



“Domestic Virtues and National Importance”: Lord Nelson, Captain Wentworth, and the English Napoleonic War Hero

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The ancient canard that Jane Austen did not write about the Napoleonic Wars is annihilated in Brian Southam’s *Jane Austen and the Navy*. As he proves, her detailed knowledge of the British navy, its battles, and its personalities is clear, particularly in *Persuasion*. I suggest in this article that Austen was just as alert to the cult of naval heroism, which represented a new kind of masculinity and a new kind of Englishness. Although she denied reading any lives of Lord Nelson, she models Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* not only on her brothers, as is well known, but also on England’s foremost naval hero, especially as Robert Southey represented him in his hagiographic *Life of Nelson* of 1813. That is, Wentworth enacts many of Nelson’s most admirable qualities, but the adulterous admiral was no exemplar for the “domestic virtues” lauded in the last sentence of her novel. Nor was the battered, wizened appearance of England’s prematurely aged defender appropriate to her hero. For Wentworth’s contemptuous curl of the mouth and his bright, proud eye, Austen turned elsewhere, to the dashing villain-heroes of Byron’s Oriental tales. Byron’s admiration for Napoleon then so complicated the issue, however, that she had to clear away all taint of imperial tyranny and misogyny.

As Austen considered what it meant to be a Napoleonic war hero, she may also have called upon Othello, the sailors’ favourite, for Wentworth’s pride of service and his jealousy, and on Antony for his

feminization. Finally, she seems to turn to Captain Cook, the very emblem of British manliness, for the most unimpeachable aspects of Wentworth's character. Her attention to masculinity as much as femininity suggests that, in spite of persistent assertions that she could not write about men, she moved easily between the public and the private spheres of action that convention called male and female.

Many of *Persuasion's* first readers must have realized, without Austen needing to remark upon it, that Captain Wentworth's status as a star of the Navy List is frequently enhanced by his resemblance to the man Southey called the "darling hero of England," Horatio Lord Nelson.¹ The Admiral was virtually deified after his death at Trafalgar in 1805. Even "his leaden coffin, in which he was brought home, was cut in pieces, which were distributed as relics of Saint Nelson." Likewise at his interment, when a flag was about to be lowered into the grave, the attending sailors rent it into pieces, "that each might preserve a fragment while he lived."² After Trafalgar, his image appeared everywhere from the theatre to any imaginable souvenir.³ Although Nelson exemplified what Linda Colley calls the ostentatious cult of heroism and state service that arose during the wars,⁴ his public and private reputations were both problematic.

The rapid trajectory of Wentworth's career follows the early stages of Nelson's meteoric rise. After entering the navy at the age of twelve, Nelson was a midshipman at seventeen years, a lieutenant at eighteen and a half, instead of the usual twenty, and a commander, then a captain at twenty.⁵ Part of the Nelson legend was that he rose by merit, not patronage, and Wentworth too earns his way, beginning his life of command in the *Asp*, a one-masted sloop of war.⁶

1 Robert Southey, *The Life of Nelson*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1814), 2:237. Joseph Kestner argues that Austen looked to Nelson and Wellington to construct "a new masculinity to correspond with the new politics of revolutionary and post-revolutionary Britain," in "Revolutionizing Masculinities," *Persuasions* 16 (1994): 147-60. Austen's admiration for Charles Pasley the advocate of armed imperialism, Thomas Clarkson the abolitionist, and Claudius Buchanan the missionary in India suggests further elements of her ideal progressive man. See Ruth Perry, "Austen and Empire," *Persuasions* 16 (1994): 94-106.

2 Southey, 2:277.

3 See Park Honan, *Jane Austen: Her Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), 162; and Brian Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy* (London: Hambledon UK, 2005), 228-29.

4 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 178.

5 Michael Lewis, *The Navy of Britain: A Historical Portrait* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1948), 270.

6 Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, in vol. 5 of *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R.W. Chapman, 3rd ed., 6 vols. (1923; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932-34; reissued 1965-66), 64. References are

Sloops, the smallest vessels of war except for cutters, were rated sixth. Sometimes they carried out the patrol duties of frigates, but being vulnerable because of their size, they kept close to shore for raiding and cutting-out expeditions to capture particular ships.⁷ Sloops were usually commanded by lieutenants, but in 1806, Captain Wentworth is “made commander in consequence of the action off St Domingo” (26), his “hero-promotion” being one way for a lieutenant without patronage to command a sloop and claim prize money.⁸ In Wentworth’s passage on the way home the following autumn, he duly takes “privateers enough to be very entertaining” (66). By capturing these virtual pirates, for privateers were a byword for cruelty, Captain Wentworth helps block Spanish and American interference with the lucrative West Indies trade.⁹ By “falling in” subsequently with a French frigate and capturing her, he draws enough attention to himself to be granted command of the frigate *Laconia*. Admiral Croft says that Wentworth had been a “Lucky fellow to get any thing so soon, with no more interest than his,” for he gained the *Asp* when “there must have been twenty better men than himself applying for her at the same time.” Wentworth agrees: “I felt my luck, admiral, I assure you” (65). Although he modestly ascribes to “good luck” his capture of “the very French frigate I wanted,” it took real courage to attack the enemy when frigates were so much more powerful than sloops. He gestures to real harm when he adds that “our touch with the Great Nation,” a term that by 1799 became an ironic usage for France in the mouths of her enemies, had not “much improved our condition.”

Good judgment as well as “another instance of luck” brought his ship into safe harbour at Plymouth just before a storm struck the Sound, for its exposure to southerly winds makes this large inlet between Plymouth Harbour and the English Channel extremely

to this edition. A sloop held 10–18 cannon and 65–120 men: see Southam, xv, 197; and William Falconer, *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine*, new ed., corrected (London: T. Cadell, 1753), s.v. “sloop of war,” <http://southseas.nla.gov.au/refs/falc/1228.html>.

- 7 Dean King, with John B. Hattendorf and J. Worth Estes, *A Sea of Words: A Lexicon and Companion for Patrick O'Brian's Seafaring Tales*, 2nd ed. (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), 11.
- 8 Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy: The Ships, Men and Organization, 1793–1815* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1989), 98.
- 9 N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Collins, 1986), 427, 186. See also Tim Fulford, “Romanticizing the Empire: The Naval Heroes of Southey, Coleridge, Austen, and Marryat,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (1999): 161–96. Privateers were armed merchant ships, privately owned and officered, which held a government commission authorizing them to cruise against enemy ships, especially other merchant ships, to their owners’ profit.

dangerous.¹⁰ Wentworth admits that the gale could have done for “poor old *Asp*, in half the time” (66). His “luck,” in other words, corresponds to Providence, ever watchful over those who boldly exert themselves, especially if they are British. So Austen seemed to think when on 2 September 1814 she wrote of the war with America that Britain had “a claim to the protection of Heaven, as a Religious Nation, a Nation inspite of much Evil improving in Religion, which I cannot beleive the Americans to possess.”¹¹

When Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove fetch “their own navy list, the first that had ever been at Uppercross,” with “the professed view of finding out the ships which Captain Wentworth had commanded,” they seek eagerly for the *Laconia*’s “name and rate.”¹² Wentworth tells the young women that they will not find his previous ship the *Asp* there, because she was “Quite worn out and broken up,” and he was her last commander. Admiral Croft challenges his complaint, saying that “Never was a better sloop than the *Asp* in her day.—For an old built sloop, you would not see her equal” (64–66). Older ships were actually more durable and seaworthy than newer ones, because, as the wars dragged on, the shortage of good timber led to the use of fir and other inferior wood.¹³ The *Asp* serves Wentworth well enough for battle in the West Indies, “the station for honour,” as Nelson called it.¹⁴

After his return in the *Asp* from the battle of St Domingo in 1806, Captain Wentworth’s next and more difficult step was to become captain of a frigate. But soon after his engagement with Anne broke off, he “got employ,” then “distinguished himself, and early gained

10 Lavery, 233.

11 Austen to Martha Lloyd, 2 September 1814, in *Jane Austen’s Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 274. Peter Knox-Shaw comments that Austen’s urgent hope of divine intervention and raw nationalism has “the authentic ring of her times,” in *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 159.

12 Ships were divided into six rates, from the largest flagships to the smallest vessels. The Musgroves’ Navy List may be either *Steel’s Original and Correct List of the Royal Navy*, a square sixty-four-page duodecimo pamphlet crammed with information, published monthly during the war, then quarterly during the peace; or one of the first official Navy Lists, published first quarterly and then monthly by the Admiralty from February 1814. Navy Lists were also included in larger volumes, such as the *Royal Kalendar; or Complete and Correct Annual Register*, which listed ships and their captains, and often ships captured and lost as well as prize money gained.

13 Southam, 270. Due to the shortage of ships, technical corners were cut to extend the life of old ships: see Rodger, *Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain 1649–1815* (London: Allen Lane with the National Maritime Museum, 2004), 482. Francis Austen complained to Nelson himself about the battered state of his ship, the *Canopus* (Honan, 218).

14 Southey, 1:45.

the other step in rank” (29). He actually holds a post, not a rank. As a full captain in command of a sixth-rate ship of twenty guns or above, his title is a “post-captain” rather than a commander or a lieutenant-in-command who, like Captain Benwick, merely held the courtesy title of captain.¹⁵ He makes his fortune by “successive captures,” not by salary (29–30), for captains’ pay was only about ,100 a year. Prize money was the fairest and most straightforward reward for success, as well as recompensing officers and crew for their risk. Since any admiral in sight of the prize took the biggest share, the really lucky officers were the captains of fast, “good,” or “crack” frigates cruising independently within striking distance of the shipping lanes.¹⁶ Such a one is the *Laconia*.

Frigates, being fast and manoeuvrable, were destined, as William Falconer explains, “to lead the convoys of merchant-ships, to protect the commerce in the colonies, to cruize in different stations, to accompany squadrons, or be sent express with necessary intelligence and orders.” He also thought them “extremely proper for cruizing against privateers.”¹⁷ Single-decker frigates were not expected to tackle higher-rated ships with their multiple decks and vastly superior firepower. Instead, they hovered on the edge of the line of battle, passing along signals and information. Nelson, who called frigates “the eyes of the fleet,” wrote after the Battle of the Nile in 1798, “Were I to die this moment ... *want of frigates* would be found stamped on my heart!”¹⁸

What needs to be stressed is the sheer glamour of frigates and their captains, whose exploits were as keenly followed in the newspapers as Battle of Britain pilots’ missions. Typically, they fought single-ship actions, being licensed by the Admiralty to “cruise against the enemy, and take, sink, or burn their shipping, or dry, annoy them as opportunity offers.”¹⁹ Thus, when Wentworth talks about the money he made in the *Laconia*, after a “friend of mine, and I, had such a lovely cruise off the Western Islands [Azores],” and “again the next summer, when I had still the same luck in the Mediterranean” (67), he means not an idle pleasure trip, but the quasi-piratical liberty to

15 Lavery, 98; Southam, xv.

16 Southam, 114–15.

17 Falconer, 1046. Frigates held 20–44 guns and a complement of 135–294 men (Southam, xv).

18 Southey, 2:240, 1:243.

19 Lavery, 49; Falconer, 990. First, second, and third rates were “Battleships”; fourth, fifth, and sixth rates were “Cruisers” (Lewis, 98).

prey on enemy shipping. Such lucrative raiding trips were often given as a reward for post-captains, such as Wentworth, who distinguished themselves in action. By acting independently, they could gain more freedom, more responsibility, and potentially more money.²⁰

Wentworth made “a handsome fortune” by his “successive captures” (30), for his prize money of £25,000 equates to a stunning £1.25 million in today’s currency.²¹ Many successful captains achieved fame and some great wealth, so that Sir Walter Elliot’s agent Mr Shepherd is right to say that “This peace,” by which he means the Peace of Paris, signed on 30 May 1814, “will be turning all our rich Navy Officers ashore” (17). With Napoleon believed to be safely contained on Elba, naval funding has run down, as was usual in peace-time, and the *Laconia* appears in the Navy List as “non-commissioned,” officially out of service and looked after by a skeleton crew.

On the positive side, then, Wentworth’s rapid rise mirrors Nelson’s. There are other similarities yet. If Wentworth’s ship, being “Quite worn out,” has since been broken up, Nelson declared, after his eye was damaged, that the *Agamemnon* “was as nearly worn out as her captain.” Nevertheless, like Wentworth, he made her “as fit for sea as a rotten ship could be”²² and fought in her again: Wentworth’s similarly sarcastic remark that the *Asp* was “Hardly fit for service,” indeed reported fit only “for home service” patrolling the Channel and the North Sea “for a year or two,—and so I was sent off to the West Indies,” astonishes his listeners. Wentworth’s bitter comment that the admiralty “entertain themselves now and then, with sending a few hundred men to sea, in a ship not fit to be employed ... thousands that may just as well go to the bottom as not” (65) echoes Nelson’s subsequent complaint to the Admiralty, that it was “a matter of indifference to them [whether] I lived or died.”²³ Wentworth also resembles Nelson in his recklessness after Anne refuses him, while his swings between despondency and pride are too close to Nelson’s for comfort. He refrains, however, from emulating the national hero’s vainglorious lust for praise and honours—according to Southey, the stars and decorations that Nelson insisted on wearing at Trafalgar made him a conspicuous mark.²⁴

20 See Rodger, *Wooden World*, 296, 425.

21 Deirdre Le Faye suggests multiplying by fifty for today’s values, in *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels* (London: Francis Lincoln, 2002), 129.

22 Southey, 1:139, 153.

23 Christopher Hibbert, *Nelson: A Personal History* (London: Penguin, 1994), 270.

24 Southey, 2:253.

Nelson’s ability to weather a disastrous storm is shared by Wentworth, who speaks of a gale of almost biblical proportions lasting four days and four nights, which might have made him only “gallant Captain Wentworth, in a small paragraph at one corner of the newspapers; and being lost only in a sloop, nobody would have thought about me.”²⁵ Similarly, Wentworth’s application of the word “touch” to his engagement with the French (66) recalls Lord Nelson, on the night before Trafalgar, famously understating his fiercely aggressive tactics as “the Nelson-touch,”²⁶ a word that Samuel Johnson deems synonymous with “brush,” a “rude assault; a shock; rough treatment,” or a “scouring.”²⁷

Nelson’s personal encouragement of his midshipmen’s seamanship reappears in Wentworth’s schoolmasterly kindness to Dick Musgrove. Of Nelson’s midshipmen, Southey wrote, “happy were they whose lot it was to be placed with such a captain,” for “Every day he went into the school-room, to see that they were pursuing their nautical studies.”²⁸ Dick Musgrove may complain that his captain is “two perticular about the school-master” (52), but all naval ships were required to carry a schoolmaster to teach midshipmen writing, arithmetic, and the study of navigation. In practice, since only the bigger ships employed them, Wentworth probably undertakes Dick’s education himself. Even though the boy’s inability to learn would have prevented his advancement,²⁹ Wentworth adopts Nelson’s celebrated humanity when he acts towards Dick’s bereaved mother “with so much sympathy and natural grace, as shewed the kindest consideration for all that was real and unabsurd in the parent’s feelings” (67–68). Nelson’s friendship to his wounded officers was likewise well known: one called him “my friend, my nurse, my attendant, my protector,” and Nelson even called the dying Captain Parker “my child,” for he “found him in distress.”³⁰

Wentworth’s friendship to the disabled Harville and the grieving Benwick is equally heartfelt. Arriving in Plymouth a week before Benwick’s return from the Cape at the start of August, Wentworth hears of Fanny Harville’s death in June, and is asked to break the news. Although there is “no danger of [the *Laconia*] being sent to

25 Hibbert, 135.

26 Southey, 2:242.

27 Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. “Brush.”

28 Southey, 1:52–53.

29 Rodger, *Wooden World*, 68, 262.

30 Hibbert, 282; Southey, 2:181.

sea again," he "stood his chance for the rest," and "wrote up" to the Admiralty, as captains had to,³¹ for leave of absence, "but without waiting the return, travelled night and day till he got to Portsmouth, rowed off to the Grappler that instant, and never left the poor fellow for a week." His behaviour recalls Nelson ignoring orders by clapping the telescope to his blind eye, at the battle of Copenhagen.³² Captain Harville declares, "that's what he did, and nobody else could have saved poor James. You may think, Miss Elliot, whether he is dear to us!" (108). Here again, Wentworth sounds like Nelson, whose "generous regard for the feelings as well as interests of all who were under his command," said Southey, made him as "beloved in the fleets of Britain," for "Never was any commander more beloved."³³

If Louisa is enraptured by the friendliness and brotherliness of the navy, whose sailors, more than any other set of men in England, "only deserved to be respected and loved" (99), Nelson spoke in deliberate echo of *Henry V* of "my brave officers," and "my noble-minded friends and comrades. Such a gallant set of fellows! Such a band of brothers! My heart swells at the thought of them." Nelson's "active and watchful benevolence, ever desirous not only to render justice, but to do good,"³⁴ is again mirrored by the episode where Wentworth, a fearless man and a determined friend to Mrs Smith, helps recover her husband's property in the West Indies (251).

A further link with Nelson is Sir Walter's abuse of the navy for raising to distinction Lord St Ives, whose father was "a country curate [parish priest], without bread to eat" (19).³⁵ The fact that Nelson's father was a country clergyman formed an essential part of his legend, showing that, as he himself pointed out, "Without having any inheritance, or having been fortunate in prize money, I have received all the honours of my profession, have been created a peer of Great Britain, &c &c and I say to the reader, 'GO THOU, AND DO LIKEWISE.'³⁶ Sir Walter's scorn towards humble origins would

31 Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 401.

32 Hibbert, 261.

33 Southey, 2:190-91.

34 Southey, 2:211-12, 192.

35 Austen may allude here to lines by George Crabbe (1754-1852), a country clergyman and poet she admired: "Pity! a Man, so good, so mild, so meek, / At such an age, should have his bread to seek." Crabbe, *The Borough*, letter 3, "The Vicar-The Curate, etc.," lines 265-66. Wentworth's brother is a country curate, or clergyman (23), as were Austen's father and her brothers James and Henry.

36 James Stanier Clarke and John M'Arthur, *The Life of Admiral Lord Nelson*, 2 vols. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809), 2:8.

have been noted in Bath, which was especially proud of Nelson. As his father told him after the battle of Cape St Vincent, “The name and services of Nelson have sounded throughout this city of Bath—from the common ballad singer to the public theatre.”³⁷ In 1780–81, Nelson recuperated in Bath following his illness in the West Indies; in 1784 he visited his father there; and in 1797 he returned to his wife in Bath, to nurse his shattered arm after the battle of Santa Cruz. All this points to Wentworth as a distinctly Nelsonian war hero.

For all his courage and humanity, however, Nelson exposed himself to disapproval and ridicule by deserting his wife for Emma Hamilton, wife of the complaisant Sir William. In his attempt to establish Nelson as the apotheosis of British masculinity, Southey blamed Lady Hamilton as a seductive Oriental temptress, while James Gillray’s caricatures portray her as Messalina, Dido, and Cleopatra.³⁸ On the slim evidence that Nelson’s father was “soon convinced that the attachment, which Lady Nelson regarded with natural jealousy and resentment, did not, in reality, pass the bounds of ardent and romantic admiration,” Southey asserts that the relationship was merely platonic.³⁹ Neither an abandoned wife nor little Horatia was so easily explained away, however. The published love letters of Nelson and Lady Hamilton were read with indignation, and Nelson’s one-time colleague Lord St Vincent spoke for many when he praised his “animal courage” after his death, but called his private character “most disgraceful.”⁴⁰ Nelson may have been a naval hero, but Austen condemned Admiral Crawford in *Mansfield Park* for adultery and sympathized with the Princess of Wales in her humiliation.⁴¹ Since Lady Nelson was living in Bath when the Austens arrived there in 1801, Austen may also have been aware that in April 1802, Lady Nelson attended the deathbed and funeral of Nelson’s father, in Bath, while Nelson himself pleaded indisposition.⁴²

37 Southey, 1:181.

38 See Fulford. Representations of Nelson and Lady Hamilton as Antony and Cleopatra were confirmed by his victory in Egypt and his recreation as Baron Nelson of the Nile, while Lady Nelson neatly fitted the role of Antony’s wronged wife. Nelson’s attachment to Lady Hamilton sometimes affected his judgment on military matters, as did Antony’s to Cleopatra.

39 Southey, 2:183–84.

40 See Southam, 229–31; Hibbert, 388n.

41 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, vol. 3 in *The Novels of Jane Austen*, 41. Southam, 231.

42 Hibbert, 301; Edgar Vincent, *Nelson: Love and Fame* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 466.

If Austen diverges from Southey in her final assessment of Lord Nelson, perhaps she also differs from him in her view of his mistress, for Austen's giving Mrs Smith the maiden name of Hamilton can hardly be accidental. Like Mrs Smith, Emma Hamilton became a "poor, infirm, helpless widow" (153) after Sir William's death in 1803 and Nelson's failed attempt to leave her as a "Legacy to my King and Country." Arrested for debt in 1813, she fled in 1814 to Calais, fatter than ever from heavy drinking, and died on 15 January 1815,⁴³ seven months before Austen embarked upon *Persuasion*. Austen may therefore be thinking of Lady Hamilton in that controversial passage about Mrs Musgrove's "large fat sighings" over her dead sailor son: "Personal size and mental sorrow have certainly no necessary proportions. A large bulky figure has as good a right to be in deep affliction, as the most graceful set of limbs in the world. But, fair or not fair, there are unbecoming conjunctions, which reason will patronize in vain,—which taste cannot tolerate,—which ridicule will seize" (68). For contemporary readers, the passage might conjure up Gillray's grotesque cartoon of Nelson's bloated, tearful mistress as "Dido in Despair!" (1801), striking one of her famous "attitudes" as her lover departs for the Nile (figure 1).⁴⁴ IMAGE n/a online.

Austen undoubtedly knew all about Lord Nelson. He was a family favourite, for he praised her brother Francis Austen as "an excellent young man," and might have helped him to a frigate, if he had lived.⁴⁵ And yet she sounds ambivalent about England's saint when she writes on 11–12 October 1813, "Southey's Life of Nelson;—I am tired of Lives of Nelson, being that I never read any."⁴⁶ Here she seems to

43 See Hibbert, 365, 402–4; Southam, 231–33.

44 Mrs Musgrove is of course no Dido, for she has almost forgotten her dead son, whereas Anne is genuinely tragic as she waits without hope for her Aeneas. Similarly, Anne, not the fickle and self-serving Penelope Clay, recalls Homer's emblem of fidelity to wandering Odysseus. William Deresiewicz develops the Homeric analogy further in *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 155.

45 Letter from Nelson to Lord Moira, 30 March 1805, cited in Southam, 90–91. Although Francis Austen carried vital dispatches for Nelson in the Mediterranean and met him several times, he missed Trafalgar.

46 Austen to Cassandra Austen, 11–12 October 1813, in *Letters*, 235. Austen's addition that "I will read this [life of Nelson], however, if Frank is mentioned in it," suggests that she read it to find out that he is not. Several lives of Nelson were in circulation, but Southey savagely reviewed the two large quarto volumes of Clarke and M'Arthur's commissioned biography, then superseded them in 1813 with his own livelier, more accurate, and better received account that was commissioned by John Murray, Austen's publisher. Austen read and enjoyed the poet laureate's verse, and had connections with his family (Southam, 224–27, 228n).

mock Southey's first sentence in his preface to the *Life*, "MANY lives of NELSON have been written: one is yet wanting, clear and concise enough to become a manual for the young sailor." John Murray, its publisher and hers, hoped that Southey's *Life* would "become the heroic text of every midshipman in the Navy."⁴⁷ It also seems likely, because of her loyalty to her brothers, that she thought other naval men were as deserving as Nelson. Even the *Naval Chronicle* lamented, before Trafalgar, "that ill-judged and over-weening popularity which tends to make another demigod of Lord Nelson at the expense of all other officers in the service, many of whom possess equal merit and equal abilities and equal gallantry with the noble Admiral."⁴⁸ By stressing Captain Wentworth's domestic virtues in her final sentence, Austen pointedly distances him from Lord Nelson, who, with "every blessing except domestic happiness," set a "bad domestic example," like Admiral Crawford.⁴⁹ One last point she might have noted is Southey's comment that Nelson "suffered like a woman" when compelled to enforce corporal punishment,⁵⁰ because her construction of masculinity in *Persuasion* depends on just such fluid revisionings of gender.

Another model from reality proves equally powerful, for Wentworth is very pointedly not Napoleon. After his acceptance by Anne, he says with a smile, "Like other great men under reverses ... I must endeavour to subdue my mind to my fortune" (247). Perhaps he alludes here to La Place's jest, reported by General Becker after Waterloo, that "Buonaparte, great as he was in prosperity, was never able to bear up against a reverse, under which his talents, resolution, courage, all vanished when he had most need of them."⁵¹ If so, Wentworth's joke, by which Austen steps briefly outside her own timeline, depends on knowing that Napoleon was far from stoical in defeat. During transport to his second exile, he was reported to have said repeatedly that "to St Helena he would *not* go!—he would *die* first!—he would never

47 See Southam, 227.

48 Cited in Honan, 219.

49 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 467.

50 Southey, 2:92, 191.

51 J.W. Croker, *The Croker Papers: The Correspondence and Diaries of the Late J.W. Croker*, ed. Louis J. Jennings, 3 vols. (London, 1884), 1:68. Austen could have heard the story through her naval networks. Croker called Napoleon by the Italianate form "Buonaparte" rather than "Bonaparte" to insist that he was by origin a Corsican-Italian, rather than genuinely French. Myron F. Brightfield, *John Wilson Croker* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1940), 286. Austen's use of the identical spelling makes the same politically charged point (Austen to Cassandra Austen, 4 February 1813, in *Letters*, 203).

quit the Bellerophon *alive!*” He was even rumoured to have swallowed poison. Austen certainly read that report, because it appeared in the same volume of the *Quarterly Review* in which she read Scott’s review of *Emma*.⁵² Unlike Napoleon’s comprehensive defeat, however, Wentworth’s “reverse” only means abandoning the proud notion that he deserves everything he has gained. His fall into humility compares favourably with the hubris of proud Napoleon.

By the knowingness of his reference, Wentworth distances himself from Napoleon, but he nevertheless could have been tyrannical and misogynistic like the Emperor. Wentworth resembles him far too closely when he reacts angrily to Anne’s refusal, or when he storms away in just such a self-destructive mood as Napoleon’s on the way to St Helena. He must also learn not to behave like Bonaparte, who “insulted, with gratuitous ferocity, the tenderest sex”—to the ladies, it was said, Napoleon’s “manners were harsh and ungracious, and he seldom paid them the common attentions of society.”⁵³ Wentworth risks looking Napoleonic when he treats women like fine ladies, meaning useless.⁵⁴ Unwilling to admit them onboard, he feels it as “an evil in itself,” and even if they are made comfortable, he “might not like them the better for that, perhaps” (68–70).⁵⁵ He most starkly exposes his prejudice, however, when he believes that all women are inconstant. His proposal letter proves him a new man indeed.

52 *Quarterly Review* 14, no. 27 (October 1815 and January 1816): 88–91.

53 *Quarterly Review* 14, no. 27 (October 1815 and January 1816): 95, 90.

54 Knox-Shaw argues that when Mrs Croft complains of women being treated as fine ladies instead of “rational creatures,” she echoes Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1989), 5:75. See Knox-Shaw, “*Persuasion*, Byron, and the Turkish Tale,” *Review of English Studies: A Quarterly Journal of English Literature and the English Language*, new series, 44, no. 173 (February 1993): 47–69. In his book, he demolishes “the canard that Austen was a Tory feminist,” declaring that Wollstonecraft’s presence in *Persuasion* is unmistakable. Austen owned Robert Bage’s *Hermesprong*, which contains a substantial summary of the *Vindication* (Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, 237–38, 34n11). Anne K. Mellor also calls Austen “a committed disciple of Wollstonecraft,” in “Why Women Don’t Like Romanticism: The Views of Jane Austen and Mary Shelley,” in *The Romantics and Us: Essays on Literature and Culture*, ed. Gene W. Ruoff (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 278. See also Claudia L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s: Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 24, 37, 40–41.

55 Captains’ wives did not routinely accompany their husbands to sea, and although Mrs Charles Austen went on many of her husband’s tours of duty, Mrs Francis Austen generally stayed home. Wives of officers and petty officers often went to sea, and looked after the sick and wounded; and Betsey Fremantle, the wife of one of Nelson’s captains, was happy with her husband in a “comfortable cabin,” even during battle (Southam, 276–79). As a “reasonable woman,” Mrs Croft is “perfectly happy” onboard ship, suffering “perpetual fright” and “imaginary complaints” only when her husband is away (70–71).

As well as drawing on England's heroes and their enemy, Austen turns to English literary heroes for elements of Wentworth's wartime masculinity, because he often resembles Othello. The play was an especial favourite among sailors for its proud, martial hero. Naval men in trouble with the Admiralty often quoted his lines, "My services which I have done the signiory / Shall out-tongue his complaints," or his final reminder that he has "done the state some service, and they know't," while Wentworth, like Othello, simultaneously defends and blames himself in the "soliloquy" of his letter.⁵⁶ Again he resembles Shakespeare's "extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere" by being a "stranger without alliance or fortune" (27), and if Sir Walter gives Wentworth "all the negative of great astonishment, great coldness, great silence, and a profound resolution of doing nothing for his daughter," thinking "it a very degrading [lowering in rank] alliance" (26), Shakespeare's Brabantio responds with equal choler to his daughter being stolen from him, owing to Othello's difference (1.1.137-38).

Like Othello explaining how he wooed Desdemona, who "with a greedy ear / Devour[ed] up my discourse" of "most disastrous chances, / Of moving accidents by flood and field," and all "the dangers I had pass'd," Wentworth makes the Musgrove girls love him by tales of his near-disaster in a gale. If Desdemona swears that "'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful ... yet she wish'd that heaven had made her such a man," and "bade me, if I had a friend that lov'd her, / I should but teach him how to tell my story, / And that would woo her" (1.3.135-67), Henrietta and Louisa respond with "eager admiration," and "exclamations of pity and horror," while the Miss Hayters are "apparently admitted to the honour of being in love with

56 Southam, 165n; William Shakespeare, *Othello*, in *The Complete Works*, ed. Peter Alexander (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1978), act 1, scene 2, lines 18-19; 5.2.342. References are to this edition by act, scene, line. Nelson defended himself in Othello's words (Southey, 2:211), and Cassandra Austen remembers Othello's "one that lov'd not wisely, but too well" (5.2.347) when she writes, after her sister's death, "I loved her only too well, not better than she deserved, but I am conscious that my affection for her made me sometimes unjust to & negligent of others" (Cassandra Austen to Fanny Knight, 20 July 1817, in *Letters*, 344). Francis Austen attended a performance of *Othello* by the officers of the Gibraltar garrison while waiting for his ship to be provisioned, before Trafalgar, but left at the end of the first act (see Southam, 93, and 93n). Gene Ruoff also links *Persuasion* to *Othello*, remarking on the similarity between Shakespeare's wooing scene and Austen's, with the reversal when Wentworth becomes the listener. Ruoff, "The Triumph of *Persuasion*: Jane Austen and the Creation of Woman," *Persuasions* 6 (1984): 54-61.

him.”⁵⁷ Austen typically alters her original, however, when she writes that, “Anne’s shuddering was to herself, alone” (66).⁵⁸

Where Wentworth most resembles Othello is in his conviction that all women are fickle. Being jealous, he almost throws his happiness away. All too easily, he believes that Anne flirts with Mr Elliot at the concert, just as Othello is persuaded that Desdemona is overly familiar with Cassio. Asked if the song is not worth staying for, “No!” he replied impressively, ‘there is nothing worth my staying for’; and he was gone directly.” Anne is both gratified and appalled. “Jealousy of Mr. Elliot! It was the only intelligible motive. Captain Wentworth jealous of her affection!” But, “How was such jealousy to be quieted? How was the truth to reach him?” If Wentworth’s quick jealousy resembles Othello’s decision “to be once in doubt / Is once to be resolv’d” (3.3.183–84), Austen employs the language of tragedy when she writes of the “misery” and “evil” that could follow (190–91).

Wentworth also looks at times like Shakespeare’s Antony, the military hero in whom public and private are fatally intertwined, for he too makes a dash to the sea when rejected by Anne—the *Asp*, a fine name for a venomous little fighting ship, suggests that the play could have been in Austen’s mind.⁵⁹ Like Cleopatra, Anne is an ageing woman called changeable and fickle, but, like her, will prove her infinite variety. When Anne’s “bloom and freshness of youth [is] restored by the fine wind ... blowing on her complexion” (104), Austen may remember the moment when the boy-cupids on Cleopatra’s barge, by whose fans the “wind did seem / To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool, / And what they undid did.” Anne and Wentworth find happiness walking incognito amid a throng (241), just like Cleopatra and Antony: “No messenger but thine, and all alone / To-night we’ll wander through the streets and

57 Wentworth recalls here the equally irresistible Sir Charles Grandison, of whom “Five Ladies” declare that “they would stand out by consent, and let you pick and choose a wife from among them.” Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, ed. Jocelyn Harris, 3 parts (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), part 2, p. 43. Austen had already mocked Richardson in the *Juvenilia* when Charles Adam “had subdued the hearts of so many of the young Ladies, that of the six present at the Masquerade but five had returned uncaptivated” (Austen, *Minor Works*, vol. 6 in *The Novels of Jane Austen*, 14–15).

58 A similar scene occurs in Mary Robinson’s *The False Friend*, when the sailor Edward Ashgrove declares that, “in these tumultuous times, a sailor’s life may be quickly disposed of.” As Gertrude tells it, “Heaven forbid!” said I, shuddering at the idea.” *The False Friend: A Domestic Story*, new ed., 4 vols. (London: T.M. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), 3:189.

59 Francis Austen served in the *Cleopatra*. See David Gilson, *A Bibliography of Jane Austen*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 48.

note / The qualities of people.”⁶⁰ Shakespeare’s Mars and Venus, a soldier unmanned by love and a queen made masculine by power, might have opened new ways of thinking about gender for Austen, while the play’s persistent evocation of luck, chance, and fortune echoes throughout the novel. The higher power to which Captain Wentworth finally defers is a Christian providence, however.

As for Austen’s literary contemporaries, her announcement of 5 March 1814 that “I have read the *Corsair*, mended my petticoat, and have nothing else to do” may sound dismissive, but she turned to Byron, the idol of the moment, for Wentworth’s handsome exterior and much more. As Peter Knox-Shaw argues, although Austen mocks Byron’s morbid strain in the *Turkish Tales*, she actually takes him seriously. True, she ridicules Byron’s excesses when the bereaved Benwick identifies himself with the Giaour and with Zuleika in *The Bride of Abydos*. “Intimately acquainted” with “all the impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony” in the two works, Benwick “repeated, with such tremulous feeling, the various lines which imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness.” He has “little faith in the efficacy of any books on grief like his” (100).⁶¹ In *The Bride*, Zuleika dies of grief after Selim is killed, while the Christian Venetian Giaour, distraught after his beautiful harem lover has been drowned in a sack by a vengeful Pasha, calls himself “The wrack by passions left behind, / A shrivell’d scroll, a scatter’d leaf, / Sear’d by the autumn blast of grief!”⁶² Benwick is silenced by grief—we never hear him speak—rather as the death of Medora renders the *Corsair*

60 Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, in *The Complete Works*, ed. Alexander, act 2, scene 2, lines 207–8; 1.1.51–52.

61 Byron’s *Turkish Tales* made him the author of the day, with *The Giaour* (1813), a Turkish term for “Christian,” quickly going into five expanded editions, and the *Bride* selling even faster, at six thousand within a month. *The Corsair* sold ten thousand copies the day it was published in 1814, and twenty-five thousand in little over a month. See Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron: A Biography* (London: John Murray, 1957), 1:408, 424, 433. Other critics link Austen and Byron: see, for example, Doucet Devin Fischer, who speculates that Murray might have sent *Persuasion* to Byron in Venice, and comments on likenesses in their irony and satire in “Byron and Austen: Romance and Reality,” *Byron Journal* 21 (1993): 71–79; Mary Waldron, who suggests that Anne’s reflection, “Once she felt that he was looking at herself—observing her altered features, perhaps, trying to trace in them the ruins of the face which had once charmed him” (72), echoes the Friar saying of the Giaour, “But sadder still it were to trace / What once were feelings in that face” (lines 859–60), in *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 147; and Deresiewicz, chap. 5.

62 George Gordon Byron, *The Giaour*, in *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), lines 1253–55.

speechless, “For Truth denies all eloquence to Woe.”⁶³ But Austen’s satiric jest is that, far from dying of grief like the Bride, he rapidly proves unfaithful.⁶⁴

Genuine admiration overrides mockery, however, when, as Knox-Shaw writes, Byron “is made to preside over the meeting with Benwick in order to draw out a dark analogy between the story of the Captain whose fiancée has died and Anne’s own aborted romance.”⁶⁵ Byron’s *Turkish Tales* also contribute to her characterization of Anne, Wentworth, and Benwick, as well as to the novel’s theme of redemptive constancy in women and men alike, its intense, impressionistic representation of emotions, and its empathy with women’s condition. *The Giaour* especially contributes its sense of “a life arrested and utterly transformed by an event buried in the past,” as Knox-Shaw puts it.⁶⁶ If Byron switches tense and viewpoint to telescope the passage of a year, Austen writes that to Anne’s “retentive feelings eight years may be little more than nothing” (60). Being a woman, and confined, she feels the *Giaour*’s despair more deeply than Wentworth. Men in the real world, says Anne, are “forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions” (232). Perhaps Byron noted this passage approvingly, then returned Austen’s compliment to his “first-rate poetry” (100) when the deserted Julia writes in *Don Juan* (1819),

Man’s love is of man’s life a thing apart,
 ‘Tis woman’s whole existence; man may range
 The court, camp, church, the vessel and the mart:
 Sword, gown, gain, glory, offer in exchange,
 Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart.
 And few there are whom these cannot estrange;
 Men have all these resources, we but one,
 To love again, and be again undone.⁶⁷

63 Byron, *The Corsair*, in *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, canto 3, stanza 22.

64 For Knox-Shaw, Anne’s recommendation that Benwick study “a larger allowance of prose” by moralists, letter-writers, and memoirists (101) recalls Samuel Johnson, who identified grief as a species of idleness in a letter to Mrs Thrale, and urged her not to “represent life as darker than it is.” Knox-Shaw cites Arthur Murphy’s edition of Samuel Johnson’s correspondence (London, 1806), 12:343, 428, and Mrs Piozzi’s *Letters to and from Samuel Johnson* (London, 1788). See Knox-Shaw, “*Persuasion*, Byron, and the Turkish Tale,” 52n21.

65 Knox-Shaw, “*Persuasion*, Byron, and the Turkish Tale,” 48.

66 Knox-Shaw, “*Persuasion*, Byron, and the Turkish Tale,” 49.

67 Byron, *Don Juan*, in *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, canto 1, stanza 194. For an earlier reference to this possibility and for analogies between this scene, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Sir Charles Grandison*, see Jocelyn Harris, *Jane Austen’s Art of Memory* (1989; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 254n16, 209–11.

In Austen, a woman rather than a man is desolate yet constant (36), a woman rather than a man loves longest when existence or when hope is gone (235). Significantly too, the Corsair's wild medley of passions, "All rushing through their thousand avenues," becomes "a thousand feelings rushed on Anne" at her first meeting with Captain Wentworth (59).⁶⁸ Thus Austen endows her heroine with the subjective, intensely impressionistic inner life characteristic of Byron's Romantic heroes.

Wentworth does share with Byron's Corsair a "bright, proud eye" (62), "a momentary expression," and a "certain glance of his bright eye, and curl of his handsome mouth" as he struggles to suppress "an indulgence of self-amusement" in response to Mrs Musgrove (67)—the Corsair "oft perforce his rising lip reveals / The haughtier thought it curbs, but scarce conceals."⁶⁹ Wentworth goes "cruising" for prizes just like Byron's Corsair, "a name commonly given to the piratical cruisers of Barbary, who frequently plunder the merchant-ships of European nations with whom they are at peace." His frequent references to luck might gesture to the same profession, for "to make a lucky cruise" was the translation of "*courir le bon bord*," according to Falconer, "a cant phrase peculiar to cruisers or pirates, and alluding to the capture or plunder of merchant-ships."⁷⁰ And when in melancholy mood after Anne rejects him, Wentworth also looks like Byron's Childe Harold, that "gloomy wanderer o'er the wave."⁷¹ If Byron was fascinated by mixed qualities like those of the Corsair, Wentworth proves chivalric over the child and the carriage, but ungenerous to Anne and intolerant about women on ships. Martial hero he may be, but he flounces off in self-destructive pride after Lady Russell persuades Anne not to marry him. At the last, he knows himself to have been weak, jealous, and resentful.⁷²

These Byronic aspects are highly problematic, for if the heroes of the Oriental tales served as a focus for contemporary fantasies,

68 Byron, *The Corsair*, in *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, canto 2, line 340.

69 See Byron, *The Corsair*, in *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, canto 1, lines 205–6, 231–33. Knox-Shaw comments that "disdain for fools and hatred of social pretension" run deep in Byron's writing of the period ("*Persuasion*, Byron, and the Turkish Tale," 65n71).

70 Falconer, 373, 1593.

71 Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, canto 2, stanza 16.

72 See this argument in slightly different form in Harris, "Jane Austen and the Burden of the (Male) Past: The Case Reexamined," in *Jane Austen: The Discourses of Feminism*, ed. Devoney Looser (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 87–100. Juliet McMaster, who points out that Wentworth was close to being suicidal when he "went to sea in a leaky ship, and would as soon have gone to the bottom as not," remarks on his similarity to Childe Harold, in *Jane Austen on Love*, English Literary Studies 13 (Victoria: University of Victoria, 1978): 40.

as Marilyn Butler puts it, "not the least element of guilty complicity about them is that they echo the French cult of Napoleon."⁷³ As the supreme embodiment of the hero for an age in which the artist was increasingly seen as heroic,⁷⁴ Napoleon's genius, energy, imagination, and daring made him a charismatic role model, especially for Byron, who acted out an obsessive, lifelong identification with the Emperor. He even named himself "The grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme."⁷⁵ But in his "Ode to Napoleon" (1814), Byron challenged the fallen ruler to revive his Promethean status through defiant death, and in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1816) called him "the greatest, nor the worst of men," with a spirit "antithetically mixt."⁷⁶ Although he saw Bonaparte as a progressive force of liberty against old European regimes, he recognized Napoleon's imperial tyranny, criticized his "whining" on Elba, and grieved for the anti-climax of his abdication. By the time he published the first two cantos of *Don Juan* in 1819, Byron was questioning the Napoleonic mode of heroism.⁷⁷

In 1816, Austen can endorse English naval heroism without ambivalence, especially when she chooses to end *Persuasion* two years earlier, in the glory days of the navy. Unlike Napoleon, Wentworth "does not breathe the spirit of an ill-used man" in his letter about Louisa; "there is not an oath or a murmur from beginning to end." As Admiral Croft declares, "Frederick is not a man to whine and complain; he has too much spirit for that" (172). Austen's resolution of the love plot by means of Wentworth's repentance moderates the more Napoleonic aspects of his antithetically mixed spirit, without diminishing his glamour and dash. And even after eight years' absence, he retains the handsome exterior of Byron's heroes, indeed of the noble author himself.

Other men in *Persuasion* comment implicitly on Wentworth's English nationalism and future prospects. The fact that Sir Walter's son was born and died on 5 November 1789, a conflation of two revolutionary dates,⁷⁸ suggests that he is on the way out. In Bath

73 Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background 1760–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 118.

74 Simon Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

75 Byron, *Don Juan*, in *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, canto 11, stanza 55.

76 Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, canto 3, stanza 36.

77 Bainbridge, 141–51.

78 See Patricia Brückmann, "How the Giaour Was Pronounced: Reading between the Lines in *Persuasion*" (paper, New York Eighteenth-Century Forum, New York, NY, 4 December 2002). Mr Elliot is defined by models from Austen's favourite novel, Richardson's *Sir*

Abbey, too, Austen must have seen the conspicuously large “column, broken in the middle, and its ornamented capital fallen to the ground, [which] appropriately designates the line of descent being overturned.”⁷⁹ Erected to mark the loss of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Walsh, his family’s only male heir (d. 1788), it reads, “By the Death of this Gentleman an ancient and respectable Family in Ireland became extinct.” Sir Walter Elliot’s similarly “ancient and respectable family” (3–4), with its “family connections among the nobility of England and Ireland” (158), may thus be ominously linked to extinct Irish nobility, indeed to all those English and Irish baronets whom Debrett listed as extinct.

Impoverished Irishmen were notorious fortune-hunters during the Bath season, as Smollett’s *Humphry Clinker* (1771), Sheridan’s *The Rivals* (1775), and Pallet’s *Bath Characters* all testify,⁸⁰ while in *Persuasion*, Mrs Smith asks after “the two new beauties, with the tall Irish officer, who is talked of for one of them” (193). Austen herself regarded Irish nobility as inferior, saying in a letter of 14 September 1804 that the son and son’s wife of an Irish Viscount are “bold, queerlooking people, just fit to be Quality at Lyme.”⁸¹ Lady Dalrymple deduces that because Captain Wentworth is “A very fine young man indeed,” with “More air than one often sees in Bath,” he must be “Irish, I dare say” (188).⁸² But Wentworth is no Irish

Charles Grandison, when Sir Walter, that practised master of surfaces, detects a flaw in his Grandisonian-looking nephew, who turns out to be Richardson’s villainous Sir Hargrave Pollexfen instead. Only Captain Wentworth, whose fine outward appearance matches his inner merit, is a true Grandison (Harris, *Jane Austen’s Art of Memory*, 201–5).

79 See Richard Warner, *History of Bath* (Bath and London: R. Cruttwell, 1801), 261.

80 Peter Paul Pallet [Richard Warner], for instance, writes of a widow with “a good house and a thumping jointure,” who is “soon assaulted by a host of those *generous* Irish gentlemen, who are always willing to befriend a solitary widow with a heavy dower,” in *Bath Characters, or, Sketches from Life*, 2nd ed. (London: G. Wilkie and J. Robinson, 1808), 53.

81 Austen to Cassandra Austen, 14 September 1804, in *Letters*, 94. As Sir Nathaniel Wraxall explains, “Previous to the union with the sister kingdom in 1801, an Irish peerage, if conferred on an Englishman who possessed no landed property in that country, could be regarded as little more than an empty honour, producing rank and consideration in society, but conferring no personal privilege, neither securing his person from arrest in Great Britain, nor even enabling the individual to frank a letter,” in *The Historical and the Posthumous Memoirs of Sir Nathaniel William Wraxall, 1772–1784*, ed. Henry B. Wheatley, 5 vols. (London: Bickers and Son, 1884), 3:392.

82 The BBC adaptation of *Persuasion* (1995) played up Austen’s joke for its Irish star, Ciaran Hinds. As Friedrich von Kielmansegge explains, many Irish, who as Roman Catholics were often educated in France or the Netherlands, were easy and civil, and spoke French better than most Englishmen. See von Kielmansegge, *Diary of a Journey to England in the Years 1761–1762* (London: Longmans, Green, 1902), 126–27. In Austen’s time, some of the Irishmen at Bath could have been similarly educated Jacobites. Mary Frampton commented on 29 January 1799 on “how full of Irish the town is at present,” perhaps “two thousand

fortune-hunter. Instead, he helps construct a new kind of English masculinity.

Austen appears much more attached to England than to Great Britain, the union of England, Scotland, Wales, and—from 1801—Ireland. If she disdained Irish aristocrats and sentimentalized Scotch Stuarts, her celebration in *Emma* of “English verdure, English culture, English comfort” (360) recalls John of Gaunt’s elegiac paean to “This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,” as pertinent in time of war with France as in the Second World War. If in *Emma*, as Joseph Kestner suggests, Austen “others” the Frenchified Frank Churchill by setting him against the ideal English landowner Mr Knightley,⁸³ in *Persuasion* she sets an English naval man against a feckless aristocrat, in an attempt to restore England to itself.

Wentworth belongs, as Tim Fulford argues, among romantic portraits of the navy offering moral exemplars for the domestic and imperial spheres. At a time of widespread anxiety about the dissolute aristocracy of the Regency and the “feminizing” of colonial officials by the seductive, luxurious East, the apotheosis of Nelson and his officers served to promote the “chivalry of the ocean when the chivalry of the land was in doubt.”⁸⁴ It also gave rise to a gendered and imperialist discourse in which the Royal Navy represented ideal British manliness. In the face of perceived threats at home and abroad, the myth of a lost national character was revived by celebrating “hearts of oak” and their naval chivalric virtues: patriotism, self-reliance, courage, and attention to duty.⁸⁵ When Austen opposes the disciplined, professional activity of naval men to the feminizing vanity of the landowner, Sir Walter Elliot, she redefines Britishness—or rather, Englishness—in masculinist and imperial terms, thereby contributing to the new national identity of which Colley speaks.

Yet, Austen undertakes what Fulford calls a comprehensive redefinition of gender roles in order to renew the social order. Although Anne and Captain Wentworth are initially described in highly gendered terms—he as “a remarkably fine young man, with a great deal

families,” in *The Journal of Mary Frampton, 1799–1846* (1885), cited in Trevor Fawcett, *Voices of Eighteenth-Century Bath* (Bath: Ruton, 1995), 56.

83 Shakespeare, *King Richard the Second*, in *The Complete Works*, ed. Alexander, act 2, scene 1, lines 39–50. See Kestner; and Claudia L. Johnson, 201.

84 Fulford, 169, 162.

85 Penny Gay identifies Wentworth as an idealized figure of contemporary drama and melodrama, the heroic yet sensitive British sailor, in *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 149–58, 165.

of intelligence, spirit and brilliancy” and she as “an extremely pretty girl, with gentleness, modesty, taste, and feeling” (26)—Austen constantly erodes gender boundaries in *Persuasion*. Harville’s domesticity and family sensibilities, Benwick’s “soft sort of manner” (171), his speechlessness, and his Romantic agony, and, above all, Wentworth’s jealousy and resentment, the collapse of his strength at Lyme, his turning to Anne for guidance, and his solicitous care as a nurse all show *Persuasion*’s men as woman-manly, in Woolf’s formulation of the matter.⁸⁶ Austen may have noted that permeable gender boundaries were common among male Romantic writers: Byron spoke of his own “feminine” sensibilities, and Wordsworth drew on the sympathetic language of the household to characterize the poet as a softly female nurse and mother.⁸⁷

Wentworth is silenced like a woman by Anne’s virtual proposal at the White Hart; he abdicates control over his life when he asks her to decide his fate; and he prepares to be equal in acting with her. Conversely, it is the “shrewd” Mrs Croft who asks “more questions about the house, and terms, and taxes, than the admiral himself, and seemed more conversant with business” (22). Anne is just as man-womanly as her friend when she sorts out Sir Walter’s affairs, exercises reason at Lyme, or speaks her desire in the constancy debate. And it is she who is constant, not Wentworth, not Benwick, in spite of several thousand years’ worth of songs and stories rehearsing the myth of women’s falsity.

In *Persuasion*, Austen tests various models for her English war hero and finds them wanting: Nelson for reckless infidelity, Napoleon for misogynistic hubris, Othello for proud glamour and jealousy, Antony for impetuousness, the Giaour for melancholy, and the Corsair for solipsistic dependence on self. Perhaps the only example of an Englishman that was acceptable to her, apart from her brothers, was Captain James Cook, the greatest explorer of the age, and a man who

86 Virginia Woolf, “A Room of One’s Own” and “Three Guineas,” ed. Michèle Barrett (London: Penguin, 1993), 94. As Margaret Kirkham notes, Austen reverses here “the burlesque stereotype of a young woman deluded by romantic reading,” in *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983), 145; while Isobel Grundy writes of “role-reversal of every kind,” in “*Persuasion*: or, The Triumph of Cheerfulness,” *Persuasions* 15 (December 1993): 89–100. John Wiltshire writes about Wentworth as a nurse in *Jane Austen and the Body: “The Picture of Health”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 169–74; Mellor sees the nurse role representing an “ethic of care” typical of women’s Romanticism (285). See also Claudia L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, 191–203.

87 Jerome McGann, *Byron and Romanticism*, ed. James Soderholm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 112n18; Clifford Siskin, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 171–72.

gained heroic stature in the English national consciousness through hard work and merit rather than entitlement. As a representative of both the new imperialism and the new masculinity, Cook came to “symbolize and embody the combination of intrepidity and humanitarianism that was quickly vaunted as a central feature of Englishness itself,” as Kathleen Wilson explains.⁸⁸ The same could be said of Captain Wentworth.

Austen herself raises that possibility when she bestows on her characters a quartet of names closely associated with Cook—Wallis, Carteret, Elliot, and Dalrymple.⁸⁹ Captain Samuel Wallis, the first European to find Tahiti, wrote journals of his circumnavigation that John Hawkesworth drew on in 1773 for *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken ... for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere ... by Commodore Byron, Captain Wallis, Captain Carteret, and Captain Cook*. Captain Philip Carteret circumnavigated the world in 1767–69; John Elliott accompanied Cook on the *Resolution* during his second voyage, and Alexander Dalrymple was a notable hydrographer and cartographer for the East India Company and the Admiralty. Cook referred to him often.⁹⁰

Austen’s satire reaches far beyond “3 or 4 families in a Country village” when she applies these distinguished names to characters who are unworthy of their possession: Colonel Wallis, Miss Carteret, Sir Walter Elliot, and the Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple.⁹¹ Sir Walter is especially arrogant to think Wentworth a nobody (248)

88 Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 19, 59–60, 90. Like Anne, Charlotte Smith’s Emmeline chooses a naval officer over the heir to a great estate. Smith’s Captain William Godolphin has “the best heart and the noblest spirit under heaven”; his face is “animated by dark eyes full of intelligence and spirit”; his person is “tall, light, and graceful,” so that all who see him feel “admiration mingled with respect. His whole figure was such as brought to the mind ideas of the race of heroes from which he was descended.” Smith, *Emmeline: The Orphan of the Castle*, ed. Loraine Fletcher (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003), 245, 269. Like Wentworth, Godolphin combines bravery with tenderness, but unlike Austen’s flawed hero, he starts and ends as a paragon of British masculinity.

89 A direct family connection with the explorer was that Francis Austen learned his nautical astronomy from a Captain Smith, who had been to sea with Cook (Southam, 37).

90 Perhaps Austen’s mocking usage of the name derives from General Sir Hew Dalrymple, a contemporary of Sir John Moore, and lieutenant governor of Gibraltar in 1808, who lived up to his nickname of “Dowager Dalrymple,” that is, a widow like Lady Dalrymple, for failing to demand unconditional surrender from the French. Austen knew about the Mediterranean theatre of war, for in her letters she refers twice to the death in 1809 at Corunna of Sir John Moore, who landed ten thousand men at Gibraltar, and died attempting to cover the embarkation of his troops by the Royal Navy during the same period of hostilities (Austen to Cassandra Austen, 24 and 30 January 1809, in *Letters*, 171–73).

91 Austen to Anna Austen, 9–18 September 1814, in *Letters*, 275.

when he himself is spendthrift and vain, his daughter Elizabeth vacuous, her self-centred sister Mary hypochondriac, Lady Dalrymple pretentious, and Miss Carteret dull. Even though the titles of Sir Walter's noble cousins are Irish, he fawns painfully upon them, while Colonel Wallis flatters in his turn a baronet, the lowest of all hereditary titles. Worst of all, Sir Walter's black-hearted nephew Mr Elliot further disgraces the family name when he plots to gain its honours even while despising them in their present owner. Appropriately, he ends up with Mrs Clay, whose very name suggests low moral and social status as well as an idol's feet of clay—Edgeworth had recently applied the name “Clay” to a mercenary family in *Patronage* (1814). Mrs Clay's use of Gowland's Lotion, a remedy for repairing marks of venereal disease on the complexion,⁹² indicates to all but the oblivious Sir Walter that she will sell herself to the highest bidder. An erased sentence in the cancelled chapters about its being “pretty evident on what terms they had previously been” makes her position as a kept woman quite clear.

When Austen sets the hard-earned rank and rate of naval men against the merely inherited rank of aristocrats, slippage between famous names and venal characters opens a wide satiric gap between the “rating” system of the navy and the more arbitrary hierarchies of society. She also places Captain Wentworth's “precious volume,” the Navy List (66), against Sir Walter Elliot's “volume of honour,” the Baronetage (249), to show that for all its awful cost, war enabled promotion through merit rather than birth. These two volumes represent radically different definitions of honour and rank, with the Navy List's proud record of names and deeds everywhere challenging the Baronetage's parade of inherited but not always deserved privilege.⁹³ In a final twist, Wentworth's prize money and fame inscribe him not only in that modern volume of honour, the

92 The apothecary John Gowland advertised his lotion, invented about 1740, for clearing the skin of blemishes, including freckles like Mrs Clay's. But, as T.A.B. Corley explains, Gowland's lotion contained “a small quantity of corrosive mercuric chloride, a derivative of sulphuric acid powerful enough to remove the top layer of skin.” Corley, “The Shocking History of Gowland's Lotion,” *Jane Austen Society Report* (1999): 37–41. Nora Crook points out that corrosive sublimate of mercury was particularly used to treat syphilis, in a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* (7 October 1983), 1089.

93 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar call naval life “an escape from the corruption of the land so closely associated with patrilineal descent,” but Wentworth's ability to avoid the rigid class system by “making money on the water” is not almost miraculous, as they say, but quite common during the Napoleonic Wars: see *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 180.

Navy List, but also in Sir Walter’s fossilized one, the Baronetage. He will actually appear in it twice, for though Sir Walter records his marriage to Anne Elliot there, he will be enrolled in the Baronetage by his own right after Austen wickedly decreed, by a last-minute change in the manuscript from knighthood to baronetcy (283), that he will rival Sir Walter in rank.

In *Persuasion*, then, Austen critiques Nelson, Napoleon, Othello, Antony, the Giaour, and the Corsair as models for her war hero, nudging Captain Wentworth implicitly towards the impeccable example of Captain Cook. At a time when the cult of military heroism was at its most powerful, she merges Wentworth’s chivalry, courage, and fraternal solidarity with the sensibility and attachment to home and family that would characterize Englishmen in a post-war, post-Romantic age.⁹⁴ Gender both inflects and alters national identity in Austen’s ultimate praise of the navy, “that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance” (273).

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94 This confirms Gilbert and Gubar’s idea of “an egalitarian society” in *Persuasion* where “men value and participate in domestic life, while women contribute to public events,” presaging “the emergence of an egalitarian sexual ideology” (180–81). Monica Cohen argues that *Persuasion* is influential in showing the domestication of the navy in the post-Napoleonic years, in “Persuading the Navy Home: Austen and Married Women’s Professional Property,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (Spring 1996): 346–66.