York: Longman, 1997). pp. 1–28; Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750–1810* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000); and Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women’s Political Writing in England, 1780–1830* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 2000).

3 More’s objection to women travelers draws attention to a debate that can be traced back at least to Samuel Richardson’s contribution to Samuel Johnson’s *Rambler* 97 (19 February 1751).

Literary critics have assumed that domestic fiction, the unique province of the woman writer and preeminently of Austen, produces what Nancy Armstrong calls the “domestic woman,” a paragon of homely virtue whose internalization of the decrees of conduct literature naturalizes and confirms its moral authority.¹ Less recognized, however, are the ways in which domestic fiction interrogates, disrupts, and resists conservative injunctions placing women at the center of the modern household. Focusing on *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*, this essay will consider how these novels displace their heroines from their homes in order to envision them within domestic structures that more readily accommodate mobility. For Anne Elliot, this displacement occurs involuntarily. Though she initially departs from Kellynch-hall with sorrow, by the end of the novel Anne finds happiness within the domestic milieu of Bath’s crowded streets. ... In her final works ... Austen redefines what home itself means: no longer the spatially enclosed site associated with the nuclear family, the domestic is conceptualized as an open and porous place linked to and constituted by local, national, and even global concerns. And if the category of the domestic expands outward and is mapped onto England’s public spaces in the later novels, it is because here, as in earlier works, family has come to signify a community drawn together by ties of the heart rather than by those of blood.²

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- 1 Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), p. 3. In this widely influential book, Armstrong argues that domestic novels, which legislated moral authority to a middle-class domestic woman informed by conduct literature, came to produce and naturalize desire for what she calls the “modern household” (p. 258), a household comprising a nuclear family that has at its center a mother rather than a father. See also Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London and Basingstoke UK: Macmillan, 1992) and Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). Recent work assuming that *Persuasion* does indeed perform the ideological work of domesticating women for the modern household includes Monica F. Cohen, “Persuading the Navy Home: Austen and Married Women’s Professional Property,” *Novel* 29, 3 (Spring 1996): 346–66; and Miranda J. Burgess, “Romance at Home: Austen, Radcliffe, and the Circulation of Britishness,” in *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order, 1740–1830*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 43 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 150–85.
 - 2 Jane Austen’s loosening definition of family can be traced back at least to *Pride and Prejudice*, which closes with Elizabeth and Darcy’s removal “to all the comfort and elegance of their family party at Pemberley” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* [New York: W.W. Norton, 2001], p. 251)—a party defined more by affinity than consanguinity. (It excludes, it would seem, Mrs. Bennet and Wickham.) The ending of *Mansfield Park*, of course, takes a [continued]

In a remarkably suggestive aside, Nina Auerbach has characterized the “problem” of *Pride and Prejudice* as Elizabeth Bennet’s struggle to “find a house she could live in.”¹ Most of Austen’s heroines, after all, can be said to face precisely this problem. House hunting was a serious business for nineteenth-century women dispossessed by primogeniture, and few—if any—of Austen’s female protagonists were entirely immune to the threat of homelessness. Certainly *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Mansfield Park* feature heroines in search of homes of their own. Catherine Morland acquires her home once she learns to read appropriately Gothic warnings about paternal figures; Elinor and Marianne Dashwood both manage to establish homes independent of the patriarchal system that disinherited them, though in doing so they must renounce the larger world; and Fanny Price strives to make a place for herself in her adopted home of Mansfield, first as a cousin who is constantly reminded “she is not a *Miss Bertram*”² and later as a daughter of the house whose position has been legitimized by marriage to Edmund.³ *Emma*’s heroine does not face immediate or potential expulsion from her father’s home but rather stands to inherit it upon his death. Though she never faces the problem of finding “a house she could live in,” Emma Woodhouse must learn instead that having a stable residence does not ensure domestic felicity, which comes only when she can live together with those she loves, her father and Mr. Knightley, in the home she makes for them at Hartfield. *Emma*, then, can be seen as revising the model of house hunting established in Austen’s earlier novels. While early heroines searched for a partner who could provide them with suitable homes, Emma discovers the benefits of having a partner with whom to share the home she already has. But Auerbach’s conceptual

darker view of consanguineous ties. When Mrs. Norris and her beloved Maria withdraw from Mansfield following the latter’s indiscretion, Sir Thomas finds “comfort ... greater than he had supposed” (p. 313) in his remaining children as well as in Fanny, “the daughter that he wanted” (Austen, *Mansfield Park*, in *Mansfield Park: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson [New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1998], p. 320). I am grateful to the anonymous reader of this piece for reminding me of the treatment of family in *Pride and Prejudice*.

- 1 Nina Auerbach. “O Brave New World: Evolution and Revolution in *Persuasion*,” *ELH* 39, 1 (March 1972): 112–28, 117.
- 2 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 10.
- 3 Here, as elsewhere, I have been influenced by Johnson’s readings of Austen’s novels in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press. 1988).

paradigm, however useful it may be when applied to *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and even *Emma*, breaks down entirely when brought to bear upon *Persuasion*.

Unlike her earlier works, Austen's last completed novel refuses categorization as a story of house hunting or as a tale of the establishment of tranquil domestic life. Rather, *Persuasion* struggles to imagine domesticity itself in positive, or even stable, terms. Anne Elliot's domestic life is anything but stable over the course of the narrative. Forced to leave her childhood home of Kellynch-hall due to the fiscal mismanagement of her father and sister, Anne becomes itinerant and thus relies upon others for her place of residence.¹ Throughout *Persuasion*, Anne lives in no fewer than five residences. In no other Austen novel does a heroine experience such domestic dislocation. Even Elizabeth Bennet, whose great energy and athleticism prove shocking to the well-traveled group at Netherfield, has little of Anne's range of movement. While *Pride and Prejudice* might be summed up as Elizabeth's survey of any number of unsatisfactory houses—from Longbourn and Lucas Lodge to Netherfield and Rosings—before finally lighting on Pemberley in her effort to find a suitable home, *Persuasion* tracks Anne's expulsion from Kellynch-hall, her movement through Uppercross, Kellynch-lodge, and the lodgings in Lyme and in Bath, and finally, after finding all to be in some way deficient, declines to situate Anne's renewed happiness with Captain Wentworth in a home at all.

Figuring houses as alternately silent and noisy, the novel imagines domestic space not only as the quiet, beloved family home Anne remembers with fondness, but also as a bustling arena that threatens to deny her quiet and privacy. Anne deems Uppercross “a domestic hurricane,” though her hostess, Mrs. Musgrove, surveys the same scene and remarks contentedly on “quiet cheerfulness at home.”² The Musgrove home is filled with bodies that encroach upon one another, from the “comfortable substantial size” (pp. 45–6) of Mrs. Musgrove to the clinging forms of her grandchildren. The presence of these bodies proves overwhelming and sometimes oppressive to

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- 1 As Cohen rightly notes, “*Persuasion* concludes with a homeless heroine” (“Persuading the Navy Home,” p. 348). But while Cohen’s discussion regards the novel as recommending “Ship-shape Homes,” diminutive, tidy domestic spaces that take their cue from the navy (pp. 352–3), my reading emphasizes the way in which *Persuasion* moves its heroine out of claustrophobic, enclosed spaces into open, public arenas.
 - 2 Austen, *Persuasion*, in *Persuasion: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Patricia Meyer Spacks (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1995), pp. 3–168, 89. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

Anne. After Wentworth releases her from two-year-old Walter Musgrove's tenacious grip, she escapes to her room as soon as possible in order to regain her composure. "She was ashamed of herself, quite ashamed of being so nervous, so overcome by such a trifle; but so it was; and it required a long application of solitude and reflection to recover her" (p. 54). More often, such trifles amuse rather than perturb her. When Louisa and Henrietta Musgrove propose a long walk to Mary and Anne, the former, despite her disinclination for walking, insists upon going. Reflecting upon "the sort of necessity which the family-habits seemed to produce, of every thing being to be communicated, and every thing being to be done together, however undesired and inconvenient" (p. 55), Anne recognizes the perverse closeness inculcated by communal family life. Though the enclosed, teeming domesticity of the Musgroves can seem claustrophobic, it increasingly provides Anne with something remarkably like solitude. After overhearing Wentworth tell his parable of the nut to Louisa, she takes comfort in rejoining the group: "Her spirits wanted the solitude and silence which only numbers could give" (p. 60). Crowds, then, accrue another meaning as Anne adapts to them: the crowd of bodies that at Uppercross overwhelm her come to offer Anne, paradoxically, more space in which to be alone.¹

Having found with the Musgroves a crowd within the domestic, Anne at Bath discovers the domestic within a crowd. As Adela Pinch has shown, "Anne's crucial encounters with Wentworth are accompanied by overwhelming moments of access to the outside world. These moments often seem claustrophobic, moments when she is crowded in by or at least surrounded by her awareness of her environment."² Anne gains the ability to reduce the once overwhelming physical and aural crush of the outside world, and it is this skill that enables her to have what Mrs. Smith calls "a sort of domestic enjoyment to be known even in a crowd" (p. 128). Her friend's remark, however playfully ironic, not only collapses the boundaries between the domestic and the crowd. It also alerts us to Anne's increased willingness to find domestic pleasure within public space. While crowds early in the novel tend to be alien and somewhat threatening, Anne later perceives crowds as made up of acquaintances and of social networks to which she herself belongs. Upon first entering Bath, Anne recoils from "the dash of other carriages, the heavy rumble of carts and drays, the bawling of newsmen, muffin-men and milk-men, and

1 As Adela Pinch has observed, "even the best of families, such as the Harvilles, are perceived as crowds" (*Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion. Hume to Austen* [Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press. 1996], p. 146).

2 Pinch, p. 155.

the ceaseless clink of pattens" (p. 89), but by the novel's end her "domestic enjoyment" can be known only in a crowd.

As Tony Tanner has noted, Anne Elliot, who is "only Anne" (p. 5) to her father and sister, has "no rank, no effective surname, no house, no location; her words are weightless, and physically speaking she always has to 'give way'—that is, accept perpetual displacement. Anne we may call the girl on the threshold, existing in that limbo space between the house of the father which has to be left and the house of the husband which has yet to be found."¹ But the house Anne must find remains elusive at the novel's close. Unlike Elizabeth Bennet, whose happiness takes material form as Pemberley, or Fanny Price, for whom Mansfield comes to represent not restriction but security, or even Emma Woodhouse, who can be content only at Hartfield, Anne never achieves a fusion of emotional gratification and spatial belonging. Or, to put it another way, Anne's reunion with Captain Wentworth is not embodied in a particular seat of domesticity. Rather, Anne remains at sea—the home she will make with Wentworth is not grounded spatially, in either a quiet country residence or even on board a naval vessel, but is left undefined.² *Persuasion's* readers may extrapolate that the marriage of Anne and Wentworth will be patterned after that of Admiral and Mrs. Croft, but whether Anne, like Mrs. Croft, will go to sea with her husband or wait on shore for his return remains unclear. Though Anne "glorie[s] in being a sailor's wife" and "the dread of a future war [is] all that could dim her sunshine" (p. 168), the novel gives very little information about how Anne's married life is conducted. Significantly, Austen's most mobile heroine has "a very pretty landaulette" as the novel ends, but no home, "no landed estate, no headship of a family" (p. 166). Her domestic experience remains dislocated, as it has been since the Elliots took leave of Kellynch.

This dislocation allows *Persuasion* to map the domestic onto social and public spaces such as the assembly hall or the street.³ In this way the domestic functions according to Doreen Massey's definition of

1 Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press. 1986), p. 209.

2 See Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1971), p. 181.

3 This mapping outward of the domestic onto social and public spaces can be viewed not as a kind of liberation but rather as a sign of the growing power of the cult of domesticity, which has come to reign over the entire nation. This more Foucauldian reading is, however, not in key with the general tenor of *Persuasion*, which views the domestic as coextensive with and constituted by the larger world rather than as holding dominion over it.

place, which “is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus.”¹ Further, place for Massey is in process and is unique; it is not bounded by simple enclosures but is linked to the outside in such a way that the outside is constitutive of the domestic place itself; and it is internally conflicted. Massey’s work provides a conceptualization of place that allows us to regard the domestic as a set of social relations not confined to the home, but linked to local, national, and global preoccupations. The domestic no longer neatly corresponds to the household in *Persuasion*. Rather, Anne’s attentive devotion to the domestic concerns of her friends takes her far outside a circumscribed home life and involves her instead in what the novel calls “domestic society” (p. 62).

Anne’s removal from home and alienation from family signals the breakdown in the novel of a circumscribed and traditional domesticity. Moreover, her itinerancy comes to seem more morally secure than does the confined home she has so recently left behind. “We certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us,” she tells Captain Benwick as they debate whether men or women are more constant. “It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us” (p. 155). Anne here considers women’s isolation in the home as emotionally damaging confinement, a view that differs markedly from the affective and nostalgic perspective she had of home months earlier. She thus denounces women’s isolation in the home as a form of emotional incarceration, one all the more suffocating for its nostalgic pull upon sentimental attachments.

Persuasion licenses female mobility by associating it—rather than the settled, homebound existence recommended by conduct literature—with virtue. Anne Elliot, who is “almost too good” a heroine for Austen,² defies the domestic injunctions of figures such as More while apparently exemplifying virtuous domesticity.³ In other words, Anne’s filial regard and almost maternal solicitude effectively divert attention from her absence from home. No longer defined in terms

1 Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” in *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 146–56, 154.

2 “You may *perhaps* like the Heroine, as she is almost too good for me” Austen informs Fanny Knight in a letter (Austen to Knight, 23–5 March 1817, in Austen, *Jane Austen’s Letters*, ed. and comp. Deirdre Le Faye, 3d edn. [Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995], p. 335).

3 More did, of course, endorse women’s participation in philanthropic activities outside the home. But Austen, unlike More, authorizes women to leave their homes for pleasure (associated with travel and with the “domestic enjoyment” of the crowd) rather than for philanthropic motives.

of household and kinship, domesticity is relocated in more companionate and egalitarian structures such as the marriage of Anne and Wentworth and the circle of friends whom they draw near.

Their marriage follows the novel's survey of domestic possibilities, and in its emphasis on companionship it differs radically from nearly every other relationship in *Persuasion*. Excepting only the marriage of Admiral and Mrs. Croft, no model exists for the warmth and equality of Anne's bond with Wentworth. As Anne avers, "(w)ith the exception, perhaps, of Admiral and Mrs. Croft, who seemed particularly attached and happy ... there could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison, no countenances so beloved" (p. 42) as those of herself and Wentworth. When reunited, the two are "more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other's character, truth, and attachment; more equal to act, more justified in acting" (p. 160) than before. Both are "equal" and "justified" in acting on behalf of their marriage, and both act together in "bearing down every opposition" (p. 165) to their union. Their shared efforts offer a model for a companionate and egalitarian marriage in which both partners work together toward a shared goal.

Marriage does not isolate Anne and Wentworth from their friends, but rather increases their circle. As Wentworth comes to appreciate: "She (Anne) had but two friends in the world to add to his list, Lady Russell and Mrs. Smith. To those, however, he was very well disposed to attach himself" (p. 167). Though Anne regrets that she has no family "which a man of sense could value" (p. 167) to add to his, she recognizes that her marriage has been mutually beneficial for her friends and her husband. Similarly, Lady Russell has the chance to reassess Wentworth. After all, "[t]here was nothing less for Lady Russell to do, than to admit that she had been pretty completely wrong, and to take up a new set of opinions and of hopes." In doing so, she finds "little hardship in attaching herself as a mother" to him (p. 166). Mrs. Smith, in turn, discovers that "their marriage, instead of depriving her of one friend, secured her two" (p. 167). Both Lady Russell and Mrs. Smith, then, gain Wentworth's friendship while retaining Anne as a companion. Anne too acquires more than a husband and a fortune in her marriage, joining a family of "brothers and sisters" whose "worth and ... prompt welcome" (p. 167) add to the felicity of her marriage. Marriage affirms not only a bond between a man and a woman, but also extends and secures friendships between the married couple and their previously separate social circles. Friendship's increased social significance makes it a stronger tie than that of blood and allows it to stand in for deficient family relations, signaled

by Lady Russell's mothering of both Anne and Captain Wentworth.¹ *Persuasion*, then, reorganizes social bonds so that friendship takes precedence over kinship.

Persuasion's reconfiguration of the domestic and parallel reorganization of social bonds offers recompense for the somewhat frightening rootlessness of Anne's domestic experience. Changing scenery, new experiences, contact with a dynamic circle of friends, and her own good sense counter Anne's nostalgia at leaving her home. Though the Elliots' withdrawal from Kellynch-hall saddens Anne, she recognizes its necessity: "however sorry and ashamed for the necessity of the removal [she was], she could not but in conscience feel that they were gone who deserved not to stay, and that Kellynch-hall had passed into better hands than its owners'" (p. 82). As many critics have noted, in acknowledging Admiral and Mrs. Croft as more worthy of Kellynch than the spendthrift baronet whose debts forced him to leave, Anne endorses a middle-class ethos in which one's social position is earned rather than inherited.² Equally significant, however, is that her experience of domestic life changes irrevocably once she leaves Kellynch. No longer consigned to her father's home, Anne finds the "continual occupation and change" (p. 155) needed to save her from brooding over her failed romance with Captain Wentworth.

II

Despite the friendships she forms and renews as a result of her social and geographic mobility, Anne remains an isolated figure throughout most of the novel.³ Though she attempts to reach out to others by performing the sociable rites of letter writing and of visiting, such efforts do little to relieve her loneliness.⁴ After all, her correspondence with

1 As Mellor has noted, for Austen mothering is learned rather than innate (p. 131).

2 Mellor, p. 124.

3 Mary Waldron finds Anne's solitude to be distinctive: "the chief difference between [Anne] and most of the other Austen heroines [is] her isolation. Not even Fanny Price is so deprived of a companion to whom she can speak" (*Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999], p. 138). For another discussion of Anne's isolation, see A. Walton Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), pp. 150–60.

4 Jonathan H. Grossman persuasively argues that these rites function as the labor of a leisured class, pointing out in his discussion of *Emma* that "efforts of civility are the very work of Austen's leisure-class societies" ("The Labor of the Leisured in *Emma*: Class, Manners, and Austen," *NCF* 54, 2 [September 1999]: 143–64, 163). See the entire article for a discussion [continued]

her family is “toil” for which there can be little satisfaction (p. 72), and many of her social visits result in Anne’s sacrificing pleasure for the enjoyment of others, as when she plays the pianoforte so that the others may dance (p. 48).

Given her isolation, it is surprising that Anne’s mobility and the almost constant contact it gives her with friends and family members does little to relieve her lack of companionship. “There is so little real friendship in the world!” Mrs. Smith exclaims (p. 103), and the novel attests to the difficulty of forming and sustaining meaningful relationships. Anne, who is “just Anne” to Sir Walter and Elizabeth, seems to share nothing more than ties of blood with her family. Generous where they are selfish, fair-minded where they are proud, Anne comes to value “nobod[ies]” (p. 17) such as Captain Wentworth and Mrs. Smith for their personal merit rather than their social standing. Such independence of mind and generosity of spirit distinguishes Anne from her family, but this distinction comes at the cost of alienation from the Elliots, particularly her father and eldest sister. Even Mary, who, unlike either Sir Walter or Elizabeth, takes some interest in her sister’s well-being, does so out of motives more mercenary than loving. Her esteem is for Anne’s usefulness—as nurse, as confidante, and as nanny—rather than her character.

Just as Anne’s family relations are flawed, so too are her friendships lacking in openness. She struggles to speak candidly even with those closest to her, Lady Russell and Mrs. Smith. Lady Russell’s prejudice against Captain Wentworth has cut off Anne’s ability to confide in her, as Mary Waldron points out,¹ and Mrs. Smith finds it difficult to warn her friend of William Elliot’s duplicity. When finally able to confide in Anne, she excuses her circuitous method by saying, “Even the smooth surface of family-union seems worth preserving, though there may be nothing durable beneath” (p. 131). Mrs. Smith’s ability to speak freely has been compromised by an unwillingness to breach the outward appearance of familial solidarity. She knows well that “family-union” may not be grounded in shared values or affective bonds, but tact—here associated with class deference and with observation of increasingly outdated codes of polite respect for familial bonds—prohibits her from revealing William Elliot’s machinations until she senses that Anne’s curiosity about “Mr. Elliot’s real character” outweighs loyalty to her father’s heir (p. 132). Friendship does little to aid communication, it seems, for *Persuasion* dramatizes a world in which social bonds, even those based on mutual respect, strain under the pressure of decorous reticence.

of how politeness and etiquette allow this class to articulate itself and to reproduce its values.

1 Waldron, p. 139.

Placed in this context, Anne's preference for "the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character" given to "burst[s] of feeling" and "warmth of indignation or delight" (p. 106) gains intelligibility, for these qualities threaten to explode the genteel reserve and false politeness that structures her social world. The character who best exemplifies this expressive spontaneity is Captain Wentworth, a "nobody" (p. 17) with whom she ultimately achieves the novel's most open dialogue. Ironically, even these candid exchanges are highly mediated. After all, Anne and Wentworth open their hearts to one another not through direct conversation, but through a series of overheard discussions, letters, and declarations made off the page. While placing high value on the mutual expression of feeling as an important component in what Mrs. Smith would call "real friendship" (p. 103), Austen's novel nevertheless struggles in its imaginative realization of such an ideal. Friendship, a structure of shared feeling, promises to supplant kinship, a structure of consanguinity and inheritance, as the most significant and meaningful domestic and social bond, but the family retains its hold over otherwise open and warm-hearted characters through older codes of polite reserve and tactful evasion.

Though the novel may not fully articulate an open dialogue between Anne and Wentworth, their attempt to speak openly gains far more narrative endorsement than the alternative. If Captain Wentworth represents expressive spontaneity, then William Elliot represents circumspect duplicity:

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 openhearted, 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.

(pp. 106–7)

William Elliot lacks openness, and this "decided imperfection" allows Anne to avoid succumbing to his advances. In resisting his bid for her hand in marriage, a bid supported by Lady Russell, Anne repudiates the claims of family and property. As Lady Russell points out, in marrying Mr. Elliot, Anne would become "the future mistress of Kellynch, the future Lady Elliot ... occupying your dear mother's place,

succeeding to all her rights, and all her popularity, as well as to all her virtues ... You are your mother's self in countenance and disposition; and if I might be allowed to fancy you such as she was, in situation, and name, and home, presiding and blessing in the same spot, and only superior to her in being more highly valued!" (pp. 105–6). Anne is not entirely immune to the allure of Lady Russell's persuasion. Beguiled by the prospect of becoming "the future Lady Elliot," she finds herself momentarily "bewitched" (p. 106) by the notion. But Anne does resist the "charm" (p. 106) of "becoming what her mother had been" (p. 106), and in doing so she refuses to recapitulate events of the past and to preserve the old England of the aristocracy and the landed gentry (p. 106). Rather she chooses to break with the ancient regime by marrying Captain Wentworth, the exemplar in the novel of the "modern-minded" professional gentleman.¹

In becoming a "sailor's wife," Anne joins "that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance" (p. 168). As Anne K. Mellor has noted, Austen underscores the domestic and national importance of Anne's profession—not of Wentworth's.² Anne's professional status as a wife has both private merit and public importance, enabling her "domestic virtues" to take on a significance that goes beyond home and family.³ Toward its close, *Persuasion* no longer distinguishes between the domestic private and the national public, but rather imagines them as bound together through a nexus of social relations. After all, Anne and Wentworth establish their domestic life together, first on a street and then on a gravel walk:

There they exchanged again those feelings and those promises which had once before seemed to secure every thing, but which had been followed by so many, many years of division and estrangement ... And there, as they slowly paced the gradual ascent, heedless of every group around them, seeing neither sauntering politicians, bustling house-keepers, flirting girls, nor nursery-maids and children, they could indulge in those

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- 1 Butler, "Persuasion and Sanditon," *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, p. 275. For further discussion of *Persuasion*'s break with the old England represented by Sir Walter, see Johnson, pp. 164–6; Mellor, pp. 122–4; and Tanner, pp. 247–8.
 - 2 Mellor, pp. 138–9.
 - 3 On the professionalization of domesticity, see Cohen, *Professional Domesticity in the Victorian Novel: Women, Work, and Home*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture 14 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 12–43.

retrospections and acknowledgements, and especially in those explanations of what had directly preceded the present moment.
(p. 160)

Amid noise and bustle the reunited couple “exchange[s]” again the words that make possible their marriage. Significantly, their reunion is described in the language of commerce, which marks their “exchange” of private feeling as a contract of public import. Even more significant is that this exchange, which marks the beginning of Anne Elliot’s life as a “sailor’s wife,” takes place in a street, a hybrid space—half promenade, half thoroughfare—that draws together labor and leisure, where “sauntering politicians, bustling house-keepers, flirting girls ... [and] nursery-maids and children” mingle with one another. The gravel walk off Union Street brings together men, women, and children of laboring and leisured classes, and in a sense the union that takes place celebrates not only reestablished intimacy, but also collective heterogeneity. Their walk together leads them to return “again into the past,” allowing them to “indulge in those retrospections and acknowledgments, and especially in those explanations of what had directly preceded the present moment, which were so poignant and so ceaseless in interest” (p. 160). The street, then, paradoxically becomes a site of *memory* and reconciliation; its clamor and flurry, its very modernity, permits Anne and Wentworth to speak openly about the past as they have been unable to elsewhere. The street here unifies and cuts across boundaries between public and private, past and present, joining together what has been temporally, geographically, and economically divided. Their reconciliation is one of a number of instances in which the public and the private merge, for *Persuasion* makes room for intimate conversation only in larger social gatherings. Anne’s discussion of men’s and women’s constancy with Captain Harville takes place in Wentworth’s hearing, and Wentworth and Anne further discuss their past estrangement while “apparently occupied in admiring a fine display of green-house plants” (p. 164) at the Elliots’ card party. The private and the domestic are imbricated in the public and the national even as the latter categories are permeated by the former ones.

By the novel’s close, then, Anne Elliot has moved away from the psychologically damaging insularity of Kellynch. No longer spatially isolated in a private household, domesticity is instead conceptualized as existing outside the structures of home and family. Renouncing any definition of the family that marks its limits as consanguineous, Austen extends familial ties to include the affective bonds of friends. In doing so, she redefines the widening circle Anne is part of in order

to give her domestic virtues greater social import. Domesticity thus acquires the aspect of sociability. *Persuasion* signals this transformation by declining to isolate its heroine within a home and providing her instead with a landaulette that allows her to move easily through city streets and country roads. By refusing the confines of more traditional spatial or familial notions of the domestic, *Persuasion* accords Anne remarkable freedom of movement. ...

Even as Austen redefines what domesticity means, detaching it from the enclosed private home and imbuing it with national importance, her efforts may seem ephemeral when contrasted with the spatial groundedness of domesticity in her earlier novels. But as *Persuasion* demonstrates, even structures that appear to be strongholds of old values can be undermined and rented out to the ascendant bourgeoisie. Reconfigured as companionate, egalitarian, mobile, and—above all—public, domesticity in *Persuasion* takes on a fluidity and openness that stands in for and modifies the stability of tradition. ...

IV

What constitutes the domestic, and how are we to understand it, if it is no longer spatially located in the home? How useful a critical and generic category is “domestic fiction”? The domestic, rather than simply equivalent to and bounded by the home, should be conceptualized as a place filled with internal contradictions and constituted by its links to social, national, and global concerns. Our current definitions of domesticity and domestic fiction have prevented us from being attentive to the complex ways in which the domestic functions in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works. *Persuasion* and *Sanditon* challenge us to reevaluate long-standing assumptions about Austen’s role as the presiding maven of domestic novels while calling into question her relation to normalized domesticity. Even more importantly, they urge us to reassess an underinterrogated critical category in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century studies: domesticity itself.

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