

***Persuasion* Discussion Questions**

JASNA E. Washington and N. Idaho Region

1. “[Anne’s] *pleasure* in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical description of autumn, that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness, . . .” (Vol I, Chap 10). What are your thoughts about how Austen uses the autumn landscape to capture Anne’s sadness about ending her engagement to Captain Wentworth years earlier? Do you see any connection between Austen and the Romantic poets in *Persuasion*?
2. “I [Captain Wentworth] had been unguarded. I had not thought seriously on this subject before. I had not considered that my excessive intimacy must have its danger of ill consequence in many ways; and that I had no right to be trying whether I could attach myself to either of the girls” (II, 11). Austen set herself a complex writer’s challenge in *Persuasion*: Captain Wentworth courts Louisa in front of Anne and seems oblivious to the hurt it might be causing Anne, and yet, the reader is supposed to view Captain Wentworth as honorable and lovable. How does Austen show some of Captain Wentworth’s good qualities? Do you think he is successful as the novel’s hero?
3. “There [Anne and Captain Wentworth] returned again to the past, more exquisitely happy, perhaps, in their re-union, than when it had first been projected; 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.” (II, 11). Do you think the whole of the novel supports a view that Anne and Captain Wentworth should have stayed engaged and married much younger or that they are better off that they waited to marry?
4. “[Anne] could only . . . think with heightened gratitude of the extraordinary blessing of having one such truly sympathising friend as Lady Russell” (I, 6). What are your thoughts about the many kinds of friendship shown in *Persuasion*: among the naval characters, between Anne and Lady Russell, between Elizabeth and Mrs. Clay, among the Uppercross folks, etc.?

5. When Anne meets Captain Wentworth for the first time at the Cottage, the narrator states, “a thousand feelings rushed on Anne” (I, 7). There are several times when Anne seems overwhelmed by feeling. Do you think that the representation of Anne’s feelings in *Persuasion* is different from how feelings are represented for the heroines of Austen’s previous novels? Anne also tries to read Captain Wentworth’s feelings throughout the novel, but is she always accurate?
6. *Persuasion* explores the question of human value based on class and rank, the world of Sir Walter, Lady Dalrymple, and Mr. Elliot, compared to human value based on how you treat others and your usefulness to society, as embodied by the naval characters. Austen seems clearly on the side of the naval values. Do you think Austen predicts a decline in the importance of the landed upper class in Britain through her portrayal of Sir Walter and his financial problems?
7. There are several discussions about men’s and women’s roles in society, including Mary’s claim that “if there is any thing disagreeable going on, men are always sure to get out of it” (I, 7). Mrs. Croft tells her brother Captain Wentworth that most women are not “fine ladies” but “rational creatures” (I, 8), a phrase that connects with Mary Wollstonecraft. In Anne’s debate with Captain Harville, she says that women are limited by lack of education and the roles they have. Do you think Austen is claiming women’s potential equality to men in *Persuasion*?
8. “She was only Anne” (I, 1). What are your thoughts about Anne’s character? Does she change at all in the novel?
9. In Captain Wentworth’s letter to Anne “You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope.” and in Anne’s claim to Captain Harville of women’s “loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone” (II,11), the couple voice their love. Do you think *Persuasion* is more romantic than Austen’s other novels in portraying the love of the hero and heroine?
10. There have been four film adaptations of *Persuasion*: the 1971 BBC series with Ann Fairbank and Bryan Marshall, the 1995 Sony Pictures movie starring Amanda Root and Ciarán Hinds, the 2007 ITV television movie starring Sally Hawkins and Rupert Penry-Jones, and the 2022 Netflix movie starring Dakota Johnson and Cosmo Jarvis. Have these adaptations enhanced your appreciation of the novel in any way?

11. [Optional] Have you ever read the cancelled chapters of *Persuasion*? Austen's original plan for the ending of the novel was quite different from the published version; the cancelled chapters are Volume II, Chapters 10 and 11 which are replaced by Chapters 10, 11, and 12 in the published version of *Persuasion*. Cancelled Chapter 10 is revised significantly and divided into Chapter 10 and 11 in the book, while cancelled Chapter 11 has more limited revisions to become Chapter 12. These cancelled chapters are the only manuscripts that survive of Austen's published novels and show ways in which she worked. In the cancelled Chapter 10, Admiral Croft asks Captain Wentworth to talk to Anne about whether she wants the Crofts to leave Kellynch after hearing a rumor that Anne will marry Mr. Elliot. When Anne denies that she will marry Mr. Elliot, Captain Wentworth and Anne reach an understanding through looks "a silent but very powerful Dialogue;--on his side, Supplication, on her's acceptance" (p 11 of the manuscript). If you have never read the chapters, *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts: A Digital Edition*, edited by Kathryn Sutherland (2010). (Available at <http://www.janeausten.ac.uk>) includes both a facsimile of the handwritten manuscript (where you can see how many corrections and revisions have been made) and the typed transcript of the chapters showing the strikeouts and changes (<https://janeausten.ac.uk/manuscripts/blpers/1.html> links to the first page of Chapter 10). The cancelled chapters are also included in an appendix of the Cambridge Edition of *Persuasion* edited by Janet Todd and Antje Blank (2006). If you read the cancelled chapters, are there any parts of them that strike you? Most readers prefer the revised chapters, especially Anne's conversation with Captain Harville and Captain Wentworth's letter in the published Chapter 11—can you imagine *Persuasion* without them?

If you want to read more about the ending of *Persuasion*, here are two great articles: Paul Wray, "Persuasion: Why the Revised Ending Works So Well" in *Persuasions Online*, 38, 2017 <https://jasna.org/publications-2/persuasions-online/vol38no1/wray/>.

If you have access to the journal *Persuasions*, 40, 2018, there is also Marcia McClintock Fulsom's "The Final Chapters of Persuasion: Austen's Passionate Revision" pp. 15-31. (You can download the journal on the jasna.org website through the member portal for free if you were a member of JASNA 4/30/19-4/30/20).

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