

# Austen's phoenix: anne elliot's transformation in persuasion



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Jane Austen's *Persuasion* is a satirical romp through the cold and arrogant lives of the aristocracy as seen through the eyes of a self-sufficient and free thinking woman, who must realize the false values in her life and learn enough to reconcile what she has lost. The plot is presented through Anne Elliot's point of view, while those she associates with embody false values: they are used by Austen to caricature an already debauched lifestyle. Anne seems to be cursed for her simplicity, yet at the end, she is blessed with the fulfillment of her dreams because of her perseverance.

The first view presented is of the over-excessive aristocracy, seen in the first two chapters, with Sir Walter Elliot in debt due to his ill-judgment of finances. Now he must sell his family manor, Kellynch-Hall, to cut the expenses on his huge liability. Sir Walter's character is revealed through how he handles the affair; he is a proud man and a world of shame would come if he had to sell his family manor, so he decides to rent it out to a person of prominence, so as not to lose face among his peers. Mr. Shepherd, a friend of Sir Walter, suggests renting it out to sailors, which only sends shivers down Sir Walter's spine, for sailors "are persons of obscure birth," thus not worthy of such a high standard of influence. However, Mr. Shepherd knows of an Admiral with a conservative wife and no children. The fact that Sir Walter is renting out to an Admiral would be far more distinguishing than renting to a plain Mr. and Mrs. so-and-so with no credentials. With Sir Walter's gradual consent, all is arranged according to Mr. Shepherd's suggestion. At this juncture, Austen has given the reader just a glimpse of the pompous judgments that lie in the minds of the aristocracy.

Thus, out of Sir Elliot's excessive lifestyle, Anne Elliot's first blemish in her past is revealed, a Frederick Wentworth, who is the brother of Admiral Croft's wife (who rented Kellynch Hall). Captain Wentworth was engaged to Anne, but because of her father's judgmental influence, he had to call it off because of his lack of either wealth or a highly regarded future. That was seven years ago, yet Anne still has not loved anyone quite like she did Frederick. The pain to Anne became apparent when she heard that Captain Wentworth had gained rank, a mastership of his own ship, and, no doubt, a lot of money with it. Anne becomes tormented over her past decision not to marry Captain Wentworth and learns the falsity of judging by class level, which is a fault of the Elliots that Anne must learn to overcome.

We see Anne's maturity, however, when the Elliots move to Bath, and Mrs. Russell (a sort of step-mother) wishes that Anne could watch over Sir Walter and Mrs. Clay (the house keeper) even though the eldest, Elizabeth, is to be with them all the time. However, Anne is left with her younger sister Mary and Mary's husband Charles Musgrove, whose smaller manor Anne must adjust to: she still is used to the extravagance of Kellynch-Hall. This is the beginning of Anne's awakening, and of the experience with others who are not so-well-to-do. Through such experience, she will see how fulfilling their lives can be. We also see that the spoiled Mary still clings to her ancestral authority and refuses to give up her past, which only makes her, and the ones around her, even more bitter.

Upon Anne and Mary's visit to the Musgroves at the Great House, Anne observes the good heartedness and light fun that the more common people have about them—their concerns are fewer and lives more free. Anne is <https://assignbuster.com/austens-phoenix-anne-elliots-transformation-in-persuasion/>

envious, but she still thinks that she would never trade her education for the freestyle life of the Musgroves. Here Anne's humility is revealed through her awareness of what is going on around her, and she is not afraid to become part of the new lifestyle, something her sisters or father never had the nerve to humble themselves to do.

Anne's maturity, through her acts of charity, sends her through the refiner's fire, for she takes it upon herself to tend to Mary's son, who has dislocated his collar bone, and sends Mary and Charles to visit Captain Wentworth.

Anne is still distressed over her past decision and longs for her first love, who is only a half-a-mile away. Because she does not wish to confront Frederick, she immerses herself in simple acts that inevitably alter her outlook on life and society.

Jane Austen does a very accurate job of narrating how foolish people act while in love, for the next day, Captain Wentworth has an appointment to hunt with Charles. However, the Captain arrives late because he is reluctant to have breakfast with Anne. When Frederick does show, however, there is only a brief introduction of a formal curtsy and a bow between the old lovers. This bothers Anne, for she wishes to know Frederick's true feelings: she would then know whether or not to let go of her past feelings. This is what makes the relationship so interesting: the fact that lovers spend days actually wondering what the other is thinking, and never acting upon those true feelings. Instead, they only act on the assumptions that the other is only humoring them, which makes each one more cautious towards the other, in turn creating negative signs of interest. The only thing that holds the two together is the fantasy that their relationship will work, which it does as time

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goes on, and they both see through each other's doubts. This is the same principle that occurs between Anne and Captain Wentworth. Not knowing the each other's true feelings they both half-heatedly pursue other love interests, not wanting to lose the opportunity of love if the other happens to back out.

First, Captain Wentworth is pursued by Anne's two sisters-in-law, Henrietta and Louisa, who through Henrietta's engagement to Charles Hayter, the eldest cousin of the two sisters, cause Frederick to concentrate all his attention on Louisa. Thus, with Frederick's attentions placed on Louisa, everyone suspects him to marry her, which only throws Anne into fits of regret and heartache. Nevertheless, there are still small acts of kindness that Captain Wentworth singles out to only Anne. For example, when it is raining and Admiral Croft offers one of the ladies a ride back to his place, all decline except Mary, who only complains that she is never directly asked, but Captain Wentworth intervenes for Anne and tells his sister of Anne's weariness. He then lovingly assists her into the carriage, which again sets Anne's mind to wondering about Frederick's true intentions.

Assured attraction between Anne and Frederick is set in motion when they make a group trip to Lyme, so Frederick can visit his friend, Captain Harville, and give the ladies the opportunity to see the coast. Anne is very pleased with Frederick's friends and can't help thinking that they could have been her friends. For the first time, Anne feels true happiness in such common surroundings and actually feels comfortable around Captain Wentworth. Also, when Anne's gentleman cousin takes note of her on the street,

Frederick sees the age-old beauty in Anne once again and knows, with certainty, that he still loves her. Yet it could be too late to win her back.

The turning point and the moment of truth in Anne's life come with the injury of Louisa after her foolish jump off the bank escarpment. She is taken to the Harvilles' for care; all suggest that Anne stay and care for her while the rest return with the grievous news, so as not to be in the way. Mary becomes upset with such a suggestion, and she rants and raves that she must stay instead of Anne because she is Louisa's sister-in-law. (This is interesting because Mary did not pay much attention to Louisa before, but now, to seem important, she wants to tend Louisa.) Thus, Frederick and Louisa split up and spend some time apart, which gives them time to think through their relationship.

Anne returns to Mrs. Russell at Kellynch Hall; though a very sincere woman, Mrs. Russell is too strongly influenced by the wealth around her, and she does not approve of this Captain Wentworth character who seems too lowly for an Elliot. Days later, Anne visits her father and sister in Bath. While Sir Walter lives the high life, Anne becomes depressed with his lifestyle because of the falsity behind such a frivolous society. Anne does feel comfortable, however, when she visits her old governess, Mrs. Smith, who is crippled, poor, and diseased. Anne is totally amazed that such bad fortune has not dampened Mrs. Smith's spirits; she may be down, but she still has dignity. This is a sharp contrast with the soulless lifestyle of the Elliots, for they would be nothing without their wealth. Mrs. Smith gets her dignity by donating her time to the poor and needy by way of her crafts. Anne's outlook

on life is altered even more, and the gulf between the other Elliots and herself is so wide that Anne now has become a completely new person.

Back at home, Sir Walter lashes out at Anne for associating with such commoners; his daughter's actions could ruin his well-established name in Bath. To add to Anne's misery, she discovers that Mr. Smith wishes to marry her. Though she finds him sweet, she does not wish to marry him; to only one man does her heart go out and that man is Captain Wentworth.

However, there seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel because, while Frederick was away, Louisa accepted Captain Benwick's proposal to be married. All acquaintances are invited to the wedding, yet Sir Walter bluntly states his doubts that the Benwicks' lodgings are worthy enough for his family to visit. (He certainly knows how to ruin a happy occasion with his pomp and arrogance.) This theme of condescension appears frequently throughout the book, and Austen seems bothered, to some extent, by class distinctions. The Elliots feel far superior because of their wealth, which is actually a disease that blinds them to the true significance real friendship.

Mr. Elliot's openness with Anne sets up Frederick to finally leave his comfort zone and confess his love to Anne through a private letter. This is what Anne really needed, but how to deal with Mr. Elliot is yet another obstacle to overcome. However, the corruption of the wealthy always shines through.

Mrs. Smith's report on Mr. Elliot's lack of respect for the family name is all Anne needs to shun the very presence of her fake cousin. Greed and power compel the dishonorable rich to do all they have to do to get to the top. So it was with Mr. Elliot, who was the heir to Sir Walter: his marriage to Anne would allow him access to much of what the Elliots had.

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Finally, at the end of the book, all the gross attitudes of the pompous and wealthy are brought out in full light. Austen wants to make sure the reader understands the real attitudes behind her more prosperous characters.

Elizabeth refuses to visit Mrs. Russell because her style of clothing is quite hideous, and Mr. Elliot will only leave a card, for she only makes herself "up so little"; since she is too old to make her presentable, he does not want to visit with her. At the party thrown in honor of Sir Walter's Aunt Dalrymple, everyone is having such a good time with innocent gaiety. However, all the good feelings are suppressed with the grand entrance of Sir Walter and Elizabeth, which throws a "general chill" around the room "to meet the heartless elegance of her father and sister."

Anne's engagement brings out her long sought for happiness in the midst of this corrupt gloom. Sir Walter finds Captain Wentworth notable enough for his daughter to give consent for marriage. Lady Russell, who never really cared for Captain Wentworth and loved Mr. Elliot, totally opposes Anne's engagement, but she shows great strength in character that places her above all in her class by recognizing the mistake of judging those who are not suitable to her own ideas. Though many may be corrupt, it shows greatness to admit one's mistakes and turn one's thinking around rather than continue in blindness.

Anne had gained moral integrity by staying true to her feelings and not giving into vain desires. She received a great knowledge of the world and her society that is most priceless. Anne, unlike her relatives, who only groaned and complained in adversity, became a better person for her trials, from which she emerged crowned in the beauty of happiness and self-worth.

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