

Original Paper

# An Insecure Harmony of Prudence and Romance in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to clarify a lesson which we can learn from *Persuasion* finished by Jane Austen in 1816. The heroine Anne Elliot is a character who has moral standards of the gentry class and an affectionate heart, which causes her to suffer a conflict between prudence and romance. Through a bitter separation from the person she loves complying with the persuasion of her godmother, she develops herself, acquires her own principle of life, and after struggling and striving in the conflict above, she finally reunites with him. She is a person of penetration, but she never loses her constant love and trust for people around her grounded upon her prudence and behavior. She never blames nor hurts anyone, and in the end brings a kind of harmony and unity to the community unconsciously, where every possible change can be assumed. How Anne keeps a balance between reason and passion, how Wentworth develops himself and how Anne behaves in every occasion will give us a lesson on how we ourselves should live in the present world, which is also full of changes.

## 1. Introduction

*Persuasion*, the last completed novel of Jane Austen, is the story of 27-year-old Anne Elliot, the second daughter of a baronet. Although she was persuaded to give up her love according to the prudence that Frederick Wentworth was not a suitable man to devote herself to at the age of 19, she keeps her love for him and finally marries him after more than 8 years. Neither her father nor her sisters estimate her real character or value, and consider thus: "she was only Anne<sup>†1) 1)</sup>" (6). However, Anne is the only person who can provide suitable advice on every occasion, and so many critics regard her as a person of reason<sup>†2) 2)</sup>. There are also many critics who say that Anne has a strong passion very much like Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*<sup>3)</sup>, and Kaoruko Sakata even says that her passion seems to be the strongest compared to that of all the other heroines of Jane Austen<sup>4)</sup>. In *Persuasion*, Jane Austen describes Anne's conflict between prudence and passion precisely. But, at the same time, Austen describes that Anne "had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older—the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" (32). What does "the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" mean? Is Anne Elliot a person of prudence or a person of romance? How does she keep the balance between prudence and romance? Besides, Anne Elliot is a heroine in an age when marriage was the practical way to secure the lives of

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women. Is her choice to marry Wentworth a means to secure her happiness? What can we learn from her way of life? The author of this paper attempts to find the answers to these questions.

## 2. As a person of prudence (Before coming to Bath)

### 2.1 *Anne: 8 years ago and now*

Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth fell in love in the year 1806, when Anne, the second daughter of a baronet, the landlord of Kellynch, was 19 and Wentworth, a captain of the navy, who came not from landed gentry, was 23. Wentworth was "at that time, a remarkably fine young man, with a great deal of intelligence, spirit and brilliancy; and Anne an extremely pretty girl, with gentleness, modesty, taste, and feeling" (28). The description of the reason they fell in love sounds ironic: "he had nothing to do, and she had hardly any body to love" (28). In fact, Wentworth was visiting his brother at Monkford near Kellynch on holidays before taking a new position in the navy, while Anne lived in a limited social circle under the protection of her father, Sir Walter. However, another fact should not be disregarded: Wentworth didn't choose Elizabeth, Anne's elder sister, nor did Anne choose Charles Musgrove, who would become the husband of Anne's younger sister Mary. That means their affection for each other should be regarded as inevitable, and neither Anne nor Wentworth ever wished for other choices.

However, the people around Anne had a different idea. "An engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hope of attaining affluence . . . no connexions to secure even his farther rise in that profession . . . without alliance or fortune" (29), was regarded as "a very degrading alliance" (28), and nobody around Anne was content with this engagement: this is the prudence of Sir Walter, Anne's father, and Lady Russell, a close friend of Anne's late mother and Anne's godmother. Sir Walter expressed his "No" with his negative behavior, while Lady Russell persuaded Anne in words "to believe the engagement a wrong thing—indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it" (30), and finally Anne gave him up. The reason Anne reached this conclusion was that she "had always loved and relied on" Lady Russell, and that she had the "belief of being prudent, and self-denying" (30), that is, Anne was guided by Lady Russell's judgement. If Anne loved and had confidence in Lady Russell as a person in the place of her parent, it was not inappropriate that 19-year-old Anne Elliot listened to Lady Russell's advice and was guided by her judgement. Nevertheless, this means that Anne considered Lady Russell's judgement more correct than that of her own even in the case that she should restrain her own feelings, and it is not incorrect to say that she was not mature enough to acquire the true judgement of her own. Consequently, Wentworth concluded that it was her weakness to follow the moral standards not of her own self but of others.

But during 8 years after breaking off their engagement, Anne has completed her own internal development. Although she gave up Wentworth according to her prudence, Anne could never give up her affection for him: she kept an eye on his current situations from the papers, found out that he "had distinguished himself, and early gained the other step in rank—and must now, by successive captures, have made a handsome fortune" (32). In short, he accomplished not too long after their separation what he had said to Anne about his future. Moreover, Austen, as the narrator, gives this description, "in favour of his constancy, she had no reason to believe him married" (32). In other words, Anne believes, or has a little hope, that he remains single, judging from her knowledge and trust in his character. In addition, Anne refused to marry Charles Musgrove when she was 22 without consulting Lady Russell. He is the heir to Uppercross estate, but she did not feel any affection for him. This means that she has no intention to marry anyone without love. Anne has kept her love and trust for Lady Russell, but not consulting Lady Russell means that Anne has found more confidence in her own judgement than that of Lady Russell. As Anne herself thought, "she and her excellent friend could sometimes think differently" (159). That is why Austen, the narrator, makes this observation, "How eloquent could Anne Elliot have been,—how eloquent, at least, were her wishes on the side of early warm attachment, and a cheerful confidence in futurity, against that over-anxious caution which seems to insult exertion and distrust Providence!" (32). This is "the

natural sequel of an unnatural beginning." Namely, at the age of 27, Anne loves and trusts both Wentworth and Lady Russell, but she has already acquired the knowledge that it is desirable for everyone to behave according to his or her own affection rather than with prudence: this is the judgement of Anne Elliot at 27 years old.

However, Anne is destined to meet Wentworth again. In 1814 while she is staying at Uppercross Cottage, Wentworth, a brother-in-law of Admiral Croft, who rents Kellynch-hall, the residence of Sir Walter, comes into the circle of the Musgroves and meets her again 8 years after their separation. She has reason to behave prudently as a matured lady with her affection for him inside, while Wentworth has not yet overcome her rejection, and so she has to endure the cold politeness of Wentworth to her and the agitated feelings caused by his becoming intimate with Louisa Musgrove. Nevertheless, he cannot but give her a helping hand when she is in trouble: when she cannot handle the bad manners of her little nephew, he removes the boy from her shoulders silently; when she is tired from a long walk to Winthrop, he asks the Crofts to take her home in their gig. In her confusion caused by his behavior, Anne realizes that he "could not forgive her,— but he could not be unfeeling" (98) (sic). This comprehension calms her down. That is, although she cannot abandon her affection for Wentworth still now, with the 8 years' experiences, Anne has developed her own self, and acquired sufficient reason to keep her judgement and feelings in a good balance. So, even though she suffers from the conflict between prudence and feelings, it is acceptable to say that her ability to reason is grounded upon her inner self.

### 2.2 *Wentworth: 8 years ago and now*

On the other hand, Wentworth does not know of Anne's development during their separation. Wentworth, who was proud of himself, considered Anne Elliot, who chose to follow the advice of Lady Russell, to be a person with weakness, and he went away from her "totally unconvinced and unbending, and of his feeling himself ill-used by so forced a relinquishment" (30) just after she announced the breaking off the engagement to him. He believed that they had loved each other more with passion than with reason, so it was incomprehensible for him that Anne should be persuaded to give up their engagement; he also assumed that it was a denial of his character. Because of his angry pride caused by her rejection, following another person's prudence, Wentworth cannot forgive her; he has the same antipathy toward Anne still in 1814. This is his reasoning.

However, this is reasoning that only satisfies his own pride. If he would have tried to understand why Anne had broken off their engagement, he could have written a letter to Anne saying that he had acquired several thousand pounds and offered marriage to her again, because at least one condition which had disrupted their marriage 8 years earlier, the financial problem, was removed; however, his pride did not allow him to do so. Further, even when they meet again in 1814, he cannot comprehend her reason for having done so nor does he conquer his anger toward her. Nevertheless, when he says he wants to marry a woman with a "strong mind, with sweetness of manner" (66-67), or when he says to Louisa at Winthrop, "let those who would be happy be firm" (94) (sic), it is absolutely clear that he still has Anne in mind. In other words, his internal self remains stuck in the time of 8 years ago. While Anne realizes and accepts the fact that she still feels affection for Wentworth, he cannot acknowledge that he, unconsciously, still has affection for Anne. In addition, Anne has acquired the capacity to manage the balance of prudence and affection during those 8 years, while he has not, at least about what concerns Anne. This means that although Wentworth has attained great success in the navy, his inner development is not completed yet; that is, it is necessary for him to understand and accept Anne's prudence in order to complete their reunion. On that account, it is not so difficult to comprehend that the self-awareness of Wentworth is one of the essential points of *Persuasion*<sup>4</sup>.

### 2.3 *What is inevitable for Anne*

Then, what is the reason why Wentworth cannot acquire what Anne has? Anne herself gives the answer

for that in the conversation with Captain Harville, a close friend of Wentworth's. On the topic of women loving longer than men, Anne says:

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. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions. (253)

That is, a man has many opportunities to create his own future, while a woman does not have the same as a man, and so a woman has to accept her situation and try to find what she can do in very confined circumstances. This is where Anne and Wentworth were 8 years earlier. In fact, when Anne broke off their engagement, Wentworth went back to the navy and subsequently succeeded in life: he had no time to think of his personal love or time to struggle with completion of his inner development. On the other hand, Anne had to stay in the small social circle of her father, where there was no one to give her attention to, and had to behave with the prudence that was expected in the gentry class. Once she lost the opportunity to live in the outer world with Wentworth, it was inevitable for Anne to accept the position in society assumed of a baronet's daughter, remain calm with the prudence of her destined community, face her inner feelings, and above all, try to keep a balance between prudence and passion whether she wished it or not. In addition to character, the difference of the circumstances where Anne and Wentworth are situated is presumed to be another contributing reason as to whether he will be able to complete his self-development.

### 3. As a person of will (After coming to Bath)

#### *3.1 Anne: at the outside of her small world*

Anne, however, is a person filled with affection. That is, she can never forget Wentworth, and so it is inevitable that her affection for him revives passionately when they meet again. What must be remembered is that in the first half of the novel she is in Kellynch, where Sir Walter is landlord, or in Uppercross, where her sister Mary lives with her family, both of which are controlled by traditional moral values. It is acceptable that this is one reason Anne has to restrain herself with the sense of being a baronet's daughter even if Wentworth behaves with cold politeness toward her and hurts her feelings desperately: Anne sometimes gets out of the scene and tries to calm herself down when her feelings are about to be agitated. In short, before coming to Bath, she unconsciously keeps control over herself with the sense or moral standards of the gentry class in order not to be swayed with passion.

But after coming to Bath, several differences are found in Anne. Many critics point out that Anne is silent in the first half of the novel, while she turns out to be eloquent in the latter half. Her lively nature seems to be activated again<sup>†3)5)</sup>. Sir Walter is surprised at her florid complexion and concludes that she has changed her cosmetics, whereas at Kellynch, he had regarded her as "nobody" (6). She chooses to keep her prior appointment of visiting an old friend Mrs Smith instead of visiting Lady Dalrymple with Sir Walter and Elizabeth: she would not have gone against her father's will at Kellynch. Anne talks more than before and unreservedly talks with Mr Elliot, the heir of Sir Walter, even though she had hardly ever spoken without restraint with her family at Kellynch. The Elliots came to Bath in order to retrench, finding a residence in Camden Place for themselves and letting Kellynch-hall to Admiral Croft. Sir Walter is the lord of the manor in Kellynch, not in Bath, and so he has less control over affairs in Bath than in Kellynch. The descriptions that show how Anne behaves with her own will and speaks without restraint in Bath seem very symbolic: Anne appeals to the idea that she can be herself outside of Kellynch, and that Kellynch is not the home to which she should belong. Then, where should she belong?

In addition, her state of mind toward Wentworth appears to have changed in Bath. Anne's mind is sometimes agitated by the cold politeness of Wentworth during her stay at Uppercross, but suddenly an accident occurs at Lyme. That accident occurred because Louisa Musgrove, 19 years old, did not listen

to the advice of others, which means she did not have prudence at that moment, and as Sakata points out, consulting Alistair Duckworth's research, it could have been a possible result if Anne had married Wentworth without prudence at the age of 19<sup>4</sup>). We must remember while she was in Kellynch and the Elliots needed to retrench, only Anne in the family, of course ignored, suggested a practical plan for the situation. When she stayed at Uppercross, she listened to all the claims of both Mary and the Musgrove family and gave some good advice to them all to keep a good balance in the family. As Wentworth never behaved in a friendly manner to her, she had no chance to show him that she had acquired appropriate judgement and firmness during their separation. Now at Lyme, neither the gentry class like the Musgroves nor naval officers like Wentworth find the best measures to respond to this accident, but only Anne, at 27 years of age, judges and indicates what they should do without hesitation and shows Wentworth her firmness unconsciously. This means that Anne, who has the prudence of respectable families and has already acquired a sympathy for the navy through the intercourse with Captain Wentworth and Admiral Croft, has a role to settle the confusion, and a possibility to unite different communities.

This accident is the trigger for Wentworth to revive his respect and trust towards Anne, which gives her some contentment in turn. So, when she is asked about the distress caused by that accident in their conversation at the concert in Bath more than 2 months later, she answers without hesitation, "The last few hours were certainly very painful . . . but when pain is over, the remembrance of it often becomes a pleasure" (200). Moreover, when she is convinced that Wentworth is jealous of Mr Elliot, she begins to find ways to have him acknowledge that her affection for him has not changed at all: for instance, she tries to convey the secret information in her remarks that only they can share. While lively Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*<sup>6</sup>) ventures to tell her gratitude to Mr Darcy only once after his coping with Lydia's elopement, modest Anne Elliot tries to encourage Wentworth to recall his affection for her several times. Wentworth once regarded Anne as a character with weakness, but the fact that she has a firmness deep inside her mind, which she acquired especially after her separation from Wentworth, and the role to bring harmony to the confusion even though it is without deliberate thought, shows her will to cultivate her own future, which is rather rare for the earlier heroines of the author.

### 3.2 *Wentworth: as an imperfect gentleman*

Wentworth is not yet as matured as Anne even in the year 1814. He acknowledges his own attachment to her again after Louisa's accident and makes up his mind to come to Bath to meet her, only to find that Anne's engagement with Mr Elliot is expected to be settled: at this point Louisa was engaged to Captain Benwick, another friend of Wentworth's. When he meets Anne at the concert in Bath, Wentworth is unable to stay at the concert and goes away from it with the perception that Mr Elliot is closer to Anne than himself and Mr Elliot may be somewhat attached to her. Later Wentworth confesses that when he realized that he did not love Louisa and still loved Anne after Louisa's accident, he went to his brother in Shropshire with the notion, if possible, to cool off everyone's expectation of his marriage to Louisa Musgrove. Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*<sup>6</sup>) and Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility*<sup>3</sup>) do disappear from the stories, but the former in order to settle the Lydia's elopement and the latter to keep the regretful engagement of years ago. That is, both of them face reality and behave in a gentlemanlike manner. In addition, Darcy is a great landlord whose mother was a daughter of an earl, and Edward is a son of a person of fortune and will be a clergyman, both of whom are native gentlemen. Anne says "Captain Harville, though not equalling Captain Wentworth in manners, was a perfect gentleman, unaffected, warm, and obliging" (105), which means Wentworth is more gentlemanlike than Harville. But compared to Darcy or Edward, Wentworth, who disappears to prevent himself from marrying Louisa, does not appear worthy to be called a gentleman. Even if compared to Anne, he is not matured enough: while Anne was at Uppercross, people in the community expected that the marriage of Louisa and Wentworth was imminent, and Anne, a person of prudence, accepted the case and managed her agitated feelings with a resigned mind. While he duly realized himself in the navy at sea, his incomplete development on land is not yet suitable enough for a

hero. There occurs a question of whether he can become a real gentleman who will be an ideal husband for a daughter of a baronet.

### 3.3 *What Anne wishes for*

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that Anne does not wish for an ideal gentleman as her husband. That is why Anne does not say "Yes" to Lady Russell when she is recommended to choose Mr Elliot as her future husband. Mr Elliot is an heir of Sir Walter and now appears to be a perfect gentleman in Bath. But, about 10 years earlier, he married to a rich woman of low birth, behaved disrespectfully toward Sir Walter and Elizabeth, and was said to have kept an undesirable life; as such, the intercourse between the Elliots and Mr Elliot ended. Unless she understands the reason Mr Elliot suddenly renews his relationship with the Elliots, Anne cannot trust him, at least she distrusts "the past, if not the present" (174). This means that she cannot trust his constancy. It is desirable to marry him and to be called Lady Elliot after he inherits her father's title if reason and the pride of a baronet's daughter are Anne's first priority, but she does not agree to that idea. Anne, who knows the sorrow of separation from Wentworth, has acquired the firmness that she should follow her own reason in which she has an absolute trust even when her judgement is different from Lady Russell's. As she refused to marry Charles Musgrove without consulting Lady Russell before, she has no intention to give up her own judgement this time even if it seems appropriate for a baronet's daughter to marry Mr Elliot. The man whom Anne wishes for as a husband is a man who has "the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character" (175), even if the expected conditions for the husband of a baronet's daughter are not fulfilled. The fact that Anne has kept her love for Wentworth and a little hope of his constancy means the "Warmth and enthusiasm" (175) (sic) of Wentworth 8 years before is what she really wishes for, being energetic with youth and passion though lacking fortune, patronage, or future prospects.

From this point of view, Anne and Wentworth are very similar in nature. In their conversation at the concert, remembering the deep attachment between Benwick and his deceased fiancé, Wentworth in excitement unintentionally says, "Fanny Harville was a very superior creature [to Louisa]; and his attachment to her was indeed attachment. A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman!—He ought not—he does not" (199). Anne is "struck, gratified, confused, and beginning to breathe very quick, and feel a hundred things in a moment" (199), and she cannot enter into that subject. This means that her inner self is agitated with a little hope of his constancy for her by his words spoken with passion, and later she will be certain that he must love her. On another occasion in a general conversation with Harville concerning which lives longer—the love of a man or that of a woman (Wentworth was listening), Anne says with irresistible passion, "All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone" (256), and she is filled with emotion and cannot say any more. She usually tries to behave with calmness toward Wentworth even when her words imply some hints which only he can understand, but there is no secret intention to be found in this passionate remark by Anne: it is a cry of her soul and a perfect description of her actual state of mind and her way to love Wentworth at that moment. Therefore, he cannot listen to her with disinterest and instantaneously wrote a letter to her in reply. Both of them react to the passionate speeches unconsciously made by the other and it leads them to the reunion in turn. His letter says:

I can listen no longer in silence. I must speak to you by such means as are within my reach. You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. Tell me not that I am too late, that such precious feelings are gone for ever. I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own, than when you almost broke it eight years and a half ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant. . . . I am every instant hearing something which overpowers me. You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice, when they would be lost on others.—Too good, too excellent creature! You do us justice indeed. You do believe that there is true attachment and constancy among men. (257-258)

In a sense, he proclaims his affection and passion for Anne and his acknowledgment of his past mistakes, which will lead him to complete his development. He also describes that his affection for her has been constant deeply within even when his angry pride dominated his behavior to her. In the same way it was necessary for Anne to clear away his jealousy of Mr Elliot, Wentworth needed the opportunity to be assured that her love for himself had never changed.

Upon her reading his letter, their relationship is renewed after 8 years. Once, when she was convinced that Wentworth was jealous of Mr Elliot and was not sure how to regain his affection for her, Anne thought that "there was a Captain Wentworth: and be the conclusion of the present suspense good or bad, her affection would be his for ever. Their union, she believed, could not divide her more from other men, than their final separation" (208). And finally she obtains what she has long wished for: the reunion with Wentworth. In other words, her constancy in love, as she says in the conversation with Harville, is attained in the end.

#### 4. Harmony of prudence and romance in *Persuasion*

##### 4.1 *Harmony of prudence and romance of Anne and Wentworth*

After 8 years of separation Anne and Wentworth finally reach the goal of their reunion, which they obtain through the outflowing of their passionate feelings. Nevertheless, Anne is a person with reason. At the evening party after their reunion, while she is enjoying the conversation with the guests, "the knowledge of his being there" (267) gives the supreme happiness to her. Knowledge forms the basis of reason. Even if she sometimes blurts out her feelings in passionate words without intention, she always keeps her reason which affords her the ability to manage her own passion. That is why she reflects on her separation from Wentworth and judges that it was right for her conscience to respect Lady Russell's advice. She never blames Lady Russell. In other words, reason and passion keeps a good balance inside her, which will bring harmony to the people around her. She says:

I have been thinking over the past, and trying impartially to judge of the right and wrong, I mean with regard to myself; and I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it, that I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend whom you will love better than you do now. To me, she was in the place of a parent. Do not mistake me, however. I am not saying that she did not err in her advice. It was, perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides; and for myself, I certainly never should, in any circumstance of tolerable similarity, give such advice. But I mean, that I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience. I have now, as far as such a sentiment is allowable in human nature, nothing to reproach myself with. (267-268)

All through her life, Anne accepted her situation, developed herself, adjusted herself to the surrounding circumstances, and finally found her happiness in the harmony of prudence and romance. This speech of hers which shows her confidence of her own prudence and life hitherto blaming no one around her gives Wentworth another chance to reflect on his own life. He begins to see Lady Russell differently. It may take a little while for Wentworth to attain the same state of mind as Anne's. However, when he is assured that Anne would have accepted him in 1808 if he had made an offer of marriage again with several pounds of fortune, he says, "I was proud, too proud to ask again. I did not understand you. I shut my eyes, and would not understand you, or do you justice" (268). As "the knowledge of his being there" gives the supreme happiness to Anne, Wentworth, who has already admitted he was mistaken, is in the process to acquire the harmony of prudence and romance equivalent to Anne's. It is possible to say that their relationship started anew with the expected completion of his self-development.

#### 4.2 *An insecure harmony of prudence and romance*

The change in the relationship between Anne and Wentworth also brings changes among the people around them. Sir Walter gives them permission to marry now that Wentworth has 25,000 pounds of fortune and he thinks "his [Wentworth's] superiority of appearance might be not unfairly balanced against her [Anne's] superiority of rank" (271). Mr Elliot, who had a wicked design to marry Anne and prevent Sir Walter's marriage to Mrs Clay, finally goes to London with Mrs Clay, and his true self is exposed to the Elliots and their friends. It is true that Lady Russell, who recommended Anne to marry Mr Elliot, feels embarrassed to find the truth about him, but she does overcome that feeling because she "loved Anne better than she loved her own abilities; and when the awkwardness of the beginning was over, found little hardship in attaching herself as a mother to the man who was securing the happiness of her other child" (272) (sic). She persuaded Anne to give up her engagement to Wentworth 8 years before, and now she herself is persuaded to give up her trust in her own judgement and leave Anne's happiness to Wentworth, which means her complete retirement from the role of Anne's adviser.

But is the future of Anne really secure? In fact, it is not certain whether Wentworth can assure Anne's happiness permanently. As Tony Tanner says:

But what is striking about the world of *Persuasion* is the absence of any real centre or principle of authority. Among the possible traditional sources of authority we might include the family, parents, the clergy, social rank and respected names, . . . or true love so certain of itself that it becomes self-authorising. But in this novel all such potential sources of authority have gone awry, gone away, gone wrong; they are absent, dispersed or impotent; they have become ossified, stagnant or – worse – totally unreliable and misleading. Everything is in a condition of change in this novel, and as often as not it is change as deterioration or diminution. In such a world it becomes a real question, what can and should remain 'constant'?

To begin with, "family," the first traditional authority itself, is insecure in this novel. There is a description concerning Sir Walter, Anne's father, that vanity is "the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and of situation" (4), and Anne's mother Lady Elliot, who is described as "an excellent woman, sensible and amiable" (4), died when Anne was 14, which should be "the absence of any real centre or principle of authority." Even in families where both parents are still alive, there are some changes among the old and the young. For instance, the Musgroves are "in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement. The father and mother were in the old English style, and the young people in the new" (43) (sic). When social situations are considered, 1815 was the year that another battle in the Napoleonic War was coming near; Wentworth might go back to sea, and Anne's married life would not be secure thereafter. In fact, there is no description of where Anne and Wentworth will settle after their marriage. Further, the rise of the new powers brought several changes to the traditional values: years ago it had been improbable that Admiral Croft, not from a respectable family, would rent Kellynch-hall. Moreover, in Anne's intercourse with the Crofts after Sir Walter's leaving for Bath, Austen, as the narrator, describes Anne as "however sorry and ashamed for the necessity of the removal, 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" (136). The fact that the "good example" which Sir Walter, the "real centre or principle of authority" should show, is to be shown by Admiral Croft is such a bitter irony of the lack of traditional authority and, as Tanner says, everything must be in confusion in this novel.

Nevertheless, should our society always have a confident authority? Is it wrong to find harmony in the changing of values in a world full of possibilities? When she stays with the Musgroves and is surprised at the differences between the lives of the Musgroves and those of the Elliots, Anne tries to accept them, thinking that it is "highly incumbent on her to clothe her imagination, her memory, and all her ideas in as much of Uppercross as possible" (46). This means that even if she cannot find what is exactly the same as hers in circles outside her own, Anne tries to reconcile with the situation as much as possible. Besides,



although she has deeply suffered, she has already found what is most important for her: mutual affection based on love and constant trust in a person's character, which she finally obtains because she herself is the representative of the harmony of prudence and romance. She has it between Wentworth and herself, and also between Lady Russell and herself, both of them have been inevitably necessary in her life even when there are some changes in the world. That is why when Wentworth discloses his jealousy of Mr Elliot and his agony concerning Lady Russell, she tells him, "You should have distinguished. . . . You should not have suspected me now; the case so different, and my age so different" (265). And Wentworth, who accepted the fact that her "character was now fixed on his mind as perfection itself, maintaining the loveliest medium of fortitude and gentleness" (262), makes an offer of marriage to Anne again confessing that he has kept his love for her unconsciously. In other words, the harmony of prudence and romance which Anne has created in herself brings her what she has faithfully wished for: the reunion with Wentworth. Consequently, it is appropriate to say that their mutual affection will endure even if their future life might be insecure.

## 5. Conclusion

At the very beginning of this novel, the heroine Anne Elliot was not fairly estimated in her family and is described as thus: "Anne, with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding, was nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way;—she was only Anne" (6). At the age of 19, she was persuaded to give up her engagement, a chance to go into the outer world where her real value would be estimated justly. Now at the age of 27, after years of resignation, she has obtained the opportunity to pursue her happiness with the person she has kept loving. However, it is not the luck which she is given by chance; it is what she struggled and strived to possess in the conflict of prudence and romance without blaming or hurting anyone around her all that long while. That is why her words to Wentworth, reflecting the sad persuasion made 8 years earlier, sounds triumphant:

I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience. I have now, as far as such a sentiment is allowable in human nature, nothing to reproach myself with. (268)

Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* may not be as active as Elizabeth Bennet in the famous *Pride and Prejudice*<sup>6)</sup>, but her way of life was remarkably flexible, graceful, gentle, and full of reason, trust and conscience. Midori Niino says that *Persuasion* is a novel which describes characters who are subtle, fluid, full of antinomy in the middle of the world continuously changing<sup>8)</sup>. Through struggling and striving in a bitter conflict, Anne develops herself, and acquires her own principle of life. She always cares for others and never blames nor hurts anyone, and brings a kind of harmony to the social circle around her unconsciously, where every possible change is in the process. She is a person of penetration, and at the same time she keeps her constant love and trust for people around her grounded upon her prudence and behavior. How Anne keeps a balance between reason and passion, how Anne obtains her reunion with Wentworth, and how Anne behaves in every occasion can be a practical example in the world which is in the process of change. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that we can learn a life lesson that shows us how we ourselves should live in the present world, also full of changes, in *Persuasion*, the novel of Jane Austen finished in 1816.

## Notes

† 1) All quotes from *Persuasion* come from *Persuasion, The Cambridge edition of the works of Jane Austen*, written by Jane Austen and edited by Janet Todd and Antje Blank.

† 2) Margaret Kirkham calls her "the central moral intelligence of the novel<sup>2)</sup>" (Kirkham 151)

† 3) John Wiltshire says, "Anne's becoming increasingly an object of regard in her circle<sup>5)</sup>." (Wiltshire 43)

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