

Elinor and Anne:

Emotional Isolation, Family, and Society in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*

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Dedicated to my great aunt, Margaret Castiglie,
who left her love of Jane Austen to me.

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1. Introduction:

In her first novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, and her last, *Persuasion*, Jane Austen centers the perspectives of gentry women, Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliot, who were socially successful because of their ability to regulate their own emotions and influence those around them, skills cultivated as a response to their emotional isolation from their families. Austen famously “cares intensely for what is natural, possible, and probable in fiction,” and consequently her writing provides an intimate portrait of the very real social and familial experience of women within the structure of the marriage plot (Sturrock, 1). Through her narration of the novels, she carefully portrays the impact of social requirements and family dynamics on the mental states of her protagonists as they navigate turbulent periods of their lives. Because of Austen’s skill at creating characters with complex psychological lives, modern understandings of psychology and emotion can be applied to the emotional experiences of Austen’s characters and their social interactions to better understand the purpose of her writing, which in the cases of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion* is her concern for emotionally isolated women.

According to *The Handbook of Emotion* (2008), “the classic perspective on the functionality of emotions is that they increase the probability of an individual’s survival and/or reproductive success” (Fisher and Manstead, 456). As humans evolved, the functionality of emotions shifted to ensuring social survival, “our human capacity to build social bonds and to address and overcome social problems such as social exclusion or loss of power” (Fisher and Manstead, 456). Austen’s world blurs the line between social survival and survival in the more primal sense of the word. In the Regency Era, upper-class women especially relied on the building and maintenance of social relationships; social survival was survival for them. Elinor Dashwood in particular is an example of the stakes social interactions had for women. “For this

genteel heroine to whom the professional world is closed, the primary avenue of gainful employment is to adhere to societal norms and marry into domestic bliss,” therefore failure to successfully maintain social connections spelled destitution for women unsupported by a patriarchal figure (Tavela, 3). People, especially women, were required to master a certain level of emotional regulation in order to navigate its strictures, form and maintain relationships, and establish themselves socially and financially. Emotional regulation, “which refers to how we try to influence which emotions we have, when we have them, and how we experience and express these emotions,” relates to social survival, both in the Regency period and today, because it allows people to express emotions that will most effectively communicate our needs to others (Gross, 497). Austen explores this function of emotional regulation through her portrayals of Elinor and Anne in society and in their more personal family dynamics. Elinor and Anne are both adept at regulating their emotions in public *and* within their families, but by sustaining that level of regulation, they are emotionally isolated and bear the burden of affective labor. Affective labor, a concept that gained traction in the 1990s, includes “immaterial, intangible, psychological, or interpersonal labors...labors that are not traditionally categorized as work” (Tavela, 4). Typically taken on by women, affective labor is a central tenet of much of Austen’s work, particularly in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*. Elinor and Anne take on affective labor as a means of surviving their social situations by forming connections with those around them, although their specific motivations differ. Elinor is so intent on managing her emotions and those of her family because she is all too aware of the fact that “maintaining an outward appearance of self-possession kept women socially viable subjects” and she must remain viable in order to care for her family (Tavela, 1). Anne, in contrast, is no longer socially viable when *Persuasion* takes place. She is nearly a decade older than Elinor, without marriage prospects, and

of a higher social status meaning that Anne is not responsible for maintaining her family's social status in the same way Elinor is. Instead, Anne turns to affective labor, facilitated by her skill at emotional regulation, to find a purpose in another family because her father and elder sister actively isolate her. Elinor and Anne each regulate their behavior by suppressing their emotions and often sacrifice their emotional well-being in order to play their familial and social roles. Because their families, as well as other characters, also require affective labor from them, rather than providing support in social situations, the heroines exist in emotional isolation until the people around them begin to understand their need for care.

Elinor and Anne exist in positions which require them to regulate their emotions in order to behave properly, due to a combination of social and familial expectations, and Austen is most concerned with sharing the inner lives of Elinor and Anne to help the reader understand the extent of their emotional labor. Elinor is constantly negotiating between her feelings and the way she knows society expects her to behave, as well as striving to emotionally support her family members. Her strength of feeling and attunement to the emotions of others benefit Elinor in social interactions. An isolated Anne accepts the burden of affective labor in her family and the necessity of suppressing her emotions and needs in order to both protect herself emotionally from the immediate family that treats her as disposable and to feel a sense of purpose and belonging in the extended family that appreciates her caretaking. When someone with whom she can be emotionally vulnerable appears, it requires great energy to keep her emotions regulated, but she does so in order to maintain the perception other characters have of her. Again, attunement and emotional intelligence is her strength, not her weakness. Elinor and Anne find difficulty within their families because this strength is misunderstood and undervalued, respectively.

Through their experiences, “Austen makes plain the realities of what women need to do to survive in their society” (Tavela, 4). Building on the modern understanding of social emotion, the functionality of any given person in society “depends on how the individuals or social groups involved appraise the social context, and how they regulate their emotions and expressions in a way that is consistent with those social appraisals” (Fisher and Manstead, 465). Applying that concept to Sarah Tavela’s work and the stories of Elinor and Anne, “what women need to do” is this work of appraising the behavior of others and regulating themselves accordingly. By comparing Elinor and Anne to other women in their families who are less adept at managing themselves:

Austen shows the necessity of self-governance for achieving ‘success’ as a woman, because a heroine’s ability to self-manage is tied to the ability to successfully navigate her world and achieve as much happiness as is possible for her to do. (Tavela, 4)

Self-governance is made necessary by the behaviors and manners society expected women to exhibit, exemplified in the advice of conduct books. At the time of Jane Austen’s writing, the necessity of conforming to social requirements “often means playing a part, disguising emotions, saying one thing and thinking or even doing another. There is a new awareness here that to be socially successful, some manner of playacting or performance was required” (Kenlon, 83). Elinor especially is the perfect example of this awareness. She fully understands how to behave in order to fit the social strictures and maintain her family’s connections, despite the fact that her mother and sisters explicitly lack this awareness and often work against Elinor’s efforts. Anne’s social performance is more subtle and relates more to her role in her family than to a potential loss of social capital. Anne’s affective labor consists of managing her emotions in order to maintain her role as the family’s caretaker, something that allows her to form connections with

others and secure a social position for herself, even before Captain Wentworth returns—Anne’s version of success.

Within Austen’s work, there is a certain grim understanding of the limits society imposed on women. The modern public often characterizes Austen’s work as a kind of blueprint for romance novels and movies, but in reality Austen uses the marriage plot as a vehicle for analyses of the dynamics within familial and social relationships, and the psychological development of young women within those limits. Despite Elinor and Anne’s skill at navigating their world, they can only “achieve as much happiness as is possible” within the limits of their social status as women (Tavela, 4). Tavela paraphrases one of Austen’s lines in *Persuasion* that demonstrates Anne’s understanding and acceptance of her limited capacity for the joy that would come from true agency over her own life. Austen demonstrates how Anne and Elinor work within the social structure to “gain [their] own ends,” despite their emotional isolation from their families (*Sense and Sensibility*, 116). Elinor’s experience is largely contained within her own mind and she does not experience the benefit of her relationships until she begins to express herself. In contrast, Anne’s immediate family may isolate her, but she is a valued, if criminally misunderstood, presence in her social circle, which in *Persuasion* is made up of extended family. In *Persuasion*, therefore, Austen expands on the exploration of social and emotional isolation begun in *Sense and Sensibility* in a setting that is smaller in scope and free from the pressure of ensuring social survival. Through Anne’s engagement in caretaking and affective labor, she is more connected to the people around her despite her emotional isolation. While there were only six years between the publications of Austen’s first and last works, twenty years lapsed between her actual writing of the manuscripts. It took twenty years for Austen to return to the conversation she began in *Sense and Sensibility*, and her difference in perspective is evident in the very different

experiences of two emotionally isolated women. Austen's portrayals of Anne and Elinor inherently speak to and reflect each other. *Sense and Sensibility* considers Elinor's experience maintaining social bonds as an emotionally isolated woman; *Persuasion* centers Anne's emotional isolation in a more intimate exploration of family dynamics and her role within them. In both cases, the women find relief from their isolation through the relationships they build throughout the novel, by their care and mindfulness of others.

2. Emotional Regulation, Isolation, and the Survival of Elinor Dashwood

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor Dashwood possesses a unique understanding of the importance of operating within the rules of society and regulates her emotions to behave accordingly, while contending with family members who are unable to either regulate themselves or support Elinor. To be socially successful, gentry women of the Regency Era had to exert a certain amount of control over their emotional expression to maintain a particular image despite how they felt internally; “though a woman may wish to be authentic, she must remain contained for her protection. Unruly emotions cannot slip through a façade of composure, nor can the body betray internal states for risk of public and social censure” (Tavela, 1). Elinor is a young woman who understands and internalizes the necessity of portraying the proper amount of feeling and therefore prizes her ability to regulate her emotions above all else, despite the difficulty of doing so. Austen makes Elinor the novel’s center of consciousness to demonstrate the dissonance between the strength of her feeling and the calm, polite, socially acceptable exterior she presents. Elinor is socially successful because she uses her emotional intelligence to form connections with others and upholds impeccable social standards of behavior. While the social aspect of her life is difficult, Elinor also isolates herself within her family because her mother and sister misunderstand her emotions and are therefore unable to support her emotionally or socially. At the same time, Elinor shoulders the bulk of the affective labor that must be done, maintaining social bonds and caring for her family despite her own emotional struggles.

It is important to Austen that Elinor’s effort to regulate her emotions be acknowledged; Elinor’s ability to adhere perfectly to the rules of society is less important than the affective labor it requires for her to do so. In *Sense and Sensibility*, every character, except Marianne, engages in a certain level of emotional regulation in order to maintain their social positions “because

feelings have to be kept private, and because social life exacts a tax not only on behaviour but also within the self” (Wiltshire, 30). Austen exhibits the tax of emotional regulation by clearly describing the pain of Elinor’s internal life and “Elinor’s feelings...which required some trouble and time to subdue” (85). As Austen introduces Elinor, “she had an excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them” (8). Austen demonstrates the lack of emotional regulation and self-governance in Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne in order to emphasize Elinor’s abilities. Austen’s narration shows how “Elinor, who, in spite of her own suffering, never lets melancholy cloud her judgment or influence her ability to truly engage with others” regulates herself out of both social and emotional necessity (Bagno-Simon). Socially, this regulation allows her to stabilize her family’s position by building and maintaining relationships with people of higher status. Within her family, Elinor regulates her emotions to avoid the pain caused by the isolation she feels when she expresses herself and receives no comfort.

Elinor’s efforts to regulate her emotions are necessary in the broader social sphere of the novel because of the death of her father, which strips the Dashwood women of financial support and sends Elinor scrambling to secure their perilously uncertain future. Mr. Dashwood inherited the estate from his uncle “in such a way as to leave to himself no power of providing for those who were most dear to him, and who most needed a provision”—his wife and daughters (6). Because of this, John Dashwood, Elinor’s older stepbrother, inherits everything and is solely responsible for providing for his sisters and stepmother—a duty he shirks at the encouragement of his wife. Austen contrasts Elinor’s response to the tragedy of her father’s death with that of her mother and sister, who are lost in their “agony of grief” to the point where they are rendered totally unable to perform tasks necessary to keep the family stable (8). Elinor takes it upon

herself to maintain civil connections with the people around them in order to secure her family's position in society, although it requires great effort: "Elinor, too, was deeply afflicted; but she could exert herself. She could consult with her brother, could receive her sister-in-law on her arrival, and treat her with the proper attention" (8-9). She is the most active in accommodating Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood because the couple, as the new owners of Norland, have power over the future of the Dashwood women. In contrast, Mrs. Dashwood is so upset by Fanny's "ungracious behavior, [toward herself and her daughters] and so earnestly did she despise her daughter-in-law for it...that she would have quitted the house [Norland] forever, had not the entreaty of her eldest girl induced her first to reflect on the propriety of going" (8). Elinor's sense encourages her mother to avoid a blatant falling-out with her son and daughter-in-law. Even so Mrs. Dashwood, and Marianne by extension, do not make the same effort to be entirely polite to Fanny, as Elinor does. In one instance, after Elinor and Edward, Fanny's brother, begin to grow close and Fanny makes a pointed remark "of the danger attending any young woman who attempted to *draw him in*," Mrs. Dashwood "gave her an answer which marked her contempt and instantly left the room" (21). She makes no attempt to regulate herself or keep herself from stooping to Fanny's level of incivility, and throws caution and frugality to the wind in "resolving that, whatever might be the inconvenience or expense," she must remove her family immediately from Norland (21). Despite her belief that she is acting on Elinor's behalf, Mrs. Dashwood's behavior directly counteracts everything that Elinor has prioritized, and could very easily have put the Dashwood women at risk had not Sir John's offer of Barton Cottage been "particularly well timed" (21). While Mrs. Dashwood allows her emotions to drive her behavior rather than always maintaining civility, Elinor makes a great effort to behave in a manner contrary to that of her mother because she is aware of the social reality of the situation.

Elinor sees the larger implications of her actions in society because she “possessed a strength of understanding and coolness of judgment which qualified , though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother” on any and all matters after Mr. Dashwood’s death (8). Through the Dashwoods’ experience, Austen demonstrates how “the loss of prestige and money that follows the loss of husband, father, and home exposes them to new social difficulties as well as to material problems,” something only Elinor understands (Sturrock, 60). Because of Elinor’s natural tendency to regulate herself and because “Mrs Dashwood’s character and her newly widowed state place a burden of practical and moral usefulness on Elinor,” Elinor becomes isolated as the only family member who is able to govern her emotions and do what needs to be done (Sturrock, 48). It is Elinor who in all aspects must “counteract, to the advantage of them all, that eagerness of mind in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence” (8). Austen shows Mrs. Dashwood’s imprudence time and again, including in her reaction to the relationship between Edward and Elinor. Based only on her observations of them and “a reflection Elinor chanced one day to make on the difference between [Edward] and his sister,” Mrs. Dashwood immediately assumes they will marry (16). Elinor herself keeps tight control of her expectations of what her relationship with Edward might become because “she required greater certainty of” his attachment to her and because she understands that his mother will likely oppose the match (19). Without accepting this reality, or even acknowledging it, Mrs. Dashwood commits wholeheartedly to the belief that Elinor will soon marry Edward simply because they love each other, a microcosm of Mrs. Dashwood’s dangerous manner of operating in the world. Due to Mrs. Dashwood’s impulsivity, Elinor is also her mother’s financial advisor as they learn to manage on a greatly decreased income, taking into account that Mrs. Dashwood is “a woman who never saved in her life” (27). In finances as well as in social behavior, Elinor becomes

responsible for regulating the behavior of her mother because she is unable or unwilling to regulate herself despite the fact that her actions put her daughters at risk. Elinor overregulates herself in order to preemptively stem her mother's emotions, a constant burden on her throughout the novel, understood through Austen's explanation of Elinor's feelings as she interacts with the world around her.

When the Dashwoods finally settle at Barton Cottage, accommodations that are financially prudent but emotionally taxing, Elinor bears the largest cost because she takes the most active role in maintaining social relations with the upper-class family of Barton Park, the Middletons. The Dashwoods are invited to live at Barton Cottage because of their financial difficulties and to be a source of entertainment for the Middletons. Elinor relies on her skillful performance of propriety to assure that she and her family keep the Middletons' favor because the women are subject to their generosity, but Marianne is frustrated by this requirement. She observes that "the rent of this cottage is very low; but we have it on very hard terms if we are to dine at the park" whenever the Middletons wish (90). The Dashwoods experience at Barton Park exemplifies how, "for reasons of convenience as well as of kindness, families and individuals" during the Regency were "expected to maintain amicable relations with their neighbours and the community at Large" (Sturrock, 60). All too aware of this requirement and the consequences of falling short, Elinor worries when Marianne is rude or sullen and doubles her efforts to be amiable in order to compensate for her sister's bad behavior.

Elinor demonstrates her polite adherence to the rules of propriety through her attentiveness to the desires of her social superiors in lieu of forming genuine relationships; she "upholds the social code...of 'general complaisance'" when faced with the demands of society (Wainwright, A197). When the Dashwoods arrive at Barton Cottage, they are accosted by an

open and jovial Sir John who possesses an “earnest desire of their living on sociable terms with his family, and pressed them so cordially to dine at Barton Park every-day till they were better settled at home,” a point which he has “interrupted” the Dashwoods’ settling in to make (27). Although his friendliness is a positive element of his character, it is also overbearing. Austen notes that “his entreaties were carried to a point of perseverance beyond civility,” but because of his manners and social position the overwhelmed Dashwoods must humor him and comply with his requests (27). Sir John and Mrs. Jennings treat the love lives of Elinor and Marianne as a spectator sport, speculating on which young man might be fortunate enough to woo them. When he learns about Marianne’s interest in Willoughby, Sir John approves of Marianne’s “setting her cap at him” but is disappointed on behalf of Colonel Brandon, the match he originally encouraged (39). Marianne gives her honest opinion that his phrase is “gross and illiberal; and if [it] could ever be deemed clever, time has long ago destroyed all its ingenuity” (39). Austen explains Sir John’s reaction, that he “did not much understand this reproof; but he laughed as heartily as if he did,” noting both that the Middletons are not the intellectual equals of the Dashwoods and providing one example of how misunderstandings like this one often save Marianne from committing grievous social sins (39). Due to Marianne’s unwillingness to participate in social rituals or monitor the relationship between what she feels and what she says, Elinor is left to do the work of maintaining tedious social bonds alone. When Mrs. Jennings brings the elder Dashwood sisters to London, Marianne “sat in silence almost all the way, wrapped in her own meditations, and scarcely ever voluntarily speaking except when any object of picturesque beauty...drew from her an exclamation of delight exclusively addressed to her sister” (129). She all but ignores Mrs. Jennings, the woman who provides Elinor and Marianne with an objectively generous opportunity and who is intimately connected with the people

housing the Dashwoods. In short, she is not a woman to whom Elinor can risk giving offense. “To atone for this conduct [of Marianne’s] therefore, Elinor took immediate possession of the post of civility which she had assigned to herself, [and] behaved with the greatest attention to Mrs. Jennings” despite her own antipathy to the journey and the general exhaustion inflicted by the lady’s presence (129). Unlike Marianne, or perhaps because of her, Elinor is an excellent companion because she is constantly engaged in the effort to be helpful, a state which in Austen’s work “involves a range of altruistic or prosocial behavior, from paying attention or being accommodating to actively engaging with others” (Wainwright, A196). This state, however well Elinor exhibits it, is tiring to maintain. Elinor initially argues against traveling with Mrs. Jennings because “she is not a woman whose society can afford us pleasure,” and unlike when they are at Barton Park and can return to the privacy of their cottage, Elinor understands that she will have no respite from the effort of politeness (125). When she is without an escape, then, Elinor relies on polite but detached attention to appease people she finds taxing.

Elinor’s social work is more difficult because she is isolated from her family and those in her broader social circle; her character is unique and therefore she struggles to find companionship in anyone other than Edward and Colonel Brandon, whose appearances are relatively infrequent. In society at Barton Park, “Elinor’s happiness was not so great,” and she was “afforded no companion that could make amends for what she had left behind” (46). She is lonely and isolated among the women of Barton Park and within her family. Lady Middleton is “reserved, cold, and had nothing to say for herself beyond the most commonplace inquiry or remark” (28). Lady Middleton and the Dashwood women are “equally polite” to each other in strict adherence to social convention, but it is performative (27). When they first arrive, the Dashwoods are “very anxious to see [Lady Middleton] a person on whom so much of their

comfort at Barton must depend,” once again reminding the reader of their precarious social position (27). Although Elinor is perfectly polite to Lady Middleton because the Dashwoods are in need of her goodwill, she does not particularly enjoy her company. Upon engaging with Lady Middleton, “Elinor needed little observation to perceive that her reserve was a mere calmness of manner with which sense had nothing to do” (46). Lady Middleton does not have emotions to hide; therefore Elinor does not hold genuine respect for her. Elinor values self-governance as a necessary element of life and social success and she is all too aware of the effort she exerts to accomplish it. Therefore, Lady Middleton’s naturally calm demeanor is not as impressive as Elinor’s studied one. It is instead a signal that she lacks Elinor’s depth and intelligence and is incapable of being a proper companion to Austen’s lonely heroine.

Because of Elinor’s honed skills of emotional regulation, she is able to control the outcomes of her social interactions by understanding the thoughts of others and behaving in whatever way will grant her a positive response. Elinor “is endowed with traits and abilities that enable her to act appropriately with respect to the demands that are made on her, but which also—when necessary—allow her to secure for herself a psychological advantage” (Wainwright, A197). Elinor’s regulation leaves room for her to understand other people as well, which in turn allows her to control how she is perceived by them, a skill of particular necessity because Marianne’s lack of emotional regulation often jeopardizes the family’s status. To a certain extent, everyone plays the social game—everyone except Marianne. Lonely and worried, Elinor often encourages Marianne to the same “exertion,” although that often means “Marianne tends to underestimate her sister’s emotional capacity and to oppose her concepts of good behaviour” (Sturrock, 61). Marianne refuses to engage in any kind of emotional regulation; she acts impulsively based entirely on how she feels. Because of the Dashwoods’ social status,

“Marianne's behavior, then, has an impact not only on her family, but on her ability to function properly in society,” and Elinor must work constantly to counteract it (Bagno-Simon). The relationship between Marianne and Willoughby is particularly dangerous for the Dashwoods' social standing because of its indiscretion. Elinor observes how their behavior exposes Marianne to “some very impertinent remarks,” and though Marianne concedes that her actions were “ill-judged,” she does not change her behaviour or make any effort to regulate her grief upon Willoughby's betrayal (58). In contrast with Marianne's obliviousness to the opinions of others, Elinor is extremely perceptive and is able to read emotions to understand and predict people's reactions to her behavior and that of her family. She is consequently in a unique position to both protect her family's standing and master social situations for her own interest. For example, when Lady Middleton proposes playing cards and “Marianne...with her usual inattention to the form of civility,” refuses, adding insult to injury by declaring, “I detest cards,” and promptly leaving to play the piano (116). Elinor notes that “Lady Middleton looked as if she thanked heaven that *she* had never made so rude a speech” (116). Her perceptiveness allows her to see the potential risk of Lady Middleton's offense and defuse the situation by excusing Marianne who “can never keep long from that instrument,...for it is the very best toned pianoforte I ever heard,” successfully securing the lady's good graces. Elinor, “by a little of that address which Marianne could never condescend to practice, gained her own end and pleased Lady Middleton at the same time” (116). Elinor knows that by playing to Lady Middleton's vanity and emphasizing their class difference, she will elevate Lady Middleton's opinion of herself and consequently be afforded more freedom without endangering the relationship. Austen here shows how Elinor's perceptiveness and her refusal to be distracted by her emotions give her the psychological advantage over almost everyone in the novel and allows her to protect her family.

Marianne's sensibility poses one of the biggest challenges to Elinor's social efforts and makes Elinor more emotionally isolated within the family. Without a patriarch's protection, Elinor keeps her emotions in check not out of desire but out of necessity, something Marianne does not understand and at times actively combats. Elinor "once or twice did venture to suggest the propriety of some self-command to Marianne. But Marianne abhorred all concealment...and to aim at the restraint of sentiments...appeared to her not merely an unnecessary effort but a disgraceful subjection of reason to commonplace and mistaken notion" (45). Marianne has internalized her mother's excess of sensibility, exhibiting how "the position of the mother profoundly affects the sense of usefulness and effective exertion of the daughter," a phenomenon also seen in Elinor to the opposite effect (Sturrock, 48). Because Mrs. Dashwood makes no attempt to regulate her emotions, Marianne does not either. Elinor, on the other hand, doubles her exertion upon herself to compensate for the lack of regulation in her mother and sister. For Marianne, "it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the occasion; and upon Elinor, therefore, the whole task of telling lies when politeness required it always fell" (100). It takes Elinor great effort to appease the Middletons in their vapid vulgarity, to bear the thinly veiled insults of Fanny Dashwood, and to spar with the self-serving Lucy Steele. As Austen demonstrates, while Elinor ideally should be able to rely on her sister for help and commiseration, Marianne leaves her to labor alone.

Elinor not only hides her emotional pain from people outside her immediate family, she also hides how she feels from her mother and sister because she does not believe they will be able to help her based on her observations of their behavior. Austen demonstrates the behavior that leads Elinor to this assumption from the novel's opening. When Mr. Dashwood dies, Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne "gave themselves up wholly to their sorrow, seeking increase of

wretchedness in every reflection that could afford it, and resolved against ever admitting consolation in the future” (8). Instead of participating in their debilitating grief, Elinor maintains her composure because she is responsible for caring for others and must be functional enough to perform the tasks at hand. This learned behavior persists at moments of great emotional difficulty for Elinor alone; even when she is in pain, she behaves as if nothing were wrong. Elinor isolates her emotional life from her family to preemptively regulate her mother and sister’s emotional expression, motivated equally by the social consequence of their lack of emotional regulation and by her instincts for self-preservation, as their emotionality often causes Elinor greater pain. Upon Edward’s departure from Barton Cottage, Elinor grieves both for his absence and for his “want of spirits” and “uncertain behaviour to herself” while he was there, but “it was her determination to subdue it, and to prevent herself from appearing to suffer more than what all her family suffered on his going away” (83/85). She refuses to engage in Mrs. Dashwood’s and Marianne’s indulgent emotional expression, which leads to her further isolation from them.

While Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne understand each other’s expressions of grief, Elinor’s emotional expression is intentionally subtle, often deliberately repressed in favor of propriety, as a result her family often discounts the depth of her feelings. When Elinor explains her regard for Edward to Marianne, and Marianne assumes they will soon marry, “Elinor started at this declaration and was sorry for the warmth she had been betrayed into, in speaking of him” (19). Betrayal, in this instance, refers to Elinor’s dismay that she has undermined her own constant effort to keep her emotions from her family and to her discomfort with her family’s response to her emotionality. She has “betrayed” herself because she constantly anticipates their emotional reactions, and when she cannot—when she is distracted by genuine excitement or feeling—she feels uncomfortably exposed. Elinor does not trust her sister with her feelings

because “she knew that what Marianne and her mother conjectured one moment, they believed the next: that with them, to wish was to hope, and to hope was to expect,” and disappointed expectations would result in floods of emotion which Elinor would then have to manage and struggle against to maintain her own composure and uphold social bonds (19). Even when Elinor is happy in her relationship with Edward, Marianne criticizes her “cold-hearted” lack of affect in her description of him, to which Elinor responds by retreating back into herself (20). Marianne judges her sister against the common (fictional) ideas of sensibility which she herself exhibits. As Elinor emotes differently, Marianne concludes that she must not possess the same feelings. Upon leaving Norland, Marianne observes to her mother, “Elinor cried not as I did...her self-command is invariable. When is she dejected or melancholy? When does she try to avoid society, or appear restless and dissatisfied in it?” (35). Because of the example set by her mother and the books she loves, Marianne believes emotion must show itself in specific, often clichéd, ways. “Marianne is a new edition of a half-century’s worth of betrayed heroines,” and her adherence to this archetype almost kills her (Lynch, 229). To the reader, Austen’s narration directly and systematically contradicts Marianne’s assessment of her sister by sharing Elinor’s complex interior life and the effort it takes her to subdue her feelings and maintain a calm demeanor, a dynamic that demonstrates Austen’s use of “psychological subtly...as an escape from models of heroines offered by fiction before her” (Mullan, 377). Heroines of earlier novels by authors like Samuel Richardson or Frances Burney “are models of feminine rectitude” without the psychological complexity found in literary depictions of characters with human faults, like Jane Austen’s (Mullan, 377). While Elinor is a fundamentally good person, she also makes a great effort to be that way through careful observation of her own emotions and behavioral tendencies as well as the natures and behaviors of those around her. Because she is

emotionally intelligent, “she is able to use her often isolated state in order to watch, evaluate and judge the people and the situations around her, making her supremely capable of engaging with others,” although it is more difficult when her own emotions are strong (Bagno-Simon). Much of the tension between Marianne and Elinor occurs because Marianne is too distracted by her own feelings and by the exaggerated way she expects people to display emotion to understand the difficulty of Elinor’s role in the family or the prudence of her hard-won emotional regulation in society.

Elinor emotionally isolates herself because she witnesses the ineffectiveness of emotional expression in Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood. The maternal example set by “Mrs. Dashwood exacerbates Marianne’s mental and emotional volatility,” and for both women, the expression of their emotions encourages their despair rather than healing it (Bagno-Simon). For example, Willoughby’s departure sends both Marianne and her mother reeling. Mrs. Dashwood, rather than being a comforting presence to help her daughter regulate her emotions, “felt too much for speech” or selfless action (64). Likewise, Marianne reacts with totally unrestrained emotion, “without any power because she was without any desire of command over herself,” though her sadness is a real risk to her health (69). Austen’s commentary on Marianne’s experience blurs the line between genuine feelings and forced affectation, telling the reader that “Marianne would have thought herself very inexcusable” and “she would have been ashamed” if she was not so visibly distraught, “unable to talk, and unwilling to take any nourishment” (69). Marianne’s refusal to be anything but heartbroken and her efforts to portray that state are the first tangible examples of how overindulgence in sensibility and lack of self-governance has real physical consequences in this novel, something that terrifies Elinor. Marianne’s expression is unhealthy and almost selfish because she is “giving pain every moment to her mother and sisters, and

forbidding all attempt at consolation from either” (69). From the beginning, Elinor “saw with great concern the excess of her sister’s sensibility,” Austen’s foreshadowing of the relationship between the sisters and the danger in Marianne’s future (8). In contrast to Marianne, Elinor “asks questions, demands evidence, and relies on facts rather than imagination” when deciding how much of her emotional life she can safely share (Bagno-Simon). Often, this period of deliberation and what she observes from the world around her leads her to the conclusion that it is best to share nothing rather than contribute to the unregulated whirlwind of emotion exhibited by her family members.

Elinor isolates herself from her family because she feels unable to rely on her mother and sister for emotional support; because of the difference in their temperaments and their inability to govern their own emotions, she does not trust their reactions to hers. Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne’s emotionality only worsens the pain of Elinor’s feelings, rather than easing it. When Elinor learns that Edward is engaged to Lucy Steele, “the necessity of concealing [this information] from her mother and Marianne, though it obliged her to unceasing exertion,” is due in part to Elinor’s promise to Lucy, but more importantly to her lack of trust in her mother and Marianne (113). While hypothetically Elinor could share a version of the news and her sadness without betraying Lucy, she chooses to say nothing. The narrator’s emphasis on the exertion it requires for Elinor to suppress her pain speaks to Austen’s understanding of emotional isolation:

It was a relief to her to be spared the communication of what would give such affliction to them, and to be saved likewise from hearing that condemnation of Edward which would probably flow from the excess of their partial affection for herself, and which was more than she felt equal to support. From their counsel or their conversation she knew she could receive no assistance; their tenderness and sorrow must add to her distress, while her self-command would neither receive encouragement from their example nor from their praise. She was stronger alone, and her own good sense so well supported her that her firmness was as unshaken,

her appearance of cheerfulness as invariable, as with regrets so poignant and so fresh, it was possible for them to be. (113)

Austen's description of Elinor's thought process clarifies her behavior from the beginning of the novel up until this point. Elinor avoids expressing her pain to her family because she knows their emotions will eclipse her own and cause her more distress; "she is wise enough to know that excessive intimacy, empathy and commiseration can actually aggravate an already unfortunate situation" (Bagno-Simon). Elinor needs encouragement to look beyond her pain, not to indulge in it without intention of healing as her mother and Marianne do. Likewise, she needs to be "saved" from hearing her family's disparaging of Edward on her behalf because despite her hurt, she still loves him, and "Elinor cannot face the added stress that would be caused by the emotionalism and injustice of her family's probable response" (Sturrock, 29). Elinor constantly strives to hide her emotions, and "if by this conduct she did not lessen her own grief, it was at least prevented from unnecessary increase" (85-86). With one sentence, Austen summarizes Elinor's approach to her relationship with her family and the reason she exists in emotional isolation until they begin to understand her. Until then, their conflicting values and mannerisms mean that Elinor will always take it upon herself to support and encourage her family members, even when she herself is in pain. Elinor needs people around her who understand the importance of emotional regulation in society, but Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood do not. They have no ability or desire to regulate themselves, instead indulging in their emotions regardless of their social implications or the pain they cause to Elinor.

Despite all her efforts to the contrary, Elinor comes to express herself as rapidly changing circumstances wear away her ability to hide her emotions. The ever-unregulated Mrs. Jennings learns of Edward's engagement to Lucy Steele, and "Elinor soon saw the necessity of preparing Marianne for its discussion" to prevent any unfortunate public outbursts by her sister on her

behalf (208). Elinor finally reveals the secret she has carried so carefully and the cycle of the Dashwood family begins again: “Marianne listened with horror and cried excessively. Elinor was to be the comforter of others in her own distresses no less than in theirs” (209). Elinor enters the conversation full of determined “self-command” to encourage Marianne to the same, believing that speaking to her sister privately will give her a better chance of controlling the public outburst that might occur if Marianne were to find out the truth from Mrs. Jennings (210). Elinor’s inclination is correct, as Marianne is naturally full of emotion, “astonishment,” and guilt (209). In an uncharacteristically empathetic moment, she feels for how Elinor has suffered in isolation (209). Elinor at first clings to the excuse that her promise to Lucy forced her “to avoid giving any hint of the truth,” trying to protect Marianne from knowing how alone she really feels, but as Marianne’s emotional outburst continues, Elinor’s resentment toward her isolation begins to emerge in her speech (210). She endeavors to convince Marianne to be calm through “assurances of her own composure of mind,” but she also explains what she has endured and her efforts to hide her emotions to avoid causing her family pain, something Marianne in her sadness did not do. Elinor speaks calmly and fully explains how she desired “to spare them [her family] from knowing how much I felt” and that she has “borne it as much as possible without spreading it farther” (210). Elinor points out how her behavior stands in contrast to Marianne’s overt emotional expression that caused pain to everyone who loved her because she would not allow herself to be comforted, despite Elinor encouraging her to “think of your mother; think of her misery while *you* suffer; for her sake you must exert yourself” (148). Elinor takes care to protect her family from emotions that can have no relief. Throughout the conversation, Austen brings Elinor closer and closer to her breaking point, but she does not break until Marianne says, rather cruelly, “if the loss of what is most valued is so easily to be made up...your resolution, your

self-command, are perhaps a little less to be wondered at” (210). At this, the pain of Elinor’s emotional isolation overwhelms her and she finally reveals to Marianne what readers have seen to be her unceasing effort to maintain her emotional regulation. Elinor explains her labors, challenging her sister, “If you can think me capable of ever feeling, surely you may suppose that I have suffered *now*” (211). Austen shows how the repeated injury of Marianne’s assumption that Elinor feels less than she does eventually outweighs Elinor’s desire to shield Marianne from the more painful elements of her experience. Marianne finally begins to understand that her sister’s composure and self-governance “have been the effect of constant and painful exertion; they did not spring up of themselves” (210). Here, Elinor’s revelation to Marianne comes not from a feeling of safety or trust that she will be comforted, but from exhaustion and frustration with what she has endured. The outcome, however, is ultimately positive because there is real love and friendship between the sisters. Through this conversation, Marianne comes “to believe that her sister’s behaviour springs not from indifference but from love and active principle: she begins to grasp, intellectually if not at first emotionally, the connection between love and exertion” that Elinor has always seen and exhibited (Sturrock, 62). Marianne begins, finally, to exert herself and “she performed her promise of being discreet, to admiration. She attended all that Mrs. Jennings had to say upon the subject with an unchanging complexion, dissented from her in nothing” (212). Marianne’s new ability to participate in Elinor’s endeavors to politeness are “advances towards heroism [which] made Elinor feel equal to anything herself” (212). The relief that comes for Elinor when she and her sister are united in this way against the demands of social convention proves Austen’s argument that, when emotions can be expressed with the family, public regulation in turn becomes easier and less damaging. In addition, Austen complicates the experience Elinor has had until now because it is only through Elinor finally

expressing her emotional pain that Marianne begins to attempt to regulate herself and to do so successfully and relatively easily.

While Elinor's first foray into emotional expression is less than ideal, it teaches Marianne to make room for her sister's emotions and ultimately alters the Dashwood family dynamic for the better. Marianne becomes more reticent in society, relieving Elinor of her main worry that her sister's behavior would risk social ruin. Equally, because Elinor feels understood and supported by Marianne in public, she becomes more comfortable with expressing her emotions to Marianne when they are alone and receives support therein as well. Hearing John Dashwood's criticism of Edward's behavior upon his disinheritance, Marianne in her frustration "was going to retort, but she remembered her promise and forbore" (213). Through Marianne's new efforts at regulation, Austen builds Elinor a group that shares her feelings and allows her to express them; "Marianne's indignation burst forth as soon as [John] quitted the room, and as her vehemence made reserve impossible in Elinor and unnecessary in Mrs. Jennings, they all joined in a very spirited critique upon the party" (216). Elinor finds real distance and solace from her emotions, rather than active suppression. Because of Marianne's new understanding of Elinor's fortitude on behalf of others, "confidence between them was...restored to its proper state" and Marianne became "more dissatisfied with herself than ever by the comparison...necessarily produced between Elinor's conduct and her own" and more regretful of how Elinor has struggled in isolation (216). Marianne's ultimate appreciation for what Elinor has done leads her to begin to make more of an effort to regulate her emotions, which allows Elinor space to express her own without fear of how her family will react. She begins to trust that Marianne will regulate her emotions when necessary, Austen's method of releasing Elinor from her duty as a caretaker.

Elinor also moves out of her isolated state through the relationships she has built with those outside of her family, and Elinor's work to ensure her family's social survival ultimately ensures Marianne's actual survival. When Marianne falls ill, Elinor's capacity for emotional regulation makes her equally adept as a nurse, who reacts to the situation with astonishing "composure" (246). Elinor's reaction to Marianne's illness is consistent with her emotional processes throughout the novel; despite her fear, she endeavors to maintain a calm exterior around Marianne "to raise her spirits" (247). However, Elinor's experience here is also crucially different. In addition to showing the benefit of Elinor's emotional regulation in a real emergency, Austen uses the situation to teach Elinor that the people around her are helpful, caring, and feel real connection to Elinor and Marianne. Until this point, Elinor has found little joy or connection in her interactions with the Middletons, excluding Colonel Brandon, but because she is polite and socially adept, they see and appreciate her goodness and truly care for both her. Mrs. Jennings, Colonel Brandon, and even Mr. Palmer step up to care for the sisters in surprising ways, relieving Elinor from the burden of her isolation. Mrs. Jennings "with a kindness of heart which made Elinor really love her" was "a most willing and active helpmate, desirous to share in all her fatigues, and often by her better experience in nursing, of material use" (246). Elinor appreciates Mrs. Jennings's action because she joins Elinor, who has spent the entirety of the novel feeling isolated in her endeavors, in caring for Marianne without allowing her emotions to get in the way of what needs to be done. Mrs. Jennings also shares the burden of Elinor's worries and exhaustion in a way that is helpful. Elinor is no longer responsible for the emotional reactions of others, and so she allows herself to express her emotional pain and emerges from her isolation. When she is with Marianne, Elinor, "concealing her terror," focuses all her energy on soothing her sister, but outside of the sickroom, Elinor expresses her emotions to the others in the house

and receives support. With Colonel Brandon, Elinor's "fears and her difficulties were immediately before him...he listened to them in silent despondence," and he proves himself "a companion whose judgment would guide, whose attendance must relieve, and whose friendship might soothe her," taking it upon himself to collect Mrs. Dashwood and escort to her daughters (249). Despite Elinor's fear, she is able to care for Marianne with an almost superhuman level of energy, going without sleep and being almost constantly at her side. At the same time, Austen's writing in this scene brings characters who, until now, have been silly and taxing to Elinor in her effort to maintain social bonds, into the spotlight through the care they show for Elinor and Marianne. Their presence does what Elinor has been longing for; they give her support in her fortitude and help the sisters through their most difficult experience. Because of Elinor's skill at relationship building, when the Dashwood sisters need help, Austen reveals the bonds Elinor's kind perceptiveness has created throughout the novel.

Elinor Dashwood's experience of emotional regulation in society exemplifies that of young gentry women in the Regency Era, complicated by Austen's exploration of the emotional isolation that results from her family's misunderstanding of her needs. *Sense and Sensibility* follows Elinor's journey toward acceptance of her own emotions and her growing ability to rely on the help of those around her to emerge from her isolation. In the case of her relationship with Marianne, Austen demonstrates how a family should ideally allow all its members to express their emotions and be supported; when everyone has some ability to regulate their emotions and sees the importance thereof, no one person is left to take on the entirety of that responsibility. Austen suggests that emotional support from the immediate family makes people better able to succeed in their wider circle, maintaining bonds through adherence to social codes of conduct. The relationships Elinor has nurtured due to obligation and worry prove themselves to be

genuinely caring and helpful when the Dashwoods experience real need. Thus, Elinor's ability to successfully engage with everyone she comes into contact with is what ultimately saves her family from ruin, and, combined with Marianne's new efforts to regulate her own emotions, what allows her the security to emerge from her emotional isolation

3. Anne Elliot's Emotional Isolation and Caretaking

Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* is extremely adept at regulating her emotions because of her history of emotional isolation from her family and her growth since her failed relationship with Captain Frederick Wentworth. Austen introduces the world of *Persuasion* in a period of stasis and Anne in a state of apathy toward the injustice of her life. In contrast to Elinor's conscious and constant fight to subdue her feelings, Anne is detached from herself due to her previous efforts to regulate her emotions, and she is buried in affective labor and the work of caretaking, behavior through which she finds purpose in her world. In Anne's experience, "Jane Austen articulates the cultural encoding of affective labor as a constant task" that shapes Anne's life and her social interactions before and during the events of the novel (Tavela, 3). Anne's version of affective labor consists of regulating her own emotions and supporting those around her. When compared to *Sense and Sensibility*, in *Persuasion* "Austen mobilizes the hallmarks of literary psychology to endow her heroine with an inner life, [and] she also...has a head supplied with the emotions that belong to other people, a mental life that unfolds in what accordingly is at once an interior and a social space" (Lynch, 210). In Anne's case, her mental life is much more populated by the emotional experiences of others than Elinor's is. Twenty years after writing *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen narrows her focus to center Anne's experiences navigating the politics of family dynamics. While Elinor's solution to her isolation is found in the relationships that allow for her emotional expression, Anne frees herself by taking care of others and consequently securing a social position amongst them. Anne is not subject to the same tension Elinor operates under because Anne's family's position in society is secure, her father is alive, her sister is married, and she has an inheritance of ten thousand pounds owed to her out of her father's estate. Instead, Anne's experience is defined by the active isolation she endures at the hands of her

family members, to which she responds by suppressing her emotions and needs and throwing herself into a caretaking role in order to find belonging in another family, until a chance for real love and support returns.

Unlike the Dashwoods' innocent misunderstanding of Elinor's emotional needs, the elder Elliots intentionally isolate Anne, pain to which she responds by cutting herself off from them emotionally. When readers meet Anne, therefore, she regulates her emotional expression relatively easily because she has come to understand and accept that expressing her emotions will not result in any sort of support and often only lead to more pain when her expressed needs are ignored. Elizabeth and her father are well-established as two peas in a pod who "are unnaturally unfeeling towards Anne," and actively exclude her from their relationship (Levitt). For example, Sir Walter and Elizabeth have a tradition of visiting London without Anne. Eventually, through Elizabeth's solution to the Elliots' financial trouble "of their taking no present down to Anne," they exclude her even from association with the activity (8). Lady Russell, a member of the Elliot family by proximity if not by blood, acts in defense of Anne, and "had been very earnest in trying to get Anne included in the visit to London, sensibly open to all the injustice and all the discredit of the selfish arrangements which shut her out" (12). Austen uses Lady Russell's assessment of the situation to reveal truths about Anne's life that the heroine herself may not be willing to admit, like the injustice of Elizabeth's behavior. In the Elliot family, "personality and sibling contrasts are magnified by the fact that firstborns can identify with whatever prevailing social or familial goal has preeminence," as Elizabeth does (Souter). Elizabeth's greatest character flaw, according to Austen's narration, is "turning from the society of so deserving a sister to bestow her affection and confidence on one who ought to have been nothing to her by the object of distant civility" because of the vanity and pride Elizabeth

inherited from her father (12). Not only does Elizabeth overlook Anne's merits and needs, she replaces her in the family with Mrs. Clay, who "had made herself so agreeable to Miss Elliot" (12). In contrast, Anne voices her disapproval of her father and sister and suggests improvement, as in her recommendation of extreme frugality "on the side of honesty against importance" during the aforementioned period of financial difficulty (9). Unfortunately, Elizabeth and Sir Walter more often see this as a threat than as genuine concern and sage advice, blind to Anne's true value and subsequently discredited by the narrator's summary of the situation and Anne's personality.

Anne, with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding, was nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way—she was only Anne. (5)

Because Sir Walter and Elizabeth punish Anne for her differences by isolating her, they are not people of "real understanding" or worth taking seriously in Austen's view, or in Anne's. In contrast to the inherent goodness of Anne, Austen notes, "vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and of situation" and Elizabeth was "very handsome, and very like himself" (4-5). Elizabeth takes on her father's sense of social superiority and values it above all else, including her relationship with her sisters. The cycle of isolation Anne experiences is so established in the family dynamic that "Anne herself was become hardened to such affronts" (25). Elizabeth's cruelty, an extension of their father's, does not bother Anne anymore because she has taught herself not to be bothered.

Within the Elliot family dynamic, Sir Walter, in his narcissism, clearly ranks his daughters by their similarity to himself and their use in boosting his social status, with Anne being his least favorite, and she responds to this treatment by fading further into the background. Due to the way her family has treated her in the past, Anne is not at liberty to speak freely in her

family without fear of a strong disagreement and as a result she subdues herself before she is tempted to express her feelings or opinions. Anne's previous attachment to Captain Wentworth, which Sir Walter considered "a very degrading alliance," also contributes to the difficulty between father and daughter (20). Even years later, Sir Walter continues to reference the impropriety of Anne's choice when discussing potential tenants of Kellynch Hall and his concern that it will be let to a "sailor or soldier" (14). Anne quietly defends the navy "who have done so much for us, have at least an equal claim with any other set of men" on the comforts of Kellynch Hall (14). Anne's brief comment is met with a lengthy speech from Sir Walter regarding his "strong grounds of objection" to such men, something readers understand to be a repetition of his arguments against the relationship between Anne and Frederick (15). In response, Anne retreats into herself for the rest of the conversation and the few interjections she makes are delivered timidly "after the little pause which followed" and, a little later in the discussion, "after waiting another moment" (17-18). Through the pauses before Anne speaks, Austen delivers important information about Anne's place in the family. Anne, the middle daughter, has no value in her father's opinion because she is neither beautiful (in his view) nor someone who will make a socially advantageous match.

Quiet resolution is the hallmark of Anne's interactions with her family and the rest of society; she consistently minimizes herself to cause the least amount of trouble, spending the first half of the novel trying to make herself invisible rather than have her expressed opinions and needs ignored. Anne's silence is her only reliable means of protection from the pain of her isolation. Beyond Anne's internal reasons for sidelining herself, her situation also exemplifies the plight of unmarried women in the Regency Era, an experience Austen knew well. Without a place as the head of a household, unmarried women were at the mercy of their relatives and were

often shuffled between established family members, in Anne's case between Mary and Elizabeth, who is also unmarried but reigns over the household of their father. Anne accepts her family's relocation to Bath with only a bit of "grieving," though she herself would much rather remain in a familiar place (25). As Anne considers the situation, she comes to the realization that "it would be most right, and most wise, and, therefore, must involve least suffering, to go with the others," despite her disinclination (25). Through her description of Anne's thought process, Austen shows how Anne is governed by her impulse to avoid discord in her family despite the pain it causes her; the "suffering" to which she refers is the difficulty Anne faces when her family ignores her. Ultimately, Anne stays at Uppercross with Mary and Charles rather than joining Sir Walter and Elizabeth in Bath, but this release is through no action on Anne's part. Instead, Elizabeth and Mary negotiate where Anne will move, and Anne herself "never seemed considered by the others to have any interest in the question" (25). At this point in Anne's life, she has internalized her family's view of her as something inconsequential, and so she accepts their poor treatment of her.

While Sir Walter, Elizabeth, and Mary are all similar in their vanity and inability to govern themselves; Anne, however, is most like her mother, whose death caused the further isolation of Anne in her younger years. Austen's narration mimics Anne's self-effacement but prevents her from being erased completely. Austen's free indirect discourse builds Anne's character by sharing other character's views of her and judging their truth. Austen describes Lady Elliot before she describes Anne, having established that the two are similar. The deceased Lady Elliot was "an excellent woman, sensible and amiable; whose judgment and conduct, if they might be pardoned the youthful infatuation which made her Lady Elliot, had never required indulgence afterwards" (5). Austen intimates that the marriage to Sir Walter was the one flaw in Lady Elliot's judgment, throwing a shadow over the relationship from which Anne came into

being. Anne, with her mother's sense, has little patience for her father's vanity and silliness. Lady Russell, who serves as a surrogate mother to the Elliot girls and is particularly fond of Anne, is likewise described as a "sensible, deserving woman" (4). Austen's description of Anne's mother extends to Anne herself, as Lady Russell declares "that she could fancy the mother to revive again" in Anne (5). Like her mother, Anne is a woman of great sense and compassion, which enables her to navigate her social world beyond that of her immediate family despite the pain her isolation from her family has caused. Without Lady Elliot's presence, Anne lacks a support system because even the people in her life who value her do not truly understand her emotional needs.

Even Lady Russell, to whom Anne "was a most dear and valued goddaughter," has failed Anne, evidenced by their interaction at the beginning of the novel, a reiteration of the situation with Frederick (5). Austen notes that Anne has changed from "a very pretty girl" into a "faded" and "haggard" woman (5). This change is due to her trials in love, her emotional difficulty after Lady Russell persuaded her "to believe the engagement [to Frederick] a wrong thing," despite the clear connection between Anne and Frederick (21). Lady Russell, who claims to operate with Anne's best interests at heart, often does not consider her goddaughter's wishes when deciding where her best interests might lie. With regards to the Elliots' relocation to Bath, Lady Russell "was obliged to oppose her dear Anne's known wishes," because she believes in her own understanding, however misguided, of what is best for Anne, which often conflicts with Anne's expressed wishes (11). Lady Russell considered Anne's dislike of Bath

as prejudice and mistake, arising first from the circumstance of her having been three years at school there, after her mother's death, and, secondly, from her happening not to be not in perfectly good spirits the only winter which she had afterwards spent there. (11)

Austen's narrator takes on Lady Russell's voice, dismissive of what Anne is directly telling her, although Anne's preference is understandable. This argument from Lady Russell provides a clearer picture of Anne's character, emotional experience, and rationality. It further proves how inconsiderate the other characters are of Anne. It is perfectly reasonable that Anne would have a negative association with Bath, as the place she was sent after the death of her mother. Austen notes that Anne was fourteen years old when her mother died. For a child to be sent away from home must be an isolating experience, especially when that child is processing a great loss. This history of physical isolation exacerbates Anne's experience of emotional isolation and colors her relationship with the rest of her family because they caused that rift. The phrasing of Lady Russell's assessment of Anne's "happening" to be in poor spirits on vacation in Bath discounts the negative association Anne has for Bath as a place of isolation. Anne's sadness in Bath was a valid emotional response to the difficulties of her life, which, though years have passed, she has not been able to process or resolve. Although her love for Anne is genuine, Lady Russell is unable to provide true support for Anne because she is too focused on her own idea of how Anne should feel and behave to listen to her goddaughter's wishes or understand how to comfort her.

Left without anyone to rely on for emotional support, Anne regulates her emotions in order to cope with her isolation from her family. Before the action of *Persuasion* takes place, Anne has suppressed her emotions, desires, and needs because she knows they will go unrecognized by her family, similar to Elinor's experience in *Sense and Sensibility*. Thus, when Frederick returns, rather than share her emotional upheaval with anyone in her family, "free indirect discourse reveals to readers how Anne copes alone with the shock of this reunion with Wentworth" (Lynch, 215). After having grown up being excluded and overlooked by her family, the twenty-seven year old Anne isolates herself when she is overwhelmed by emotions rather

than exhibit them to her family. When she learns that Captain Wentworth's sister will be moving to Kellynch Hall, "Anne...left the room, to seek the comfort of cool air for her flushed cheeks; and as she walked along a favorite grove, said, with a gentle sigh, 'a few months more, and *he*, perhaps, may be walking here'" (19). Especially after facing such displeasure for her choice of suitor, Anne hides any feeling she has on the subject in order to protect herself. The Musgroves speak constantly of Captain Wentworth when it is apparent that his sister will be moving into Kellynch Hall, and it was "a new sort of trial to Anne's nerves" to keep her emotions subdued (40). As the distance between Anne and Frederick shrinks, Anne must expend more effort to "teach herself to be insensitive" to him, as she is determined to keep him from seeing that she still loves him (40). Still, Frederick's proximity and his small attentions to her "required a long application of solitude and reflection to recover" from (61). As in her depiction of Elinor, Austen demonstrates Anne's process of regulating her emotions. Because of her efforts to regulate her emotions, Anne feels things quietly in comparison with the other women in the novel. Upon hearing Frederick's tales of dangers at sea, "Anne's shuddering were to herself, alone; but the Miss Musgroves could be as open as they were sincere, in their exclamations of pity and horror" (50). While the Musgrove sisters and Mary are overt in their emotional expression, Anne's emotion is unexpressed but deeply felt. She has trained herself to avoid drawing attention, a learned behavior from her adolescence.

While Anne copes with her isolation and grief by retreating into herself, asking virtually nothing of her family in terms of help or service, her younger sister Mary responds to the isolation her family imposes on her by creating scenarios that in theory would require them to focus on and care for her, although Anne is the only one who responds. According to modern understandings of family dynamics, often "the middle child [Anne] is ignored and obliged to be

satisfied with a family niche that nobody else has taken (or wants)” (Souter). In the Elliot family, this empty niche is that of the caretaker, thus Anne assumes the greatest share of the burden of emotional labor and caretaking. Despite the difficulty of filling this role, Anne appreciates it as a means by which to form social connections that are otherwise closed to her. Outside of the immediate family, Anne embraces her caretaking work for Mary and the Musgroves because they do value certain elements of her personality and presence. Mary appreciates Anne’s presence because Anne takes care of her and fills the motherly role she is otherwise missing. Mary is also isolated from her father and eldest sister because though she “acquired a little artificial importance, by becoming Mrs. Charles Musgrove [she] had merely connected herself with an old country family of respectability and large fortune, and had therefore *given* all the honour and received none” (5). Despite the snobbery with which Sir Walter views the Musgroves, Mary’s marriage allows her to exist in her own space with a much kinder family, the Musgroves, though she has inherited some of the Elliot self-absorption that prevents her from fully embracing her situation. Anne fills the role of the helper, the caretaker of the household. Mary is constantly ailing; it is in this way that Sir Walter’s vanity and narcissism manifests itself in his youngest daughter. Mary “was always thinking a great deal of her own complaints, and always in the habit of claiming Anne when anything was the matter” (25). Mary is less overtly similar to her father than Elizabeth, but she carries the narcissistic element of his personality and constantly demands Anne’s attention and labor. Austen uses Mary to demonstrate another woman’s response to loneliness. When Mary is alone, “her being unwell and out of spirits, was almost a matter of course;” her inability to be alone or to care for herself results from the fact that she has also grown up in isolation due to Sir Walter’s favoritism of Elizabeth and the early death of Lady Elliot (27).

Anne's genuine kindness and care for others make her a valued presence in her social circle, therefore she commits herself fully to being as helpful as possible because through that role she secures a position for herself in the Musgrove family. In her portrayals of the dynamics of Uppercross, Austen explores Anne's mixed feelings towards caretaking in the Musgrove family. Anne dislikes when she is recruited as a mediator, but embraces physical caretaking and helpfulness because those elements of her role allow her to feel a sense of belonging that she does not experience in her immediate family. Anne falls into the helper role in the Musgrove family because of Mary's reliance on her for physical and emotional caretaking and the familiarity with which the Musgroves treat Mary, which they also extend to Anne. In contrast to Anne's humility, Mary's vanity often strains her relationship with her in-laws because they do not hold to the same social expectations, preferring instead to interact more casually, as a modern family might. When Anne arrives at Uppercross Cottage, Austen demonstrates the tension between Mary and the Musgroves. Mary attempts to hold the Musgroves strictly to the code of social convention, which would dictate that "they ought to call upon you [Anne] as soon as possible. They ought to feel what is due to you as *my* sister" (29-30). Mary invokes the code of propriety not because she values Anne as a person or wants to preserve her dignity, but because conflates the Musgroves' treatment of Anne with their respect for the difference in status between the Elliots and the Musgroves. Anne, on the other hand, "should never think of standing on such ceremony with people I know so well," sentiments the Musgroves echo (29). She believes them to be "some of the happiest creatures of her acquaintance," and they in turn treat her "with great cordiality" (30). Louisa, Charles's sister, even later tells Captain Wentworth that "we do so wish Charles had married Anne instead," but as Anne refused his proposal, he married Mary. Mary's self-importance clashes with the Musgroves' more down-to-earth

personalities, a situation Anne often finds herself mediating (68). In contrast to Elinor's constant effort to maintain social bonds for her family's survival, Anne's work in the Musgrove household is to maintain interpersonal relationships to preserve familial peace. She judges Mary's behavior and understands her selfishness to be the cause of much of this strife, and therefore makes more of an effort to be agreeable to compensate for that. Like Elinor and Marianne, Anne makes an effort to manage Mary's emotional expression, though Anne is motivated by a desire to maintain the family peace rather than to protect social standing.

Anne falls into the mediator role because of her skill at caretaking; everyone in her vicinity relies on her kindness and reasonable nature, especially because those elements of Anne's personality stand in such stark contrast to everyone else. Charles and his family feel comfortable enough with Anne that they do not screen their words around her, but rather they speak candidly of their difficulty with Mary and appeal to Anne for help, while Mary simultaneously complains to Anne about the Musgroves. Anne becomes the central figure in this constant conflict, "one of the least agreeable circumstances of her residence there...her being treated with too much confidence by all parties" (32). This duty is stressful because it is impossible for Anne to fix the situation so that everyone is happy with everyone else, a difficult conundrum for one who regulates herself by helping others. Austen sympathizes with Anne's situation:

How was Anne to set all these matters to rights? She could do little more than listen patiently, soften every grievance, and excuse each to the other, give them all hints of the forbearance necessary between such near neighbors, and make those hints broadest which were meant for her sister's benefit. (35)

In her response to family complaints and squabbles, Anne encourages everyone to regulate themselves as she does in order to maintain peaceful social interactions. Anne makes the greatest effort to convince Mary that her behavior is unreasonable because Anne sees her to be the most

at fault, due to her vanity and selfishness. Despite Mary's difficult nature, Anne manages to agree with everyone to keep the peace, though she sacrifices the opportunity to be candid and to share her own opinions in the process. However, because "Anne's services as a mediator, laboring for and producing a common good, ally her with the narrator," her judgment of others is not lost to the reader as it is to the characters (Lynch, 233). By centering the narration in Anne's perspective, Austen is clear about the effort it takes Anne to regulate those around her, the same method Austen employs in *Sense and Sensibility*, and shows how Anne's caretaking is simultaneously her burden and her relief.

While the caretaking role causes stress, Austen uses Anne's affective labor as a net positive, a means of allowing her to be valued by a family and to aid her in regulating her emotions when Frederick returns; Anne accepts her role and uses it to distract herself from the intensity of her emotions and to relieve her isolation. Anne's commitment to her role as the resident caretaker demonstrates "Austen's ideas of how her heroine survives through the necessary work of affective labor" (Tavela, 1). Survival for Anne means finding a way out of her isolated state and finding relief from her emotional pain. From the Musgroves, Anne receives attention and praise only for being helpful and self-sacrificing. In the evenings at Uppercross, when the Musgrove girls want to dance, Anne "played country-dances to them by the hour together; a kindness which always recommended her musical powers to the notice of Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove more than anything else" (36). Austen again invokes Lady Elliot as a sorely missed balm for Anne's isolation. Anne "knew that when she played she was giving pleasure only to herself...excepting one short period of her life, she had never...since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to" (35). Only from Lady Elliot did Anne receive attention purely for who she was, attention which is now gone. Anne's pain and isolation at the

loss of her mother was exacerbated by the loss of her relationship with Frederick, someone who likewise saw and appreciated her value for that “short period.” Therefore, when he returns and confronts her with the pain of that loss, Anne dives into caretaking as a means to avoid it. During the first evening spent with Frederick, “Anne offered her [musical] services, as usual, and though her eyes would sometimes fill with tears as she sat at the instrument, she was extremely glad to be employed, and desired nothing in return but to be unobserved” (55). Austen demonstrates how providing a service to others “gives Anne the means of diverting her consciousness into channels other than that of the language of her heart’s desire” (Lynch, 236). She can think about how to best help others and avoid focusing on the pain of Wentworth’s presence and “cold politeness” to her (55). When Mary’s son is injured, Anne “had everything to do at once” and volunteers to nurse him rather than attend a dinner with the Musgroves and Captain Wentworth (41). Successfully avoiding the situation, Anne “was left with as many sensations of comfort, as were, perhaps, ever likely to be hers” (44). She again takes refuge in her helpfulness when Frederick appears at Uppercross Cottage; their interaction, though minimal, “renders her speechless...she could only hang over little Charles, with most disordered feelings” (61). Anne focuses on the child rather than on Frederick, although Austen’s narrator shows how her mind is occupied with thoughts of the Captain and their relationship, “his kindness in stepping forward to her relief—the manner—the silence in which it had passed” (61). Austen represents Anne’s disjointed thoughts in contrast to her usual logic and rationality. As the distance between Anne and Frederick continues to shrink, Anne’s caretaking becomes a means by which she regulates her emotions.

Besides providing the means by which Anne can hide her feelings, giving her enough space and time to reconcile herself to Frederick’s presence, the practice of caretaking also gradually rebuilds the relationship between them. Anne and Frederick are two people who are

altruistic and self-sacrificing. Anne's status as a helper is ultimately what gives her a way through her grief by first allowing her space to come to terms with Frederick's proximity and then by facilitating their reconnection. In *Persuasion*, Austen uses the practice of caretaking to indicate the quality of a person's character. Austen distinguishes Frederick and Anne from the rest of the characters in the novel because they are the only people in the novel who are able to assess the needs of others and care enough to act to fulfill them. Austen's narrator shares almost nothing of Frederick's inner world, so to build his character Austen uses his interactions with others and the observations made by Anne. Like Anne, Frederick cares for the Musgroves, exemplified in his treatment of their deceased son. Austen reintroduces Frederick through the Musgrove family's "warm gratitude for the kindness he had shown poor Dick, and very high respect for his character" (40). In Frederick's interaction with the family, he takes the time to sit with Mrs. Musgrove "and entered into conversation with her...about her son, doing it with so much sympathy and natural grace as showed the kindest consideration for all that was real and unabsurd in the parent's feelings," despite his true disinclination for the young man (51). Frederick also demonstrates his kindness in his relationship with Captain Benwick—something else he and Anne have in common. Anne learns that when Benwick's fiancée died, Frederick was the one to deliver the news "and never left the poor fellow for a week" afterwards (84). As Anne witnesses Frederick's attention and kindness to others, these observations amplify her love for him and demonstrate it to the reader. Here Austen confirms their compatibility—Frederick is unique in the world of *Persuasion* because he cares for others in the same way Anne does.

Frederick's caretaking also extends to Anne, something by which she is deeply affected; he is the person who not only cares for her, but does so actively in order to relieve her from the burden of caretaking. While her younger nephew "fastened himself upon her" as she is trying to

care for the injured little Charles, Anne struggles to manage both boys until “she found herself in the state of being released from him...and he was resolutely borne away” by Frederick (61).

Austen compares Frederick’s action with the inaction of Charles Hayter, who only attempts to call the little boy to himself, but does not physically move to assist Anne and so is ridiculously ineffectual. A few days later, the party at Uppercross embarks on “a *long* walk,” towards the end of which the Crofts offer to drive “any lady who might be particularly tired” (63/69). Although the narrator notes at many points throughout the description of the walk that Anne is tired, she does not accept the offer because “the invitation was general, and generally declined” (69).

Frederick, however, “cleared the hedge in a moment to say something to his sister” (69). The next moment, Anne receives a personal invitation to drive, and although from politeness she was “instinctively beginning to decline,” Frederick “quietly obliged her to be assisted into the carriage” (69-70). Without waiting for Anne to advocate for herself, something she will not do based on her adherence to social conventions and her role in the family, Frederick takes action to care for her. As Anne understands it, his care for her, “was a remainder of former sentiment; it was an impulse of pure, though unacknowledged friendship,” hopeful conjecture that ultimately reveals itself to be true (70). Anne’s caretaking is a way for her to form connections with others by demonstrating her goodness. Frederick’s is likewise an indication of his merit, and Austen’s way of proving that he is worthy of Anne. Austen paints Frederick’s character and his relationship with Anne through the care he takes of the Musgroves, Captain Benwick, and, most importantly, Anne herself. Frederick and Anne come together again through a shared aptitude for caretaking; they mutually support each other and work together to care for everyone else.

Austen links Anne’s ability for caretaking to her capacity for emotional regulation, something that helps her find social success by forming relationships built on trust, respect, and

love. Because Anne is so practiced at regulating her emotions, when Louisa's accident at Lyme occurs, Anne, unlike those around her, does not have to waste time or energy regulating her initial emotional reaction, instead bypassing it entirely and jumping immediately to enacting the logical solution. Anne's "cool, analytical mind is shown to advantage, and her years of working at composure and self-control are showcased through her skills of handling a tense situation" (Tavela, 6). She is the only one who knows how to respond in an emergency. In the moments immediately following Louisa's fall, Austen paints a kind of tableau of "the horror of that moment" until Anne's logic, brought forth by Frederick's need and "despair," breaks the spell (85). "Everything was done that Anne had prompted" and "every one capable of thinking felt the advantage" of Anne's presence of mind and ability to exert herself despite the anxiety of the situation (85). Austen is deliberately ambiguous in her description of Frederick's reaction. While he is horrified and concerned for Louisa, rather than being clearly the grief of a lover Austen notes that part of it emanates from empathy on behalf of her parents, part from guilt, and part from his genuine care for Louisa. While he may not be romantically attached, Frederick cares for her because he is a good person, as is she. Although he is deeply afflicted, he, Charles, and Anne "were completely rational," not entirely overwhelmed by emotion to the point of uselessness like Mary and Henrietta (86). Part of Frederick's rationality involves looking to Anne, "attending with all the strength and zeal, and thought, which instinct supplied" for direction in this instance, and he appreciates her intelligence and strength, traits the reader knows Anne has made a great effort to cultivate in herself (86). Before the scene at Lyme, Austen shows the small ways in which Frederick cares for Anne while she endeavors to ignore him. In return, when Frederick is distraught over Louisa's accident, it is Anne who takes the first action to help him. *Persuasion* tracks the progression of Anne and Frederick's relationship through their acts of care for each

other and the way they support each other to care for the community around them. In this instance, Anne's caretaking ability and quick, rational thinking is what saves Louisa's life, and what makes Frederick and the family at large appreciate her steadiness and the care she shows for others.

Like Elinor, the characters around Anne love her more than she initially understands, proving the true value of her caretaking. While they may not understand the true extent of the isolation she feels, they do care for her, sentiments that emerge when Anne finally fails at regulating her emotions after Frederick's confession of love "most fervent, most undeviating." in a similar scene to Elinor's emotional outburst at the end of *Sense and Sensibility*, Anne "could do nothing towards tranquility," even when Charles, Mary, and Henrietta interrupt her attempts at recovery (186). When the others enter, Anne's instincts to regulate herself kick in and "the absolute necessity of seeming like herself produced then an immediate struggle; but after a while she could do no more" (186). For the first time, in particular contrast to the scene of the walk at Uppercross when Anne refuses to admit to her exhaustion, Anne "was obliged to plead indisposition...They could then see that she looked very ill—were shocked and concerned—and would not stir without her for the world" (186). Austen's description of the shock with which the group observes Anne's distress speaks to the success of her previous efforts to subdue her own needs, and the care they take of her invites questioning of the necessity of those very efforts. After years of isolation, Anne finally admits to needing help. As Charles "in his real concern and good nature" walks her home, Frederick meets them, and Charles asks him to "take my place and give Anne your arm" (189). Frederick and Anne are allowed time to walk alone together and to openly discuss their experiences and their shared desire to rekindle their relationship. Austen is careful in the way she brings about this opportunity; it only comes because Anne, the caretaker,

admits to needing help herself. In many ways, “Anne, through her practice of affective labor, serves as a model for how to adapt to the social requirements of the world,” because it is through her caretaking that she ultimately forms supportive relationships (Tavela, 2). Like Elinor, Anne realizes her place in the community when the people who have benefitted from her help step in to care for her in return, when she can no longer regulate her emotions or suppress her needs.

From *Sense and Sensibility* to *Persuasion*, Austen narrows her focus from the social system to the familial, as Anne’s society consists of immediate and extended family. Austen’s commentary focuses mainly on Anne’s experience as a caretaker within a family for the purpose of finding connection and maintaining peace. Like Elinor, Anne regulates her emotions because of her emotional isolation from her family, but Austen is more overt in her exploration of caretaking as the solution to isolation. Like Elinor, Anne has a unique perspective on her family and their place in the world that affords her a certain objectivity that enables her to see how best to help others, qualities that mirror Elinor’s mindfulness of others that allow her to successfully navigate her society. Austen expands on the role of caretaking in Elinor’s experience with Anne in *Persuasion*, who is a much more literal caretaker, rather than an emotional or social one. In both cases, however, it is the protagonist’s ability to connect with others that frees them.

4. Conclusion

Sense and Sensibility and *Persuasion*, novels that bookend Jane Austen's body of work, mirror and adapt each other in a unique way. Most of Austen's novels exist in isolation from each other, with vastly different protagonists and challenging various elements of society, but Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliot, however, are remarkably similar. Both value their ability to regulate their emotions as it pertains to their potential for achieving their goals. They are equally perceptive and introspective, with a heightened and objective view of their families and societies, both despite and because of their isolation. In Elinor and Anne, Austen explores the relationship between social conventions of femininity and dynamics of the family to uncover the often overlooked cost of affective labor and emotional isolation. *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion* follow similar arcs. They both center the experience of a woman isolated in her family and in society and follow her as her inherent goodness helps her form real connection with those around her, revealed when she is no longer able to regulate her emotions. The sense of continuation that flows between *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion* is one example of Austen's literary brilliance.

Throughout Austen's oeuvre, it is the clarity with which Austen renders her characters that allows her intentions to shine through the text and her writing to endure for centuries. In *The Hidden Jane Austen*, John Wiltshire interrogates the timeless quality of Austen's work. It is subtle, but upon re-reading Austen's work "with the information and understanding...enables [the re-reader] to give Austen's novels the attention they ask for" (Wiltshire, 3). Austen took great care with her work, crafting every word and perfecting every sentence until it was perfectly sharp. A common sentiment among Austen readers is that "the freshness of Austen's novel would not fade with re-reading and that the second time round it might be even more rewarding,"

something I found in my own experience with Austen (Wiltshire, 1). As a chronic re-reader myself, I directly experienced this Austenian phenomenon; returning to her work has given me an increasing appreciation for her prowess as an author and for her insight into the human psyche. In *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*, delving deeper into the text brought the subtleties of Elinor's and Anne's situations to light as it revealed threads of personality buried under social conventions and familial obligations. I have always been fascinated by the process of creating a character in writing, a hallmark of Austen's work and part of what inspired my love for her. Jane Austen's books have always spoken to me and her characters have been a source of comfort and introspection from the beginning. When I was a freshman in high school, my great aunt gave me an anthology of Jane Austen's novels and a card in which she had written, "I hope you enjoy these stories as much as I always have." Eight years, three Austen classes, and one thesis later, I think it's safe to say that I do.

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