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Jane Austen's Persuasion: a Study in Literary History

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JANE AUSTEN'S *PERSUASION*:
A STUDY IN LITERARY
HISTORY

By

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Jane Austen's *Persuasion*: A Study in Literary History

I. Introduction

From a scholarly perspective, literary Romanticism is currently “in crisis” (Gilroy 147). This crisis began in the early twentieth century, and has manifested itself in various ways through the present. Temporal boundaries, genre, defining characteristics, and canon are all at issue in the debate, and matters are so complicated that some have even rejected the idea of Romanticism entirely as either a useful or accurate category for literary criticism or history.

Late-eighteenth-century British novelist Jane Austen is a figure around whom some of this debate gathers. Austen's relationship with Romanticism is itself quite complicated. For a long time entirely left out of discussions of the Romantic period during which she lived and wrote, Austen has been increasingly considered within her Romantic context. However, despite this developing interest, there is little general agreement regarding the degree to which she can be considered Romantic, or the ways in which she *is* Romantic, should she be considered thus. And to complicate matters, each of Austen's novels has its own unique relationship with Romanticism.

General perceptions of Austen have had a great deal to do with her critical reception at various moments in the history of literature. Her being left out of discussions of Romanticism, for instance, can be understood if one considers the way she was perceived by a more traditionally acknowledged Romantic author, Charlotte Brontë. We know how Brontë perceived

Austen from her letters, in which she distances herself from what she sees as Austen's restrained and subdued representations of the surface of polite society. This perception was not unique to Brontë, and in fact, was so common that it essentially necessitated that Austen should not be considered within discussions of Romanticism. Interestingly, however, Brontë's perception is subject to scrutiny, for a comparative analysis between her novel *Jane Eyre*, and Austen's final novel, *Persuasion*, generally considered to be the most Romantic of Austen's work, reveals some startling affinities.

Austen criticism is likewise problematic. In *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*, Alan Richardson discusses *Persuasion* and its relationship with Romanticism. In this extensive analysis of Romantic psychology, Richardson argues that "the pioneering neuroscience of the era manifests a 'Romantic' character, and that literary Romanticism intersects in numerous and significant ways with the physiological psychology of the time" (1). Richardson's analysis is as implicated in the Romantic crisis as the work he analyzes, however. In a review of the book, Irving Massey remarks that "someone with nominalist predilections (such as myself) might not be entirely at ease with [Richardson's] unswerving defense of Romanticism as a hypostatized entity . . . and with the general tendency to define, categorize, and identify movements, or to claim pristine novelty for schools of thought" (78).

Richardson's basic assumption about the viability of Romanticism as a category of thought is also implicitly challenged by a work like Christopher Nagle's very recent *Sexuality and the Culture of Sensibility in the British Romantic Era*. Nagle argues that Romanticism should not be defined as a distinct movement, but rather "as nothing more – and certainly nothing less – than a later stage within a Long Age of Sensibility" (4). Where Richardson would argue that *Persuasion* is "a Romantic novel indeed" (107), Nagle would counter that to label

Austen and her novel as Romantic is “to make a false choice that obscures the most apt placement for Austen’s historically specific production” (99), arguing instead that “[i]f Austen is Romantic . . . it is only by virtue of her thoroughgoing engagement with both the aesthetic and ethical assumptions of *Sensibility*” (99). A Romantic analysis of Austen might, then, begin to seem fruitless, given a critical climate in which the very act of defining Romanticism is resisted, and in which any definition that *is* proposed can always be challenged with an alternative, and often equally compelling, definition. Nevertheless, I propose that the complicated interplay between the various forces described here – the criticism of Richardson and Nagle, Austen’s *Persuasion*, and Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* – does not merely highlight the difficulties in engaging in a discussion of Romanticism, but also underscores the fascinating possibilities that the Romantic crisis holds for the future of literary studies, and the continued utility of the label.

II. Twentieth-Century Critical Contexts

In 1924, Arthur O. Lovejoy wrote that “the word *romantic* has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing. It has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign” (qtd. in McDayter 11). Lovejoy was aware of the Romantic era’s “diverse impulses and productions” (Wolfson 1438), and for him, these impulses and productions could not be reconciled, resulting in a Romanticism that he came to see as a fragmented phenomena (Najarian 140). Lovejoy therefore asked that there be a “radical remedy – namely, that we should all cease talking about Romanticism” (qtd. in Wolfson 1438), or at least that “we should learn to use ‘Romanticism’ in the plural” (qtd. in Wolfson 1438). In 1949 Lovejoy was famously countered by René Wellek. He, too, recognized that Romantic productions were many and diverse, but he

argued that these productions nevertheless indicated “a unity of theories, philosophies, and styles, and that these in turn, form[ed] a coherent group of ideas each of which implicat[ed] the others” (qtd. in McDayter 11). For Wellek, then, Romanticism could be seen as a unified, cohesive phenomenon (Najarian 140).

This was a debate that for decades Wellek was assumed to have won (Najarian 140). In fact, in 1983, when noted Romantic literary critic Jerome McGann took up the question of Romanticism in his influential work *The Romantic Ideology*, he was clearly of Wellek’s opinion. According to McGann, Lovejoy was writing in despair over what he characterized as a “Babel of Criticism” (18). Lovejoy saw much to persuade him in critical discussions of Romanticism, but he also saw much that was contradictory (17), leading him to reject the idea of Romanticism altogether. McGann saw value in Lovejoy’s arguments, but he felt that they call “attention not so much to a problem in the phenomena being studied as to a crisis in the disciplines of investigation” (18). McGann supported Wellek’s conclusion that no matter how much scholars and critics “may differ in their definitional terms and schemes” (17), they “all basically agree on what Romanticism is or was in *fact*” (17). He writes scathingly that “the present scholarly situation often appears so ignorant or forgetful of its subject, so intent upon its own productive process, that it seems capable of any sort of nonsense” (18); but he concluded that nevertheless, “informed persons *do* generally agree on what is comprised under the terms Romantic and Romantic Movement” (18). For McGann and for Wellek, the difficulties lay not in an inherent problem in Romanticism itself, but rather in the various approaches critics and scholars take when studying and analyzing Romanticism.

Romanticism, however, remains the subject of intense debate, one that sometimes appears so hopelessly complex and varied that it no longer seems safe to conclude that there is

general agreement among “informed persons” about what is meant by Romantic and Romantic Movement. In their 2001 introduction to an exploration of the Romantic era novel, Amanda Gilroy and Wil Verhoeven discuss the current and uncertain state of Romantic studies, and the situation seems bleak:

The title, the contents, and the chronology of the Romantic period have been subjected to intense scrutiny. Some scholars have argued that our period has been cannibalized, at one end by encroachments from the “Long Eighteenth Century” . . . and at the other by an expanding Victorianism or “Long Nineteenth Century.” . . . A rival “Romantic Century” (1750-1850) has been proposed to counter this territorial aggression. At the same time, under the influence of feminism, new historicism, and cultural materialism, the Romantic canon has been thoroughly transformed, with historical readings of old canonical writers . . . new attention to previously marginalized women and other writers and to a range of genres . . . all studied in the cultural context in which they were produced. But the problem arises, how then to define this new Romantic recipe? More authors, more texts, more types of writing: the borders of Romanticism, temporal and ideological, begin to seem fluid, amorphous, resistant to the limitations of definition. (148)

As James Najarian remarks in “Romanticisms, Histories, and Romantic Cultures,” “‘Romantic’ is one of the most contentious words in literary criticism, perhaps even in the language” (150).

Though many factors, as noted above, have contributed to this most recent version of the crisis of Romanticism (Gilroy 147), perhaps one of the most problematic is the addition of the novel to the Romantic mix. Traditionally, as Anne K. Mellor recounts in a discussion of feminism and Romanticism, the British Romantic literary canon revolved around, and was

essentially made up of, the writings of six male poets: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and Blake (182). She notes that “conventional descriptions of literary Romanticism have been founded on the works of these Big Six” (182). Robert Miles, in his essay “What is a Romantic Novel?” remarks that “it is certainly very strange that Romanticism alone of our conventional periodizations, customarily includes the text of a single genre in its list of canonized works” (182); and Mellor points out that “such an exclusive focus has seriously distorted our understanding of the literary culture of the Romantic era” (182). This includes, of course, the Romantic era novel.

The English novel, even as it was defining itself in the early eighteenth century, was a contentious new genre. As Gilroy and Verhoeven report, “there was a pervasive sense that the novel was a debased form, mad, bad, and dangerous, particularly for impressionable female readers” (147). They go on to write that “again and again, critics see novels as polluting, staining, poisoning, or deforming the individual and the nation” (153). As it developed throughout the eighteenth century, the novel was approached by critics and readers alike with uncertainty. Both its value and its status, especially with respect to older literary forms such as poetry, were questioned. Today, the novel still faces challenges of inclusion within the realm of Romantic literary studies. Miles remarks upon the “endemic hostility” (18) with which the Romantic novel must contend. According to Miles, the Romantic novel has been received with embarrassment, aggression, and silence. Even “the simple conjunction ‘novel’ and ‘Romantic’” (182), he argues, results in hostilities and omissions. In her discussion of the novel and its relationship to Romanticism, Corinna Russell explains that “the ambiguous status of the novel in relation to other ‘Romantic forms,’ combined with the generic experimentation of the age itself and the formal heterogeneity already associated with this mode of prose fiction, might suggest

that Romantic period novels are peculiarly resistant to the kind of literary historicizing that seeks to draw out a set of literary characteristics” (369); indeed Gilroy and Verhoeven assert that “the fiction of the Romantic period has remained one of the most underresearched – or unevenly researched – areas of English literature” (155-56).

Also problematic is Romanticism’s relationship with Sensibility. According to Adela Pinch, “[t]he connection between Sensibility and Romanticism is close and complex” (49). She notes that “[l]iterary historians used to see Sensibility . . . as the literary movement that *preceded* Romanticism” (49). However, she goes on to observe that “many of the features of Romantic literature . . . are strikingly similar to some of the features of Sensibility” (50), and concludes that “[i]t may be more accurate to see Sensibility as a literary movement that preceded, enabled, *and* coexisted with Romanticism. And perhaps Romanticism ought to be seen as simply one phase of a longer Era of Sensibility” (50). This, in fact, is exactly what Nagle has in mind. According to Nagle, “it is time to put more pressure on the putative coherence and intellectual utility of the term [Romanticism]” (3). He argues “that at its core Romanticism is built on the ground of Sensibility and is so thoroughly invested in its rhetorical and stylistic tropes – and thus, in its ideological investments as well – that what is most distinctive about the literature we call Romantic might be the uses to which it puts Sensibility” (3), noting that Sensibility went “right into the heart” of Romanticism (4). Finally, Nagle concludes that the movement of Sensibility should be placed “at the center of our traditional eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary periods” (16), and insists “that this segment of literary history can best be seen as a Long Age of Sensibility, with more or less discreet modes like Romanticism . . . taking place within this broader movement” (16). Discussions of Romanticism, then, must also contend with the notion of Sensibility and the degree to which it either influences Romanticism, or completely subsumes

it.

III. Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and Romanticism

The problems that can arise when discussions of Romanticism, its historical range, and its canon are opened up beyond “the Big Six” are interestingly exemplified by an analysis of Jane Austen and her ever-developing critical reception. For a long time Austen was seen as being “hermetically sealed off from the tumultuous and revolutionary period in which she lived and wrote” (Coleman 246), and “was generally read in a different context from her poetic contemporaries” (Roberts 224). As the boundaries of Romanticism became less rigid, however, Austen criticism began to take more consideration of her “Romantic moment of production” (Tuite 2). This re-contextualization, however, was not met without objection. One need only look to McGann to see the tension between the idea of an un-Romantic Austen and that of an increasingly Romantic one. In *The Romantic Ideology*, during a discussion of what McGann saw to be the problems of Romantic criticism in 1983, he cites a recent series of essays put together by Gene Ruoff. These essays, according to McGann, had as their subject “the relation of Austen to her period” (18) – a neglected and important one, he allows. Nevertheless, McGann disapproved of this collection, writing that “the general approach fills one with dismay. For even as these writers correctly protest against ‘omitting Jane Austen from our general discussions of English Romanticism,’ almost all work on the assumption that the omission will be rectified if one can see and isolate the Romantic elements in Austen’s work” (18). This, according to McGann, simply will not do:

the assumption made by so many of the critics who took up the subject of Jane

Austen and Romanticism: that if Austen is not to be seen “either as a figure outside the bounds of literary history or as a throwback to an earlier time,” then she must be seen as a Romantic . . . is thoroughly misguided, and when critics work from it they have not only obscured the special historical significance of Austen’s work, they confuse the entire subject of Romanticism both in its structural and its historical formations. (19)

He ends with the reminder that “not every artistic production in the Romantic period is a Romantic one . . . indeed, the greatest artists in any period often depart dramatically from their age’s dominant ideological commitments, as the example of Austen so dramatically illustrates” (19).

Despite McGann’s objections, however, subsequent Austen criticism, such as Clara Tuite’s 2002 study *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon*, has increasingly sought to “contextualize Austen in light of [the] reconfigurations of Romanticism by engaging the Austen novel as a specifically Romantic form of cultural production” (Tuite 1). Indeed, it could be argued that Austen cannot be fully understood outside of a Romantic context. Furthermore, a close and conscientious study of Austen’s Romanticism involves more than the simple isolation of the Romantic elements in her work, the impulse that so disturbed McGann. Instead, one could argue that Austen’s work is Romantic in a much more fundamental and implicit way. This is especially true of Austen’s final novel, *Persuasion*, described by Nagle as a novel “which most often represents to critics a stylistic and thematic departure [for Austen], and one commonly characterized as Romantic and significantly removed from the concerns of her first published work” (99). As one way to approach *Persuasion*’s, and thus Austen’s, Romanticism, I wish to turn first to another, later British novelist: Charlotte Brontë.

Born in 1816, one year before Austen's death, Brontë wrote from the late 1830s through the early 1850s during the beginning of a broad span of years that would come to be known as the Victorian Era. However, unlike Austen, who was seen for a long time as having written in isolation from her Romantic contemporaries, Brontë's connection with Romanticism has been widely acknowledged. In an article entitled "Charlotte Brontë, Jane Austen, and the Meaning of Love," Susan Ostrov Weisser observes that "Charlotte Brontë was an avid reader of the Romantic poets" (95), and that "it is generally agreed that the Brontë sisters were not only interested in and influenced by the Romantic movement, but represent a continuation of it in some form" (95). In his discussion of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century novel, Michael Herbert describes Brontë and her sisters as "archetypal children of the Romantic movement" (621).

Given that the critical receptions of these authors are substantially at odds, it might at first appear as if discussions of the two could only highlight the disparities between them. Indeed, Brontë herself saw their differences to be great. Her first encounter with Austen's work came as a result of her correspondence with critic George Henry Lewes. Surprised by the intensity of his admiration of Austen, she acquired Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. In a letter to Lewes in 1848 she wrote:

I got the book and studied it. And what did I find? An accurate daguerrotyped portrait of a common-place face; a carefully-fenced, highly cultivated garden with neat borders and delicate flowers – but no glance of a bright vivid physiognomy – no open country – no fresh air – no blue hill – no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen in their elegant but confined houses.

(Barker 180)

Brontë was puzzled by Lewes's high regard for Austen, finding nothing in the novel herself that was moving or inspiring. For Brontë, *Pride and Prejudice* was little more than a subdued representation of polite social life. In another letter to Lewes only days later, Brontë wrote guardedly that she *could* "sympathize with Miss Austen's clear common sense and subtle shrewdness. If you find no inspiration in Miss Austen's page, neither do you find there windy wordiness" (181). In Brontë's eyes, then, Austen was unremarkable at best.

Two years later, however, when Brontë reacted to Austen's *Emma*, her tone became one of thinly veiled contempt. In a letter to her publisher, William Smith Williams, she wrote that she read the novel "with interest and with just the degree of admiration which Miss Austen herself would have thought suitable – anything like warmth or enthusiasm; anything energetic, poignant, heartfelt, is utterly out of place in commending these works: all such demonstrations the authoress would have calmly scorned as outré and extravagant" (277). Brontë continued, remarking that

[s]he does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well. . . . She ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound: the Passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy Sisterhood; even to the Feelings she vouchsafes no more than an occasional graceful but distant recognition; too frequent converse with them would ruffle the smooth eloquence of her progress. Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands, and feet; what sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study, but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen Seat of Life and the sentient target of Death – this

Miss Austen ignores; she no more, with her mind's eye, beholds the heart of her race than each man, with bodily vision sees the heart in his heaving breast. (277-78)

She closes with the remark that “Jane Austen was a complete and most sensible lady, but a very incomplete, and rather insensible . . . woman” (278). This is a scathing representation of Austen, and one that portrays her as a creature barely human, an incomplete and insensible woman, interested only in the surface of human experience, and one indeed who was capable of nothing else, for her knowledge and understanding went no further.

In her characterization of Austen, Brontë has implicitly distanced herself from her, both in terms of style and values. More importantly, however, she has, in effect, established herself as a Romantic. To the degree that Romanticism may be characterized by, among other things, an “intensity of emotion, intensely conveyed” (Herbert 621) and by an “overwhelming forcefulness of feeling” (621), then Brontë clearly identifies and aligns herself with Romanticism. Austen, on the other hand, in what Brontë perceives as her inability to approach even an *acquaintance* with feeling and emotion, or to do more than merely acknowledge their existence, is established as one who is decidedly un- (or rather non-) Romantic.

Today, of course, questions of Austen's Romanticism are not as decided as Brontë would have had them to be. Nevertheless, remnants of Brontë's characterizations of both herself and Austen persist. In fact, in 2005, Herbert, though generally seeming to hold a complex and varied sense of the characteristics of Romanticism, held them to be self-evident. He asserts that Brontë's writings are “much closer in style and subject to the poetry of Byron than the prose of Austen. It could not be otherwise, given the nature of its author” (623). Herbert's assertion has a number of implications. He sees Brontë's prose as poetic and her themes as akin to those of

poetry, long the privileged form in studies of Romanticism. At the same time, he creates a clear distinction between the style and values of Brontë and those of Austen. Brontë is linked not only with poetry in general, but more specifically to a member of “the Big Six”: Byron. Austen is denied this link. Instead, it is implied that her prose, in its distance from Byron’s poetry, and thus from Brontë, is not Romantic. Finally, Herbert closes with the thought that the situation could not be otherwise given Brontë’s nature. He thus suggests that Brontë has a kind of essence (here identified as Romantic) that Austen does not (and cannot) share. The distinction between Austen and Brontë is also quite explicit in what Nagle describes as the “common sense of Austen” (100), describing how “the tendency in most Austen criticism . . . is still to place her within the parameters of propriety . . . whether she is seen as a Romantic writer or not” (100), a tendency that is quite apparent in Brontë’s perception of Austen, with her dismissal of Austen’s “business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people.” Nagle proceeds to point to the remarks of James Thompson, who writes that Austen “never lingers over emotion,” her expression of which is much more restrained than that which is found in a novel like *Jane Eyre* (100). And curiously, as Nagle points out, “Thompson sees this restraint as especially characteristic of *Persuasion*” (100), the most recognizably Romantic of Austen’s novels.

The belief in such fundamental differences between Brontë and Austen and their work can also be found outside the realm of criticism, in the popular imagination. In writing about the 2005 film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* starring Keira Knightley, Weisser observes that “the original love story of Augustan balance and harmony” was revised and sold “as a romanticized version of the original” (94), and, as one reviewer wrote in *The New Yorker*, “What has happened is perfectly clear: Jane Austen has been Brontëfied!” (qtd. in Weisser 94). However, despite these representations of the “self-evidently” oppositional nature of the relationship

between Brontë and Austen, their relationship is, in fact, not self-evident, and not entirely oppositional, at all. Ironically, it is through Brontë's own novel, *Jane Eyre*, that assertions of Brontë and Austen's estrangement may be challenged.

IV. *Persuasion*

Proposing some degree of intertextual harmony between *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre* might appear to be at worst, absurd, and at best, futile. *Jane Eyre* is the first-person account of the passionate and youthful eponymous heroine. It is filled with unconventional and unique characters, characters who openly acknowledge and embrace their emotions. It delights in the natural world. It is deeply infused with the religious and the supernatural. *Persuasion*, a novel in the third person, is the account of the "quiet" and "self-effacing" (Nagle 104) Anne Elliot. It takes place in the drawing-rooms and among the concerns of polite society. Attention is paid not to "the most obvious public displays of feeling" (101), but rather to "its rich activity in private spaces, such as Anne's consciousness" (101). Nature is barely a presence, religion gets merely a passing glance, and the supernatural is nonexistent. But these disparities are, in some sense, only skin deep, and what lies beneath is a complex, and at times remarkable correspondence between the two works, especially concerning the ways in which they fit into a Romantic context.

In commenting on Brontë's Romanticism, Herbert notes that she, like many other Romantic writers, was drawn to individuals who were "ignored or slighted or otherwise marginalized or even outcast" (622). This is an excellent characterization of her protagonist, Jane, who, for nearly the entire novel, finds herself on the outside looking in. As a child at Gateshead, unwanted and reviled by Mrs. Reed, separated from her cousins, and disregarded

even by the servants, she wonders pleadingly, “[w]hy was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, for ever condemned? Why could I never please? Why was it useless to try to win any one’s favor?” (11-12). She has a home neither with the Reeds, nor at Lowood school, to which her aunt eventually sends her, for, looking back on her childhood, she sadly reflects, “[h]ow people feel when they are returning home from an absence long or short, I did not know: I had never experienced the sensation” (206). When returning either to Gateshead or Lowood, “no magnet drew me to a given point, increasing in its strength of attraction the nearer I came” (206). Jane eventually discovers, to her infinite joy, relations by whom she is accepted and valued, and though she ultimately finds a home, both physically and emotionally, in her relationship with Mr. Rochester, her sense of self remains almost constantly that of an outsider. Yet even at her most alienated, she never feels worthless, for as she asserts in an outburst to Rochester, “[d]o you think because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have full as much soul as you, – and full as much heart!” (216).

Just as Jane is early established as a marginalized figure, so too in Austen’s novel, “Anne’s social isolation quickly emerges as her defining characteristic” (Nagle 104). Her mother, the reader learns, died when she was but fourteen, and she is left with a father, Sir Walter, and two sisters, Elizabeth and Mary. To Sir Walter and Elizabeth, she is “nobody . . . her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way; – she was only Anne” (5), and to Mary, she is valued only in her capacity to be of use. Given “the partialities and injustices of her father’s house” (20), “home” for Anne is nearly as unpleasant as it is for Jane. Returning after an absence, she feels her “progress through the streets to be, however disagreeable, yet too rapid; for who would be glad to see her when she arrived?” (89). And yet, like Jane’s, Anne’s

isolation does not preclude her worth, for she has “an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding” (5). Anne’s worth is recognized and valued by many in the novel, and she is not as consistently marginalized as is Jane, but she, too, is often on the outside looking in. She is only truly appreciated and valued by Lady Russell, a family friend, and Captain Wentworth, with whom she falls “rapidly and deeply in love” (18), for she “had hardly any body to love” (18). A simple coincidence of subject, however, does not make a compelling argument either for a meaningful relationship between the novels or for their shared Romanticism. For this, one must look more deeply into the fabric of the works.

According to Richardson, Austen’s novel is Romantic in a number of striking ways, not the least of which is the manner in which it “takes up and extends . . . the embodied approach to human subjectivity being worked out concurrently by Romantic poets like Coleridge and Keats and Romantic brain scientists like Gall and Bell” (107). This “embodied notion of mind” (101-02) is a concept in which the mind “has no location or meaning apart from the body” (112), where the “mind cannot be disentangled from the central nervous system that enacts it” (105). Thoughts, feelings, and emotions, then, in both Romantic literature and Romantic brain science, have a real and intense effect on the body. It is through this embodied notion of the mind that *Persuasion*, especially as it relates to *Jane Eyre*, emerges as a deeply Romantic text in many ways.

Human thoughts, feelings, and emotions are a fundamental concern throughout *Jane Eyre*. These aspects of the human mind often have an intense physical presence, or rather, they are conceived and described in such a way that they have severe, if not actual, implications for the body. Rochester, for example, describes his love for Jane in ways that are quite substantial:

it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame. And if that boisterous channel, and two hundred miles or so of land come broad between us, I am afraid that chord of communication will be snapt; and then I've a nervous notion I should take to bleeding inwardly. (215)

When Jane returns after a year of absence, and, blind and crippled, Rochester hears her voice, he cries, “[a]nd where is the speaker? Is it only a voice? Oh! I *cannot* see, but I must feel, or my heart will stop and my brain burst. Whatever – whoever you are – be perceptible to the touch or I cannot live!” (369). And later, clutching her to him, he declares, “[m]y very soul demands you: it will be satisfied: or it will take deadly vengeance on its frame” (371).

Jane, too, frequently characterizes her love in physical terms. Fearing that Rochester will grow desperate when he finds that he has lost her, she thinks, “[o]h, that fear of his self-abandonment – far worse than my abandonment – how it goaded me! It was a barbed arrow-head in my breast; it tore me when I tried to extract it; it sickened me when remembrance thrust it further in” (274). And, when forced to leave Rochester, Jane dreads the effort of “cracking my heart-strings in rending them from among [his]” (255). This very corporeal representation of emotion remains consistent for both Jane and Rochester throughout the novel. At one moment, Jane fears her cousin John Reed so much that “every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near” (8). At another, Rochester suffers the “gnawing fang of melancholy” (376). Marrow is frozen by fear (126), words penetrate the breast painfully (240) and make the blood feel their subtle violence (247), brains are on fire with impatience (245), hearts weep blood (254), are lacerated (375) and “torn out and devoured” by jealousy and despair (159), blood curdles (264), hands of iron grasp the vitals (269), and the pulse bounds and veins thrill (328).

Had Jane and Rochester actually endured these tortures, their bodies would be mangled beyond recognition. But however hyperbolic these descriptions at times may be, they consistently give the emotions a very real physical presence and quite palpable effects. Furthermore, their substantiality suggests the power of emotion to inflict deadly harm to the body, reflecting a clear connection between mind and body.

Thoughts and emotions are represented far less violently in *Persuasion*, but they are similarly imagined as having very physical effects. When Anne, persuaded that Captain Wentworth's sister, Mrs. Croft, knows nothing of their previous engagement, hears her mention their acquaintance, she is "electrified" (33). Awaiting the doctor's prognosis of Louisa Musgrove's condition when all believe her to be lost, everyone is "sick with horror" (75), and after Captain Benwick's fiancée dies, Captain Wentworth describes him as a man "with a heart pierced, wounded, almost broken!" (121). Anne represents women as living at home, "quite confined" with feelings that "prey on us" (155). She endures a "gnawing solicitude" (151). She pierces Captain Wentworth's soul (158). And hearts once again bleed (140).

Despite all of the metaphorical hyperbole in each novel, however, the physical effects of thoughts and emotions move beyond mere implication and suggestion and become quite real. One first observes this in the general sense throughout both novels of the actual connection between the mind and the body. Physical appearance, health, and well-being are closely tied, for instance, to the state of the mind. In *Jane Eyre*, this is most notable in descriptions of Jane, who, before she finds a home and happiness at Thornfield Hall with Rochester, is characterized as thin and pale (101). However, as she begins to experience love and happiness, her looks begin to improve. As Rochester's attentions to her increase, she notes that "[s]o happy, so gratified did I become with this new interest added to life . . . my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and

strength” (125). She acquires “more colour and more flesh; because I had brighter hopes and keener enjoyments” (133). On the morning after Rochester asks her to marry him, she relates how, “[w]hile arranging my hair, I looked at my face in the glass, and felt it was no longer plain: there was hope in its aspect, and life in its colour” (219). And when Rochester sees her shortly thereafter, he remarks, “Jane, you look blooming, and smiling, and pretty . . . truly pretty this morning” (220).

Descriptions of Anne consistently assert a connection between her appearance and happiness similar to that found in descriptions of Jane. As the novel opens it is noted that “[a] few years before, Anne Elliot had been a very pretty girl, but her bloom had vanished early” (5), and she was now “haggard and thin” (5). The cause is, of course, her broken engagement with Captain Wentworth, for, while “[a] few months had seen the beginning and end of their acquaintance . . . not with a few months ended Anne’s share of suffering from it. Her attachment and regrets had, for a long time, clouded every enjoyment of youth; and an early loss of bloom and spirits had been their lasting effect” (19-20). They have such an effect, in fact, that when Captain Wentworth sees her again, eight years after their engagement was broken off, he thinks her “wretchedly altered” (41). When Captain Wentworth is restored to her, however, she is “[g]lowing and lovely in sensibility and happiness” (163). Anne also makes this connection between mind and body in observations of Captain Wentworth, for she remarks, at one point, that “[h]e looked very well, not as if he had been suffering in health or spirits” (116).

In *Persuasion*, this sense of the connection between mind and body is also more generally acknowledged. When Sir Walter remarks on the general deterioration of the looks of sailors, Mrs. Clay, Elizabeth’s particular friend, remarks,

is it not the same with many other professions, perhaps most other? . . . even in

the quieter professions, there is a toil and a labour of the mind, if not of the body, which seldom leaves a man's looks to the natural effect of time . . . it is only the lot of those who are not obliged to follow any [profession], who can live in a regular way, in the country, choosing their own hours, following their own pursuits, and living on their own property, without the torment of trying for more; it is only *their* lot, I say, to hold the blessings of health and good appearance to the utmost. (15)

And Mrs. Croft, arguing that there are no real hardships in being a sailor's wife, or in traveling with one's husband, notes that

[t]he only time that I ever really suffered in body or mind, the only time that I ever fancied myself unwell, or had any ideas of danger, was the winter that I passed at Deal, when the Admiral . . . was in the North Seas. I lived in perpetual fright at the time, and had all manner of imaginary complaints from not knowing what to do with myself, or when I should hear from him next; but as long as we could be together, nothing ever ailed me, and I never met with the smallest inconvenience. (48)

Mrs. Croft's sentiments begin to suggest that the effect that the mind has on the body goes far beyond mere general appearance.

In Jane's very physical reactions to her emotions, for example, her pulse throbs (31). Her fingers quiver in anger (45). Her hands tremble like a leaf (137), and she is "shaken from head to foot with acute distress" (215). She finds herself "exhausted by emotion" (60), enfeebled by fear (242), and "worn out" with the torture of certain thoughts (276). She shudders involuntarily at the thought of leaving Rochester for another (378). When Rochester takes her in his arms,

before she believes him in earnest in his wish to marry her, she attempts, in her distress, to free herself so violently that Rochester pleads, “Jane, be still; don’t struggle so, like a wild frantic bird that is rending its own plumage in its desperation” (216). And when she eventually leaves Rochester, forever longing to return, she recalls the nightly dreams, in which

I still again and again met Mr. Rochester, always at some exciting crisis; and then the sense of being in his arms, hearing his voice, meeting his eye, touching his hand and cheek, loving him, being loved by him – the hope of passing a lifetime at his side, would be renewed, with all its first force and fire. Then I awoke.

Then I recalled where I was, and how situated. Then I rose up on my curtain-less bed, trembling and quivering; and then the still, dark night witnessed the convulsion of despair and heard the burst of passion. (312)

A body that trembles and quivers and convulses with despair, despair precipitated by a dream, no less, speaks powerfully to the deep and very real connection between the mind and the body, a connection that is similarly registered in Anne. She begins to “breathe very quick” (121) when she believes Captain Wentworth is beginning to love her again, and, like Jane, she shudders (140) at the thought of giving him up for another, trembles (150), and becomes exhausted by emotion, finding that “her spirits had been so long exerted, that at present she felt unequal to more, and fit only for home, where she might be sure of being as silent as she chose” (151).

The discussion, thus far, has been operating under the assumption that, as Richardson notes, “the relation of mind to body” is a concern “typically associated with Romanticism” (2). One should not forget, however, that conceptions of Romanticism are complexly entangled within the debate surrounding it, and that any discussion based on these assumptions is subject to

scrutiny. It is important, then, to return for a moment to Nagle, who while he never mentions Richardson's embodied notion of the mind specifically, does define Sensibility as a movement that, "at its most basic, 'understands emotion as social energy that moves through persons . . .'" (5). Emotions as Anne and Jane experience them could certainly be regarded as a kind of energy that moves through them. However, Nagle's definition of Sensibility highlights an important distinction between his argument regarding Austen's Sensibility, and Richardson's asserting her Romanticism. Nagle defines the emotional energy that moves through a person as social, and, indeed, his central argument about *Persuasion* is that it represents "the Romantic incorporation of Sensibility, illustrating [Austen's] debt to the earlier tradition for her own, quieter vision of social sympathy and feeling community" (14). According to Nagle, Anne's emotions carry her "into the lives and paths of others" (116), and it is through the lens of Anne's connection with others, especially her connection with Captain Wentworth, that Nagle views Austen's treatment of feeling and the body, and thus her Sensibility. Richardson, on the other hand, is interested in Anne's conscious and unconscious mental existence, how *her* body interacts with *her* mind, not in how her body interacts with Captain Wentworth's actual physical touch or proximity. It would seem, then, that the categories of the social and the individual suggest an important distinction between Sensibility and Romanticism, and indeed, whereas Sensibility is often directed outward, in its emphasis on sympathy and the social, to the community, Romanticism is often directed inward, devoted to "a quest for knowledge of the self" (Roberts 221) and concerned with the interiority (227) of the individual. This is a distinction Nagle does not explore, and one that speaks to the continued usefulness of Romanticism as a term, and to the distinctiveness and legitimacy of Richardson's argument.

To return, then, to Richardson's conception of the Romantic connection between mind

and body, perhaps the most remarkable instances of this connection in both novels occur when emotion seems to take complete control of the subject's entire physical being, both her senses and her form, and to leave her with little control of herself. When Jane comes unexpectedly upon Rochester after an absence during which she has tried to teach herself not to love him, she is thus overpowered:

[w]ell, he is not a ghost; yet every nerve I have is unstrung: for a moment I am beyond my own mastery. What does it mean? I did not think I would tremble in this way when I saw him – or lose my voice or the power of motion in his presence. I will go back as soon as I can stir: I need not make an absolute fool of myself. I know another way to the house. It does not signify if I knew twenty ways; for he has seen me.

‘Hillo!’ he cries; and he puts up his book and his pencil. ‘There you are! Come on, if you please.’

I suppose I do come on; though in what fashion I know not: being scarcely cognizant of my movements, and solicitous only to appear calm; and, above all, to control the working muscles of my face – which I feel rebel insolently against my will, and struggle to repress what I had resolved to conceal. But I have a veil – it is down: I may make shift yet to behave with decent composure. (208)

Jane's emotions once again make themselves felt in her body, but at this moment, they completely dominate her body, leaving her unable to do with it what she wills.

Austen's Anne also experiences similar moments when she is overpowered by her emotions, losing the ability to hear, to speak, and to comprehend, and left, for a brief time at least, entirely at their mercy. In fact, she seems completely overwhelmed far more often than

does Jane. When Captain Wentworth removes her troublesome nephew from her back, to which he tenaciously clings, “[h]er sensations on the discovery made her perfectly speechless. She could not even thank him. She could only hand over little Charles, with most disordered feelings” (54). Later, Anne’s emotions leave her “fixed” (59) and unable to move when she hears Captain Wentworth talking about her with “just that degree of feeling and curiosity about her in his manner, which must give her extreme agitation” (59-60). Listening to Mrs. Musgrove and Mrs. Croft, speak of the evils of a long engagement, and receiving one “quick, conscious” look from Captain Wentworth (154), she “felt its application to herself in a nervous thrill all over her,” and though “the two ladies continued to talk . . . Anne heard nothing distinctly; it was only a buzz of words in her ear, her mind was in confusion” (154). When asserting that women love longer than men “when existence or when hope is gone” (157), and feeling its echo in her own emotions for Captain Wentworth, she finds that “she could not immediately have uttered another sentence; her heart was too full, her breath too much oppressed” (157). Her emotions on an unexpected meeting with Captain Wentworth are described as “overpowering, blinding, bewildering” (116). And when she reads Captain Wentworth’s renewed declaration of love, she feels “an overpowering happiness” (158), and, being at that moment in company, “the absolute necessity of seeming like herself produced then an immediate struggle; but after a while she could do no more. She began not to understand a word they said” (158).

This climactic moment is one in which Richardson sees a “collision of conscious awareness with unconscious thoughts and feelings and the intense physiological sensations that accompany them” (102). He goes on to argue that Anne “proves highly susceptible to influxes of feeling from sources not always consciously present to Anne herself, registered instead in the body, in ways that at times become so pressing as to overwhelm the conscious subject” (102).

There is no doubt that Anne's emotions are at times quite overwhelming, leaving her beyond her own mastery. But the conclusion that Anne's emotions are often not consciously present to her would seem a bit overstated, and risks reinforcing the questionable notion that feeling, as Austen expresses it, is far more restrained or suppressed than it is when Brontë expresses it. Jane, for instance, though she loses the ability to assert control over her own body, is left in no doubt as to the cause. When her body "rebel[s] insolently against [her] will," she describes her "struggle to repress what I had resolved to conceal," suggesting, of course, that she knows exactly what she desires to conceal: her love for Rochester. But Anne, too, consistently registers quite consciously the cause of her loss of control. The inability to hear anything else distinctly after listening to Mrs. Musgrove and Mrs. Croft speaking of the evils of a long engagement occurs because she "felt its application to herself." The struggle to seem like herself after reading Wentworth's letter and her resulting physical discomfort are quite consciously the result of her feeling "an overpowering happiness." When Anne experiences a full heart and when her breath is oppressed, it follows her declaration that women love longer than men when existence or hope is gone. It would be giving Anne far too little credit to argue that she did not know that she was affected by her feelings for Captain Wentworth. Time after time, Anne is well aware of the reasons her body behaves the way it does, supporting Nagle's argument that, rather than being an example of a heroine who does not know quite how or how much she feels, she "never really seems unaware of her feelings – even when she is fighting them" (202-203 n.47), and challenging the perceived opposition between Austen and Brontë that Richardson's reading would serve to perpetuate.

Thus far, it has been primarily Jane and Anne whose bodies have been so consistently connected to their minds in such a palpable way, and, as Richardson notes, during the Romantic

era, “women were still seen as more emotional and ‘softer’ than men” (110). Nevertheless, “men were . . . implicated within a changing vision of the human, one that displaced the rational, disembodied, male-coded ideal subject with an embodied model of human subjectivity” (110), and ample evidence lies in the figures of both Rochester and Captain Wentworth.

It has already been noted that Rochester intellectually makes the connection between mind and body, but it is also quite clear that, like Jane, he experiences this connection in a very real way. When Jane tells Rochester that Mr. Mason, his (unknown to her) brother-in-law, whose presence he dreads for various reasons (not the least of which is that he could expose that he is secretly married to a lunatic), has arrived unexpectedly, she recounts how “Mr. Rochester was standing near me; he had taken my hand, as if to lead me to a chair. As I spoke, he gave my wrist a convulsive grip; the smile on his lips froze: apparently a spasm caught his breath” (174). She notes that “he hardly seemed to know what he was doing,” (174), and whispering, “Jane, I’ve got a blow; I’ve got a blow, Jane!” (174), he staggers. At other moments, he trembles (180). He starts and shudders, and draws his breath short (243). Anger makes his pulse throb (259), clenches his hand, and contorts his fingers (258). The name “Mr. Mason” once again affects him powerfully when, on the day he is to wed Jane, Mason comes to expose his previously existing marriage. Jane, standing beside him, observes that “Mr. Rochester, on hearing the name, set his teeth; he experienced, too, a sort of strong convulsive quiver; near to him as I was, I felt the spasmodic movement of fury or despair run through his frame” (248). And, just as Jane once struggled like a “wild frantic bird,” so when she tells Rochester, while combing his hair, that during their separation she has been with far better people than him, she must caution him, “[i]f you twist in that way you will make me pull the hair out of your head; and then I think you will cease to entertain doubts of my substantiality” (373).

Captain Wentworth, too, often experiences his emotions through his body. When he comes unexpectedly upon Anne one day, “[t]he surprise of finding himself almost alone with Anne Elliot, deprived his manners of their usual composure: he started, and could only say, ‘I thought the Miss Musgroves had been here – Mrs. Musgrove told me I should find them here,’ before he walked to the window to recollect himself, and feel how he ought to behave” (53). Captain Wentworth is in need, just as Anne often is, of some time to compose himself and recover from his emotions. He is particularly emotional when Louisa Musgrove, after hitting her head, becomes senseless: “‘Is there no one to help me?’ were the first words which burst from Captain Wentworth, in a tone of despair, and as if all his own strength were gone” (74). When he is relieved of the burden of supporting her, he is observed “staggering against the wall for his support” (74), and learning that Louisa is likely to recover, “[t]he tone, the look with which ‘Thank God’ was uttered by Captain Wentworth, Anne was sure could never be forgotten by her; nor the sight of him afterwards, as he sat near a table, leaning over it with folded arms, and face concealed, as if overpowered by the various feelings of his soul” (76). Finally, in the letter to Anne in which he declares that his heart is still her own, he writes, “I can hardly write. I am every instant hearing something which overpowers me” (158).

Not only do thoughts and emotions affect the body in these novels, but the body can also be a powerful communicator of emotion, or of the thoughts and struggles passing within the mind. When Jane is walking in the grounds of Thornfield with Rochester, she observes that,

[l]ifting his eye to its battlements, he cast over them a glare such as I never saw before or since. Pain, shame, ire – impatience, disgust, detestation – seemed momentarily to hold a quivering conflict in the large pupil dilating under his ebon eyebrow. Wild was the wrestle which should be paramount; but another feeling

rose and triumphed: something hard and cynical; self-willed and resolute: it settled his passion and petrified his countenance . . . (121-122)

At another moment she sees that “a singularly marked expression of disgust, horror, hatred, warped his countenance almost to distortion” (181). He approaches her at one moment with “tenderness and passion in every linament” (233), and she forgives him for deceiving her when she sees that “[t]here was such deep remorse in his eye, such manly energy in his manner; and, besides, there was such unchanged love in his whole look and mien” (255). When Jane returns to Rochester after their year of separation, it pains her to see “the lines of now habitual sadness marking his strong features” (374); and she notes that, at times, “painful thoughts darkened his aspect” (378). The body’s ability to convey emotion is something that, also, can be quite involuntary, for when Jane comes upon Mrs. Fairfax after she has been informed by Rochester that he and Jane are to be married, Jane recounts that, “[s]eeing me, she roused herself: she made a sort of effort to smile, and framed a few words of congratulation; but the smile expired, and the sentence was abandoned unfinished” (225).

That the body, in its connection with the mind, can convey the inner experiences of the individual is made quite explicit in the novel. When Jane decides to leave Rochester, standing by her previously held values, she thinks to herself, “there I plant my foot,” and says, “I did. Mr. Rochester, reading my countenance, saw that I had done so” (271). Jane calls her tears “the impotent evidence of my anguish” (28). Of Rochester, she says that, “I understand the language of his countenance and movements” (149). Looking at Mrs. Reed’s corpse, she observes that “her brow and strong traits wore yet the impress of her inexorable soul” (205). Jane can “read the signs of bliss” in Rochester’s face (238). And when wondering what St. John thinks of Rosamond Oliver, a woman “with a face of perfect beauty” (309), she says that, “naturally, I

sought the answer to the enquiry in his countenance” (309). At times, it is even as if the body could speak, as when Rochester tells Jane,

“. . . you may have intolerable defects to counterbalance your few good points.”

“And so may you,” I thought. My eye met his as the idea crossed my mind: he seemed to read the glance, answering as if its import had been spoken as well as imagined: –

“Yes, yes, you are right,” said he, “I have plenty of faults of my own: I know it, and I don’t wish to palliate them, I assure you.” (115)

The reading of a countenance, its language, and the ability of a glance to approach the power of speech, all indicate the expression of emotion through the body.

Richardson is also interested in this connection between the internal and the external, observing that “*Persuasion* also bears comparison to Romantic brain science in its emphasis on extrasemantic, bodily communication” (107). He points in particular to a moment when Mrs. Musgrove expresses the wish that her son, a rather worthless young man, had stayed longer under Captain Wentworth’s command, thankful for the positive influence he had on her “poor dear fellow” (45). Anne observes that “[t]here was a momentary expression in Captain Wentworth’s face at this speech, a certain glance of his bright eye, and curl of his handsome mouth, which convinced Anne, that instead of sharing in Mrs. Musgrove’s kind wishes, as to her son, he had probably been at some pains to get rid of him” (45). Richardson cites this as a moment in which a character reveals “by expression what [his] words are intended to conceal” (107), reminding one of Mrs. Fairfax’s inability to conceal her discomfort, despite the words of congratulation she offers. It is also a moment, of course, that demonstrates Anne’s understanding of the language of Captain Wentworth’s countenance, just as Jane understands

that of Rochester's. This is also evident when Mary makes a distasteful comment to Captain Wentworth and Anne observes that "[s]he received no other answer than an artificial, assenting smile, followed by a contemptuous glance, as he turned away, which Anne perfectly knew the meaning of" (58).

Anne herself is quite aware that her countenance betrays her emotions. She expresses a wish that Lady Russell and Captain Wentworth never meet, for "[t]hey did not like each other . . . and were Lady Russell to see them together, she might think that he had too much self-possession, and she too little" (62-63), and at another moment is conscious that "her own countenance . . . was unfit to be seen" (118-119).

In his discussion of the communicative powers of the body in *Persuasion*, Richardson observes that "[s]ome of the novel's most impassioned moments are wordless" (107), and it is perhaps this wordlessness which might account, in part at least, for the perceived disparity between Brontë and Austen, for the most impassioned moments in *Jane Eyre* are often so because of the words Jane and Rochester use in describing and participating in them. Take, for instance, the moment when Rochester pleads with Jane to forgive him after it is revealed that he is already married:

Jane, I never meant to wound you thus. If the man who had but one little ewe lamb that was dear to him as a daughter, that ate of his bread and drank of his cup, and lay in his bosom, had by some mistake slaughtered it at the shambles, he would not have rued his bloody blunder more than I now rue mine. Will you ever forgive me? (254)

Or the moment when Jane tells Rochester, "[a]ll my heart is yours, sir; it belongs to you; and with you it would remain were fate to exile the rest of me from your presence for ever" (378). It

is quite another matter in *Persuasion*. It is only through Captain Wentworth's body language, for example, that Anne starts to be aware of his beginning to love her again: "his manner and look, had been such as she could see in only one light. . . . his half-averted eyes, and more than half-expressive glance, – all, all declared that he had a heart returning to her at least. . . . She could not contemplate the change as implying less. – He must love her" (123). And while it is in a passionate letter that Captain Wentworth declares his love to Anne, the letter itself acknowledges that, up until this point, his expressions of love have been entirely through his body:

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. You alone have brought me to Bath. For you alone I think and plan. – Have you not seen this? Can you fail to have understood my wishes? (158)

Captain Wentworth thus expects that Anne has been able to see quite a remarkable amount of what he has been feeling, writing that "I had not waited even these ten days, could I have read your feelings, as I think you must have penetrated mine" (158). He ends with the assertion that "[a] word, a look will be enough to decide whether I enter your father's house this evening, or never" (158), and it is indeed a look which conveys Anne's acceptance of the heart he offers (159).

It is also worth noting that *Persuasion*'s explicitness about reading the language of the body speaks directly to one of Massey's misgivings about Richardson's "unswerving defense of Romanticism as a hypostatized entity." The most obvious example of reading the body in

Persuasion is found in the following exchange between Anne and her old school-fellow, Mrs. Smith:

“You need not tell me you had a pleasant evening. I see it in your eye. I perfectly see how the hours passed – that you had always something agreeable to listen to. In the intervals of the concert, it was conversation.”

Anne half smiled and said, “Do you see that in my eye?”

“Yes, I do. Your countenance perfectly informs me that you were in company last night with the person, whom you think the most agreeable in the world, the person who interests you at this present moment more than all the rest of the world put together.”

A blush overspread Anne’s cheeks. She could say nothing. (128)

Richardson, of course, would read this exchange as an example of Austen’s commitment to the “extrasemantic, bodily communication” characteristic of Romantic brain science. Nagle, however, would disagree, using precisely the same point to argue in favor of his analysis of *Persuasion* as a novel of Sensibility. He writes that “the richness of body language in the novel seems to carry much of the weight of the narrative’s emotional power” (102). While this analysis seems to correspond precisely with Richardson’s, Nagle attributes this effect not to the influence of Romanticism, but rather to “the source of the most systematic elaboration of the body’s language that Austen’s generation had been taught to read so clearly: the tradition of Sensibility” (102). One is reminded here how often the same evidence “supports” quite different arguments about the most general period concepts in literary history, and how discussions of the Romanticism of a work can, at times, become almost indistinguishable from arguments for its implication in Sensibility.

The reference here to Nagle's treatment of the eighteenth-century discourse on Sensibility might raise questions regarding where Reason fits into this picture. According to Richardson, "[i]n giving an expanded and often leading role to . . . 'inward' sensations, emotional reactions, and bodily sensations within mental life, Romantic brain science threw traditional valuations of reason over passion and mind over body into crisis" (110). However, this does not mean that the equation was now simply inverted, that the passions were now valued over reason, or that, as in the "sentimental" novel of the eighteenth-century, enhanced powers of feeling and empathy were aligned with the irrational (105). Nor is Nagle satisfied with a simple inversion of feeling over reason. He usefully complicates the issue, arguing that "Sensibility does not operate in the radical absence of reason nor to its exclusion, though it may work toward its demotion or even suspension; we might say that Sensibility imagines *feeling beyond the bounds of reason*; it does not insist on reason's negation" (99). Yet there is still a difference between this conception and Richardson's notion of a *continuity* of feeling and reason as imagined by Romanticism (104): "the 'struggle' between rational control and passionate feeling, conscious volition and the physiological rush of intense inner emotions, manifests not a split between mind and body, but the impossibility of ever teasing them apart" (102). And while Nagle cites "the complicated interconnection of reason and feeling" in *Persuasion* to support his argument, it becomes clear, as one investigates the relationship between reason and feeling in both *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre*, that Richardson's characterization explains more of the psychological dynamic represented in the narratives.

The 'struggle' that Richardson describes between "rational control and passionate feeling" has a powerful presence within Jane. When she finds herself falling in love with Mr. Rochester, feeling her love to be futile and unwanted, she is quite stern with herself:

[I] looked into my heart, examined its thoughts and feelings, and endeavored to bring back with a strict hand such as had been straying through imagination's boundless and trackless waste, into the safe fold of common sense. . . . Reason having come forward and told in her own quiet way, a plain, unvarnished tale, showing I had rejected the real, and rabidly devoured the ideal; – I pronounced judgment to this effect: – That a greater fool than Jane Eyre had never breathed the breath of life: that a more fantastic idiot had never surfeited itself on sweet lies . . . (136)

But for all her reasoning with herself, Jane's feelings cannot be subdued:

[Mr. Rochester's features] were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me, – that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his. I had not intended to love him: the reader knows I had wrought hard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there detected; and now, at the first renewed view of him, they spontaneously revived, green and strong! (149)

She goes on: "I know I must conceal my sentiments; I must smother hope; I must remember that he cannot care much for me. . . . I must then repeat continually that we are forever sundered; and yet while I breathe and think I must love him!" (149).

Jane's reason is almost continually at odds with her passions, and, if her passions do not always prevail (though they do more often than not), they at least make themselves known, and assert themselves with quite as much strength as reason. However, when necessary, reason can stifle or strangle the passions, the most heart-breaking instance of which occurs when Jane must tear herself from Rochester when the existence of his wife is revealed. The struggle at times approaches a brutal violence. When she awakens after learning of his wife on the day on which

she was supposed to be married, she asks of herself:

“What am I to do?”

But the answer my mind gave – “Leave Thornfield at once” – was so prompt, so dread, that I stopped my ears: I said, I could not bear such words now. . . . “I cannot do it.”

But then a voice within me averred that I could do it; and foretold that I should do it. I wrestled with my own resolution: I wanted to be weak that I might avoid the awful passage of further suffering I saw laid out for me; and conscience, turned tyrant, held passion by the throat, told her tauntingly she had yet but dipped her dainty foot in the slough, and swore that with that arm of iron he would thrust her down to unsounded depths of agony. (253-254)

When Rochester pleads with her to stay, Jane’s troubles increase:

“Is it better to drive a fellow-creature to despair than to transgress a mere human law – no man being injured by the breach? for you have neither relatives nor acquaintances whom you need fear to offend by living with me.”

This was true: and while he spoke my very conscience and reason turned traitors against me, and charged me with crime in resisting him. They spoke almost as loud as Feeling: and that clamoured wildly. (270)

The power of reason, though great at times, has an equal match in passion, and the two vie constantly for supremacy. And while the passions often assert themselves over reason, the relationship between the two seems much more indicative of a struggle, as Richardson imagines it, then as *“feeling beyond the bounds of reason”* as it is imagined by Nagle.

Like Jane’s, Anne’s reason can claim dominance over her passions, for, when first

engaged to Captain Wentworth, she is persuaded by Lady Russell “to believe the engagement a wrong thing – indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it” (19); believing that she is “consulting his good, even more than her own” (19) and having “the belief of being prudent, and self-denying principally for *his* advantage” (19), she ends the engagement. However, throughout the novel, when Anne, like Jane, struggles between reason and feeling, it is the latter that most often emerges as dominant, demonstrating, as Richardson concludes, that “[a]nother of the features supporting a Romantic reading of the novel . . . is its revaluation of rationality and emotion” (111). When Captain Wentworth leaves after Anne has seen him for the first time in eight years, she repeats to herself, “It is over! It is over! . . . The worst is over!” (40), as if to comfort herself and calm her agitation. At first, she cannot attend to anything Mary says:

Soon, however, she began to reason with herself, and try to be feeling less. Eight years, almost eight years had passed, since all had been given up. How absurd to be resuming the agitation which such an interval had banished into distance and indistinctness! What might not eight years do? . . .

Alas! with all her reasonings, she found, that to retentive feelings eight years may be little more than nothing.

Now, how were his sentiments to be read? Was this like wishing to avoid her? And the next moment she was hating herself for the folly which asked the question. (40-41)

When Captain Wentworth later comes upon her unexpectedly,

[h]er start was perceptible only to herself; but she instantly felt that she was the greatest simpleton in the world, the most unaccountable and absurd! For a few minutes she saw nothing before her. It was all confusion. She was lost; and when

she had scolded back her senses, she found the others still waiting for the carriage.
(116).

And fearing that Captain Wentworth's unfounded jealousy of her cousin, Mr. Elliot, will keep them apart, she falls into dialogue with herself, as Jane often does:

She tried to be calm, and leave things to take their course; and tried to dwell much on this argument of rational dependence – “Surely, if there be constant attachment on each side, our hearts must understand each other ere long. We are not boy and girl to be captiously irritable, misled by every moment's inadvertence, and wantonly playing with our own happiness.” And yet, a few minutes afterwards, she felt as if their being in company with each other, under their present circumstances, could only be exposing them to inadvertencies and misconstructions of the most mischievous kind. (147-148)

Richardson ties this struggle between reason and the emotions to the unconscious. He notes particularly that when Anne must scold back her senses, it is indicative of “[t]he intimation of a divided subject” that “builds to the acknowledgement of a fundamental split between a superintending conscious self and a potentially unruly, desiring other” (102). However, Anne's passions seem as much a part of her conscious self as her reason. There is no question that she is a divided subject, as Richardson indicates, but her division recalls that of Jane, who is intensely aware of the forces fighting within her. Once again, Austen's treatment of the issue appears more closely linked with Brontë's than Richardson's argument would seem to allow.

Continuing to support the link between Austen and Brontë, in each novel, characters who are too rational, too in control of their emotions, are not approved by either heroine. This is the most pronounced in *Jane Eyre* in the figure of Jane's cousin, St. John Rivers. Unlike those

whose bodies convey and conduct their emotions, St. John is nearly impenetrable. Jane remarks that his eyes, “though clear enough in a literal sense, in a figurative one were difficult to fathom. He seemed to use them rather as instruments to search other people’s thoughts, than as agents to reveal his own” (295). She notes that “he could command his countenance thoroughly” (348), and that, at moments, “he controlled his passion perfectly” (348). This is not to say that St. John does not feel, but rather that he controls these feelings with an iron fist, and even seems to disdain them, both in himself and in others. A man with a strong religious calling, St. John admits to Jane that there was a time when “I thought I had made a mistake in entering the ministry: its uniform duties wearied me to death. I burnt for the more active life in the world. . . . I considered: my life was so wretched, it must be changed, or I must die” (308). But then he receives the call to be a missionary, and all his difficulties melt away, with, as he puts it, only “an entanglement or two of the feelings to be broken through or cut asunder – a last conflict with human weakness, in which I know I shall overcome, because I have vowed that I *will* overcome” (308-09).

St. John is particularly affected by Rosamond Oliver, whom he loves “wildly” (318).

Jane observes them together, and,

[a]s [Rosamond] patted the dog’s head, bending with native grace before his young and austere master, I saw a glow rise to the master’s face. I saw his solemn eye melt with sudden fire, and flicker with resistless emotion. . . . His chest heaved once, as if his large heart, weary of despotic constriction, had expanded, despite the will, and made a vigorous bound for the attainment of liberty. But he curbed it, I think, as a resolute rider would curb a rearing steed. (310-311)

Jane feels that “[w]ith all his firmness and self control . . . he tasks himself too far: locks every

feeling and pang within – expresses, confesses, imparts nothing” (316). But St. John asserts that, while he loves Rosamond, “I experience at the same time a calm, unwarped consciousness that she would not make me a good wife; that she is not the partner suited to me. . . . Rosamond a sufferer, a labourer, a female apostle? Rosamond a missionary’s wife? No!” (318). He acknowledges that “Reason, and not Feeling, is my guide” (320): the visible effect Rosamond seems to have on him, he asserts, is no feeling of love, but scorn of his own weakness (319). Yet Jane notes that St. John is “wasting away” (319). His determined suppression of all feeling but that of religious fervor seems unnatural and inhuman, and his body cannot escape its effects.

Jane will not tolerate this extreme repression of emotion. When St. John asks her to be his wife, and to go with him as a missionary to India, he tells her that “God and nature intended you for a missionary’s wife . . . you are formed for labour, not for love” (343). He proclaims that “[y]ou shall be mine. I claim you – not for my pleasure, but for my sovereign’s service” (343) and that “it is not the insignificant private individual – the mere man, with the man’s selfish senses – I wish to mate: it is the missionary” (346). He scoffs at Jane’s objections that they are not in love as “all minor caprices – all trivial difficulties and delicacies of feeling – all scruple about the degree, kind, strength or tenderness of mere personal inclination” (347) that can be simply passed over. But Jane rejects this dismissal of feeling, telling him, “I scorn your idea of love. . . . I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer: yes, St. John, and I scorn you when you offer it” (348). Jane’s values (and those of the novel) are clear in her observation that “[f]eeling without judgment is a washy draught indeed; but judgment untempered by feeling is too bitter and husky a morsel for human deglutition” (202).

Anne’s feelings towards her cousin Mr. Elliot, and towards feeling in general, mirror those of Jane. Thinking over a possible alliance with Mr. Elliot, she reflects:

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. . . . She prized the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character beyond all others. . . . 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. (106-107)

For Austen as for Brontë, it is the unvarying presence of mind that spells trouble: reason that exists in the absence of feeling, or rather reason that asserts complete control over feeling, and that seeks to deny the body's complex relationship with the psyche. Though perhaps with different intensities, both Austen and Brontë give close attention to the struggle between reason and feeling, a struggle in which, it seems to me, Romanticism is centrally interested.

V. Conclusion

As Nagle has observed, “Austen has been at least partly silenced for almost two centuries” (118) in “a literary history that, despite its perpetual interest, has never known quite what to do with her” (118). For a time, at least, it knew what *not* to do with her: consider her within the discursive context of the Romantic period during which she wrote. However, “[r]ecent years have seen some loosening of the critical stranglehold [on Austen] enforced by the legacy of ‘the proper lady’” (99), and while, for the purposes of his argument, Nagle feels as if it has not been loosened enough, this loosening has nevertheless allowed the study of Austen to grow and develop, so much so that her remarkable relationship with Brontë can now be

acknowledged and analyzed, and the terms of her Romanticism productively debated. However, this is not to ignore the significant differences between the two authors, or to deny the complex nature of their relationship. That has not been the purpose of this discussion. Nor has it been to prove decisively that Austen is nothing if not Romantic, for Nagle's arguments clearly demonstrate that any discussion of Austen and Romanticism must be qualified, and influences other than Romanticism must be considered. As Susan J. Wolfson observes, Austen has "as much to do with eighteenth-century movements (Enlightenment, rationalism, Sensibility) as with the energies of the emergent age" (1433), speaking to the fact that literary movements are, finally, intellectual constructs, categories that literary critics and historians create in order to understand the literature of the past. These categories, of course, are not set in stone, but rather flexible in that their definitions and relationships to each other depend to a large degree on the critic or historian who uses them. As Nagle remarks, Austen has been cast as a bridge between Neoclassicism on the one hand, and Romanticism on the other, and she tilts "toward one or the other depending on the individual critics own disciplinary convictions" (98). This discussion, then, instead of seeking ultimately to define Austen as Romantic, has rather attempted to show that discussions of Austen and Romanticism can be compelling and fruitful, especially in the context of current debates over periodization. Moreover, our ability to include her in such discussions speaks to her extraordinary versatility as an author.

But, to return to Lovejoy's question from decades ago: should there even *be* discussions of Romanticism? In response to the recent anxiety about the state of Romantic studies, McDayter asks, "What is it about Romanticism as a field of literary study that has invited such an orgy of self-conscious angst?" (11). He quotes Marc Redfield, who remarks that "the handwringing much in evidence in recent books and anthologies written or edited by professional Romantics

has no real equivalence in, say, Victorian studies, where even the most politicized cultural critics seem able to go about their business without worrying that the regal name of their professional field might be a synonym for ‘ideology’” (qtd. in McDayter 11). As Najarian points out, “Medievalists do not argue as we do about the term ‘Medieval’” (150). And according to Wellek, we are justified “in referring to the Renaissance and Baroque. Why not the Romantic?” (McDayter 11). Indeed, why not? Perhaps it would be wise to *embrace* the anxiety, to celebrate the current richness and variety of Romantic studies, and to delight in a study of literature in which discussions such as Richardson’s, Nagle’s, and even my own can productively negotiate the terms of the next generation’s understanding of Romanticism – and of Jane Austen.

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