

The Nineteenth-Century Novel
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Lecture – 13
Persuasion, Volume II, Chapters 19 - 24


Hello and welcome to week 4's lectures on Persuasion. We have come to a point where we see the novel winding up, so we have come to the last third of this fiction by Austen. So at this point of time, what are the state of affairs in terms of Wentworth and Anne? And we can also see that the two key players in this romantic novel are in the same domain once again, which is Bath, and when they meet what are the reactions on the part of one another.

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Wentworth meets Anne in Bath

- He was more obviously struck and confused by the sight of her than she had ever observed before; he looked quite red. For the first time, since their renewed acquaintance, she felt that she was betraying the least sensibility of the two.

Handwritten notes:
Anne - ability to master her emotions
imbalance of power
Anne ✓ Beauty = social power



So, with that we will begin lecture 4. Wentworth meets Anne in Bath and what is his reaction? “He was more obviously struck and confused by the sight of her than she had ever observed before, he looked quite red. For the first time since their renewed acquaintance, she felt that she was betraying the least sensibility of the two.” The immediate interpretation would be that there is an imbalance of power, and this time, the greater power rests with Anne Elliot and not Wentworth.

She is the more powerful of the two, the reason being Wentworth is losing his equanimity. When he meets Anne Elliot in Bath, he is not only struck, struck by her beauty, most likely, but he is also confused by the sight of her. He is not able to control his emotions as to what is the

best possible manner with which he can approach and talk to her. And Anne is sensible of the changes that are developing within Wentworth in their meeting.

So, and he is looking quite red. In fact, we can guess that he is blushing, and the immediate reason is possibly because he had not expected to meet Anne when he did meet her in the streets of Bath, and that is why he is not able to control his emotions. We can compare the scene with another scene in Austen's fiction, and that is a famous scene in *Pride and Prejudice*, when Elizabeth Bennet and Darcy meet quite unexpectedly at Pemberley grounds.

So, there are echoes of other scenes between the key figures who are courting one another in Austen's fiction. And for the first time since their renewed acquaintance, she felt that she was betraying the least sensibility of the two. She is able to control, Anne is able to control her feelings. To master, not only control, but master her emotions. If you remember earlier in the novel it was Wentworth who was not revealing anything other than his resentment and perhaps his coldness towards Anne at the beginning of the novel.

And now, Anne is able to hide or camouflage her reactions to Wentworth. So as I said, that key moment in the novel is the fall of Louisa at Lyme Regis, and Lyme Regis is a site which does bring in a lot of changes on the part of several key players in *Persuasion*. And in terms of Anne Elliot, it brings back her beauty, and with beauty she also assumes a sense of power over the figures around her.

So, we need to also realize the relationship between beauty and some kind of power, social power, you can call it social power, on the part of the one who is possessing such beauty over the people around her or him. And Wentworth, we should also remember, is somebody who is very attractive and at this moment of time, he is not at all conscious of his superiority, whereas it is Anne who is in the ascendancy.

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Anne's beauty

- "She is pretty I think; Anne Elliot; very pretty, when one comes to look at her. It is not the fashion to say so, but I confess I admire her more than her sister."
- "Oh! so do I!"
- "And so do I. No comparison. But the men are all wild after Miss Elliot. Anne is too delicate for them."

*Mr Elliot
Capt. Wentworth*

Anne & Elizabeth ≠ conventionally beautiful

Elizabeth



Now, not only is Wentworth struck by Anne's beauty, and if you remember it is Mr. Elliot too who is the first one to be affected by the beauty of Anne. So we have Mr. Elliot beginning this trajectory of appreciating Anne, and then followed by Captain Wentworth who notices because Elliot notices, and then his belief is strengthened when he meets Anne for the first time in Bath. Anne is looking really well.

And followed by Captain Wentworth, we have his party of women appreciating Anne's, you know, physical attributes. And this is one lady saying, "She is pretty, I think, Anne Elliot; very pretty when one comes to look at her. It is not the fashion to say so, but I confess I admire her more than her sister." "Oh! So do I!" And somebody else is kind of agreeing, there is unity of, you know, a belief here in appreciating Anne Elliot.

And then we have another figure saying, another female figure saying, "So do I. No comparison." There is no comparison between Anne and Elizabeth here, her sister. "But the men are all wild after Miss Elliot, Anne is too delicate for them." So a contrast is kind of struck between these two female Elliot sisters, and Anne is striking in this regard because it is not the fashion to say that Anne is very beautiful.

So, she is somehow, you know, standing against the tide, she is kind of swimming against the tide here in becoming a different kind of beauty. So she is not conventionally beautiful, not conventionally attractive, but is somehow different and striking or attractive or charming in a different way, and this is the norm, the fact that Miss Elliot, that is, Miss Elizabeth Elliot is beautiful is the norm with which, you know, beauty is understood in that time.

And look at the choice of words, the men are all wild, so this is the set of men who are not of the same ilk as Captain Wentworth, so these are the ordinary mortals who are kind of, kind of being led by the contemporary, conventional, traditional views of what is right and wrong in terms of aesthetics. But women who are of the party of Captain Wentworth, women who kind of can get into the feelings of men such as Captain Wentworth, can see that Anne is the unlikely beauty in the set of women who are in Bath.

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Captain Wentworth

- "She was perfectly conscious of Lady Russell's being turned exactly in the direction for him—of her being turned exactly in the direction for him—of her being, in short, intently observing him. She could thoroughly comprehend the sort of fascination he must possess over Lady Russell's mind, the difficulty it must be for her to withdraw her eyes, the astonishment she must be feeling that eight or nine years should have passed over him, and in foreign climes and in active service too, without robbing him of one personal grace!"

*Anne = fibing = thought of Lady R.
personal grace / attractiveness*

*prequel
animosity
Cap W Lady R.*



And another point that we need to remember here is that Anne is too delicate for them, she is somehow fragile, her, you know, sense of charm is almost fragile, too subtle somehow to be understood by the common men folk. So again, there is a kind of a fine superiority even in the beauty that Anne embodies. So there is a kind of sophistication about Anne which is missing in Elizabeth Elliot.

Now, Anne is in Bath and she is spending time with Lady Russell as she is doing with Mrs. Smith, so these are her companions. And during her walks with Lady Russell, which she does indulge in quite frequently, she is worried about meeting Captain Wentworth, and becomes a kind of a reality because during one of her walks with Lady Russell, she sees Captain Wentworth at the other end of the road, and she is worried about the reactions of Lady Russell.

And if you remember the back story, the prequel, where Lady Russell influenced Anne to give up on her engagement with Captain Wentworth, so there is a lot of let us say animosity in spirit

between Captain Wentworth and Lady Russell. So she is worried, and quite naturally. And this is Anne's personal views about that scene where the two antagonists are about to meet.

“She was perfectly conscious of Lady Russell's being turned exactly in the direction for him - of her being turned exactly in the direction for him - of her being, in short, intently observing him. She could thoroughly comprehend the sort of fascination he must possess over Lady Russell's mind the difficulty it must be for her to withdraw her eyes, the astonishment she must be feeling that eight or nine years should have passed over him, and in foreign climes and in active service too, without robbing him of one personal grace.”

So, Anne thinks that Lady Russell has seen Captain Wentworth, it is impossible not to have seen him. Her eyes were turned in that direction where Captain Wentworth is walking, so it is not likely that she has missed him. So she is imagining that Lady Russell is undergoing some kind of difficulty, she is finding it very hard to realize that this man even after the passing of eight or nine years, is still very, very attractive and it is even more surprising that he has passed those times in foreign climates, not in Britain, but in other countries, and it is again very shocking that that climatic condition; the climatic condition that he has been through in several countries has not affected the physical attractiveness of Captain Wentworth. Not even a single personal grace has been removed from the figure of Captain Wentworth. So Anne is imagining what Lady Russell is probably imagining, so Anne is filtering for us the thoughts of Lady Russell.

We need to kind of understand the intense anxiety with which Anne is kind of, you know, wallowing in at this point of time, when she is with her older companion here, and she is meeting her ex-lover. Not directly but, you know, indirectly because they are separated by that road. Captain Wentworth is on the other side of the road and she is thinking that Lady Russell has seen him.

So, here I would also like to point out one more thing in relation to personal grace or attractiveness which is that, if you remember, Sir Walter Elliot's belief about, you know, the personality of naval men, you will know that he thinks that all naval men are terribly unattractive. And Captain Wentworth is once again, you know, pointing out that that is not the case, not all naval men are unattractive, so that is one thing.

And the other thing that we can, you know, assume is that since he is the hero of the novel, you know, Austen has specifically made him attractive. And it is also very ironic that at the beginning of the novel at least, it is Anne who is the lesser attractive of the two. So there is something very interesting and perhaps realistic going on, which is that the hero is very attractive and not particularly so that is one thing.

Another thing is that beauty becomes a symbol of the kind of impact a failed relationship has on one's figure. So the female who apparently, you know, feels stronger about one's relationship does kind of embody, you know, its failure on her personal figure. So there are several, you know, interpretations that are possible about the concept of beauty embodied in the figures of the hero and the heroine in Persuasion.

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Lady Russell

Reason:
1) Sir Elliot

1) Materialistic preoccupation
2) spying?

- "You will wonder," said she, "what has been fixing my eye so long; but I was looking after some window-curtains, which Lady Alicia and Mrs Frankland were telling me of last night. They described the drawing-room window curtains of one of the houses on this side of the way, and this part of the street, as being the handsomest and best hung of any in Bath, but could not recollect the exact number, and I have been trying to find out which it could be; but I confess I can see no curtains hereabouts that answer their description."

Lady R. doesn't know him
A window-curtains
Handsome Ordinary
Assumption of Anne shattered by Lady R.

Now, Anne has assumed that Lady Russell has seen Captain Wentworth, and Anne has assumed that Lady Russell is shocked by the personal attractiveness of Captain Wentworth. So that is the assumption. And that assumption is shattered, assumption of Anne is shattered by Lady Russell. How does she do it? She does it very, very cleverly, she says, "You will wonder," said she, 'what has been fixing my eyes so long; but I was looking after some window curtains, which Lady Alicia and Mrs. Frankland were telling me of last night. They described the drawing room window curtains of one of the houses on this side of the way, and this part of the street, as being the handsomest and best hung of any in Bath, but could not recollect the exact number, and I have been trying to find out which it could be. But I confess I can see no curtains hereabouts that answer their description.'"

So what is happening here? It is quite clear from the words of Lady Russell that she has not seen Captain Wentworth. So that is the biggest irony here for Anne who is so worried about, you know, the possible reactions of Lady Russell. She says that, lady Russell says that, I have not seen him. That is what she tells indirectly, I have not seen him about whom you are too much worried. That is the indirect meaning, what else has she seen then?

She has seen some window curtains. That is what has been preoccupying Lady Russell's for so long, which Anne kind of misinterprets. She says that Lady Alicia, you know, and Mrs. Frankland, Lady Alicia from the nobility and Mrs. Frankland, you know, from the middle classes, were talking about this exciting set of window curtains which were found at the windows of a particular house in this street in Bath.

And I was looking for that, and which is what has been fixing my eye so long. And she says that these women told me that the window curtains have been the handsomest and best hung of all the curtains in Bath, and these women could not tell me what is the exact house number which is why I have been seriously gazing at every window curtain and looking for this handsome set. And she says that ultimately, I have not been successful, because I could not, you know, find any window curtains which have been so attractive to me.

So this is something very mundane, isn't it? This is mundane, this is very ordinary. That is what is preoccupying Lady Russell, and we need to realise that Lady Russell even though, she is the guardian, she is sort of a mother figure for this heroine whom we are very much invested in, despite all the positions that she occupies in terms of Anne,

She is also a woman who is caught up in all these materialistic, you know, attractions that many women are, you know, caught up in in that period, especially the nobility and the middle classes. And that is what Lady Russell also embodies, that is one interpretation. So that, we will put it as the materialistic preoccupation, and this is very ordinary, and this is not what fascinates Anne Elliot, we need to remember that.

The other side to this set of views about window curtains is this one - Lady Russell is lying. It is possible, it is a reasonable speculation. We can project this, you know, speculation on this set of views and see what are the results, is she lying? If she is lying, then clearly she does not want to

broach this topic of Captain Wentworth with Anne Elliot. And why? Reasons are just one, that is, Mr. Elliot is in the picture.

And that Elliot is the person that Lady Russell wants Anne to marry. So if she is going to talk about Captain Wentworth and his physical attractiveness, and the fact that even after eight or nine years, he is still very attractive and on top of that very rich, then we will have two figures who could be potential suitors for Anne Elliot, and Lady Russell does not want that because if she marries Captain Wentworth, she is not going to get Kellynch Hall.

And Anne is also not going to be called lady Elliot, she will not stay within the aristocracy, she will have to move out of that class identification. So it is also likely that Lady Russell is deliberately suppressing the fact that she has seen Captain Wentworth. So these are the two interpretations that we can come up with about this incident. It is a very important incident that happens in Bath, you know, the potential meeting between Lady Russell and Captain Wentworth, and the, you know, the ideological implications for Lady Russell.


A, she is very, very, you know, ordinary in the sense that she is, you know, preoccupied with material considerations; and B, which is more disturbing, is that she is not at all willing to talk about Captain Wentworth who is likely to marry Anne now, than he was eight or nine years ago.

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Anne's determination

- Elizabeth had turned from him, Lady Russell overlooked him; her nerves were strengthened by these circumstances; she felt that she owed him attention.

Slight offence
doesn't pay attention
the Right thing
Capt Wentworth



Now, what is Anne determined about? “Elizabeth had turned from him, Lady Russell overlooked him, her nerves were strengthened by these circumstances; she felt that she owed

him attention.” This excerpt is very exciting in the sense that you can play a guessing game as to who has turned from him, as to who has overlooked him, and finally who is this “him”, and this him is of course, Captain Wentworth.

Anne and her party meet Captain Wentworth in a shop in Bath, and Elizabeth, her elder sister who is very proud and snobbish, her pride stemming from her position in the aristocracy, turns from him, turns from Captain Wentworth, and that is a slight. In fact that is an offense to him. And Lady Russell overlooks him, you know, she does not pay attention, just as she did not pay attention to him when Captain Wentworth was talking; was taking a walk on the streets of Bath, and it is likely that, you know, she has seen him but pretends not to see him.

So, once again, Anne notices that Lady Russell has overlooked him. And these two factors strengthens Anne, and she thinks that, she felt that she owed him attention. That it is only right that she kind of pays attention to Captain Wentworth who has been slighted by Elizabeth and Lady Russell. So, we can also get a sense that Anne is desirous of doing the right thing here.

And I think she would have done this, that is pay attention to Captain Wentworth, even if she had not been romantically involved with him years ago. So Anne is someone who is highly utilitarian to the people around her, she is also very, very conscious of the, you know, the rightness of a thing. And if you go back to the early sections of the novel, when her family vacates Kellynch Hall, Anne is the one who goes to all the villagers and says, you know, good bye to them, she takes leave of them in the proper, appropriate way.

So now that her sister and her friend insult Captain Wentworth by ignoring him, she thinks that she has to take it upon herself to do the appropriate thing, the decent thing, by noticing him, that is one thing. The other thing is that she is also romantically interested, so she goes up to him to talk.

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Captain Wentworth on Louisa and Benwick

- Had it been the effect of gratitude, had he learnt to love her, because he believed her to be preferring him, it would have been another thing. But I have no reason to suppose it so. It seems, on the contrary, to have been a perfectly spontaneous, untaught feeling on his side, and this surprises me...Fanny Harville was a very superior creature, and his attachment to her was indeed attachment.

genuine
Benwick to Fanny Harville
Judgment on the engagement between Benwick to Louisa



Now, when Captain Wentworth and Anne meet, we do get the details about the engagement between Louisa and Benwick. Why do we get that? Because Wentworth is keen to offer that information, and he is filling in the gaps as to what had happened that had resulted in the engagement between Louisa and Benwick. And he is interested in doing this because everybody had expected him to marry Louisa, right. And suddenly, we have this, you know, unexpected man, Captain Benwick, who has been recovering from the loss of his fiancée, as the man who is ultimately going to marry Louisa Musgrove.

And so this is the excerpt in relation to that engagement. “Had it been the effect of gratitude, had he learned to love her because he believed her to be preferring him, it would have been another thing. But I have no reason to suppose it is so, it seems on the contrary to have been a perfectly spontaneous, untaught feeling on his side, and this surprises me. Fanny Harville was a superior creature, and his attachment to her was indeed attachment.”

So here we have Captain Wentworth's judgment on the engagement between Benwick and Louisa. And he is also contrasting this relationship, the relationship between Benwick with the relationship between Benwick and Fanny Harville, the sister of Captain Harville.

And he thinks that this engagement was the more genuine one. And why does he think that? He thinks that is the case because Fanny Harville was a very superior creature, was a more sophisticated woman than, by implication, Louisa. So Louisa Musgrove is coming off really badly in the eyes of Captain Wentworth, and early on in the eyes of Admiral Croft. So her reputation as a superficial woman is kind of getting reinforced time and again in Persuasion.

So, and he says that that attachment was indeed an attachment. That was a real relationship. But here it is, that is the relationship between Louisa and Benwick, seems to be spontaneous, something that is impulsive, and it is untaught feeling on his side. It is almost as if Benwick is falling into this relationship without, you know, without a lot of discrimination, you know, without a lot of, you know, understanding of his own emotions and the context of this relationship.

And Captain Wentworth says that it is surprising, it is really surprising to me that Benwick is going for Louisa. So this is Captain Wentworth's judgment on this new engagement.

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- "sentences begun which he could not finish, his half averted eyes and more than half expressive glance, all, all declared that he had a heart returning to her at least; that anger, resentment, avoidance, were no more; and that they were succeeded, not merely by friendship and regard, but by the tenderness of the past...He must love her."

mobility
Returning

Now, Anne is quietly studying Captain Wentworth's appearance, the way he talks to her and comes up with an assessment. She is doing this analysis in a very, very measured manner. She thinks that "his sentences begun which he could not finish, his half averted eyes and more than half expressive glance, all, all declared that he had a heart returning to her at least; that anger, resentment, avoidance were no more; and that they were succeeded, not merely by friendship and regard, by the tenderness of the past. He must love her."

So finally, finally Anne is able to kind of look closely at Captain Wentworth, assess his mannerisms and behaviour, and come up with a conclusion that would very much please her, which is that he must love her. So, what are the characteristics that lead Anne to come up with this assessment.

And it is very typical of a man in love in that period. Sentences are not able to be completed by the man who is uttering it. So incomplete statement, half averted eyes, the ability not to meet, you know, the lady love, and here in the context of Wentworth, it is Anne. And you know that the half expressive glance is full of meaning, and all these, all these characteristics are perfect embodiments of a man in love.

And Anne; look at the way Anne puts it. She says that all these characteristics stem from a heart that is returning to her, coming back. Again, the language of mobility is very, very interesting, Captain Wentworth who has moved away from her eight or nine years ago, is now returning to Anne, is coming back to Anne, and she realizes that his anger, resentment and coldness and the desire on his part to distance himself from her, everything has disappeared from him. And you know, what succeeds that set of negative feelings is not only friendship and respect, that is regard, but tenderness of the past that, you know, sympathetic feelings associated with romance is what is kind of defining the relationship between the two.

And Anne is very clear in her assessment. And we got to give credit to Anne, because if you look at the, you know, the previous sections of the novel, even early on, she is very clear that Wentworth is not interested in either of the Musgrove girls, not in Louisa, not in Henrietta, she is very clear, because she thinks she knows how Captain Wentworth will act, will behave if he is in love.

So she has studied him in the past, and that gives her some kind of ground with which to measure the present relationships that he develops between the Musgrove girls. And she thinks that it is not, you know, true love there. But, you know, she also feels that it will eventually lead to marriage with one of them because that is how circumstances, you know, head towards in such cases.

So, she is a woman who knows Captain Wentworth, and with that kind of historical understanding of him at this moment in Bath, based on her observations, she has come to this conclusion which is very you know, which is a happy one for her. Thank you for watching, I

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