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JANE AUSTEN AND THE ROMANTIC LYRIC: *PERSUASION* AND COLERIDGE'S CONVERSATION POEMS

BY KEITH G. THOMAS

When discussing the Romanticism of *Persuasion*, long regarded as the most Romantic of Jane Austen's novels, critics usually make comparisons with the Romantic lyric in one or other of its forms. Barbara Hardy, for example, writes that chapter 10 of the novel, which describes the autumnal walk to Winthrop, "brings us close to the romantic ode": "This nearly lyric episode," she argues, "resembles an Ode to Autumn in three stanzas" in the way it presents the changing response of the heroine, Anne Elliot, to a landscape whose character changes at successive stages of the walk. Nina Auerbach calls Anne's climactic speech to Harville in the novel's penultimate chapter a "romantic lyric," and mentions that the novel's "blended tone of [fear and joy, pleasure and pain] brings us close to the elegiac lyrics of Jane Austen's contemporaries, Shelley and Keats."¹ If the novel at times "brings us close"—the phrase both critics use—to major Romantic poetic forms, how close do we actually get? Is an episode or a speech actually "a romantic lyric" or only "nearly lyric"? Do novel and poems parallel or approach each other, touch or in some way converge? If comparisons with the lyric are to be genuinely heuristic and not simply encomiastic or loosely descriptive, then we need to ask what aspects of the lyric appear in the novel and how they work.

Behind Hardy's and Auerbach's observations is a problematic historical point. Although it is possible that Austen read Keats (though certainly not "To Autumn") and some Shelley, she would most likely not have read them in time to affect the composition of *Persuasion*.² Her relation to the poets is thus best explained by such notions as "the spirit of the age." As a result, critical debate has focused on the presence of recognizably Romantic themes in her work: in *Persuasion*, for example, the self in relation to the natural landscape, solitude and estrangement, the role of memory and feeling, the recovery of the past—all of which have most often suggested Wordsworth.³ But Austen's satirical reference to Scott and

Byron in *Persuasion*, as well as audible echoings of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" in her description of the landscape around Lyme (both in chapter 11), implies that more is involved in her relation to the poets than a straightforward adoption of themes prevalent in the age.⁴ Quite clearly, as Hardy's and Auerbach's comments intimate, the Romantic elements in the novel are events of considerable structural complexity, and ones that should be examined in their full context. For to say that successive moments of the Winthrop walk add up to an ode to autumn is to say that they possess an ode-like structure and development. Equally, to claim that Anne's speech on constancy is a Romantic lyric is to recognize that the speaker's tone, intensity of feeling, situation and motivating occasion are similar to those of the speaker in a typical elegiac lyric by Keats or Shelley. (Somewhat like the Poet in "Alastor," say, Anne emerges as a solitary who continues to espouse an ideal even after experiencing profound disappointment and loss.) But the context of these "lyrics" is important, too. In chapter 10, the ode is soon subverted, and Anne gently satirized for her self-indulgence, when the conversation she overhears between Wentworth and Louisa in the hedge behind her puts an end to her poetic musings. In chapter 23, when declaiming her elegiac lyric on constancy, Anne is no nightingale "who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds": she is heard and overheard by auditors who dramatically affect what she is saying.⁵ In sum, Austen appropriates lyrical ideology and method, as I hope to show, but adapts these to particular novelistic ends. By attending to their structure, strategy and context, rather than overt theme, we can best understand how the novel's lyrical moments work.

Discussing Austen's relation to Romanticism, Susan Morgan points to "a few of the moments at which ['Austen's work' and 'particular romantic poems'] touch." My point in this essay is that they not only touch but overlap—and indeed Morgan herself gives us as her premise one such place of overlapping: "The subject of Austen's fiction, like that of the major poets of her time, is the relation between the mind and its objects."⁶ I take this premise as a starting point for my discussion of the relation of the Romantic lyric to *Persuasion* precisely because the epistemology of subject-object relations engages a full sense of structure, strategy, and context: the mind's knowledge of its objects does not happen in isolation but is determined by a wide array of conditions. Time and place, conscious and unconscious intentions, the presence and behavior of

other people or contingent objects all help shape the encounter between subject and object in the lyric, and between heroine and hero in the novel. In short, heroine knows hero in the novel in precisely the same way as subject knows object in the lyric.

To show how novel and lyric overlap I compare the novel's lyrical moments not with poems by Keats, Shelley, or even Wordsworth, who have most often afforded Austen critics their paradigms of the Romantic lyric, but with the conversation poems of Coleridge, and three in particular: "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," "Frost at Midnight," and "The Nightingale." I choose Coleridge not so much because Austen is almost never compared with him, but because, as M. H. Abrams argued in his seminal essay of 1965, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," he "inaugurated the greater Romantic lyric, firmly established its pattern, and wrote the largest number of instances."⁷ His practice in the conversation poems can therefore be taken as normative for the Romantic lyric as a whole—and for Austen's adoption of lyrical strategies and structures in her novel. But equally importantly, the conversation poems bring us surprisingly close to Austen's practice in *Persuasion* insofar as their dramatic "conversational" situations already suggest a poetic approach toward the novelistic. Social and domestic, employing a sizable set of characters, these poems present brief scenes of encounter that always lead, of course, to "persuasion." The convergence in this case is most evident in each author's use of one particular epistemological strategy: third parties (the auditors in the poems, other characters in the novel) who function as semiotic intermediaries between subject and object, heroine and hero. Another surprising sign of this convergence is that each author also gives individual moments or scenes, and even the work as a whole, a chiasmic shape.

Jane Austen's adoption of lyrical structures and strategies is not simply a matter of mechanics. On the contrary, it entails an assimilation of Romantic lyrical ideology, for along with the mechanics Austen inevitably appropriates the theory and its problems. By reviewing the Romantic lyrical project as exemplified by Coleridge's conversation poems, we can gain a sense of the inherent problems informing Austen's lyrical practice in *Persuasion*.

M. H. Abrams set the terms for subsequent discussion of the Romantic lyric not only by describing the lyric's generic contours and investigating its possible origins in seventeenth-century medita-

tive and eighteenth-century loco-descriptive poetry, but by outlining the lyric's specifically Romantic epistemological method and metaphysical goal. His succinct definition of the lyric well describes its epistemological character: the lyric consists in a "repeated out-in-out process, in which mind confronts nature and their interplay constitutes the poem" (528). Beneath this epistemological to and fro lies a Romantic ontology of categorical difference between mind and nature, subject and object, that seeks metaphysical resolution in what Abrams calls, after Coleridge, a "coalescence of subject and object" (544). In the Romantic lyric, Abrams says at the end of his discussion of "Frost at Midnight," "nature is made thought and thought nature, both by their sustained interaction and by their seamless metaphoric continuity" (551).

Such an account of the Romantic lyric, however, remains frankly Coleridgean and frankly idealistic, repeating by way of interpretive explanation the lyric's own ideological fictions about itself.⁸ These are detectable in Abrams's inaugural and most extensive definition of the lyric, which, not surprisingly, since Coleridge is his "central reference" from first to last (530), perfectly fits the model of the conversation poems. Romantic lyrics, Abrams writes,

present a determinate speaker in a particularized, and usually a localized, outdoor setting, whom we overhear as he carries on, in a fluent vernacular which rises easily to a more formal speech, a sustained colloquy, sometimes with himself or with the outer scene, but more frequently with a silent human auditor, present or absent. The speaker begins with a description of the landscape; an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely interwoven with the outer scene. In the course of this meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem. Often the poem rounds upon itself to end where it began, at the outer scene, but with an altered mood and deepened understanding which is the result of the intervening meditation.

(527–28)

Abrams's enumeration of the components of plot and setting is accurate and unexceptionable enough, but his way of configuring their interrelationship already hints at those aspects of the lyric that later critics have found problematic. Herbert F. Tucker, for example, commenting on Abrams's "by now . . . canonical" concept, points out that "the genre Abrams called 'greater' was not more-

lyrical-than-lyric but rather more-than-lyrical.”⁹ It is precisely what is “more-than-lyrical” about the lyric (particularly those aspects deriving from the contemporary philosophical situation) that shapes the lyric in the Romantic period and simultaneously renders it problematic—implicitly, even, in Abrams’s account.

Abrams’s opening sentence contains three crucial propositions that either point towards what is “more-than-lyrical” or directly raise questions about the lyric’s status and strategies. First, Abrams says that in the Romantic lyric we “overhear” a speaker; second, that this speaker’s discourse is a “colloquy”; and third, that the interlocutors in this colloquy are objects, or other human subjects, or the speaker’s own mind, who in their variety and alternation (in the same poem, as the following sentences make clear) are in some sense contingent and beyond the speaker’s control. For if the speaker’s “meditation” is “credibly stimulated by the setting” and “follows the various and seemingly random flow of the living consciousness” (543), then it is because that objective stimulus itself is a given, simply posited as “various and seemingly random.” These three ideological, fictive propositions constitute the problematic of the Romantic lyric for Coleridge—and, implicitly, for Austen.

To conceive of the lyric as a speaker’s utterance we overhear is, of course, to emphasize the extent to which the lyric relies on voice and aspires to be speech. Although the careful craftsmanship and formal ordonnance of any Romantic lyric easily counter this impression by declaring the poem’s written textual nature, the privileging of speech creates a sense of spontaneity and immediacy, innocent of any premeditated art. The subject-object encounter at the center of the lyric thus purports to be accidental, as if the poet were simply reporting to us what happened to befall him, the poem pretending to record either events happening in the present while the poet speaks (that is, writes), or events that happened just a moment ago. Although seemingly triggered by an external stimulus, the lyric nevertheless presents itself as a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings—a discourse that appears to require no auditors at all and is therefore only accidentally overheard.¹⁰

But auditors are present in the poem, whether silent or not, and the speaker interprets their behavior, even their mere presence, as some kind of responsive reaction to this discourse. For whatever is in the position of the auditor—or, more properly, in the position of the object, since Abrams includes the landscape and the speaker’s own mind as interlocutors in the “colloquy”—becomes all-impor-

tant to the speaker as the occasion, the mediator, and ultimately the arbiter of his acts of cognition, the persuasion he reaches. In a real sense, the object persuades the subject. Yet if it is a colloquy, as Abrams stresses, then the lyric has ceased to be a monologue—as he later claims it is and as we might expect it to be (543)—but has now verged towards dialogue. As a result, it is essentially defined by the “more-than-lyrical,” since obviously the auditor-object is integral to the poem’s drama and succeeds in making its voice heard, in a dialogical way.¹¹

There are dangers here, however. By turning the speaker’s lyrical monologue into a colloquy, a near dialogue, the poet invites disruption of his argument, inasmuch as the auditor or object, autonomous and contingent, can be “seemingly random” in his behavior or response. Who knows, for example, whether Charles Lamb will feel the way Coleridge hopes he does in “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,” whether the rook will fly within sight of him, or whether he will even notice it or give it a second thought? Although the voice of the other supposedly blends smoothly with the speaker’s, we can nevertheless sense that its answers—whether affirmative or negative, whether too easily complaisant or wilfully enigmatic—threaten to reify the radical difference between subject and object (in the second alternatives by collapsing it altogether) instead of resolving it. For this reason, Coleridge usually silences the human voices (or denies them articulate speech) and lets only nature speak an “intelligible” language.¹²

In short, there is an agenda to the epistemology of the subject-object encounter, which in turn calls into question the metaphysical resolution, the “coalescence of subject and object” of which the conversation poems often try to persuade us. Abrams acknowledges the agenda but does not foresee its dangers. “Even when the initial impression,” he writes, “is of the casual movement of the relaxed mind, retrospect reveals the whole to have been firmly organized around an emotional issue pressing for resolution” (552–53). A strong intentionality, then, motivates the encounter in the first place, directs the course of the argument, and supervises the inclusion of all that is “seemingly random” and other in the lyrical discourse. But earlier in his essay Abrams has already specified what the aim of this intentionality, this “emotional issue,” might be: “the reintegration of the divided self (of ‘head and heart’) and the simultaneous healing of the breach between the ego and the alien other (of ‘subject and object’) was for Coleridge a pro-

found emotional need” (547). Given the power of such an overriding intention, one cannot but question the poems’ climactic claims of having achieved the desired metaphysical goal of coalescing subject and object and making thought nature and nature thought.

From considerations such as these, we can see how precarious and careful a construct the Coleridgean lyric must be. To work, it must achieve a balance between the intentional and the contingent. The contingent must seem independently to mediate—that is, both carry and check—subjective intention. Although pathetic fallacy is always involved, the lyric should never seem obviously wishful or factitious. Indeed, at its best, the lyric is both idealistic and skeptical. In artfully transforming subjective intention into objective contingency, the lyric generates the impression of spontaneous, benevolent accident. The accident seems providential, and the experience recorded in the poem assumes the aura of allegory. For some power outside the self (nature or God) seems to shape the world according to the self’s desires. If the tendency of these effects is idealistic, the structure of their presentation is nevertheless inherently skeptical. The epiphanies that would persuade Coleridge of the presence of some design at work in the world are always entrusted to others, and thus remain, for him, a matter of surmise. They remain hypothetical, “imprisoned within the imaginary,” as Tilottama Rajan points out, however much Coleridge may try to “confirm the truth of the fictive by identifying it with a person who exists outside the realm of the fictive.”¹³ Although such strategies of vicariousness are intended to make the imaginary real, Coleridge’s lyrics never achieve more than an uneasy compromise between the dangerous extremes of outright idealism and outright skepticism; these poems, Rajan writes, allow “deconstructive and self-mystifying tendencies to coexist, by a kind of automatism, without being accommodated to each other” (231).

Many of the problems of the conversation poems, as I hope to show, have their direct analogues in *Persuasion*, precisely because Austen’s strategies for enabling the subject to contact objective presence risk the same dangers as those encountered in Coleridge’s lyrics. The case will become clearer if we turn first to some more obvious similarities between the novel and the lyric.

The center of interest in *Persuasion* is clearly the epistemological drama of Anne Elliot’s attempts to understand and know again her estranged former lover, Captain Frederick Wentworth. Because

she continues to love him and is unsure of his present feelings (as is he, we eventually find out), the gap between them only accentuates desire, making each encounter a subject-object confrontation. Gap, uncertainty, and desire, each compounding the others, turn Wentworth into an enigmatic object for Anne. While we see, as Douglas Bush says, "Anne's anxious efforts to interpret his every act and look and word," Wentworth remains as remote and inscrutable as Keats's Grecian urn.¹⁴ Pitted against Anne's forceful intentionality (which is always evident even if always held in check by a wise passiveness) is Wentworth's sometimes "seemingly random" behavior. Other factors further compound the epistemological predicament. Each encounter is usually brief, happens accidentally, and is circumscribed by all the various formalities and protocols of social intercourse, which serve more to restrict than to allow understanding and knowledge. In consequence, each encounter is highly charged.

Such limitations impose a lyriclike scope and proportion on the encounters, resulting in a drama like the one Abrams outlines for the conversation poems. Always "particularized" and "localized," to press Abrams's definition into service again, the encounters present a colloquy that evokes in the subject "a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation and feeling which remains closely interwoven with the outer scene"—in this case, Wentworth and the others, their conversation and behavior. Moreover, each encounter is in some way epiphanic: Anne "achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem." Invariably too, the episode ends "with an altered mood and deepened understanding," even if only provisionally achieved. If such an account seems true of most scenes in most novels as well as of Coleridge's lyrics, it is because this is one clear area where lyrics and novels overlap.

Anne's affective response during and after the encounters is an index of their lyriclike nature. Invariably she feels a riot of sensations, an agitation, which only later, when she withdraws from company, can she quieten into something like the meditative calm that Coleridge claims to feel at the close of a conversation poem.¹⁵ Confused and embarrassed when Wentworth removes the young Walter Musgrove from her back, for example, Anne knows full well that "she was ashamed of herself, quite ashamed at being so nervous, so overcome by such a trifle; but so it was; and it required a long application of solitude and reflection to recover her" (81).

Happy encounters produce the same effect. Later in the novel, when she senses Wentworth returns her love, the agitation modulates into a paradoxical fusion that is “something between delight and misery”: Anne is “plunged at once in . . . agitations. . . . She was deep in the happiness of such misery, or the misery of such happiness, instantly” (229). Such statements have invited comparison with Keats’s oxymorons, this one anticipating, perhaps, the “aching Pleasure” of his “Ode on Melancholy.”¹⁶ But if Anne’s emotional agitation as she is winning near the goal is reminiscent of Keats’s, it is really a sign of an interpretive agitation prompted by the inscrutability of the object—an agitation that is definitive of the Romantic lyric in general. Austen’s—and Keats’s—oxymorons in fact act out and repeat as figure the “out-in-out process” of cognitive alternation between self and other that is the lyric’s fundamental discursive movement.

This strenuous interplay between inner intention and outer contingency produces the same set of epistemological procedures, with the same set of problems, in the novel as in the lyric. With Wentworth as the object quite simply given as remote, opaque, and enigmatic, until the pivotal encounter in the octagon room before the concert in chapter 20, it is no wonder that Anne’s intentions color her interpretation of his behavior and conversation. At its worst, this results in paranoid projection, as, for example, when Anne infers that the “noise” Wentworth makes with the child after he lifts him off her back indicates that “her conversation was the last of his wants” (80). More likely, having first sensed her predicament, Wentworth now senses her confusion and embarrassment and wishes to put her at ease by changing the subject, by attending to Walter (he may also be covering his own embarrassment at their sudden, close contact). The comment Anne makes to Mrs. Smith later in the novel applies to such instances of dubious interpretation: “What wild imaginations one forms, where dear self is concerned! How sure to be mistaken!” (202).

And yet Austen’s mode of narrative presentation only accentuates Anne’s inclination to form wild imaginations where dear self is concerned—and only accentuates the subject’s epistemological predicament. As has often been remarked, *Persuasion* is noticeably Romantic in focusing on Anne’s consciousness.¹⁷ The narrator may objectively present the characters’ actions and dialogue, but the only interpretation and penetration of character, motivation and behavior we are given are Anne’s. This applies above all to Went-

worth, whose inner self is only fleetingly revealed at the beginning of the novel and then in full only in the penultimate chapter, first in the letter he writes Anne, then at length in their subsequent conversations on the gravel walk and later that evening in Campden Place.¹⁸ Moreover, as often as not, Austen filters objective action and dialogue through Anne's consciousness, her frequent use of free indirect speech actually giving us only Anne's perception of events and no other point of view.¹⁹ By dwelling, then, on Anne's hermeneutic struggle and affective states, and by frequently presenting only her point of view, Austen essentially lyricizes the novel, shaping colloquy as almost the discourse of a single voice.

Even so, those other voices are clearly audible behind the subject's voice in the foreground—exactly as in the lyric. We can detect, for example, that the noise Wentworth studiously makes with the young Walter (even though the episode is narrated exclusively from Anne's point of view) probably means something quite different from what Anne takes it to mean. The overall effect, to borrow Rajan's phrase, is a powerful mix of "deconstructive and self-mystifying tendencies" that "coexist" but "without being accommodated to each other" (231). Or, to quote Coleridge's "The Nightingale," song "answer[s] and provoke[s]" song (58), but the result may well be dissonance rather than harmony—or an unintentional harmony. Just as Coleridge's deconstructive tendencies cause him to station auditors and objects at various distances from himself and thereby entrench difference and its possible disruptiveness, so Austen allows us to see and hear Wentworth's difference from Anne's imaginations of him, even though, for the most part, we see and hear through her eyes and ears. In fact in the novel's most narratologically complex episodes, we are not only given the objective data of Wentworth's behavior and conversation and Anne's misinterpretation of these, but allowed to infer Wentworth's motivation or meaning (even though these are not provided) as well as Anne's motivation for arriving at her particular interpretation (even though this too is not provided but only its result, the "wild imagination"). Austen achieves this effect not only by presenting the discrepancy between subject and object but by intimating a discrepancy within the self: conscious self conflicts with unconscious (and therefore self conflicts with other). Austen thus doubles what is already double voiced, turning actual dia-

logue into “out-in-out” colloquy even as she blends all into the near monologic discourse of Anne’s consciousness.

If the novel’s narrative mode favors subjectivity of interpretation, how does Anne eventually manage to form correct imaginations? If the answer is in part that she possesses the necessary “quickness of perception . . . nicety in the discernment of character [and] . . . natural penetration” (249), such skills would be insufficient unless Wentworth himself (knowing his own heart after the accident in Lyme and betraying his own unconscious constancy even earlier) communicated his own intentions, making himself less remote, less opaque. Ultimately the object’s responsive echo is arbiter of whether an imagination proves wild or correct. But the subject’s path to the truth is by no means straightforward; it lies through a difficult semiotic field. Various motivations can thwart the ostensible meanings of conversations; the statements people utter can be intentionally general, in order to impart information in a guarded if still suggestive fashion, and therefore ambiguous. In their climactic conversation in the octagon room in chapter 20, for example, Anne and Wentworth trade generalities about the excursion to Lyme several weeks earlier, one’s attachment to a place, suffering, recovery, Louisa and Benwick—a conversation that allows both to imply their love for each other but could allow other interpretations too.²⁰ If Anne realizes now, for the first time, the truth about Wentworth, then she does so by considering other indications besides the denotative meaning of the statements he utters:

She was thinking only of the last half hour, and as they passed to their seats, her mind took a hasty range over it. His choice of subjects, his expressions, and still more his manner and look, had been such as she could see in only one light. His opinion of Louisa Musgrove’s inferiority, an opinion which he had seemed solicitous to give, his wonder at Captain Benwick, his feelings as to a first, strong attachment,—sentences begun which he could not finish—his half averted eyes, and more than half expressive glance,—all, all declared that he had a heart returning to her at last; that anger, resentment, avoidance, were no more; and that they were succeeded, not merely by friendship and regard, but by the tenderness of the past; yes, some share of the tenderness of the past. She could not contemplate the change as implying less.—He must love her.

(185–86)

To determine the full significance of his conversation, to discern

that Wentworth is motivated by the same intentions as herself, Anne must move from the denotative meaning of utterances to a supplementary order of signs: "His choice of subject, his expressions, and still more his manner and look," "sentences begun which he could not finish," "his half averted eyes and more than half expressive glance." In supplementing the conversation such signs further elaborate its meaning and thus confirm Anne's imaginations.

The epistemological method for forming imaginations, whether wild or correct, is the same in the novel as in the lyric. It consists in making inferences from the general to the particular, in determining the reference of the object's behavior or discourse. Inferring thereby the object's relation to itself, the subject can then fix the ratio of contingency to intention and assess the object's responsiveness. As acts of inference and reference alternate in almost an "out-in-out process," subject and object move into uncertain contact and relation. The episode in the novel that perhaps best exemplifies this is the walk to Winthrop in chapter 10, when both Anne and Wentworth form imaginations about each other that are half wrong and half right. Moreover, their contact is indirect rather than face to face, and thus works in part through the mediation of supplementary signs—just as does a conversation poem in which Coleridge is excluded from direct contact with nature.²¹

Overhearing the conversation between Wentworth and Louisa in the hedge behind her, Anne can tell that Wentworth is impressed at Louisa for insisting Henrietta patch up her quarrel with Charles Hayter. Wentworth replies to Louisa:

"I see that more than a mere dutiful morning-visit to your aunt was in question;—and woe betide him, and her too, when it comes to things of consequence, when they are placed in circumstances, requiring fortitude and strength of mind, if she have not resolution enough to resist idle interference in such a trifle as this. Your sister is an amiable creature; but *yours* is the character of firmness, I see. If you value your conduct or happiness, infuse as much of your own spirit into her, as you can. But this, no doubt, you have always been doing. It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on.—You are never sure of a good impression being durable. Every body may sway it; let those who would be happy be firm. . . . My first wish for all, whom I am interested in, is that they should be firm. If Louisa Musgrove would be beau-

tiful and happy in her November of life, she will cherish all her present powers of mind."

(87-88)

If we consider the episode as a subject-object encounter between Anne and Wentworth, then here the object, unaware of the subject's presence, autonomously expresses itself. The subject, for its part, gains knowledge of an object which is at this moment unseen but not unheard. There are immediate analogues in such standard lyrics as "Ode to a Nightingale" and "To a Sky-Lark," where the bird sings, unaware of the poet overhearing it. The behavior of natural phenomena in the conversation poems is a less obtrusive instance of this. The object's essential nonrelation to the subject therefore makes its communication seem direct, unself-conscious and true. This the subject well realizes. Yet what the subject does not realize until a certain point in the encounter is how much its understanding of the object is an interpretive construction, even a wild imagination where dear self is concerned. Anne assumes that Wentworth's prejudices against her are confirmed when Louisa tells him that Lady Russell persuaded Anne not to marry Charles Musgrove. Despite the truth of the matter (Louisa has misinterpreted Anne's refusal as Lady Russell's persuasion), we know that Anne, like us, is busy applying his comments to herself. She infers that the object is referring to her, when in truth, on one level, the object bears no relation to her at all.

On another level, of course, the object here does indeed refer to the subject. Wentworth, it would seem, has Anne in mind when he praises Louisa. The very virtues he impulsively praises Louisa for possessing he implicitly criticizes Anne for lacking: "fortitude and strength of mind . . . resolution enough to resist idle interference . . . [a] character of decision and firmness." We, like Anne, infer that she was weak, irresolute and indecisive in not resisting Lady Russell's "idle interference" eight years before. We make such inferences because Wentworth's statements are blanket generalizations whose reference is by turns double, ambiguous, and vague. He begins a sentence with "woe betide him, and her too" (the "her" added as an afterthought), proceeds correctly enough to a combined "they," but then switches to a "she" who is ostensibly Henrietta but more properly Louisa (and implicitly, by inversion, Anne). He talks later of a general "you" ("you are never sure of a

good impression being durable”), of “every body” and finally “all” (“all, whom I am interested in”). Such rapid change of grammatical subject and reference has the effect of making his generalizations absolute, free-floating, and hyperbolic: while they point predominantly at Louisa and Anne, they do not properly engage either as the full referent, thus encouraging our attempts at inference all the more. Moreover, Wentworth contradicts himself. The “character of resolution and firmness” he first praises is one that successfully resists the persuasions of others; but in claiming that the “worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character [is] that no influence over it can be depended on,” he implies not only that the firm, resolute character consists in successfully persuading others but that it also consists in being successfully persuaded. The irresolute character is made firm when “a good impression” is “durable,” when an “influence over it” is lasting (that is, of course, Wentworth’s own influence). The contradictory turn in his argument allows us to infer, quite accurately, that Anne, who was successfully persuaded eight years before by Lady Russell, now fits the category here and not Louisa. Unintentionally, then, Wentworth ascribes firmness of character to Anne when he had intended his counterexample to establish Louisa’s firmness of character. And indeed, in a dialectical manner, we have been applying what is just in his hyperbolic generalizations to Anne all along, for we see that besides rightly allowing Lady Russell to have an “influence” over her when she was only nineteen, Anne has since held “firm,” been “resolute,” “resisted idle interference” (such as Lady Russell’s attempt to persuade her to marry Charles Musgrove), and will doubtless be “beautiful and happy in her November of life” because “she will cherish all her present powers of mind,” powers that she has possessed since an early age. Because they are by turns unfair and then generous exaggerations, vague and then pointed, Wentworth’s generalizations prompt us to infer how they refer to Anne as well as Louisa, or to one and not the other. If the ostensible reference is to Louisa, the unintentional but motivated reference is to Anne. The object, therefore, unconsciously reaches towards the subject.

The situation here is basically that of the Romantic lyric. In the lyric, the object, in its nonrelation to the subject, acts in a way that the subject refers to itself. The subject makes a series of inferences from very general behavior on the object’s part, with the suppressed intention of unmasking the object’s unconscious motiva-

tion so that the object will indeed appear to refer to the subject. The effect is really that of pathetic fallacy, but because the object's behavior is fortuitous and independent of the subject, it seems for that very reason to corroborate even while it chastens the subject's inferences. This double sense of nonrelation and yet relation is the hallmark of the Romantic lyric in general; it pervades "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," which best bears comparison with the situation in chapter 10 of *Persuasion*.

Coleridge carefully plots the course of interconnections in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" by generalizing and making inferences about the particular contingencies of the moment. He correlates his recollection of his own previous walks on the Quantocks with his imagination of his friends' actual walk in the present, presuming that Charles in particular will respond in the same way as he has to the views of the landscape. The simultaneity of recollecting past experience and imagining the present one (Wentworth's statements in chapter 10 span the same expanse) pivots on the shared sight of the sunset: Charles must see it just as Coleridge sees it; and just as it has transfigured the landscape when Coleridge was there in the past and transfigures the garden around the lime-tree bower now, so he infers that at the same time it must be transfiguring that distant landscape too:

Ah! slowly sink
Behind the western ridge, thou glorious Sun!
Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,
Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn, ye clouds!
Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves!
And kindle, thou blue Ocean! So my friend
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round
On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when he makes
Spirits perceive his presence.

A delight
Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad
As I myself were there! Nor in this bower,
This little lime-tree bower, have I not mark'd
Much that has sooth'd me.

(32–47)

Coleridge interprets the transfiguring effects of the sunset on the landscape as a sign of the restoration of presence, first obviated when he was confined to his "prison" and denied the "Beauties

and feelings . . . / Most sweet" (3–4) of the walk with his friends on the hills. He thus interprets something so general and universal as the sunset as referring to himself in the present because it carried particular associations in the past. The repetition therefore appears to corroborate—fortuitously and intentionally—the object's relation to the subject.

In both the lyric and the novel these strategies of inferring the particular reference of general behavior or discourse traverse a taxonomy of exclusion and inclusion. Coleridge posits some presence or ideal (whether remembered, imagined, or actual) from which he senses his own exclusion. Anne senses in Wentworth the absence of his former love for her. Measuring their own situations by these absences, both only gradually infer the restoration of presence and their inclusion in its domain (whether imagined or actual). Moreover, for both, various objective signs mediate exclusion or inclusion according as they appear to signify the desired presence. If the all-embracing sunset in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" causes Coleridge to realize his own inclusion, its further effect is to trope metonymies as synecdoche: the vacant waste and the narrow plot are now to be included in "Nature" (61–62), and "dissonant" sounds in "Life" (76). Similarly, in *Persuasion*, Anne, Wentworth and Louisa are all invited to assess their participation in the general ideal of "firmness" that Wentworth inconsistently elaborates. Perhaps the central sign for all is the odd exemplum of the hazel nut. Although its strength and firmness have enabled it to survive autumnal storms, it presents no more than a partial and inconsistent embodiment of the ideal, for it is doomed to wither on the branch, or eventually fall to the ground like its weaker brethren, or be eaten by birds, beasts, or the casual passer-by.

The most important of such objective signs for mediating exclusion/inclusion are undoubtedly the auditors in the conversation poems, or the apostrophized objects that for a moment fulfill the same function, like the film fluttering on the grate in "Frost at Midnight." Connecting subject with object—with the object, that is, in the sense of metaphysical goal, such as God or nature—they act as intermediary third parties between the two. Whether present or absent, responsive or silent, human or nonhuman, the third party is always positioned closer to the object than Coleridge is, and can therefore be a mediator of exclusion/inclusion because it occupies the border between the two domains. It is in closer contact with the desired presence, and yet, vis-à-vis that presence, it is

a phenomenal other just as Coleridge himself is. It can thus simultaneously or in turn be a double or a rival, a surrogate self or a mere other, as it images the inclusion Coleridge desires but reflects the exclusion he feels. As an included other, the third party functions as mediator of the subject's desire in the classic Girardian way: it possesses what the subject desires to possess and so the subject strives to imitate it and its desire (its enjoyment of intimate communion with nature).²² In this role, the third party can easily turn into a rival, an object of jealous admiration, thwarting the subject from fulfilling its desire (Sara, for example, in "The Eolian Harp"). Yet in its role as excluded other, the rival is defeated and turned into a simple double, a surrogate self that is at the same time a mere other.

Triangulating the semiotic situation both spatially and epistemologically, the third party initiates a play of alternating identifications and differentiations, but one that only half fits the Girardian model. For as much as the third party mediates the subject's desire, it is patently presented from the start as a screen on which the subject has projected that desire. The third party therefore has its desire mediated to it by the subject as much as it autonomously appears to mediate the subject's desire. Both the subject and the third party thus seem reciprocally to persuade and be persuaded by each other.

The third party also constitutes one of Austen's major epistemological strategies for connecting subject with object, and it functions in precisely the same way as in the conversation poems. As a semiotic detour through which the subject must pass in its movement toward the object (and vice versa), the third party is a contingent character who also functions as potential double or rival. We see this clearly in *Persuasion* in chapter 10, where Anne is cast in the role of excluded Coleridgean outsider overhearing the interaction of others. Here Louisa functions as intermediary who simultaneously facilitates and blocks the subject's relation to the object. Through the responses Louisa elicits from Wentworth, Anne can infer Wentworth's attitude toward herself. Such vicariousness turns Louisa into a double of Anne, albeit an inferior double: taking Anne's former place as wooer of Wentworth, Louisa resembles her in strength of mind, decisiveness, and so on. But of course Louisa is also an obstacle between Anne and Wentworth and a rival for his affection.

Austen makes the intermediary a more obviously tactical figure

than Coleridge does, however, strategically situating it to allow the subject to reach some important understanding. The third party serves almost literally as a marker, a point of reference, in the subject's tracking of the object (or vice versa). In the climactic scene in the Musgroves' drawing room in the White Hart Inn, for example, the various third parties are all contributory, contingent means to an end, the spatial configuration itself affording all-important stage directions: Mrs. Musgrove whispering loudly to Mrs. Croft at one end of the room about the desirability of young people marrying as soon as possible after getting engaged (and parents and relations posing no objections), Wentworth sitting within earshot of Anne and apparently preoccupied in writing a letter, and Anne conversing with Harville at the window about Benwick and the constancy of human love. Mirroring and reversing the earlier situation in chapter 10 (Wentworth now overhears Anne's conversation), this episode works in the same way: Anne trades generalities with Harville, and although their ostensible reference is to Benwick we know that their more pointed reference is to Wentworth and herself. Harville serves here as intermediary agent between Anne and Wentworth, as to a lesser extent do all the other parties in the room.

Anne sometimes learns as much from the intermediary agents' relations among themselves as she does from their relation to Wentworth. She feels that the loud whispering between Mrs. Musgrove and Mrs. Croft is somehow meant for herself, and meant to tell her something about the appropriate relation to the object, Wentworth:

"Yes, dear ma'am," said Mrs. Croft [to Mrs. Musgrove], "or an uncertain engagement; an engagement which may be too long. To begin without knowing that at such a time there will be the means of marrying, I hold to be very unsafe and unwise, and what, I think, all parents should prevent as far as they can."

Anne found an unexpected interest here. She felt its application to herself, felt it in a nervous thrill all over her, and at the same moment that her eyes instinctively glanced towards the distant table, Captain Wentworth's pen ceased to move, his head was raised, pausing, listening, and he turned round the next instant to give a look—one quick, conscious look at her.

(231)

Coleridge uses this same epistemological technique, and to the same end, in "The Nightingale." He learns most about the right relation to his object, nature, by witnessing and interpreting interactions (here imagined or remembered) between other agents:

there are the nightingales in “a grove / Of large extent, hard by a castle huge” (49–50), who “answer and provoke each other’s song” (58); there is the “gentle Maid” (69) who “knows all their notes” (74); and there is his son Hartley, who is intuitively more in harmony with nightingales and moonlight than Coleridge himself:

And I deem it wise
To make him Nature’s play-mate. He knows well
The evening-star; and once, when he awoke
In most distressful mood (some inward pain
Had made up that strang thing, an infant’s dream—)
I hurried with him to our orchard-plot,
And he beheld the moon, and, hushed at once,
Suspends his sobs, and laughs most silently,
While his fair eyes, that swam with undropped tears,
Did glitter in the yellow moon-beam!

(96–105)

By listening to the nonverbal conversation of the maiden and Hartley with elements of nature, Coleridge can inferentially derive his own (and the proper) relation to nature.

And yet, more obviously than in the conversation poems, epistemologically triangular situations in *Persuasion* usually result in only a potential and not an actual mediation of the subject’s desire. To be sure, the originating intentions in the novel, as in the lyric, are already mediated to the subject by various cultural precedents. Sudden, deep romantic love, like “a profound emotional need” to heal “the breach between the ego and the alien other” (Abrams, 547), is a received cultural ideal. And Lady Russell’s early persuasion of Anne not to marry Captain Frederick Wentworth further fashions Anne’s identity by the same means.²³ But once persuaded, Anne emerges from the start of the novel’s action as essentially unpersuadable and, if anything, intent on persuading others. (Coleridge, though giving ear to his auditors, is similarly intent on persuading all of them to see the world as he does.) Anne may seem dangerously open to persuasion in the first half of the novel because of her wise passiveness, but once she openly asserts her firmness of character from the Lyme chapters on she succeeds in persuading others by sheer dint of that self-affirmation, by simply being who she is. First, she mediates Benwick’s desire with respect to literature, but then, more importantly, she elicits Wentworth’s love once he begins seeing who she is (although his attention to her is first mediated by Mr. Elliot’s admiration of her). In fact, the third parties in *Persuasion* all behave as would-be medi-

ators whose invitations to shape her desires Anne, with very few exceptions, ignores. On the Winthrop walk, for example, Anne never succumbs to jealousy of Louisa, who is classically in an ideal position to mediate her desire for Wentworth. Except for the Crofts, who present Anne with the best available ideal of a happily married couple, and Mrs. Smith, who presents her with the ideal of a single woman's triumph over adversity, all the third parties represent desires that she has already acted upon, fulfilled, or rejected. What they have to show or tell has already been assimilated and understood, so that if they have not been already superseded they now function as negative exemplars. Neither Lady Russell, nor her family, nor Mr. Elliot can persuade Anne. Even Captain Harville extracts only a few concessions from her. If anything, then, intermediary agents function in the novel as dialectical markers for the course of an already autonomous desire.

The semiotic play of the third parties—as doubles or others, as facilitating or blocking agents—not only prepares a dialectical path for the subject but generates a sense of allegorical intent. Each incident, each contingency, seems incipiently allegorical, intimating a near-providential design at work because intermediary and object for a time echo and mirror—even if they later confound—the subject's desire. In *Persuasion*, conversation often functions allegorically by becoming some kind of commentary on the central situation: it unintentionally recalls the past or foreshadows a possible future. More important, characters and situations, in all their diverse combinations, repeatedly echo, parallel, invert or anticipate the characters of Anne and Wentworth or the situations between them. Louisa and Benwick, for example, seem like inferior echoes of Anne and Wentworth, for the qualities which are just and balanced in heroine and hero are ludicrously exaggerated in the former couple. Similarly, Mrs. Smith's marriage and Mr. Elliot's, though safely in the past, function as reminders of how a marriage can go wrong. The warning applies to both Anne and Wentworth, who are or were at risk of making wrong choices.²⁴ The novel's ongoing debate about change and constancy harkens to this end, too. By seeing how various characters grow or remain the same—some stay stagnantly the same (Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot), some change alarmingly fast (Louisa and Benwick), some seem to change but are really the same (Mr. Elliot)—Anne and Wentworth, like the reader, can infer that the appropriate way to live in time is to grow but remain constant (as Anne and Wentworth in fact do).

These patterned variations all reflect on the relationship between Anne and Wentworth, assuming allegorical status by intimating that all factors in their world serve to illustrate and clarify their situation, or predict potential dangers or a happy future.

Doubles, echoes, mirrors, inversions, reversals and anticipations are the hallmark of the conversation poems, especially “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison” and “Frost at Midnight,” and are the structural vehicle of their allegorical intimations. They can essentially be reduced to a structure of doubling, repetition, and polarity, whose root figure is really the chiasmus. Jerome Christensen has argued the importance of the chiasmus in Coleridge’s prose, but it is a figure that subtly informs the early poetry, too.²⁵ In fact, the chiasmus is the poem’s ontological structural principle. For example, if the film fluttering on the grate in “Frost at Midnight” is a failed echo or mirror, Coleridge subsequently moves through a series of oppositions and doubles repeated with a difference to arrive at the desired ideal image of true subject-object reflexivity (the icicles quietly shining to the quiet moon). He moves from frost at midnight to the hot fair day, adult to schoolboy, father to son, stern preceptor to God as universal teacher, and through a set of companionable forms that become better and better echoes or mirrors of the self ideally conceived: film on the grate, stranger, friend, townsman, aunt, sister (“My play-mate when we both were clothed alike” [43]), and finally his son Hartley. Imagining the ideal future Hartley as the ideal self he never was able to be, Coleridge situates him in a landscape whose one characteristic is perfect self-mirroring:

But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
And mountain crags.

(64–68)

The final stanza, with its closing image of icicles shining to the moon, repeats the figure but embraces several of the other oppositions mentioned in the poem: winter, summer, snow, thaw, the blast, trances of the blast, and so on. Polar oppositions swing back and forth across these repetitions and doublings with a difference—a chiasmus coming to rest in the balanced, reflexive images of the final stanza and of Hartley in the landscape earlier.

The same structure is evident in “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison.” The pivotal moment is the transfiguring action of the setting sun on the landscape and on Coleridge. The movement in meditation from memory of the past to imagination of the present takes Coleridge from prediction to projection to prescription, as he not only infers what Charles must be seeing at a certain moment, but imagines how he must be responding and then orders nature to give him reason to respond in the desired way. The chiasmus consists in the dramatic structural switch that follows: the intentionality of gazing transforms into gazing at intentionality. The purposive character of Charles’s/Coleridge’s gazing results in God’s purposive appearance in and behind the landscape—a God, that is, who perfectly mirrors at the same time as he answers Coleridge: he stages the landscape effects that Coleridge desires to have staged.

With much the same play of doubles, repetition and polar opposites, structure in *Persuasion* generates the same trope. The figure is anticipated in the various reversals and inversions, which enact a to and fro movement actually characterized on occasions as an antistrophic repetition and return. Once Louisa has been carried off to the doctor, for example, after her fall on the Cobb, Anne, Henrietta, Charles and Mary “set forward, treading back with feelings unutterable, the ground, which so lately, so very lately, and so light of heart, they had passed along” (111). Later, after learning Mr. Elliot’s history from Mrs. Smith, Anne decides “to retrace, as quietly as she could, the few steps of unnecessary intimacy she had been gradually led along” (214). On a larger scale, the figure gives shape to the novel as a whole. Although the division of the novel into two volumes was an editorial decision and not Austen’s, the action of the novel naturally divides into two parts that mirror and reverse each other. In the first part, set in the country, Anne is uncertain of Wentworth’s relationship with Louisa, while in the second, set in Bath, Wentworth is uncertain of Anne’s relationship with Mr. Elliot. The chapters set in the country show city politenesses controlling natural feeling: Anne can never speak her feelings, just as Wentworth feels obligated to consider himself engaged to Louisa, even though he eventually realizes that he does not love her. The chapters set in the city reverse the situation; they show natural feeling manipulating city protocols to its own best ends: although constrained by social circumstances, both Anne and Wentworth succeed in speaking their hearts.

But an important feature of the chiasmus is that it can never offer

a conclusive resolution. The antistrophic to and fro does not issue into a dialectical synthesis, however much Coleridge himself may entertain such an end in the coalescence of subject and object. Correlatively, the two-part, two-volume *Persuasion* does not permit the same sense of closure as, say, the three-volume *Pride and Prejudice* or *Emma*. As has often been noted, the ending of *Persuasion* is peculiarly muted.²⁶ The marital happiness of Anne and Wentworth is under continual threat, as Austen clearly tells us in the last two sentences of the novel: “the dread of a future war [was] all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor’s wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance” (252). As in the conversation poems, where the fulfillment of wishes is already vexed by the very wishfulness of Coleridge’s intent, such resolution as is achieved is always in danger of being undone.

What the chiasmus can do instead is stabilize the dualistic play of doubles, polarities and repetition. The result is not a blending or a union but something closer to a paradoxical juxtaposition that, at its most powerful, is both “deconstructive” and “self-mystifying.” The chiasmus achieves this effect because the versions it presents of correspondence, proximity, or even something resembling union, still presume distance and difference as a ground.

The strength as well as danger, therefore, of the Romantic chiasmus is that the two parties in the figure can never be exactly reciprocal or in balance. The figure can be rendered invalid by too forcefully insisting on similitude in dissimilitude or dissimilitude in similitude. Either identity or absolute difference will bar the crossing. Coleridge maneuvers through these fractious possibilities by continually zigzagging back and forth between phenomena that are *near* doubles, *near* polarities. The actual difference between any pair is an ontological remainder that first grounds but then collapses the chiasmus, thus precipitating Coleridge towards another ground.

The chiasmus obviously works best, however, when the two parties can reciprocate each other as much as possible. This happens in the two climactic scenes in *Persuasion*: in the octagon room in chapter 20 and in the White Hart Inn in chapter 23. On these occasions subject and object match each other in their interest in and desire for each other, although we do not know this for certain until later, even if we sense it at the time. In these in-

stances, the uncertainty, the potential imbalance, only diversifies the epistemological field, creating a chiasmus in which similar and dissimilar cross back and forth in answer to each other, as words evoke looks or acts in response, and vice versa. Austen's chiasmus thus bears close comparison with Coleridge's, for in both there is an epistemological movement across the uncertain ground between two potentially equal and similar parties. This is most evident in the scene in the White Hart Inn. In fact, the chiasmus Austen constructs in this scene surpasses even that of the Romantic lyric, for the object fully responds to the subject, and in a way that powerfully accentuates the Romantic lyrical project and its various strategies.

In this scene, the chiasmus consists in a double declaration of love—first in speech, then in writing—but a declaration that is simultaneous and becomes reciprocal. As Anne directs her speech on woman's constancy at Wentworth, Wentworth writes a letter in reply declaring his own constancy. Anne concludes her speech by saying:

"I believe you equal to every important exertion, and to every domestic forbearance, so long as—if I may be allowed the expression, so long as you have an object. I mean, while the woman you love lives, and lives for you. All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone."

(235)

Wentworth's letter in reply reads:

"I can listen no longer in silence. I must speak to you by whatever means are within my reach. You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. Tell me not that I am too late, that such precious feelings are gone for ever. I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own, than when you almost broke it eight years and a half ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant. You alone have brought me to Bath. For you alone I think and plan.—Have you not seen this? Can you fail to have understood my wishes?—I had not waited even these ten days, could I have read your feelings, as I think you must have penetrated mine. I can hardly write. I am every instant hearing something which overpowers me. You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice, when they

would be lost on others.—Too good, too excellent creature! You do us justice indeed. You do believe that there is true attachment and constancy among men. Believe it to be most fervent, most undeviating in

“F. W.

“I must go, uncertain of my fate; but I shall return hither, or follow your party, as soon as possible. A word, a look will be enough to decide whether I enter your father’s house this evening or never.”

(237–38)

The coalescence of Anne’s and Wentworth’s desires establishes a reciprocity extending backwards and forwards from this pivotal moment of revelation in perfect chiasmic formation. Anne’s position is: “I did not cease to love even when existence and hope were gone”; and Wentworth’s in answer: “I had thought I ceased to love yet continued existing in the hope of loving again.” Conducting to and supporting this epiphany is a series of further doublings with a difference that work according to the Coleridgean pattern. It is in this light that we should first consider the writing of a letter as an answer to a speech. Although as an answer it is in a different medium, temporally deferred, and given in the object’s absence—for the subject does not know at the time how, or even whether, the object is responding—such dislocations amount to premises of ontological difference that allow the doublings, the reversals and hence the chiasmus to occur.

Anne’s speech to Harville (and Wentworth) on woman’s constancy amounts to an elegiac ode, elaborating with passionate intensity the theme of surviving devastating loss in solitude. As such, it is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, even if “credibly stimulated” by Harville’s counterargument on man’s constancy. If the privacy of her reference and emotion turns Anne into the Romantic poet, her timely utterance is immediately set in a Coleridgean context that inverts and doubles the lyrical situation. Drawn by the beauty and pathos of her song, as well as by its specific reference to himself, Wentworth, as auditor who then writes in response to what he hears, now turns himself into the lyric poet and Anne into his poetic object. Song provokes and answers song; lyric dialogically engages lyric. If Anne’s speech is an elegiac ode, Wentworth’s letter in response begins as elegy, suggests epitaph averted, but modulates into a genuine love lyric, which in turn offers itself as envoy to Anne’s ode. The argument, tone, and occasion of the letter all evoke this fluid a range of possible poetic para-

digms; but most importantly the letter assumes a Romantic lyrical shape: moving the subject from deadening exclusion to revivifying inclusion, it is a colloquy with self and other that reaches a fuller knowledge of both.

A fuller knowledge of self, to be sure, is precisely what the lyric aims to achieve. The lyric is the site of identity, the place where some immediate experience prompts self-recognition and a reflective reordering of past identity in light of it. The poet then realizes the continuity of past with present. In “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,” for example, after realizing his inclusion in nature’s beneficence, Coleridge exclaims, “Henceforth I shall know / That Nature ne’er deserts the wise and pure” (59–60). Similarly, upon learning that he too had not been deserted, Wentworth claims company with the “constant.” What is important in these instances is not the truthfulness of the speaker’s claims but the power of utterance to persuade. Saying it makes it so, for both the self and the other. This applies equally to Anne, who is sufficiently persuaded by Harville’s defense of man’s constancy to declare not only woman’s constancy but her own—a self-identity of which she persuades herself most of all as she affirms it, persuading Harville and Wentworth in the process.

It is precisely on this point that writing supplements speech. Wentworth’s letter can conclusively answer Anne’s speech because it mirrors her message in a different medium. To have it put in writing is, in this instance, conclusive confirmation of what has been spoken. Opening his letter, Anne reads, as it were, the proof of her theorem about constancy and herself, the postscript not only constituting a Q.E.D. but a rider that becomes a contract between subject and object.

The supplementarity of writing to speech here is exactly chiasmic. Anne’s speech, though taking and changing shape in the course of her colloquy with Harville, is so rhetorically well constructed as to seem like a set speech—that is, like a text. Conversely, Wentworth’s letter loudly *speaks* his heart: he writes, “I must speak to you by whatever means are within my reach.” Because she cannot be sure that Wentworth is listening, or can discern what she and Harville are saying if he is listening, Anne must send her speech to him as if it were a letter—a text addressed and sent to a distant person. Wentworth, constrained by distance and silence but easily able to catch the strains of Anne’s voice, “can listen no longer in

silence” but must speak back—in silence and therefore in writing, because he does not wish to interrupt this objective revelation of his own desire by breaking decorum and speaking out loud.

In making a speech work like a writing which evokes a writing that works like a speech, Austen both plays out and ventures beyond the possibilities allowed in the lyric. In the lyric, the object is a text or utters a speech to which the subject responds with the speech that is the lyric (that is, with a text). Austen’s chiasmus, Wentworth as lyric poet responding to Anne’s speech, creates just such an object-subject reversal. But if we attend to the primary focus of the novel, in which Anne is subject and Wentworth object, then Austen achieves what is impossible in the lyric: writing answers speech as the object responds to the subject’s lyricizing. At best, in the lyric, the poet only writes to an object that can never respond to him. In Coleridge’s lyrics, the closest we get to Austen’s achievement (and it is still essentially the reverse) is the “writerly” conclusion of “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison.”

My gentle-hearted Charles! when the last rook
Beat its straight path along the dusky air
Homewards, I blest it! deeming its black wing
(Now a dim speck, now vanishing in light)
Had cross’d the mighty Orb’s dilated glory,
While thou stood’st gazing; or, when all was still,
Flew creaking o’er thy head, and had a charm
For thee, my gentle-hearted Charles, to whom
No sound is dissonant which tells of Life.

(68–76)

Intended to carry Coleridge’s blessing to Charles, the rook in its flight makes an inscription in the sky. The inscription is like Wentworth’s letter: it carries heartfelt sentiments from one person to another, and at the crucial moment “speak[s] to [Charles] by whatever means are within [its] reach”—the “creaking” sound “which tells of Life.”

To be sure, there are important differences between *Persuasion* and the Romantic lyric, differences imposed by genres so divergent in interest, vision, scale, proportion, narrative mode and literary style. But these differences do not obscure the central fact that, as far as Austen’s relation to Romantic poetry is concerned, novel and lyric clearly converge in epistemological method,

strategy and structure. If, given the historical priority of Coleridge's (and Wordsworth's) lyrics to Austen's fiction, such convergence would seem to imply an actual influence, it testifies more powerfully to the dominance of a particular epistemological ideology in the Romantic period affecting novels and poems alike. The stance of "vis-à-vis," gap, uncertainty, the difficulty of penetrating the other's meaning or motivation all mutually constitute and exacerbate one another, prompting recourse to ambiguous generalizations, the interpretation of ambiguous behavior, or attention to intermediary agents and other signs.

The consonance between the novel and the lyric therefore argues that the problems of knowing other minds are intrinsically no different from the problems of knowing nonhuman phenomena. If the lyric poet explores these problems in the frequently solipsistic and nonhuman domain of nature, the methodology, intent, and results of his explorations are no different from those of the novelist in her thoroughly human domain of rural and urban society. While the motive for both, as represented by Anne Elliot and Coleridge's speakers, may be an emotional need to heal the breach between self and other and establish bonds of love, the central drama is always that of striving to know and understand—an epistemological drama in which ends are subordinated to means and are meant to follow, if almost contingently, as effect to cause. The marriage between heroine and hero or mind and nature thus happens as a consequence of the self's reaching knowledge and understanding of the other. Moreover, knowledge itself is as frequently reached by means of gazing at the object, noticing who notices or talks about the object, and noticing whether the object looks back or responds, as by attending to the object's language (whether actual conversation or a natural but still "intelligible" language)—as if the return of perceptual attention were more significant in itself than the actual content of the looks or words exchanged. While the novel, then, adopts lyrical procedures to realize its goals, and thereby attests to the persuasive predominance of an epistemological problem, the lyric transports interpersonal conceptions into the nonpersonal domain of natural objects in order to know nature. Casting nature as a figure who will not desert but will nurture the human mind (like a loving parent), Coleridge then enters into conversation with his object—a conversation that is as seemingly random and dialogical as conversations in novels. In such instances, there is more than a convergence or overlap;

there is an actual crossing over from one genre to another: that is, a chiasmus.

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NOTES

¹ Barbara Hardy, *A Reading of Jane Austen* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1976), 56, 58; Nina Auerbach, "O Brave New World: Evolution and Revolution in *Persuasion*," *ELH* 39 (1972): 125, 128

² *Persuasion* was completed August 6, 1816. If Austen continued revising the novel during the last eleven months of her life (she died July 18, 1817), then she could have read, if belatedly, a fair amount of Keats's poetry but most likely only the odd poem by Shelley. Keats's first poem to be published, "To Solitude," appeared in Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* May 5, 1816, as did "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" later in the year (December 1, 1816). His first volume, *Poems*, appeared March 3, 1817. The *Examiner* also published Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" (January 19, 1817), but it is virtually impossible Austen saw two earlier publications of Shelley's, *Queen Mab; A Philosophical Poem* (1813) and *Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude: and Other Poems* (1816), because of the small number of copies printed and the still smaller circulation. See Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, eds., *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 14n and 70n.

The question of Austen's knowledge of Romantic poetry is vexed, however, by the well-documented fact that she was an avid reader and purchaser of several of the latest publications, including works by Scott, Southey and Byron. See letters 64, 66, 86, 93, 101, and 134 in *Jane Austen's Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 2nd ed. (1932; reprint, London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964). For a discussion of Austen's library and subscriptions see D. J. Gilson, "Jane Austen's Books," *The Book Collector* 23 (1974): 27-39. Given her reading habits, then, and given her father's sizable library (largely sold, however, in 1801) and her membership in circulating libraries and the Chawton Reading Society, there is every reason to believe that Austen's knowledge of Romantic poetry was extensive.

³ For the most extensive treatment of Austen's "Wordsworthianism," see Stuart M. Tave, "Jane Austen and One of Her Contemporaries," in *Jane Austen: Bicentenary Studies*, ed. John Halperin (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975), 61-74. On the Wordsworthian elements in *Persuasion* in particular, see also A. Walton Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), 150-60, and "Persuasion: Forms of Estrangement," in Halperin, 227 f.; Karl Kroeber, *Styles in Fictional Structure: The Art of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), 83-84; and Norman Page, *The Language of Jane Austen* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1972), 10-12. See also *The Wordsworth Circle* 7 (1976), devoted to the topic of the Jane Austen and Romanticism, and *The Wordsworth Circle* 10 (1979), devoted to the topic of British Romantic fiction. On Austen's Romantic conception of landscape, see Jon Spence, "The Abiding Possibilities of Nature in *Persuasion*," *Studies in English Literature* 21 (1981): 625-36; and Rosemarie Bodenheimer, "Looking at the Landscape in Jane Austen," *Studies in English Literature* 21 (1981): 605-23.

⁴ See Alatheia Hayter, "Xanadu at Lyme Regis," *Ariel* 1 (1970): 61-64. For a dissenting view see Litz, "Forms of Estrangement," 230-31.

⁵ I follow here and throughout this essay the consecutive ordering of chapters. The division of the novel into two volumes of twelve chapters each when it was published by John Murray in 1818 was an editorial decision and not Austen's. All

quotations, however, will be taken from *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 3rd ed., 5 vols. (1923; reprint, London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), vol. 5, which preserves the two-volume division. Page references will be given in the text. The quotation is from P. B. Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* (note 2), 486.

⁶ Susan Morgan, *In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Fiction* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1980), 3, 4. Morgan's epistemological interest is thematic rather than structural and strategic. While she suggests some of the parallels with Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, she does not discuss any poems in detail. Another work published contemporaneously with Morgan's and exploring epistemological issues but also from a thematic point of view is Martha Satz, "An Epistemological Understanding of *Pride and Prejudice*: Humility and Objectivity," in *Jane Austen: New Perspectives*, ed. Janet Todd, *Women and Literature*, vol. 3, new series (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 171–86.

⁷ M. H. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," in *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, ed. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), 550. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

Most of Coleridge's poetry was available to the reading public, if in scattered form. Austen died the same month that his collected poems, *Sybilline Leaves*, were published (July 1817; *Biographia Literaria* was published concurrently), but there had been an earlier volume of poetry that she may well have read, *Poems on Various Subjects*, published in 1796 and reprinted, with some changes, in 1797 and 1803. All four editions of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798, 1800, 1802, 1805) contained poems by Coleridge, most notably, from the point of view of this essay, "The Nightingale; A Conversation Poem." The other conversation poems appeared in various formats such as anthologies or pamphlets: "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" was first published in the *Annual Anthology* of 1800, and reprinted in Mylius's *Poetical Classbook* (1810), while "Frost at Midnight" was first published in 1798 in a quarto pamphlet along with "Fears in Solitude" and "France: An Ode" (the same poems were reissued in 1812 in an octavo pamphlet titled *Fears in Solitude, &c.*) and was included in the *Poetical Register* of 1808–9, published in 1812. It is quite likely then, that Austen read the conversation poems I discuss here.

⁸ For the most probing discussion of this general question and of Abrams's theory of Romanticism in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), see Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁹ Herbert F. Tucker, "Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric," in Chaviva Hošek and Patricia Parker, eds., *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), 236.

¹⁰ Despite their detailed discussions of audience and of the appropriate language for communicating with that audience, the Romantic poets subscribe to the fictive notion that the lyric is a spontaneously spoken monologue. This is at bottom Abrams's definition, too, and the one I take as general and operative here (as I discuss below). Such a theory of the lyric is evident in the conversation poems (despite the inclusion of auditors), in Wordsworth's concept of emotion recollected in tranquillity as outlined in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), and in Shelley's "To a Sky-Lark" and *A Defence of Poetry*.

¹¹ I am using here and below Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of "dialogue," "dialogism," and the "double-voiced." If monologue is the defining condition of the lyric for the Romantics, then dialogue, as Bakhtin explains, is the defining condition of the novelistic. Novelistic discourse, even when not overtly dialogical, will be at least double-voiced insofar as the other's "speech" will be apparent in the narrator's own report of it. The Romantic lyric achieves a similar effect when the speaker reports the object's behavior or "language." See "Discourse in the Novel," in *The*

Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 259–422 (see especially 341 ff.). For a full discussion of Bakhtin's theories, see Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), 63–94 and 275–94. For a Bakhtinian discussion of dialogue and monologue in relation to the Romantic lyric, see Tilottama Rajan, "Romanticism and the Death of Lyric Consciousness," in Hošek and Parker (note 9), 194–207.

¹² "Frost at Midnight," in *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 2 vols. (1912; reprint, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 59. All quotations from Coleridge's poems are taken from this edition and will be given by poem title and line number in the text.

¹³ Tilottama Rajan, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980), 223. Further references will appear in the text. I am indebted to Rajan's discussion of skepticism and idealism in the conversation poems.

¹⁴ Douglas Bush, *Jane Austen* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 172. L. J. Swingle mentions Keats's Grecian urn in his discussion of the strangeness of one person to another in Jane Austen's novels ("The Poets, the Novelists, and the English Romantic Situation," *The Wordsworth Circle* 10 [1979]: 226).

¹⁵ Anne's affective response—the riot of sensations, the agitation—is germane to that of any main character, allowing for differences in degree, in the Gothic novel. The common origin (for Romantic poetic versions too) is, of course, the tradition of Sensibility.

¹⁶ See, for example, Auerbach (note 1), 125. See "Ode on Melancholy," in *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), 23.

¹⁷ See, for example, Douglas Bush (note 14), 171, and Litz, *Jane Austen* (note 3), 153–60.

¹⁸ When introducing Wentworth in chapter 4, the narrator gives a brief account of his character, history, and early courtship of Anne; in chapter 7 the narrator explains Wentworth's motivation in remarking upon seeing Anne again for the first time that she was "so altered that he should not have known her again!" (61), and then adds that "Anne Elliot was not out of his thoughts, when he more seriously described the woman he should wish to meet with" and marry (62). Having set the record straight on these matters, the narrator withdraws to let Anne take over, until Wentworth relates his own story in chapter 23.

¹⁹ For a full discussion of Austen's use of this stylistic technique, see Norman Page (note 3), 127–37 and *passim*.

²⁰ As Anne later finds out in chapter 23, Wentworth's jealousy of Mr. Elliot, which "had begun to operate in the very hour of first meeting her in Bath" (241), could lead him to believe that the "great deal of enjoyment" (184) she says she felt at Lyme could refer not only to the novelty of the experience or the pleasures of the landscape but to Mr. Elliot's attentions, too.

²¹ As I argue in the following five paragraphs, such factors give the scene a particularly Romantic character inasmuch as each party does indeed appear to reach towards the other and yet not. The ambivalence of gesture, coupled with an ambiguity of statement on Wentworth's part, matches the relatively incidental nature of the scene as a whole: while Anne learns about Wentworth's ideal of decisiveness she does not learn anything of strategic importance that might dramatically alter the course of events. At the most, she finds only her wildest imaginations confirmed (but they are inherently still wild imaginations): "The listener's proverbial fate was not absolutely hers; she had heard no evil of herself,—but she had heard a great deal of very painful import" (89). In dramatic point, emotional effect, and epistemological quality, this scene therefore differs from standard situations of dramatic irony or situations of overhearing in, say, the novels of Fielding or Richardson, where strategic information about characters or actions, affecting the course of events, is always revealed.

²² See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1965), 1–52. Some of Girard's later comments (56–62) apply especially to the situation in the conversation poems.

²³ D. A. Miller briefly discusses persuasion in *Persuasion* as always involving the Girardian triangular model (*Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981], 100n).

²⁴ Although both Mr. and Mrs. Smith were warm, carefree, pleasure-loving people, they showed, if anything, more feeling than judgment. The warning could be applied to Anne and Wentworth had they married eight years earlier, and to Wentworth were he to marry Louisa. Mr. Elliot's marriage was purely mercenary, coldly calculating. The warning here applies to Anne had she married Charles Musgrove, or were she to marry Mr. Elliot. In the latter case, her letting judgment overrule feeling (thus approximating calculation) would only encounter Mr. Elliot's renewed calculation head on. The novel adroitly raises these dangerous options.

For a different discussion of some of the allegorical dimensions of *Persuasion*, see Derek Mansell, who regards Anne's journey as a spiritual progress and sees Mrs. Smith's introduction into the novel as the strategic, timely appearance of a monitory figure. On the smaller scale, he points out that Admiral Croft, in their chance meeting in chapter 18, "With the aid of a picture in a shop window . . . helps [Anne] understand what is a proper boat; by telling her what his life is like he helps her understand what is a proper sailor; in discussing Captain Benwick he helps her understand what is a proper man. 'There is something about Frederick,' he says, 'more to our taste'" (*The Novels of Jane Austen: An Interpretation* [London: Macmillan, 1973], 198).

²⁵ See Jerome Christensen, *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), 26–27 and passim.

²⁶ See, for example, Nina Auerbach (note 1), 127, and Tony Tanner, "In Between—Anne Elliot Marries a Sailor and Charlotte Heywood Goes to the Seaside," in *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, ed. David Monaghan (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1981), 186. Assigning specific dates to the action (as she does in no other novel), Austen sets the action in the present, between September 1814 and February 1815. The novel thus spans the lull in the Napoleonic Wars between Napoleon's exile to Elba (May 1814) and his escape and return to France (March 1815). As P. J. M. Scott points out, by ending the novel before the allies' resumption of hostilities (April 6, 1815) and particularly before the decisive Battle of Waterloo (June 18, 1815), Austen would leave contemporary readers with a sense of the "fragility of human assurances" and the uncertainty of the future (*Jane Austen: A Reassessment* [London: Vision Press, 1982], 201).