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**The Importance of Class and Money -  
A Marxist Analysis of Jane Austen's *Persuasion***

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## **Abstract**

This essay analyzes how issues related to money and social class are presented in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. The method used will be a close reading as well as aspects of Marxist literary criticism, a theory that will be presented in the second chapter. Background information about the author and her time will then be given in the third chapter. In chapter four, the character of Sir Walter Elliot will be analyzed, in chapter five Elizabeth Elliot, and in chapter six William Elliot. Some of the other characters will be analyzed, more briefly, in the seventh chapter. Conclusions will then be drawn in the eighth and final chapter.

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

“Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch-hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were roused into admiration and respect, by contemplating the limited remnant of the earliest patents; there any unwelcome sensations arising from domestic affairs, changed naturally into pity and contempt, as he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century – and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read his own history with an interest which never failed – this was the page at which the favourite volume always opened”

(Austen 35)

Already in this first sentence of the last of Jane Austen’s finished novels, *Persuasion*, we find one of the main themes of the story – that class is what is most important. As the reader proceeds further into the novel, the opinion that class is the only thing that matters is made even more obvious. Unless someone is of a certain class, the fact that he or she has money does not matter – birth alone counts. When someone openly values money over class, such as Mr Elliot in his choice of a wife, this person is frowned upon. We are also presented with a different point of view: that of Mr Elliot, who, as a young man, valued money more than the title he would eventually inherit.

But as the story progresses, it is made clear that neither the opinion that class is superior to fortune nor that money is better than social status is constant – it changes with the circumstances, an inconsistency that can be seen in several of the novel’s main characters. Some, such as Sir Walter and his daughter Elizabeth, go from considering class as the most important thing to valuing money more; others, like Mr Elliot, after having considered money better than class, start to think the opposite.

In this essay I will analyze the attitudes towards class and money held by the characters of *Persuasion*, as well as how, for some, these attitudes change during the progress of the story. I will discuss several of the characters, but will focus primarily on Sir Walter, Elizabeth and Mr Elliot. I will start by presenting and discussing the theory and method that I

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank my teacher in ‘Advanced literary writing’, Anna Fåhraeus, for all the help she has given me with this essay

will use before providing background information about the author, Jane Austen, as well as about the concepts of money and class during her lifetime; how Austen was affected by this; and how this is portrayed in her novels. I will then analyze various passages of the novel that highlight the attitude to class and money that the characters of the novel have, as well as the fact that these attitudes change during the course of *Persuasion*. I will argue here that the attitude towards class and money is dependent on both the situation of the person in question and on surrounding circumstances, and that these attitudes change during the course of the story of *Persuasion*.

## **2. Theory and method**

I will do a close reading focusing on the scenes of the novel which show the characters' attitudes towards class and money and how these attitudes change. Aspects of Marxist literary criticism will also be used.

### **2.1. Close reading**

Close reading, or explication, is, as the term implies, to read a work or passage closely and to look at and analyze “complex interrelations and ambiguities of the form *and* the content of the work” (Childers and Hentzi 206). When doing close reading, one focuses on words, images, and symbols, instead of the characters or the plot of the story. Tensions, paradoxes and irony are noted and analysed, and the goal of literature, according to this theory, is to achieve a “reconciliation of diverse impulses” (206)

### **2.2 Marxist literary criticism**

Marxist literary criticism has, as the name indicates, its basis in the theories of Karl Marx and his associates. The main idea of Marxism is that “instead of making abstract affirmations about a whole group of problems such as man, knowledge, matter, and nature, he examines each problem in its dynamic relation to the others and, above all, tries to relate them to historical, social, political, and economic realities” (BO). Marx argued that the real foundation of society was the economic structure, that political and legal superstructures rose from this

base, and that “[i]t is not the consciousness of men which determines their existence; it is on the contrary their social existence which determines their consciousness” (BO).

The most fundamental argument of Marxist literary and cultural theories is that they do not see art as something that is separate from society – art is, as Eagleton says, “part of the ‘superstructure’ of society” (5) – and the central concern of Marxist literary criticism is the relationship between the economy and the literature. Marxist critics argue that art is social because it is produced and received in concrete contexts, and because the creator is someone with a class, gender and racial identity – the author is, unavoidably, “part of her own context” (Haslett 8). Art, in Marxist readings, “is interpreted as a material practice, perhaps because it relies on ‘technology’... is concretely realised in situations which themselves are material... or is bought and sold like other commodities” (8). The first thing that one needs to do in order to do a Marxist analysis is then, according to Eagleton, “to understand the complex, indirect relations between... works [of art] and the ideological worlds they inhabit” (6).

The interest of Marxist literary theories is consequently to try to place the work in an overall context, since “[a]rt cannot exist outside society” (Haslett 15). Or, as Eagleton expresses it, to analyse literature “in terms of the historical conditions which produce it” (xi). What makes Marxism different from other theories is that it prioritises the way in which culture is created, distributed and obtained as a tangible and social practice. The economic mode of society is vital for Marxist theorists because it is the financial system that often decides how art will be constructed (Haslett 8). Something else that sets Marxist criticism apart from other theories is not that it looks to history to understand a work of art – this approach to literary analysis can be found elsewhere, for example in historical or biographical theories – but the way in which it understands history itself (Eagleton 3).

Marxist literary theories are not homogenous, and there is no one way to do a Marxist analysis, but all approaches have in common that they try both to convey the relationship between literature and society and to challenge the separation which this relationship entails. Literature is situated within the larger parameters of social, economical and cultural history, effectively erasing the division between ‘literary’ and ‘cultural’ theory. (Haslett 9-10). Most Marxist critics also assume that “the objects we view as works of literature or art are the products of historical forces that can be analyzed by focusing on the material conditions in which they are formed” (Childers and Hentzi 175). Marxist critics discuss these conditions in terms of “control of capital... by classes” – usually, the class that is in control of the material items, also controls the intellectual and cultural spheres (175).

Marxist critics also claim that the aspects that we accept as characteristics of a certain age, are only expressions of the class that dominated during that period of time. (175)

Art or literature produced in a certain environment is ideological, signifying the class conflicts at work at the time, and it is the job of the Marxist analyst to show these conflicts as they are portrayed in the text. Marxist criticism also tries to create what it believes is “progressive political and social change”; the final goal generally being a classless society (Childers and Hentzi 176).

Marxist literary critics see literature as tied to social power, thus literary analysis is often related to larger issues in society. In the end, Marxist literary criticism is only a small fraction of a much larger attempt to expose the inner machinery of our civilization. (E-CCT)<sup>2</sup>. In other words; “Marxist criticism is part of a larger body of theoretical analysis which aims to understand *ideologies*” as Eagleton puts it (xii-xiii).

### **3. Background**

#### **3.1 Jane Austen and her time**

Jane Austen was the second daughter and the seventh child of the Reverend George Austen and his wife Cassandra (born Leigh), and was born on December 16 in 1775. At the time of Austen’s birth, the family was living in Steventon in the county of Hampshire on the south coast of England. Austen had seven siblings: six brothers and one sister, Cassandra, who was her closest companion through life. Her father, George Austen, was a scholar and encouraged his children’s love of learning while her mother, Cassandra, was known for making up stories and verses.

Austen’s social network was extensive, consisting of family as well as friends, and the loving environment she lived in was an important source of inspiration when it came to her writing. She wrote about the parts of the world and the social arena that she knew best, and the settings in her novels are villages and country towns, as well as larger cities such as Bath and London. The characters of her novels are also derived from the social spheres where she herself could be found, such as the country clergy – her father was, as already mentioned, a clergyman – and the minor landed gentry, to which her brother belonged.

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<sup>2</sup> This abbreviation will in the rest of this essay refer to the Internet page “English 60A – Contemporary Critical Theory”. For URL, see the bibliography

In 1801, at the age of 70, George Austen retired and moved his wife and daughters from Steventon to Bath. In January 1805, George Austen passed away, and his wife and daughters moved to Southampton, where they remained for four years, until Austen's brother Edward finally managed to provide them with a large cottage on his own estate in the village of Chawton, not far from Steventon. Austen remained here until she, in May 1817, was taken to a surgeon in Winchester due to her declining health. She died on July 18, and was buried in Winchester Cathedral six days later.

Austen never married, but there are indications that she, in 1802, agreed to marry Harris Bigg-Wither, who was the heir of a Hampshire family, only to change her mind the following morning. There are also several contradictory stories which talk of her being in love with someone who died.

During the time of Jane Austen's life, class was part of the everyday life, and, since she wrote realistic novels, Austen needed to observe the fine differences between social levels. Her novels should show people "in their social roles, and... be precise about the differences between them" (Copeland and McMaster 128). The portraits of characters from the higher classes in her novels suggest that she found "nothing divine about royalty" and little that was "special about peers" (116). In Austen's world, social status was always pertinent, but people were to be judged by standards higher and more durable than this. (129)

Austen was, due to her father being a country clergyman, part of the class that historian David Spring called 'pseudo-gentry' – "upper professional families living in the country" (132). These families had connections with the wealthier landed-gentry families, but had very different economic situations. (132)

Since women in that time were supposed to take their status in society from their husbands, Austen, as an unmarried woman, was to an extent outside the class system. On the other hand, Austen had the advantage of being able to move between two different class situations; she lived with her widowed mother and sister in a cottage that belonged to her brother, but she could also spend time at her landowner brother's country estate. (115)

It can also be noted that Jane Austen lived during the British industrial revolution and that the British society was changing drastically, as were the technological and economical spheres. According to Cantor, money was replacing property as "the fundamental form of wealth" (129). The political power also shifted; from having belonged to the aristocracy, the political arena was now also open to people from the growing middle class. (129)

Among the gentry and the landed gentry in Austen's time, there were different levels of income. On the lower levels, the number of servants was a good indicator to a family's income; on the slightly higher levels, the purchase of a carriage would function in the same way; and for the very wealthy people, the 'house in town' would signal the amount of money possessed. (Copeland and McMaster 134)

On an income of £100 a year, a family could employ only one servant on a low salary, with £300 a year, another servant could be added to the staff, and with £500 a year, three servants could be kept. With an income approaching £1000 a year, the keeping of a carriage was made possible, and with more than £4000 annually, one would be able to purchase a house in London. (Copeland and McMaster 135-137)

Married women had no legal right to money in Austen's time, and the rights of unmarried women were ruthlessly deficient. The irony of this was that women were responsible for the administration of the household, but legally prevented from exercising any control over the finances, a duty which lay with the man of the house. In other words, if the man went bankrupt, it was still the responsibility of his wife to maintain the household. (137)

### **3.1.1 Titles and ranks**

On top of the social ladder in Jane Austen's time was, of course, the Royal Family. Below Royalty, we find what is known as the Peerage, a system of titles and nobility and a part of the British honours system. The highest title in the Peerage is Duke and Duchess, under which are four titles; highest is Marquis and Marquise, then comes Earl and Countess, after that Viscount and Viscountess, and finally Baron and Baroness. (JAC)<sup>3</sup>

Those who held more than one title would go by the highest of them; the oldest son would then have the second highest and any younger sons would have the title Lord. These titles were known as courtesy titles; only the Duke himself had a title in his own right, in other words a title that had been either inherited or bestowed on the person in question. When the possessor of the title died, the oldest son would inherit the title. The other children would keep their titles. If there was no son, the title could pass to the oldest daughter, but it was more likely that the title went to the closest male relative. (JAC)

The Peerage did not include Knights or Baronets, both referred to as 'Sir'. These titles were generally bestowed without the privileges of the Peerage or a seat in the House of

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<sup>3</sup> This abbreviation will in the rest of this essay refer to the Internet page "The Jane Austen Centre". For URL, see the bibliography

Lords. The titles of Knight – there were two different types – were not hereditary and the children of a Knight were usually only called Mr or Miss, though the wife of a Knight had the title of Lady. A Baronetcy, on the other hand, could be inherited by a male heir. The heir would then become Baronet, but was before this not given any special title, nor were the other children of the Baronet. The wife of the Baronet was, as the wife of the Knight, called Lady. (JAC)

Beneath Baronets and Knights, Esquire or Squire could be found, the Squire once having been the assistant to a Knight. The title of Squire was later used to refer to a son of a Knight or the Lord of a Manor, and the title could also be given to people with judiciary ties. On the level below Squires, there were the members of the clergy and barristers, as well as Naval and Army officers; below this level one could find the Burgess and the Yeomen; and, finally, at the bottom of the social ladder, the poor. (JAC)

There was a difference between titles that were inherited and titles that were bestowed for particular service during Austen's time. The titles of Baronet and Knight, as mentioned above, were both signalled by the title 'Sir', but since the Baronetcy was an inherited title, it was more prestigious than the Knighthood. Differences in women's titles were also obvious. A woman could be a 'Lady' by birth, as the daughter of an Earl, or she could achieve the title by marrying a Baronet or a Knight. If she had the title by birth, she would maintain it regardless of the status of her husband, whereas if she gained the title by marriage, she would lose it if she chose to remarry a 'Mr'. (Copeland and McMaster 116-117)

There were also differences between siblings; in general, the oldest son would inherit not only his father's title – if there was a title to inherit – but also the majority of the land. This practice was to preserve the family name and estate; if the estate was divided equally between the siblings, it would ultimately disappear. The oldest son, who would eventually come into the family estate, was often raised to laziness, while the younger sons had to work for their living. Sisters in a family also had different titles. The oldest daughter would be called 'Miss' followed by the last name, while the younger daughters would be called 'Miss' followed by their first name. It was also common practice that the oldest sister was presented to society before her younger sisters. When one sister married, she automatically obtained a higher status than her older, unmarried sisters. (119-120)

### 3.2 Class in Jane Austen's novels

As Downie states, the events in most of Jane Austen's novels centre around the issue of social status, which, perhaps, is not surprising considering the fact that, as we have already seen, class was an important part of society in those days. The subject described in her novels is "the complex interaction of the various groups which made up the ruling class of Georgian England" (72).

The very top of the social ladder, the royalty, are never depicted in Austen's novels – the person of highest rank presented is most likely Lord Osborne in *The Watsons* – and the characters that have titles are rarely presented in a favourable way. Lord Osborne is "not much better than a fool", and Sir Walter Elliot in *Persuasion* is obsessed with his social status; even Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, who is "the best of them" overvalues the importance of himself and his family (Copeland and McMaster 116).

The professional class – Austen's own social class – seems to be the one that is most favoured in her novels; several of her heroines marry clergymen like Austen's own father. (120) The landed gentry seems respected, as other heroines marry into the landowning gentry, and Austen's two most eligible heroes, Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* and Mr Knightley in *Emma*, come from this class. A negative side of the landed gentry can, however, be seen in Mr Rushworth in *Mansfield Park*, who is "morally and intellectually not worth much more than his name signifies" (117).

The lower social classes are rarely represented in Austen's novels. What was later to be called the working class is hardly present at all; the only connection the main characters have with this social class is through the servants, which correctly describes reality as it was at the time. The few glimpses we do catch of this class are of gypsies and rural labourers. Servants were generally not given speaking roles, though Austen did recognize that they had a discrete influence on their masters. The poor are not talked about often, but there is some contact between the world of the upper class and that of the poor. (127-128)

In Austen's novels the heroine often marries a man with an income as well as a social status markedly above her own. Money is not the only thing that matters, however, something that is shown when Elizabeth Bennet turns down Mr Darcy's initial proposal in *Pride and Prejudice*, indicating that she is not marrying him only for his fortune. (117)

In the relationship between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy we can also see that Austen appears to support what McMaster calls the “relative flattening of the degrees of distinction above the country gentry” (118). On the other hand, Austen notes the inclination to be highly conscious of the social levels below this class in *Emma*, something that is done with irony. (118)

In her novels, it is also clear that Austen believed that with the privileges of the upper class came responsibilities – for example, to treat people with courtesy and respect, as well as to handle one’s money responsibly. This can, for example, be seen in *Pride and Prejudice*, where Elizabeth Bennet turns down Mr Darcy’s proposal because he is proud and pretentious, and in *Persuasion*, where Sir Walter must leave his residence to a man of the navy because he has ignored his responsibilities and only wanted to benefit from the advantages. (118-119)

The importance of connections (connexions) in the upper classes is made obvious in *Emma*, where the difference between ‘old’ and ‘new’ upper class can be seen. Mrs Bates used to be the well-known wife of the vicar, and after his death, she and her daughter live on a slim income – but they still have connections in the neighbourhood, which seems more important than all the money in the world. The opposite is shown in the Coles, who have a considerable amount of money and many servants, but no connections to speak of. (125-126)

Finally, as McMasters so fittingly says about Austen’s treatment of class in her novels;

“With amused detachment, she registers exactly the social provenance of each of her characters, and judges them for the ways in which they judge each other. The importance assigned to class distinction is the source of much of her comedy and her irony, as of her social satire.”

(Copeland and McMasters 129)

### 3.3 Money in Jane Austen's novels

According to Copeland, Jane Austen was “[f]rom the start of her career... a shrewd observer of the economic terrain of her class, though always from the chilly and exposed position of an economically marginal female member of it”, and single women without money are a recurring feature in her novels (Copeland and McMaster 145).

Income is a subject that is discussed openly in Austen's novels; either the income of the character is provided in plain numbers, or a hint is given by the descriptions of said character's house, carriage and servants, for example (133). As Downie says, Austen “goes to considerable lengths” to provide the reader with information about her characters' financial situations in most of her novels (70).

Austen's attention to money in her novels can be seen to change during her career; in the early novels the focus was simply on the lack of riches as a financial issue for women, but as her writing progressed, women were involved in increasingly more complicated economic dealings. (Copeland and McMaster 132) In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor and Marianne discuss their “hearts' desires” as the level of income they wish their future husbands to have; in *Pride and Prejudice*, one of the main issues is Elizabeth Bennet's lack of money in relation to Mr Darcy's fortune; and in *Persuasion*, women are actually seen as more suitable to control finances than men since “[w]hile Lady Elliot lived, there had been method, moderation, and economy, which had just kept [Sir Walter] within his income: but with her had died all such right-mindedness, and from that period he had been constantly exceeding it” and when the situation grows more complicated, Sir Walter turns to Lady Russell. (Copeland and McMaster 133, Austen 40)

It can also be noted, as Clausen has, that *Persuasion* is the first novel where Austen has the hero of the story making his own way in life. In the previous novels, most of the heroes have been either eldest sons who only needed to manage the family estate, or younger sons who have been thrust into the church; Captain Wentworth is the only hero in a Jane Austen novel who even tries to better his situation in life. (92-93) As McMaster expresses it, Captain Wentworth is a “relatively self-made man” who has made his fortune by working. (Copeland and McMaster 121)

## 4. Sir Walter

“Sir Walter Elliot... was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there... he could read his own history with an interest which never failed – this was the page at which the favourite volume always opened”<sup>4</sup>

(Austen 35)

This passage, already mentioned in the introduction, establishes Sir Walter’s attitude towards class in the beginning of the novel. The only thing that can cheer Sir Walter up is, apparently, to read about his own status in society – never mind that he has three daughters. This outlook on life shows the vanity that is so obvious in Sir Walter, both regarding his appearance and, more importantly, his place, and the place of his family, in society. In the following pages we are allowed to learn of Sir Walter’s attitude towards his own children, which is also tainted by the importance of class; Elizabeth is dear to him since she can still be expected to “one day or another, marry suitably”, in other words, add to the status of the family name by raising or emphasizing hers; Mary only “acquired a little artificial importance” as a member of the Elliot family by “becoming Mrs Charles Musgrove”; and Anne is treated badly, neglected and has her feelings and thoughts ignored because “[h]e had never indulged much hope, he had now none, of ever reading her name in any other page of his favourite work” (38, 37). These short quotations show that the love and attention Sir Walter gives his daughters is dependent on what they have already added or what they can, or what he thinks that they can, add to the social status of the Elliot family name. Mary has already made her match, and since it was a relatively good one, she has been granted the honour of having an additional entry in the all-important Baronetage. Elizabeth still has the potential to marry well, and add to the status of the family, and for this she is highly valued by her father, whereas Anne, in Sir Walter’s mind, is already a lost cause of sorts. He does not expect her to contribute to the status of the family name, so he chooses not to put any effort into his relationship with her; “she was only Anne” (37).

Furthermore, Sir Walter’s attitude towards class in relation to money can be seen in his reaction to Mr Elliot’s marriage to “a rich woman of inferior birth”; he “resented it” (39). The fact that it is pointed out that the rich woman is of inferior birth shows that this is more important than the fact that Mr Elliot has gone behind Sir Walter’s back, rejected his

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<sup>4</sup> For the entire quotation, see the introduction

precious daughter and married another woman. The fact that by doing this he ascertained that the title of the Elliot family would no longer be in Sir Walter's line of the family is also an important factor; in the event of Sir Walter not remarrying and having a son, the title of Lady Elliot would pass from his family to this woman that is, in his mind, below him and his daughter. This passage clearly shows that Sir Walter thinks that status in society is infinitely more important than money; he would, probably, not have had anything to object to if Mr Elliot had married a woman of equal or superior birth.

Another implication that Sir Walter favours class over money can be found in his attitude towards his own financial situation; "He had condescended to mortgage as far as he had the power, but he would never condescend to sell" (41). This attitude, along with Sir Walter's reaction when Lady Russell presents her economic plan to help him clear himself of debt, shows that he considers money as inferior to class. It is only disgracing to sell Kellynch, but it is no disgrace to be in debt without the ability to pay the people he owes money. It is more important to uphold the image of his title than to try to do something about his financial problems. The fact that he is willing to leave Kellynch before retrenching on the luxury that he believes is due his position, only emphasizes this attitude. In renting out Kellynch and moving to Bath, he can still maintain his image, whereas if he had stayed at Kellynch and applied a more controlled economic strategy, everyone would have been able to see that Sir Walter of Kellynch Hall had financial issues, and this is worse than actually having them.

Moreover, in Sir Walter's attitude towards the Navy can we see that he prefers the 'old' upper classes – the ones that are based on old, inherited titles – to the new and upcoming ones – the ones who have worked for their place in society. He resents the Navy because it brings "persons of obscure birth into undue distinction" and raises "men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers had never dreamt of" (49). The fact that he uses the phrase 'undue distinction' shows that he considers himself as being worthy of this distinction simply because he has inherited his title and money, whereas men of the Navy – and, we may assume, others who have actively improved their place in society – who have actually worked for their money and social advancement, do not deserve it. This overestimation of his own class only shows Sir Walter's refusal to accept that the world changes.

Cantor comments on Sir Walter's attitude towards the Navy, saying that, though Sir Walter is simple-minded in the matter, he does still realize that the English society has been reshaped by the Napoleonic wars, something that can be seen in his complaint that the Navy helps men who do not deserve it to rise to a better place in society. According to Cantor,

this shows that Austen understood that the social and economic evolution in England was more successful in creating a new society than the revolution in France; “The French guillotine their aristocrats; the English simply buy them out” (129).

Sir Walter’s ignorance as to who the “gentleman who lived at Monkford”, that Shepherd refers to when they are discussing the Crofts renting Kellynch, is shown that, in his mind, the only thing that can make someone a gentleman is property and birth (Austen 52). Sir Walter is confused about the term that Shepherd uses because he thought that by gentleman he meant “some man of property” (52). In Sir Walter’s opinion, “Mr Wentworth was nobody... quite unconnected; nothing to do with the Strafford family” (52-53). Since Mr Wentworth, apparently, did not own any property nor came from a family high on the social scale, he was nothing to Sir Walter.

The issue of the nature of a gentleman is explored by Cantor, who claims that, to Sir Walter, “being a gentleman is simply a matter of birth and family connections” (132). This point of view is, according to Cantor, proven to be the wrong way of thinking by the way that Lady Russell intends to extricate Sir Walter from debt, when she says that, though “a great deal is due to the feelings of the gentleman”, there is “still more due to the character of an honest man” (133). Cantor argues that the plot of *Persuasion* shows that “middle-class figures may be acting more ‘nobly’ than aristocrats” and that Austen, as a “supporter of aristocratic principles”, was able to understand the shift of traditionally aristocratic standards from the disappearing aristocracy to the upcoming middle class (133).

This aspect of class and landownership is further discussed by Martin, who claims that, in Austen’s novels, gentlemen were “as a rule, the owners of landed estates” (139). He further argues that the concept of being ‘gentlemanlike’ in the world of Austen is “complex and fluid”, something that can take a slightly different meaning “either from the user, or from the situation which prompts its use” (140). Austen was also, according to Martin, mainly concerned with “the interplay between two distinct meanings of ‘gentleman’, an ethical meaning... and a social meaning”, where the social meaning referred to strictly superficial aspects, such as how men talked and dressed for example, something that could be plain acting (140). Martin further states that the way a gentleman was defined in Austen’s works changed in *Persuasion*. In previous novels, there had been a link between the gentleman owning property and ethical issues; this connection has been abandoned in *Persuasion*, and the behaviour of those who were previously seen as ‘gentlemen’ is embodied in “the treacherous scheming of Mr Elliot and in the near-caricature figures of Sir Walter and of his eldest daughter” (141).

Sir Walter's thoughts after he has decided to let Kellynch Hall to Admiral Croft further show his attitudes towards class; "I have let my house to Admiral Croft' would sound extremely well; very much better than to any mere Mr... An admiral speaks his own consequences, and, at the same time, can never make a baronet look small. In all their dealings and intercourse, Sir Walter must ever have the precedence." (Austen 53). In other words, as long as it does not reflect badly upon himself, Sir Walter is perfectly happy to let his house. It is important that the person allowed to rent the estate is not a 'nobody' in society, but at the same time, he cannot be 'better' than Sir Walter himself. Everything comes back to Sir Walter's status in society and what people think of this status.

The way that Sir Walter talks about Bath after Anne has arrived in Camden Place is also an indication to his attitude towards class; the first thing he says is that their house is "undoubtedly the best in Camden Place" and that their acquaintance is "exceedingly sought after" (151). The only reason that Sir Walter and Elizabeth are happy to see Anne is because they can show off their status in Bath.

Additionally, the importance of class, and connections with people higher up on the social ladder, is clearly seen in the reactions of Sir Walter and Elizabeth when it is announced that their cousins, the Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple and the Honourable Miss Carteret, are coming to Bath. The interest that Sir Walter shows in re-acquainting himself and his family with the relatives is rather odd; it has been more than thirteen years since the incident that caused the two families to lose contact, why has he not tried to correct the error committed all those years ago before this time? It appears that it is only when connections with relatives can benefit himself and the status of his family that they matter. This way of thinking is also obvious in the relationship with Mr Elliot. Sir Walter had no interest in seeking Mr Elliot's acquaintance after the death of his wife, but now, when he thinks that he has reason to believe that Mr Elliot might be interested in Elizabeth, the relationship is very important.

Another situation which shows Sir Walter's attitude towards people he considers below him is when Anne refuses to go with him and Elizabeth to visit the Dalrymples because she has a previous engagement with Mrs Smith; "'Westgate Buildings!' said he; 'and who is Miss Anne Elliot to be visiting in Westgate Buildings? – A Mrs Smith. A widow Mrs Smith, – and who was her husband? One of the five thousand Mr Smiths whose names are to be met with every where?'" (169). With this speech, Sir Walter shows his disregard, and contempt, for people of lower social classes than his own. He hopes that he, by reminding Anne of who she is, will be able to persuade her to cancel her meeting and go with the rest of the family to

a more 'suitable' appointment. He also shows his disregard of other people's feelings, as he speaks about Mrs Smith as a "poor widow, barely able to live" in front of Mrs Clay, who is in a very similar position herself (170). It can also be seen that Sir Walter values connections and class higher than friendship; he expects Anne to give up a meeting with her friend to spend her evening with people she has no feelings for whatsoever.

The turn of events, so to speak, comes when Sir Walter shows his recognition of Captain Wentworth at the concert. Anne, from seeing Captain Wentworth bowing in the direction of her father, conveys that Sir Walter has "judged so well as to give [Captain Wentworth] that simple acknowledgement of acquaintance" (191). The fact that Sir Walter has accepted Captain Wentworth as an important member of society is emphasized by his conversation with Lady Dalrymple, when he calls Captain Wentworth "'[a] very well-looking man'", something that can be compared with his earlier reflections that men of the navy suffered from decay in their appearance due to their work (197). These words are an indication that Sir Walter has, after many years, and – perhaps more importantly – many thousands of pounds, accepted Captain Wentworth.

The complete change of attitude that Sir Walter has towards Captain Wentworth can be seen in the last chapter, where Sir Walter has gone from thinking that Captain Wentworth marrying Anne would be "a very degrading alliance" to considering it "very far from... a bad match for her" (55, 250). The only thing that has changed in the situation is that Captain Wentworth is now a wealthy man, whereas the fortune of the Elliot family has been reduced so much that Sir Walter has been forced to let Kellynch Hall; so though the union brings no social status to the family, Sir Walter has realized that money is, in some cases, more important than class.

Sir Walter's change of attitude towards Captain Wentworth is discussed by Cantor, who claims that the fact that Wentworth has earned himself a fortune in the years that he and Anne have been apart is the reason that Sir Walter, in the end, considers him an appropriate match for his daughter. Cantor says that though Austen does not "trumpet the fact", she is "portraying a major shift in the balance of power in Regency England" – that the aristocracy is slowly being pushed to the side to make room for the increasing middle class, a transfer that is most obviously seen in the exchange of Sir Walter for Admiral Croft as the proprietor of Kellynch Hall (129).

## 5. Elizabeth

“[Elizabeth] had, while a very young girl, as soon as she had known [William Elliot] to be, in the event of her having no brother, the future baronet, meant to marry him... and in one of their spring excursions to London, when Elizabeth was in her first bloom, Mr Elliot had been forced into the introduction. He was at that time a very young man, just engaged in the study of the law; and Elizabeth found him extremely agreeable, and every plan in his favour was confirmed. He was invited to Kellynch Hall... but he never came. The following spring he was seen again in town, found equally agreeable, again encouraged, invited and expected, and again he did not come.”

(Austen 39)

This quotation shows Elizabeth’s attitude towards her own social status; she has, already before meeting Mr Elliot, decided to marry him, simply because he is the heir to her father’s title. It does not matter what kind of person he is, how he looks, or if he even deserves her affection; the only thing she is concerned with is the title that would go with the marriage. When actually meeting Mr Elliot, she finds him “extremely agreeable”; whether she actually does find him agreeable or not is impossible to say, because she is so determined that she will marry him that she has no choice but to find him agreeable (39). The fact that, even after he rejects the first invitation to visit Kellynch, he is invited again, only emphasizes how completely uninterested Elizabeth is in anything other than Mr Elliot’s status. It is perfectly clear that Mr Elliot is not the least bit interested in courting Elizabeth, and by simply not coming to Kellynch he shows himself to be an impolite person, but none of this matters – at least not when a title is involved.

Further on, we can again see Elizabeth’s obsession with class and status, when we learn that Elizabeth could see “only in [Mr Elliot], a proper match for Sir Walter’s eldest daughter” and that “[t]here was not a baronet from A to Z, whom her feelings could have so willingly acknowledged as an equal” (40). So Elizabeth is not only unable to picture herself marrying ‘below’ her own social status, she can really only see herself marrying her father’s heir and through doing so becoming the rightful lady of her own family. The fact that she cannot consider Mr Elliot again after his first wife died might show some kind of common sense, but the only reason that she cannot is that “he had... spoken most disrespectfully about

them all, most slightly and contemptuously of the very blood he belonged to” and “[t]his could not be pardoned” (40). It is, apparently, a greater sin to talk ill of the family than to reject Elizabeth, a suitable match when it comes to class, to marry a woman of a lower rank.

Another incident which shows Elizabeth’s attitude to, or perhaps faith in, class is when Anne tries to draw her attention to the fact that their father could develop an interest in Mrs Clay. Elizabeth so completely disregards Anne’s thoughts, saying that “Mrs Clay... never forgets who she is... And as to my father, I really should not have thought that he, who has kept himself single so long for our sake, need be suspected now. If Mrs Clay had been a very beautiful woman, I grant you, it might be wrong to have her so much with me; not that any thing in the world, I am sure would induce my father to make a degrading match” (62). By considering it completely impossible that Sir Walter would ever marry a woman below his own social status, Elizabeth shows her belief that class is everything; even more important than love.

Elizabeth shows that she shares her father’s attitude towards men of the Navy when it is known that Admiral Croft is due in Bath. When Sir Walter suggests that they introduce the Admiral to the Dalrymples, Elizabeth replies; ““Oh! no, I think not. Situated as we are with Lady Dalrymple, cousins, we ought to be very careful not to embarrass her with acquaintances she might not approve... We had better leave the Crofts to find their own level.”” (177). By saying that the Crofts should find their own ‘level’, Elizabeth shows her opinion that the Crofts are below not just the Dalrymples, but themselves as well. By saying that they had better not introduce the Crofts to their cousins, she also shows her fear of being turned away from the Dalrymples by introducing them to the ‘wrong’ people. The most important thing is to be seen as friends of the Dalrymples, since the acquaintance with them raises the Elliots’ own social status, and this situation must not be disrupted by anything.

Elizabeth’s appreciation of class, and her fear of other people considering her lower than what she herself thinks she is, is also shown when the Musgroves come to Bath. She does not want to give a dinner party, because that would show “the difference of style, the reduction of servants” to “those who had always been so inferior to the Elliots of Kellynch” so she chooses to have an evening party instead (224). Elizabeth is so eager to maintain the image of the ‘Elliots of Kellynch’ that she is able to talk herself into not inviting her sister with family to dinner, but only to an evening gathering. This behaviour shows that Elizabeth values class, and the image of class, much more than family.

Another incident that clearly shows Elizabeth’s attitude towards class occurs during the concert. Anne is happy because she believes that Captain Wentworth is still in love

with her, whereas Elizabeth is happy because she enters the concert room “arm in arm with Miss Carteret, and looking on the broad back of the dowager Viscountess Dalrymple before her” (194). We can here see that the only possible source of happiness for Elizabeth is when her social status is in focus, and preferably high-lighted by a person of even higher class, such as the Dalrymples. She does, most likely, find no satisfaction in the music or the conversation, but just being seen in public with people who make her look good is enough for her.

Elizabeth, like Sir Walter, accepts that money can be more important than class at the concert, though apparently unwillingly. The real change of attitude for Elizabeth, however, comes when she invites Captain Wentworth to the evening party she is throwing for the Musgroves; “The truth was, that Elizabeth had been long enough in Bath, to understand the importance of a man of such an air and appearance as [Captain Wentworth’s]. The past was nothing. The present was that Captain Wentworth would move about well in her drawing-room.” (230-31). Elizabeth realizes that Captain Wentworth, with all his money, is good company in Bath, regardless of his lack of social status. In other words, money has become more important than class.

## **6. Mr Elliot**

As we have very little first hand information about Mr Elliot, much of his character is derived from what Mrs Smith tells Anne. It appears that Mr Elliot, when he as a young man was approached by Sir Walter, considered money as much more important than a title;

“Mr Elliot... at that period of his life, had one object in view – to make a fortune, and by a rather quicker process than the law. He was determined to make it by marriage. He was determined, at least, not to mar it by an imprudent marriage; and I know it was his belief... that your father and sister, in their civilities and invitations, were designing a match between the heir and the young lady; and it was impossible that such a match should have answered his ideas of wealth and independence.”

(Austen 207)

“Money, money was all that he wanted. [His wife’s] father was a grazier, her grandfather had been a butcher, but that was all nothing.

She was a fine woman, had had a decent education, was brought forward by some cousins, thrown by chance into Mr Elliot's company, and fell in love with him; and not a difficulty or a scruple was there on his side, with respect to her birth. All his caution was spent in securing the real amount of her fortune, before he committed himself. Depend upon it; whatever esteem Mr Elliot may have for his own situation in life now, as a young man he had not the smallest value of it. His chance of the Kellynch estate was something, but all the honour of the family he held as cheap as dirt." (208)

These two episodes show how Mr Elliot felt about class as a young man; he did not care about the title he was to come into when Sir Walter died, saying that "if baronetcies were saleable, any body should have his for fifty pounds", which shows that what he wanted was money (208-209). The only part of his future inheritance that he was interested in was the Kellynch estate, which could generate money, something that was very important to him. The fact that he, in the letter to his friend, Mrs Smith's late husband, insults the Elliot name by writing that he wished he had "any name but Elliot" and that he is "sick of" the name shows that he does not expect ever to be in a position where he would care about the title, as he must realize that Sir Walter might find out about him speaking ill of the family (210). When he writes that his first visit to Kellynch "will be with a surveyor" that can help him to "bring it with the best advantage to the hammer" he further emphasizes that his only concern is money (210).

But Mr Elliot's attitude towards class has, apparently, changed when he comes to Bath, possibly even before the actual story of *Persuasion* starts. Two situations where we can see Mr Elliot's attitude towards class is when he and Anne discuss the Dalrymples and, thought not as openly, Mrs Clay;

"My idea of good company, Mr Elliot, is the company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation; that is what I call good company.'

'You are mistaken... that is not good company, that is the best. Good company requires only birth, education and manners, and with regard to education is not very nice. Birth and good manners are essential... you have a better right to be fastidious than almost any other woman I know; but will it answer? Will it make you happy? Will it not be wiser to accept the society of these good ladies in Laura-place, and enjoy all

the advantages of the connexion as far as possible? You may depend upon it, that they will move in the first set in Bath this winter, and as rank is rank, your being known to be related to them will have its use in fixing your family... in that degree of consideration which we must all wish for” (162-163)

“[H]ere you are in Bath, and the object is to be established here with all the credit and dignity which ought to belong to Sir Walter Elliot. You talk of being proud, I am called proud I know, and I shall not wish to believe myself otherwise, for our pride, if investigated, would have the same object, I have no doubt, though the kind may seem a little different. In one point, I am sure, my dear cousin... we must feel alike. We must feel that every addition to your father’s society, among his equals or superiors, may be of use diverting his thoughts from those who are beneath him.’ He looked, as he spoke, to the seat which Mrs Clay had been lately occupying.” (163)

These two passages show that Mr Elliot feels that the most important thing is to associate with people who make a person look better; one should, apparently, only socialize with people who are ‘equals or superiors’, in other words higher up on the social ladder. But this in itself is somewhat of a paradox; if people only associate with those who are equal or above themselves, there would not be anyone who would willingly mix with people below their own social class, hence it would be impossible to associate with people who are higher on the social scale.

It is also interesting to study the second passage with the advantage of knowing that, in the end, Mr Elliot takes Mrs Clay to London and sets her up in a house there; “[Mr Elliot] soon quitted Bath; and on Mrs Clay’s quitting it likewise soon afterwards, and being next heard of as established under his protection in London, it was evident how double a game he had been playing” (252). It would appear that, though he tells Anne that he does not want Sir Walter to make a degrading match, his actual interest is to keep Mrs Clay away from Sir Walter and, by doing this, avoiding the possibility that Sir Walter produces an heir. His desperation to become Sir William is evident here; he is willing to take Mrs Clay to London, effectively destroying both their reputations, to retain his future title.

Cantor claims that Mr Elliot’s use of the terms ‘good’ and ‘the best’ company is a reference to the Greek meaning of aristocracy – rule of the best – and that Austen with this

wanted to point to the shift in the British society, where the middle class was replacing the aristocracy, not only in terms of wealth, but also when it came to political power; that “the understanding of the aristocracy [had] been severed from the understanding of the best” (130). Cantor argues that *Persuasion* shows that the aristocracy no longer based their right to rule on natural merit or supremacy in virtue, but purely on birth and, in reality, on snobbery.

Even if Mr Elliot only says these things to Anne because he wants to prevent Sir Walter from marrying Mrs Clay and by doing so assure himself of the title he is going to inherit, it still shows that he has now changed his mind about class. One possibility can be that he now, when he has all the money he could want, has started to realize that the baronetcy would help him rise in society, as Mrs Smith says; “Having long had as much money as he could spend, nothing to wish for on the side of avarice or indulgence, he has been gradually learning to pin his happiness upon the consequence he is heir to... He cannot bear the idea of not being Sir William” (Austen 212). This can be seen in contrast to the fact that Mr Elliot, when younger, wrote to Mrs Smith’s late husband that he did not care if Sir Walter remarried, since then he would finally be left alone.

Mr Elliot’s reaction to the news that Anne is marrying Captain Wentworth also shows his new appreciation of class. It was, apparently, not his main objective to marry Anne, but to, as Mrs Smith says “watch Sir Walter and Mrs Clay” (213). When the opportunity, as he saw it, to marry Anne presented itself, he realized that he would perhaps be able to use his role as Sir Walter’s son-in-law to prevent him from marrying Mrs Clay. But when this possibility disappeared, he turned to his second plan; to remove Mrs Clay from the presence of Sir Walter, effectively erasing the risk of Sir Walter remarrying – or at least marrying Mrs Clay. By this action, he tried to ascertain his own right to the title of Sir William Elliot, and has gone from valuing money more than this title, to considering social status as more important than wealth.

## **7. Other characters**

The three characters analyzed above – Sir Walter, Elizabeth and Mr Elliot – are the ones in whom the importance placed on money and class can be seen most obviously in the novel, and the ones who can be seen to change their minds in the matter, but other characters also show an interest – if only on a subconscious level – in the importance of money and social status.

The people who appear to be the least interested in money and class in the novel are the Musgroves. This can be seen in their relationship with their relatives, the Hayter family, who are financially and socially less well off, where there is no “pride on one side, and no envy on the other” and with whom they “had always been on excellent terms” (98). It is also possible to see the lack of importance of class and money in regards to the marriages of the Miss Musgroves, and mostly in Henrietta – more than once are we made to understand that the most important thing for the Musgroves is that their daughters are happy, the fact that their husbands do not have much money is less relevant; “Charles’s attention to Henrietta had been observed by her father and mother without any disapprobation. ‘It would not be a great match for her; but if Henrietta liked him’” (98).

The unimportance of class for the Musgroves can also be seen when the Miss Musgroves talk to Anne about the fact that Mary always wants to “take place of” Mrs Musgrove; they think that “it would be a great deal better if she were not so very tenacious” (72). They do not doubt “her right to have precedence... but it would be more becoming in her not to be always insisting on it” (72). In other words, they do not think it is necessary to display one’s class to other people. This can be seen in complete contrast to Mary, as well as Sir Walter and Elizabeth, who constantly want other people to see what class they belong to.

But even here we can see that there is a line that cannot be crossed – as Charles Musgrove says in regards to Mary considering Charles Hayter as a bad match for Henrietta; “‘It would not be a *great* match for Henrietta... and you will please to remember, that he is the eldest son; whenever my uncle dies, he steps into very pretty property... I grant you, that any of them but Charles would be a very shocking match for Henrietta, and indeed it could not be; he is the only one that could be possible’” (99-100). So it appears that, though the Musgroves have nothing against socializing with their financially and socially inferior relatives, there will be no more union between any of the younger children, as only the eldest Hayter son would be good enough for the Musgrove children.

Charles further shows that even the Musgroves value money to a certain extent when talking about the possibility of Captain Wentworth marrying one of his sisters; he starts by saying that he has “never seen a pleasanter man in his life” and then goes on to discuss Wentworth’s fortune, which is “not... less than twenty thousand pounds” for several lines (99). This discussion clearly shows that though it is important that the man in question is pleasant, his fortune does matter, if not more, then at least equally.

Lady Russell can also be seen to value money and class; it is, after all, because Captain Wentworth has neither that she discourages the union between him and Anne, a union

which she considers would have been “a most unfortunate one” (55). She does not want Anne to involve herself with a man “who had nothing but himself to recommend him” and “no connexions to secure even his farther rise” in the navy (55). She thinks that Anne, if she marries Captain Wentworth, would be “snatched off by a stranger without alliance or fortune” – in other words, without social status or money (55-56).

The importance Lady Russell places on money and class can also be seen in the fact that she apparently encourages Anne to marry Charles Musgrove, though she must know that Anne has no affection for him; “Lady Russell had lamented [Anne’s] refusal; for Charles Musgrove was the eldest son of a man, whose landed property and general importance, were second, in that country, only to Sir Walter’s” (57).

Lady Russell also considers Sir Walter as a man deserving respect, simply based on the fact that he is a Baronet; “she had prejudices on the side of ancestry; she had a value for rank and consequence, which blinded her a little to the faults of those who possessed them”, “she gave the dignity of a baronet all its due”, and she was “aristocratic in her ideas of what was due” to the Elliots (42). Lady Russell does, however, appear to realize that a title is not the only thing that matters, at least not to other people, when she says that “though a great deal is due to the feelings of the gentleman, and the head of a house... there is still more due to the character of an honest man” (43).

Lady Russell’s view of class is also seen when the Dalrymples come to Bath. She says that she “had expected something better”, which can only mean that she, since the Dalrymples are nobility, assumed them to be, automatically, pleasant people (162). Though they are, as Anne expresses it, “nothing”, Lady Russell still thinks they are “an acquaintance worth having” simply because they are nobility and will raise the status of the Elliots in Bath (162).

Anne is also influenced by the power of money, even if it is through Lady Russell. It is interesting to note that Anne says that “she should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement [with Captain Wentworth], than she had been in the sacrifice of it”, when she knows that he has made a fortune in the wars (58). This can be seen in contrast to the fact that Anne, after having been reunited with Captain Wentworth later in the novel, actually claims the exact opposite, that she “should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than [she] did even in giving it up” (248). We will, of course, never know if Anne would have felt that she would have been happier if she had maintained the engagement if Captain Wentworth had returned to Britain without any money, but it is not a far leap to assume that she would have felt very differently in that case.

The fact that Anne does value class to a certain extent can also be seen in that she does not want her father to form an attachment to Mrs Clay, that “results the most serious to his family from the intimacy were more than possible” (62). What other reason can there be for Anne to discourage this possible romance than the fact that Mrs Clay is of an inferior class than her father? That Sir Walter could very well have gotten married again after Lady Elliot’s death is discussed earlier in the novel, and it is even pointed out that the fact that he did *not* remarry needs explanation. So it does appear as if Anne is only against the relationship because it would be a degrading match for her father. It is, of course, impossible to know whether Anne would have discouraged the relationship if it became an actual fact; but it is clear to see that she does not want to risk this happening.

Another character that places a great deal of importance on money and class is Mary. The first inclination we have of her attitude is when Anne arrives at Uppercross and Mary suggests they go for a walk, continuing by saying that they should not visit the Musgroves before they have come to see Anne at the cottage, because they “ought to feel what is due to” Anne as Mary’s sister (67). Mary considers herself and her sisters as better than the Musgroves since they are daughters of a Baronet, something that can be seen several times, for instance when she complains to Anne that Mrs Musgrove “was very apt not to give [Mary] the precedence that was her due” (72).

Mary shows that her attitude towards people of ‘new’ upper classes is similar to that of her father when she and Charles discuss which of the Miss Musgroves Captain Wentworth is likely to marry. She says that it would be “a noble thing” for Henrietta if Wentworth was made a Baronet, but that she herself “never [thinks] much of... new creations” (99). It does appear that Mary would appreciate Wentworth being made a Baronet, but, as we later realize, only if he marries Henrietta. After Anne and Wentworth are married, Mary clearly shows that she does not want her sister to take precedence of herself, saying that “if they could but keep Captain Wentworth from being made a baronet”, she would be perfectly happy (252).

In Mary’s hope that Wentworth marries Henrietta, we can also see that she values class; it is only because Henrietta has shown an interest in Charles Hayter, whom Mary considers a bad match, that Mary is convinced that Wentworth prefers Henrietta to Louisa. Since Mary “looked down very decidedly upon the Hayters” it suits her purposes best if Wentworth marries Henrietta, thus removing her from the arms of her cousin (99). Here we can also see the fact that Mary, like Elizabeth, values class and money more than love; Mary says that she does not think that “any young woman has a right to make a choice that may be

disagreeable and inconvenient to the *principal* part of her family” (99). In other words, the feelings of the rest of the family in regards to the potential marriage of a young woman are more important than the feelings of the young woman herself.

Mary’s attitude towards class, and the fact that she wants other people to know what class she belongs to, can be seen during the walk to Winthrop, when she anxiously assures Captain Wentworth, who does not care in the least, that she has “never been in the house above twice” in her life and that it is “very unpleasant, having such connexions” (109). Wentworth has not commented on the situation at all, but Mary still feels the need to display her own class and the fact that she does not socialize with people of inferior status.

## 8. Conclusions

In conclusion, a change of attitude when it comes to class and money can be seen in the three main characters that I have focused on, Sir Walter, Elizabeth and Mr Elliot, during the course of the story. These changes can also be seen to have their roots in personal changes as well as external circumstances.

Sir Walter, who, in the beginning, thinks of class as superior to money, resents the Navy for bringing men who do not deserve it into respectful places in society, cannot see how a man without property can be a gentleman, and disregards the feelings of people who he considers to be beneath him, in the end realizes that money is more important than class – at least when one has less money than one might want or need.

Elizabeth, who from the start of the novel is seen as someone who values social status infinitely more than wealth, cannot imagine marrying below her own status in society, truly believes that love cannot overcome class, and is happiest when her own social status is evident and emphasized, finally realizes that money can give a person a higher place in society and make them a desirable acquaintance.

Mr Elliot, who married a woman who was below him on the social ladder in order to obtain wealth, disregarded the title he was to inherit and wished he could have a different name, changes his mind when he has all the money he could want and starts to desire the title that he may inherit one day, doing everything he can to make sure that this will happen.

It appears, in short, that the attitudes to class and money change both as the situation of the character changes, and as the external circumstances change.

Captain Wentworth is, in the end, considered a good match for Anne for two reasons; he has himself obtained a fortune since he and Anne last met, and the fortune of the Elliot family has been significantly reduced. Mr Elliot wishes to become Sir William because he now has the money he desired when younger.

It can also be seen that other characters in *Persuasion*, who at first appear to place no value on society's appreciation of class and money, do in fact, if not value them, then at least realize and recognize that the issues do exist. Anne, who wanted nothing more than to marry Captain Wentworth, with a fortune or without, still decides to end the engagement after being advised to do so by Lady Russell. She can also be seen to, if not discourage, then at least try to prevent a relationship between her father and a woman of inferior birth. Even the Musgroves, who on first appearance seem to disregard everything that has to do with money and class, know that there is an invisible line that cannot be crossed; they do not mind socializing with their less well-off relatives, and it is not a problem that Henrietta wants to marry the eldest son of the family, but the idea that any of the younger cousins would, in the future, marry into the Musgrove family is unthinkable.

In short, even the characters who do not *want* to value class and money, are forced to acknowledge the fact that society does – that there are boundaries even if you do not want to admit that they are there.

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