Disciplining Love

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Virginia Woolf’s comment on *Persuasion* has prompted numerous critics to explore the novelty of Austen’s final completed narrative. This scholarly emphasis on the freshness of *Persuasion* has in turn encouraged readers of Austen to view her prior five tales as familiar stories that commemorate the stability of England. Austen’s novels, however, persistently question the security of the nation’s ancestral order, and as we have seen, she exposes one feature of this social insecurity by dramatizing a crisis of English masculinity. Her works reveal a cultural anxiety about both England’s future male leaders and the decay of its ostensibly established men. *Northanger Abbey* depicts the consequences of Henry Tilney’s disciplined adherence to Enlightenment dictates of rationality and the tyrannical behavior of General Tilney. *Sense and Sensibility* narrates the inability of Mr. John Dashwood to sustain the unity of his landed family following the death of his father and details the struggles of Brandon and Willoughby to train their sensibilities. *Pride and Prejudice* highlights the final exemplar of the crumbling English aristocracy, but it also prefigures a newly emerging class of men associated with trade, upon whom England must now depend for important civic contributions. *Mansfield Park* offers perhaps the most powerful image of the collapse of ancestral conven-
tions; this dark novel prefigures the fall of the Bertram family and portrays Edmund’s incestuous efforts to maintain some sense of religious integrity, genteel masculinity, and an inherited cultural structure. *Emma* presents a world that has begun to accept the impending social transformation of the post-Revolutionary nation and illustrates how even Burkean men can successfully adapt to modernity. Austen’s corpus has been concerned with England’s transition to modernity throughout, and, thus, her last text is not a radically new direction for Austen; *Persuasion* continues Austen’s depiction of this cultural shift that marks the early decades of the nineteenth century, but the novel also offers a portrait of a new kind of English man—a man who dismisses conventional modes of masculinity developed by Burke and Enlightenment thinkers in favor of a malleable sexuality that embraces the radical fluidity and social/sexual instability engendered by Deleuzian love and desire.

Wentworth, like Knightley, adapts conventional modes of English masculinity to the culture’s recent innovations, but unlike the hero of *Emma*, Wentworth eventually relinquishes his reliance on the security of modern finitude to pursue volatile sensations. Knightley understands that he must adjust his aristocratic masculinity to participate actively in a post-Revolutionary culture. In *Persuasion*, Wentworth ultimately realizes that English society must necessarily become disciplinary as it continues to modernize; the naval captain opts to seek an alternative maritime existence characterized by movement and deregulation. His love for Anne exposes the disordered diversity of his masculinity, and with the heroine he seeks out a nautical lifestyle that does not depend upon the customs, organizational systems, or philosophical dictates upheld by post-Revolutionary discourses. The marriage between hero and heroine that ends *Persuasion* imagines a new world in which individuals prefer the complexity and dynamism of themselves and others to the stability and security sought by Austen’s other men. The marital union of Anne and Wentworth does not negate their identities as sailor and wife; they remain subjects of early-nineteenth-century England, and their social/sexual identities as sailor and wife are integral to the success of the modernizing nation. Their marriage is, however, both a reaction to and a revolution against the antiquated world of England’s ancestral culture, represented by the eroding world of Mansfield, the inertness of Mr. Woodhouse, and the decadent lifestyle of Sir Walter. The hero and heroine are not interested in the egoism and predictability of a stable hall of mirrors; they search out alterity and perpetual change. Wentworth’s volatile love for Anne enables him to pursue what Deleuze and Guattari term “nomadic waves or flows of deterritorialization” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 53). While Knightley’s reliance on the unifying effect of modern subjectivity necessitates his reter-
ritorialization, Wentworth’s passion for the heroine allows him to evade the regulatory forces of post-Revolutionary civilization and embrace the waves and flows of the sea—even as he remains on land.²

Wentworth’s dynamic and malleable masculinity is especially prominent because of the pathetic status of other men in the novel; the ancestral English society that has been faltering throughout Austen’s works has now reached the critical stage of decadence, and the male leaders of this society in *Persuasion* are marked by such decay. Austen may foreground the atrophy of aristocratic masculinity at the novel’s start, as Sir Walter begins the narrative by reading from the Baronetage of “a still-born son, Nov. 5, 1789” (9). This “still” death of the potential Elliot heir symbolizes both the cessation of the integral family line and the demise of an ancestral masculinity cherished by Burke, the Bertrams, and Sir Elliot. Burke’s vision of a sustained connection to the nation’s heritage has failed; the Elliot heritage must now accept external influences, as its men literally and metaphorically have become still and impotent. Burke’s worst fears are now realized; as he muses in his *Reflections*, “all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle, and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved” (128). The powerful yet gentle aristocratic English men who administered the nation’s inherited hegemonic culture are putrefying. Austen’s text specifically demonstrates the inability of Sir Elliot and his heir to accept modern social developments, including new kinds of identities and relations. *Persuasion* portrays the ancestral man of England in a state of decay that is distinct from the desperate nostalgia of the Bertram males and the benign idiocy of Mr. Woodhouse; moreover, the traditional culture that had buttressed such archaic men is now itself deteriorating, exposing the crass artifice that once solidified the hegemonic function of aristocratic men.

Austen immediately prefigures the death of Burke’s model of the English man with her character sketch of the novel’s extant practitioner of such archaic male sexuality. Sir Walter is the paragon of this decaying masculinity, and as the narrator explains, “vanity was the beginning and the end of [his] character, vanity of person and of situation” (10). He is only able to navigate the world through his own egotistical concerns, and his egoism prevents him from appreciating alterity. His ignorance in isolation even threatens the sustainability of the domestic domain that secures his aristocratic standing.³ When his decadent lifestyle leads to a substantial debt that forces him to have action taken, he allows his lawyer to rent his ancestral home to Admiral and Mrs. Croft, who have recently returned from the war with France.
Lady Russell reflects on this decision and offers an informative comment on both Sir Walter and post-Revolutionary England’s aristocratic community. She muses, “what will he be doing, in fact, but what very many of our first families have done,—or ought to do?—There will be nothing singular in his case” (18). Lady Russell’s remarks reveal the publicly recognized demise of England’s traditional culture; it is no longer anomalous for aristocratic families to rent their estates to individuals of new money. The ancestral domestic sphere that once symbolized the historical power of England’s elite, à la Pemberley, has been abandoned and transformed into an equity-producing investment. And unlike Knightley’s move from Donwell to Hartfield, the Elliots are forced to leave their ancestral home out of financial exigencies and must now assume rented quarters.

The impending heir of Kellynch, Sir William Walter Elliot, initially appears to share Sir Walter’s disinterest in preserving the cultural legacy of the family estate. He married a woman of new money prior to the start of the narrative, but the narrator indicates that he is now interested in renewing his connections with his relations by marrying one of his single cousins. Anne, his presumed choice as a second wife, provides a prominent commentary on her cousin, explaining that he “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.” The narrator concludes that “this, to Anne, was a decided imperfection” (152). Austen continually highlights Mr. Elliot’s ability to perform standard Enlightenment rationality and predictable Burkean gallantries, but like Knightley his behavior is hackneyed and mechanical—devoid of dynamism and spontaneity. Mr. Elliot appreciates the utility of both chivalric and rational activities as strategies that enable him to achieve egotistical ends. Austen presents Mr. Elliot as the future of the male aristocracy. Her portrayal of the territorialized Kellynch heir reveals how social dictates for appropriate English maleness have disciplined his body and desires. His pursuit of new money only promoted his reterritorialization, as he now must return to his ancestral family to acquire new monetary resources through a sanctioned marriage.

The narrator’s initial portrait of Wentworth appears strikingly similar to her sketch of Mr. Elliot: Wentworth is ambitious and industrious, and he focuses his energies around the pursuit of Anne. In Austen’s retrospective account of Wentworth and Anne’s early relationship, the narrator casts her hero as a charming romantic figure who is both confident and enthusiastic; however, *Persuasion*’s account of the early trials of Wentworth reminds us that fabulously romantic men like Darcy are no longer viable. We learn that almost eight years ago, Wentworth, “not immediately employed, had come
into Somersetshire. . . . He was, at that time, a remarkably fine young man, with a great deal of intelligence, spirit and brilliancy” (29). Austen notes that Anne and Wentworth “were gradually acquainted, and when acquainted, rapidly and deeply in love” (30). The narrator momentarily adopts the style and narrative technique of Sir Walter Scott’s popular romances: Wentworth is a mysterious yet common man who has ingratiated himself to a wealthy and powerful family; he is “a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in that profession . . . a stranger without alliance or fortune” (30). Austen casts her hero as a humble man with lofty aspirations who, like Mr. Elliot, eagerly seeks advancement. Not surprisingly, Wentworth auditions various conventional modes of English masculinity in order to achieve hegemonic social/sexual security.

Despite his mundane and fortuneless status, Wentworth adopts the optimism advocated by Enlightenment thinkers like Godwin and embodied by men like Gardiner and Bingley; at other times, it is tempting to view Wentworth as a devoted man of reason like Henry Tilney. Wentworth indeed initially appears to support Godwin’s claim that “fortitude is a habit of mind that grows out of a sense of our independence.” Austen’s hero, like Godwin, believes in the preeminence of the independent man, and he is confident of his ability to advance himself by “consulting and providing for his own subsistence” (Enquiry II: 10). Austen, likewise, explains that “Captain Wentworth had no fortune. . . . But, he was confident that he should soon be rich;—full of life and ardour, he knew that he should soon have a ship, and soon be on a station that would lead to every thing he wanted.” He follows the model of Jacobin heroes who remain convinced in the efficacy of their individual desires and efforts. While Anne is attracted to this impressive young man and specifically admires his “confidence,” Lady Russell, the heroine’s trusted advisor, translates Wentworth’s “confidence” as a “sanguine temper, and fearlessness of mind”; she concludes that although he “was brilliant, he was headstrong” (30–31).5 The same brash enthusiasm that Godwin champions and lures Anne frightens the cautious Lady Russell, who persuades our heroine to dismiss the ambitious but financially insecure sailor. Wentworth promptly “[leaves] the country in consequence,” but he does not immediately abandon his commitment to conventional modes of English masculinity (31). He no longer appears as a mysterious romantic hero, but Austen continues to present her hero as an industrious man who has earned his wealth and merit.

Austen’s stereotypical early depictions of Wentworth have led critics like Andrew H. Wright to argue that the hero is often obsessed with “over-
conventionality” (151). He appears briefly as a romantic figure and soon adopts Enlightenment dictates of self-improvement; Jocelyn Harris even dubs Wentworth the descendant of the archetypal conservative patriarch, Sir Charles Grandison. Harris explains that Wentworth’s “dashing naval career displays the martial hero,” and “his rescue of Anne from the suffocating embraces of the child or his concern for her fatigue are knightly and gentle enough” (204). Wentworth can perform and adopt various conventional masculine behaviors, and Austen’s early portraits of the young man demonstrate how he benefits from such hegemonic male identities. Indeed, Wentworth enjoys the success promised by the Enlightenment’s advocacy of individual industry and improvement. Austen announces that “all his sanguine expectations, all his confidence had been justified. His genius and ardour had seemed to foresee and to command his prosperous path. . . . He had distinguished himself, and early gained the other step in rank—and must now, by successive captures, have made a handsome fortune” (33). Wentworth, like the farmers of Jacobin novels, has labored to garner his success, but unlike such agricultural men and Austen’s own aspiring men like Bingley, Gardiner, and Mr. Weston, Wentworth has achieved his accomplishments while serving in the navy, and the national importance of his service enhances the value of his body and industry. Wentworth has obtained access to the national community by serving the national community, and the turbulent instability of the war-ridden seas proves vital to his social/sexual subjectivity.

While his active duty in the military involved great efforts and industrious labor associated with the Enlightenment ideal of English masculinity, Wentworth reverts to hyper-conventional chivalric behavior upon his return to England. During his visit to Uppercross, Austen casts her hero as a chivalric figure who can behave gallantly and perform noble deeds. The Miss Musgroves are promptly enamored of Wentworth. They speak of his “pleasant manner” that they believe demonstrated how “he felt all the motive of their attention just as he ought,” and they observe that “he had looked and said every thing with such exquisite grace” (55). The Miss Musgroves conceive of our hero as an elegant man, and their family finds “charming manners in Captain Wentworth, no shyness or reserve” (59). The Miss Musgroves’ comments remind us of Harris’s assertion that Austen presents Wentworth as the next Grandison; moreover, the young women’s remarks also recall Burke’s model of a gallant and sensible man. Wentworth’s charming early behavior at Uppercross more closely resembles Burke’s portrait of an effete military man whom Wollstonecraft rebukes than the virile man idealized by the feminist thinker. Austen’s portrayal of her hero suggests that he is both knowledgeable of Burke’s model of masculinity and is capable of rehearsing chivalric behavior; he even joins Charles Musgrove on various gentlemanly
shooting expeditions. He also maintains this chivalric persona when he encounters Anne. During a visit with the Crofts, Wentworth apologizes to Anne for almost assuming her chair, reciting, “I beg your pardon, madam, this is your seat.” Austen reports that “though [Anne] immediately drew back with a decided negative, he was not to be induced to sit down again.” Wentworth rehearses conventional chivalric masculinity, and even persists in the appropriateness of his actions, but the narrator explains that “Anne did not wish for more of such looks and speeches. . . . [his] cold politeness, his ceremonious grace” (72). Anne’s reflections indicate both her dislike of gallant rituals and the visibly artificial nature of Wentworth’s performance.

Austen’s most explicit comment on Wentworth’s hyper-conventional behavior follows her hero’s eager announcement of his intentions to marry. Austen relates: “it was now [Wentworth’s] object to marry. He was rich, and being turned on shore, fully intended to settle as soon as he could be properly tempted . . . ready to fall in love with all the speed which a clear head and quick taste could allow” (62). He presents his impending marriage as the final step in confirming his hegemonic status as a stable and successful English man. Wentworth informs his sister that he is “quite ready to make a foolish match. Any body between fifteen and thirty may have me for asking. A little beauty, and a few smiles, and a few compliments to the navy, and I am a lost man” (62). Wentworth appears willing to behave irrationally, but he is nonetheless methodical in his planning. He will act foolishly for the purpose of acquiring the wife who will secure his standing as an established English man; moreover, the qualities he desires in his future wife reveal the conflicted and synthetic nature of his own masculinity. Wentworth explains to his sister that he seeks a woman who will have “a strong mind, with sweetness of manner” (62). Austen’s naval hero imagines his appropriate wife as a hybrid female who is not only confident and intellectual but also tender and sensitive. His insistence that his spouse should be firm of mind recalls the male behavior advocated by Wollstonecraft, while his belief that a woman must be tender and sensitive reflects Burke’s investment in female delicacy. Johnson points out that Wentworth “is in fact caught within highly charged tensions about women’s manners, and his description of the ideal woman is oxymoronic, because however much he may desire ‘strength’ in women, he considers it essentially inconsistent with the sweetness he also exacts” (Jane Austen 150). Johnson is correct to emphasize Wentworth’s “oxymoronic” expectations for a future wife; and while such expectations demonstrate the contrarieties of proper English femininity, they also allow Austen to highlight Wentworth’s adherence to diverse models of conventional English maleness.
Wentworth rearticulates his chivalric attitudes toward women when he asserts that he “would never willingly admit any ladies on board a ship of his” because he believes it is impossible “with all one’s efforts, and all one’s sacrifices, to make the accommodations on board, such as women ought to have.” Wentworth affirms an archaic notion of fragile femininity and responds to his brother-in-law’s harsh rebukes by asserting that “there can be no want of gallantry . . . in rating the claims of women to every personal comfort high” (68). Wentworth defends the actions of a chivalric man who protects and pampers elegant women, but his sister promptly critiques his antiquated views. Mrs. Croft chides Wentworth, dubbing his ideas about women’s need for elaborate accommodations as “all idle refinement” (68). She instructs him, “I hate to hear you talking so, like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures” (69). Mrs. Croft’s comments directly address the hero’s conventional behavior; he has been acting like a fine gentleman, and his sister identifies this performance as artificial. Admiral Croft concludes that when Wentworth “has got a wife, he will sing a different tune. When he is married. . . . we shall have him very thankful to any body that will bring him his wife” (69). Wentworth will not allow such patronizing predictions and immediately declares, “Now I have done. . . . When once married people begin to attack me with, ‘Oh! you will think differently, when you are married,’ I can only say, ‘No, I shall not;’ and then they say again, ‘Yes, you will,’ and there is an end of it.” (69–70). Wentworth’s closing remarks in this discussion may appear trite, but they effectively illustrate the artificiality of his sexual identity; he knows he is rehearsing established modes of masculinity, and his comments expose the routine he must execute. And yet, while Austen’s other heroes learn to accept such territorialized roles and the disciplined existences they ensure, Wentworth eventually recognizes the inherent discipline of his territorialization and learns to deterritorialize himself from such social/sexual regulations.

But Wentworth is able to accomplish his deterritorialization only because of his love relationship with Anne, and in the early portions of the narrative the hero is still a bitter individual who appears as a stereotypical melancholic man; the narrator notes that “he had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him” (62). Anne is also conscious of Wentworth’s resentment, and Austen relates that her heroine “felt the utter impossibility, from her knowledge of his mind, that he could be unvisited by remembrance any more than herself. There must be the same immediate association of thought, though she was very far from conceiving it to be of equal pain” (63). Anne is certain that Wentworth maintains strong memories of their earlier romance, and her belief proves true when Wentworth unex-
pectedly encounters the heroine at her sister’s home. Austen narrates, “the surprise of finding himself almost alone with Anne Elliot, deprived his manners of their usual composure” (78). This scene serves as our first indication of Wentworth’s extant feelings for the heroine; his sensations overwhelm his composed behavior, revealing cracks in his sexuality that well-regulated men like Knightley or Mr. Elliot would never allow to become visible. Wentworth is discomposed because of his powerful amorous emotions for the heroine—emotions that Deleuze and Guattari suggest prompt individuals to divulge “the multiplicities [the beloved] encloses within himself or herself which may be of an entirely different nature. To join them to mine, to make them penetrate mine, and for me to penetrate the other person’s” (Thousand Plateaus 35). Wentworth’s passions for the heroine enable him to unveil and accept the diversity of Anne and disclose his own multiplicity. The artificial singularity and crafted security of his subjectivity become engulfed by the malleability he comes to embrace within himself and his lover.

Wentworth is indeed susceptible to the potency of amorous emotions, and while he clings to conventional male behavior early in the novel, Austen soon presents him acting as neither a Burkean man nor a coldly rational individual. For example, when he finds Anne hampered by her ill-tempered nephew, he removes the young boy from her back. Austen relates that Anne “found herself in the state of being released from [the child]; some one was taking him from her.” She is surprised to find that Wentworth has been her “rescuer,” and the narrator stresses both “his kindness in stepping forward to her relief” and “the silence in which it had passed” (79). Wentworth’s benevolent action does not follow the conventions of chivalric heroism or sentimental masculinity; rather, his is a quiet deed of concern. He behaves in a similar manner during the return from their lengthy walk to the Hayters. Anne relates that “she saw how her own character was considered by Captain Wentworth; and there had been just that degree of feeling and curiosity about her in his manner, which must give her extreme agitation” (87). His feeling leads him to arrange for Anne to ride home from the outing with the beneficent Crofts. Austen informs us that “Captain Wentworth, without saying a word, turned to her, and quietly obliged her to be assisted into the carriage.” Anne is clearly affected by this gesture of kindness and reflects, “Though condemning her for the past . . . he could not see her suffer, without the desire of giving her relief. It was a remainder of former sentiment” (89). Wentworth’s gestures are marked by neither virility nor heroism; he does not carry Anne or provide her with a pristine transportation. And yet his actions are also not the result of rational deliberations; he instead demonstrates compassion for Anne. Wentworth’s behavior reminds us of Foucault’s theory of the aesthetic of the existence, which “implies complex relation-
ships with others insofar [that] this ethos of freedom is also a way of caring for others” (“The Ethics” 287). Austen prefigures how Wentworth’s aesthetic is ultimately not egotistically organized around chivalric or Enlightenment conventions of hegemonic masculinity; his social/sexual subjectivity instead revolves around his care for others—a compassion that enhances his ability to appreciate diversity in himself, others, and new physical locations.

The artifice of Wentworth’s early masculine performances deteriorates prominently during the expedition to Lyme, where he reunites with his nomadic naval colleagues. His behavior becomes notably less conventional at this seaside locale, and as Wentworth acts more freely he becomes more receptive of his own feelings for Anne. Indeed, the atrophy of the hero’s rote masculinity appears to mirror the landscape of Lyme, whose “principal street [is] almost hurrying into the water” (93). This mingling of earth and sea emblematizes Austen’s depiction of the naval community and its ability to transfer the values of a maritime existence to a domestic setting. Anne is very impressed by the hospitality of Wentworth’s naval friends, and the heroine indicates that “nothing could be more pleasant than their desire of considering the whole party as friends of their own, because the friends of Captain Wentworth” (95). She is drawn to the unaffected charm of the Harvilles, noting how different it is from “the usual style of give-and-take invitations, and dinners of formality and display” (96). The domesticated naval community, unlike Anne’s antiquated family, is not interested in elaborate social gatherings; moreover, Wentworth acts with a cordial simplicity and a sincere concern for others when he is surrounded by his naval colleagues. The men and women of the navy are not able to abandon social identities and regulations, but as Roger Sales argues, “the naval officers . . . inhabit a world which values comradeship or partnership” (182). Wentworth’s friends, unlike Bingley or the Coles, are not concerned with sustaining their recently elevated social positions; they instead, as Tony Tanner points out, “reconstitute a meaningful domesticity, re-create the idea of home, [and] ultimately redefine the notion of society itself” (224). Austen’s portrayal of the navy anticipates both a new kind of domestic life and new social possibilities that Austen’s corpus had not earlier imagined. The naval community revises the standard hegemonic function of the domestic sphere. The men of the navy have already solidified their importance in the nation; thus, they have no need to establish their sexual stability by maintaining hegemonic control at home. And while Harville and Benwick cling to various conventional conceptions about men and women, Austen highlights the geniality of the men and women of the naval community.

Austen favorably presents the naval community as nomadic packs; its members are not tied to specific domestic settings or tethered to structured
social identities. Deleuze and Guattari theorize that nomads exist and move as packs in which they enjoy “absolute movement.” They explain that “nomads have no points, paths, or land, even though they do by all appearances” (*Thousand Plateaus* 381). Austen’s portrayal of Wentworth’s naval comrades emphasizes their versatility and acceptance of diverse experiences and people; they welcome unknown visitors without reservation, and do not conceive of their “home” as a fixed point of stasis. This radical flexibility and open reception of others displayed by the navy accentuates the conventional-ity of Wentworth’s earlier actions. Moreover, his reunion with the Harvilles also allows us to appreciate Wentworth’s compassion for his maritime friends. We learn, through Anne’s conversation with Captain Harville, of the hero’s dutiful and empathetic service to the melancholic Benwick. Following the death of Benwick’s fiancée, Fanny Harville, Wentworth offered to inform his friend of the deplorable news. Harville tells Anne that “nobody could do it, but that good fellow, (pointing to Captain Wentworth). . . . [He] 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” (105). Harville’s story suggests the hero’s knowledge of the tradition of male sentiment, but this account also reminds us how Wentworth’s care for others in the nomadic naval pack is an integral feature of his aesthetic of existence. Wentworth’s care of his self involves his concern for others, and his time in Lyme prompts him to reconsider the care he has displayed toward Louisa Musgrove.

Louisa’s near-tragic fall from the Lyme Cobb encourages Wentworth to reevaluate his relationship with the young woman as well as his conventional and contradictory expectations for women. He previously informed Louisa that his “first wish for all, whom I am interested in, is that they should be firm,” but when the young woman announces her intention to jump a second time from the seaside wall, the hero “advised her against it, [he] thought the jar too great” (86). Louisa, however, persists, and jumping “too precipitate by half a second . . . was taken up lifeless!” Wentworth is shocked by Louisa’s fall and looks upon her “with a face as pallid as her own, in an agony of silence” (106). The hero endures an overwhelming emotional experience, while Anne illustrates her resourcefulness by calling for a surgeon. Wentworth “caught the word; it seemed to rouse him at once, and saying only ‘True, true, a surgeon this instant’” (107). Louisa is not well served by Wentworth’s conflicting desires for female firmness and delicacy—neither her strength nor her fragility prevents her fall. Anne’s adaptability, however, enables the heroine to manage this moment of crisis and disruption. Her actions simulate the versatility required of the naval community, and Wentworth appreciates her flexibility. He even requests that Anne remain with the Harvilles to assist in
the care of Louisa, explaining, “if Anne will stay, no one so proper, so capable as Anne! . . . You will stay, I am sure; you will stay and nurse her’; cried he, turning to her and speaking with a glow, and yet a gentleness, which seemed almost restoring the past” (111). While the visit to Lyme begins with Anne’s admiration of Wentworth’s naval community, by the end of their outing Wentworth observes the maritime values of the heroine. The lovers had earlier ceased their relations because of severe class distinctions, but Anne and Wentworth now appear comfortable with the social/sexual subjectivities allowed by a nomadic lifestyle.

Austen highlights the effects of Wentworth’s sustained affection for Anne following his arrival in Bath. When he first encounters the heroine in Bath, the narrator records that “he was more obviously struck and confused by the sight of [Anne], than she had ever observed before; he looked quite red.” Austen adds that “[t]ime had changed him, or Louisa had changed him. There was consciousness of some sort or other. He looked very well, not as if he had been suffering in health or spirits . . . yet it was Captain Wentworth not comfortable, not easy, not able to feign that he was” (166). Wentworth is again discomposed by Anne; the “multiplicities of multiplicities” that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, become manifest in a love relationship, inhibit the hero from sustaining himself as a stable man. The familiar conventions of male behavior upon which Wentworth had previously relied to orchestrate his conduct are no longer functional. His passion for Anne over­whelms such models of hegemonic English masculinity; he suddenly lacks an organizing mechanism around which to order his sexuality, and while he offers Anne his umbrella to protect her during a walk in the rain, he does not protest when she refuses. He quickly abandons his chivalric routine, as he does when Anne later spots the hero amongst a group of naval officers.

The narrator relates that he “was preparing only to bow and pass on, but [Anne’s] gentle ‘How do you do?’ brought him out of the straight line to stand near her, and make enquiries in return, in spite of the formidable father and sister in the back ground” (171). His feelings for Anne prevent him from reverting to secure/securing modes of English masculinity like Austen’s other men; he has allowed love “to abolish [the] subjectification” that Deleuze and Guattari claim leads individuals to assume territorial­ized modes of disciplined behavior (Thousand Plateaus 134). Deleuze and Guattari argue that “every love is an exercise in depersonalization on a body without organs yet to be formed” (Thousand Plateaus 35). Austen emphasizes Wentworth’s disavowal of conventional masculine artifice that would establish him as a hegemonic social/sexual subject in favor of the malleable masculinity devoid of regulatory structures like machines or organs. The
narrator reports that the heroine “was expecting him to go every moment; but he did not; he seemed in no hurry to leave her” (172). He again demonstrates his sustained care for Anne—a concern that remains integral to the development of his own aesthetic of existence. The heroine recognizes his compassion and concludes that “all, all declared that he had a heart returning to her at least; that anger, resentment, avoidance, were no more; and that they were succeeded, not merely by friendship and regard, but by the tenderness of the past; yes, some share of the tenderness of the past. She could not contemplate the change as implying less.—He must love her” (175). Anne, unlike Emma and Fanny, does not imagine her husband as a guardian or friend; Anne presents the hero as a committed and passionate lover who risks his security by revealing his emotions. Wentworth is sensitive to the depersonalizing forces of desire and their effects upon both him and his beloved. While Anne is confident of Wentworth’s love, the hero must negotiate one final obstacle before he can enunciate his feelings for the heroine.

Mr. Elliot’s inconsistent courtship of Anne causes Wentworth notable anxiety during the latter portion of the novel. The hero initially observes a strange familiarity between the heroine and her family heir during the Lyme outing, but his concern escalates following the concert in Bath. During intermission, the narrator reports that Anne and Wentworth were engaged in a cordial dialogue, and the hero “even looked down towards the bench, as if he saw a place on it well worth occupying”; however, “at that moment, a touch on her shoulder obliged Anne to turn round.—It came from Mr. Elliot.” Mr. Elliot’s ill-timed request for an Italian translation greatly affects Wentworth, who offers the heroine “a reserved yet hurried sort of farewell. ‘He must wish her good night. He was going—he should get home as fast as he could. . . . [T]here is nothing worth my staying for’” (180). Wentworth’s recent expressions of sincere emotions have left him vulnerable to destabilizing experiences, including envy, which threaten his tenuous aesthetic of existence. He has exposed himself to a diversity of powerful feelings, and Mr. Elliot’s interruption compels the hero to revert to established models of masculine propriety to save face. Anne is not long in discerning the reason for her lover’s abrupt departure: “Jealousy of Mr. Elliot! It was the only intelligible motive. Captain Wentworth jealous of her affection!” (180). Wentworth’s conveyance of affection will prove essential to his efforts to deterritorialize himself from the social dictates for appropriate English maleness, but this brief scene illustrates how jealous sentiments easily encourage him to become reterritorialized by conventional modes of English masculinity.

Wentworth does not immediately dismiss the ceremonious male behavior that once again inhibits his ability to express emotions. Austen brilliantly
positions her hero struggling with envy while he quietly remains within ear-shot of Anne’s discussion with Harville on the duration of amorous feelings. Wentworth takes this opportunity to author his climactic love letter in which he reveals the volatility of his passions for the heroine:

I can listen no longer in silence. I must speak to you by such means as are within my reach. You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. Tell me not that I am too late, that such precious feelings are gone for ever. 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. . . . I am every instant hearing something which overpowers me. (223)

Wentworth adopts the language of a lover, using a vocabulary of passion unprecedented in Austen’s earlier narratives. He announces the power of his extant feelings for Anne—feelings that he claims have remained constant. He acknowledges his weak and embittered behavior that engendered resentment, but he also explains that Anne—and not a post-Revolutionary social discourse on appropriate maleness—serves as the sole motivation for his recent actions. He willingly admits that he is overwhelmed by his emotions for the heroine, and he again offers himself as a vulnerable lover. Wentworth’s powerful revelation exposes the breadth of his emotions, and his exposure is both potent and dangerous: it illustrates the sincerity of his feelings, but it also promotes the instability and pliability of his sexuality.

His letter is the most open disclosure of amorous emotion by any man in Austen’s corpus, and his passionate expression proves vital to his deterritorialized, nomadic lifestyle. The narrative immediately foreshadows this unplanned movement when the hero, soon after delivering his letter, approaches Anne and Charles Musgrove. Charles inquires about Wentworth’s intended direction, thinking he may be able to relinquish the duty of escorting Anne; when Charles asks, “Captain Wentworth, which way are you going? only to Gay-street, or farther up the town?” Wentworth promptly responds, “I hardly know” (226). Wentworth’s lack of knowledge about his future plans prefigures his impending domestic life with Anne—a life that will not be structured around definitively ordered plans or dictated by a decaying social system. Immediately following Wentworth’s announcement of undirected movement, Austen relates that the lovers “exchanged again those feelings and those promises which had once before seemed to secure every thing, but which had been followed by so many, many years of division
and estrangement. There they returned again into the past . . . more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other’s character, truth, and attachment; more equal to act, more justified in acting” (226–27). Anne and Wentworth renew their amorous emotions, but they are now more “tender” and “tried.” Wentworth’s letter has clearly affected his lover, and the hero maintains that “of what he had then written, nothing was to be retracted or qualified. He persisted in having loved none but her.” Wentworth even references his attempt to mask his passion for Anne with artifice; he announces that “he had meant to forget her, and believed it to be done. He had imagined himself indifferent, when he had only been angry” (227). Wentworth exposes both his constancy and his prior pretense. He openly declares his perpetual desire for the heroine, but he also admits his earlier efforts to obscure his volatile desire.

Wentworth is self-conscious about his earlier dependence upon conventional versions of English masculinity to shield himself from the diverse experiences engendered by love; moreover, he now willingly acts upon his desires for Anne. Wentworth explains that he traveled to Bath so that he “could at least put [himself] in the way of happiness.” He adds that in Bath “[he] could exert [himself], [he] could do something” (229). Austen’s hero deliberately acts to pursue his own amorous desires, prominently distinguishing himself from other men of Austen’s corpus who happen upon love. His behavior is governed by love—not by Enlightenment notions of rationality or Burkean conceptions of chivalry. He abandons such models of English masculinity and opens himself to the unpredictable flows of amorous desires when he questions, “Was it unpardonable to think it worth my while to come? and to arrive with some degree of hope? You were single. It was possible that you might retain the feelings of the past, as I did” (229–30). Wentworth identifies himself as lover of Anne, and his Deleuzian love allows him to reveal his own diversity, experience the multiplicity of his beloved, and evade the modern cultural discipline that urges men to create finite social/sexual subjectivities.

Wentworth’s openness even allows him to revisit his former feelings of bitterness toward the heroine. He tells Anne that for many years he “could think of [her] only as one who had yielded, who had given [him] up, who had been influenced by any one rather than by [him]” (231). His confession reminds us of the hero’s prior reliance upon Enlightenment notions of individual responsibility that instructed men and women to act as independent agents and earn their successes by laborious effort. He could fathom Anne’s obedience to her family only as weakness, but he now admits, “I did not understand you. I shut my eyes, and would not understand you, or do you justice” (233). Wentworth’s earlier strategy for managing his strong passions
for Anne required him to dismiss her behavior as irrational and unworthy, effectively protecting himself from his emotions for the heroine. He again discusses his past adherence to conventional Enlightenment notions of merit and industry when he explains that he “[had] been used to the gratification of believing myself to earn every blessing that I enjoyed. I have valued myself on honourable toils and just rewards” (233). Austen’s hero, like the farmers of Jacobin novels, felt that he could earn his rewards through toil, but as he concludes, he “like other great men under reverses . . . must endeavour to subdue my mind to my fortune. I must learn to brook being happier than I deserve” (233). Wentworth’s emotional language illustrates the conventionality of his previous mindset and behavior, but his love for Anne negates the relevance of such cultural dictates. He realizes that he will now experience more happiness than either his individual industry merits or his rational capacity justifies. Wentworth accepts an aesthetic of existence free from the regulations of Enlightenment or Burkean codes of masculinity. He is nonetheless an established man, “with five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and as high in his profession as merit and activity could place him” (234). He is a professional sailor, and this social status ensures his participation in the nation; yet, unlike the other men of Austen’s corpus, Wentworth no longer depends upon a hegemonic social/sexual identity. His elastic aesthetic of existence instead revolves around a nautical lifestyle marked by nomadic flows and the care of himself and his lover.14

Austen may prefigure such a migratory way of life by not placing Anne and Wentworth within a stable and permanent domestic setting. Prewitt Brown notes that “Persuasion is the only one of [Austen’s] novels that ends with a vague ignorance of where the hero and heroine are going to live, and even of what the years will bring for them” (140). Austen does not install Anne and Wentworth in a secure domain, but she does acknowledge the power of amorous emotions to guide their behavior. In classic Austenian style, she questions, “Who can be in doubt of what followed? When any two young people take it into their heads to marry, they are pretty sure by perseverance to carry their point” (233). Austen’s comment may appear strikingly similar to the witty quips that close many of her narratives, but this closing remark actually accentuates the potency of Anne and Wentworth’s desires. Unlike the “lovers” of Northanger Abbey and Emma, Anne and Wentworth “carry their point”; they are not stalled by belated parental approval. In addition, Austen does not qualify Anne and Wentworth’s happiness as she does for many of the marriages that close Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park, and Pride and Prejudice. The future of Persuasion’s lovers is strikingly ambiguous, and the lack of their definitive plan reminds us of the undulations inherent in their maritime relationship.
Austen’s closing remarks highlight both the radical movement and the powerful desires involved in Wentworth and Anne’s marriage. The narrator concludes that “Anne was tenderness itself . . . [and] the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor’s wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession, which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance” (237). Anne and Wentworth accept the realities involved in their nautical existence, and according to Austen, the values associated with this lifestyle are more important in the domestic sphere. Wentworth and Anne, however, are not rooted to a single domicile; they must instead accept the wisdom of Mrs. Croft’s prophecy that “none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days” (69). Anne and Wentworth’s acceptance of inevitable motion—and the radical malleability it requires—allows them the opportunity to seek a nomadic life, removed from the territorializing structures of a nation that is experiencing both decay and modernization. Unlike Austen’s prior couples, Anne and Wentworth do not uphold the relevance of an ancestral culture or attempt to advance Enlightenment doctrines; they are always already prepared to leave the discipline of post-revolutionary England. Austen suggests throughout the novel that the lovers’ feelings for each other engender personal insecurity, and the close of the novel may anticipate the radical impact of their relationship upon English society. Deleuze and Guattari point out that “love and desire exhibit reactionary, or else revolutionary, indices . . . where persons give way to decoded flows of desire” (Anti-Oedipus 366). Anne and Wentworth do not, of course, organize aggressive countercultural movements, but they do embody potentially revolutionary desires for each other. They model a Deleuzian existence that encourages men and women to pursue the multiplicity of love and the complexity of packs rather than hegemonic relationships and the organized discipline of modern England.

Austen does not provide us with a complete Nomadology as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari, and yet she does offer an image of what such a nomadic life might entail, especially for sexualized lovers in a modern nation. Deleuze and Guattari explain that the “nomad can be called the Deterritorialized par excellence, . . . because there is no reterritorialization afterward” (Thousand Plateaus 381). Wentworth and Anne serve as compelling examples of this migratory concept, as they avoid the reterritorialization inherent in the acceptance of a stable domestic life. Austen’s lovers resist the lure of social security in favor of the mobility of the sea, and as Deleuze and Guattari conclude, “the maximum deterritorialization appears in the tendency of maritime and commercial towns to separate off from the backcountry, from the countryside” (Thousand Plateaus 432). Anne and Wentworth achieve
such separation from the reterritorializing forces of modern capitalism and post-Revolutionary nationalism that encourage men and women to accept individualized and functional civic roles. Wentworth and Anne embrace both the dynamism of their malleable lifestyle and the destabilizing power of their love. Wentworth specifically allows himself to experience amorous passions, exposing the diversity of his masculinity; unlike Austen’s other men, he does not fix his sexuality—it remains in flux and perpetually nomadic. He reveals, by expressing his amorous emotions for Anne, the variety involved in his social/sexual subjectivity, and his awareness of this multiplicity enables him to live a nomadic existence with his wife, pursuing potentially revolutionary desires.