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In Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Persuasion*, silence is an important source of feminine power. Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, and Anne Elliot each possess a reserved, silent manner that causes them to be first dismissed, but later appreciated.

This study has been inspired by a paradox: silence allows women to simultaneously contradict and conform to norms of social comportment. AlisonSulloway and Mary Poovey have demonstrated how characters conforming to the conduct book standards of the "Proper Lady" have transformed this exemplarity model: a woman's silence often indicates an inner moral strength. For Margaret Kirkham, Austen's conduct-book heroines reveal the author's "ironic intention" (232): she is not a chaste figure, but an erotic individual (232-233). Whereas these heroines conform to the mute model, their silence actually signals their marginality, non-conformity, or, as Nina Auerbach writes of Fanny Price, a "solitary animosity against the intricacies of the normal" (51). The silent heroine is an erotic spinster, a social exile.

The unique perspective of the silent heroine allows her to perceive the "noisy evils" of society. For D. A. Miller, the harm lies in the "uncertainty" of discourse in *Mansfield Park* (37). For Laura Mooneyham, the obstacles of *Persuasion* are created both by the "barrier of silence" and the "equally deadly barrier of common speech, the 'nothingness' of polite talk" (166-167). Marylea Meyersohn reads the "garrulity" of Austen's characters as "an example of irrational social discourse" (35). In part, our goal will be to demonstrate how

silence conversely constitutes a “certain” moral dialogue, an “uncommon” content, an example of rational private dialogue. The linguistic distance will allow the silent to discover, in the words of Julia Prewitt Brown with regard to*Persuasion*, “that the estranged consciousness is better than the communal stupidity” (130). The current study will demonstrate how silence allows the heroines to escape from social stupidity, noise, and nothingness. Even as they conform to social expectations of “Proper Silence,” these heroines will oppose the “Noisy Evils” of a linguistically loose society.

In the beginning of each novel, a silent heroine possesses less power than her loquacious hero. Male characters control language and are initially fascinated by female characters revealing a similar capacity for linguistic manipulation. Lying, reciting, flirting, commanding, preaching, play-acting, story-telling and excessive verbosity incur dangerous moral situations: only silence rescues the heroine from embroilment. Furthermore, through silent listeningeach heroine gains moral and situational perspective: she attains penetration through separation. Moral insight achieved and revealed through silence distinguishes the heroine. Heroes once distracted by the attractions of fluent rivals cannot ignore the connections established by and with the heroines through silent communication. Tacit understandings, a confluence of thought, and mutual recognition found the resulting relationships. Austen grants each heroine her hero, a sign of approbation—but the value commemorated is not the coming into speech of the heroine, but the coming into silence of the hero. As each hero reevaluates his heroine, so the reader begins to reevaluate not just the structure of the text, but the value of silence itself.

Although each of the three novels considered in this study will trace the development of similar strategies of silence, they will do so in distinct ways. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor Dashwood will learn to temper her initial silent sense with the expression of sensibility. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price will establish herself as the silent moral center in response to the insincere, ‘noisy evils’ of the larger social world. In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot’s silent steadfastness will rekindle

lost love. Although silence is responsible for the misunderstandings which fuel each narrative and pose the greatest threat to the eventual union of the lovers, silence is also the basis by which the estranged lovers develop a deeper, specifically moral form of conjugal communication.

The strength of Elinor Dashwood's character is detailed in the beginning of *Sense and Sensibility*: "[S]he had an excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong: but she knew how to govern them" (8). Elinor can feel deeply without succumbing to violent expressions of grief: her strength lies in her silence. Buttressed by sense, silence is easily enforced; Elinor's challenge is to maintain her silence in spite of a growing appreciation for sensibility.

Elinor is initially criticized by her mother and her sister for her silence. In contrast to the free expression of Marianne, the silence of Elinor seems conservative, unnecessary, and anachronistic. Elinor's ability to silence her emotions, however, leads her to appreciate this same trait in others. She admires Edward Ferrars for "[t]he excellence of his understanding, and his principles...concealed only by that shyness which too often keeps him silent" (22). Edward reveals his character to Elinor, rewarding her patience with his confidence. Their intimacy is undeclared but deep, such that Elinor can soon report, "In my heart I feel little—scarcely any doubt of his preference" (23). Marianne, on the other hand, requires that the lovers declare their affection openly. She is astonished at the silent departure scene: "How cold, how composed were their last adieux! How languid their conversation the last evening of their being together!" (41). What Marianne does not realize is that Elinor and Edward communicate in silence rather than in language. They perceive in each other qualities associated with and revealed through silence: patience, perseverance, restraint, and sense. Furthermore, they show their respect for each other by refraining from discussing the obstacles to the match: Elinor evades the topic of disparity of situation out of resignation and respect; Edward conceals his engagement with Lucy Steele out of embarrassment.

By the time Edward visits Barton Cottage, his resentment of Lucy is palpable. Edward is dejected throughout the course of the visit, attempting to reconcile his own inclination for silence with the expectations of his family and his intended for renown, lamenting, "I cannot be forced into genius and eloquence" (90). Edward colours twice throughout the course of his visit. First, Edward colours when Marianne remarks that he is not just shy, but reserved. He supposes the former to be guiltless and the latter devious, and hopes the sisters have not discovered that his silence is not merely that of character, but of concealment. Second, Edward colours when he must lie about the hair ring. The hair in the ring belongs to Lucy; Edward says it belongs to his sister; Marianne and Elinor interpret the lie incorrectly, surmising that it belongs to Elinor. Edward is pained not just because he has had to lie in language, but because he has had to lie in silence. Given their tacit understanding, Elinor has every reason to suppose that Edward is communicating with her via the established method. Edward's irritation with Lucy arises not just because she encourages him to manipulate language in both public and private life, but because she forces him to contaminate silence, the only means by which he can maintain his relationship with Elinor.

Despite her ungrammaticality, Lucy Steele is an adept language manipulator. Lucy adapts her speech to her listener: in order to capture Lady Middleton's approval she admires her children, remembering that "a fond mother […] in pursuit of praise for her children, though the most rapacious of beings, is likewise the most credulous" (116). Lucy attracts Edward by being "amiable and obliging" (337) when he lacked other confidants, and then refuses to release him from their verbal contract: she attains and retains power over him by manipulating language. When she wins Robert Ferrars, Edward surmises that "the vanity of the one had been worked on by the flattery of the other" (167). Lucy is even able to attain the good opinion of her mother- and sister-in-law through "respectful humility, assiduous attentions, and endless flatteries" (349).

Lucy Steele is equally fluent in language and in silence. According to Penelope Fritzer, the other characters in the novel "never reveal a secret unless continued silence presents clear danger to another" (62). Lucy, on the other hand, knows when to reveal and when to conceal, and by regulating her revelations controls the speech and silence of others. By confessing her secret engagement with Edward to Elinor, for example, she speaks not to free herself from silence, but to enslave Elinor. In other words, Elinor's silence deepens with every word of Lucy's: "She turned towards Lucy in silent amazement" (124); "Elinor for a few moments remained silent [… She] concealed her surprise and solicitude" (124); "She was silent" (126); she spoke "with a composure of voice under which was concealed an emotion and distress beyond anything she had ever felt before" (129). Deceived by Lucy's unsophisticated use of language, Elinor is surprised by her highly sophisticated manipulation of it. Lucy provides not only verbal testimony (a jeremiad, an allusion to arrival and departure dates, and a reference to the ring) but written proof (a letter in Edward's handwriting). When the rivals return to the conversation, the narrator comments that Elinor speaks with the "truest sincerity" while Lucy speaks with "her little sharp eyes full of meaning" (140). Elinorand Lucy are involved in an open secret, in which each knows what the other knows, but neither admits knowing anything beyond what has been spoken.

Elinor's only retaliatory weapon is silence. She opts not for the silence of concealment engendered by Lucy's confession, but for both the silence of communication experienced with Edward and her own silence of observation, reflection, and decorum. She considers, "Had Edward been intentionally deceiving her? Had he feigned a regard for her which he did not feel? […] No; […h]is affection was all her own. She could not be deceived in that" (133).With others, she maintains silence in order to observe. She keeps her opinion of Lucy as "illiterate, artful, and selfish" (134) to herself. When the rivals meet in London, Lucy provokes Elinor, who "perfectly understood her, and was forced to use all her self-command to make it appear that she did *not*" (205).When Mrs. Ferrars

silences Elinor and fawns over Lucy, Elinor "[smiles] at a graciousness so misapplied" (219). Finally, when Lucy, Edward and Elinorfind themselves alone together, fully aware of the open secret in which they are all involved, only Elinor can silence her true emotions and facilitate conversation. She exerts herself again when Edward visits after his supposed marriage, breaking the pauses, though "fearing the sounds of her own voice" (334). Elinor's ability to govern her emotions even when sensible of extreme pain, affection, and jealousy, establish her as mistress of her own silence to the end. When Edward reveals the mistake, Elinor "[bursts] into tears of joy" (335), signaling him in manner rather than in words that his affection is returned. The misunderstanding is resolved, and the two lovers awkwardly establish mutual understanding. Elinor, relieved that she is no longer destined to a life of eternal spinsterhood, sacrifices her countenance to the joy of conjugal communication.

Throughout *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor's silence is a mark of her self-restraint, her trustworthiness, and her consideration of others. For these qualities she is rewarded with Edward, who realizes the worth of silence as he realizes the worthlessness of language manipulation. John Hardy writes thatElinor's silence establishes her as the "moral centre of feeling and action" (19) since it allows her to "[enter] into what others besides herself are feeling" (20). By silencing her own emotions in public settings, Elinor can more easily empathize with those around her. Although one might agree with Tara GhoshalWallace, who calls Elinor's silence "pathological"—an effort to "[enslave] men or...[adhere] to rigid codes that in repressing pain simultaneously perpetuate patriarchal power" (44), one might also look to her silence as a legitimate source of power. Through self-sacrifice, Elinor achieves self-realization. AlthoughElinor's silence secures her only unhappiness at first, her patience and principle earn her the respect of both the characters and the readers of the novel.

Equipped with an equation between power and speech, the modern feminist identifies Fanny Price of *Mansfield Park* as an anti-feminist woman. Her silence makes certain critics uncomfortable. Auerbach writes that "[a] silent,

stubborn Fanny Price appeals less than any of Austen's heroines" (50). When the current equation is replaced by the alternative (perhaps historically grounded) equation between power and silence, Fanny ceases to embarrass and emerges as a 'foremother' of modern feminists. Her silence is an instrument of her power, not a sign of her submission: a fact that is discovered by the reader, the characters within the novel, and Fanny herself as the novel progresses.

Mrs. Price silences Fanny by evicting her from a family in which she is an instructor, coordinator, and confidant; Mrs. Norris silences Fanny by reminding her of her need to show 'gratitude'; Sir Thomas silences Fanny by withholding education and enforcing class difference; Lady Bertram silences Fanny by reminding her of her duty to marry Henry Crawford (see Sulloway, 170) and holding her back from social outings, the Miss Bertram's silence Fanny by mocking her lack of knowledge and including her in their games only when necessary; Edmund silences Fanny by encouraging her 'propriety' (seePoovey, 98) and speaking for her. As a result of her initial displacement and suppression, therefore, Fanny is unable to find her voice. When she is young she is "exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice" (13), and when she is older she is "almost as fearful of notice as other women [are] of neglect" (184). Her reserve prevents her from entering into and mastering public discourse. As Meyersohn remarks, "Fanny is described throughout as strangled by speech. She is unable to speak; she will not talk; she is overcome with emotion; she ventures speech to no avail; she starts and stops endless sentences; she gasps, murmurs, mutters in undertones..." ("What Fanny Knew," 227).

Only Edmund can read Fanny's silence. Lonely and miserable, yet "with no suspicion of it conveyed by her quiet, passive manner" (16), Fanny is discovered by Edmund who is "at great pains to […] persuade her to speak openly" (16). Fanny does communicate openly, but not in words: "her increased sobs explained to him where the grievance lay" (16). Edmund demonstrates his linguistic authority by helping Fanny write a letter: he procures paper, draws lines, checks her spelling, and sends the letter. Fanny is still not at home in language, for

her “feelings on the occasion were such as she believed herself incapable of expressing,” and “her countenance and a few artless words fully conveyed all their gratitude and delight” (17). The narrator concludes the scene: “her cousin began to find her an interesting object” (17).

At first, Fanny is interesting because her silence is a challenge. Both Edmund and Henry Crawford attempt to break through that silence: the former by means of education, the latter by means of flirtation. Edmund attempts to “conquer the diffidence which prevented [her good qualities from] being more apparent” and gives her “advice, consolation, and encouragement” (22). He appeals to her for affirmation both in vocation and in affection, for “having formed her mind and gained her affections, he had a good chance of her thinking like him” (61). Whereas Edmund attempts to get Fanny to break her silence by agreeing with him, Henry attempts to get Fanny to break her silence by disagreeing with him. Her silence is irresistible; his exasperation inspires his admiration. “I could hardly get her to speak. I never was so long in company with a girl in my life--trying to entertain her--and succeed so ill!” (213). Mary Crawford responds, “Foolish fellow! And so this is her attraction after all! This is it--her not caring about you....” (213). Although both men are attracted to Fanny through the prospect of breaking her silence, both are drawn away by the greater attraction of verbal combat. Henry re-engages himself in the linguistic game with Maria Bertram, incited by the challenge of her temporarily assumed silence, and “[i]n this spirit he began the attack; and by animated perseverance had soon re-established the sort of familial intercourse—of gallantry—of flirtation which bounded his views” (434). Although Edmund eventually realizes that the value of silence lies in its being intact, not in its being broken, he is dangerously distracted by the linguistic artifice of Mary Crawford.

Since Edmund is skilled in language manipulation, he is able to perceive and appreciate the greater linguistic competency of Mary Crawford. The difference in their ability stems from intent: Edmund uses language to reveal; Mary uses it to conceal. Miller remarks that, “A seamlessness and a reserve mark

her speeches, despite their articulateness and their volubility. It is hard not to feel that something is being withheld in them....Our fascination with Mary Crawford springs from the absence of full terms to grasp her […]" (38). Although at first even Fanny is disarmed by Mary's easy conversation, commenting to Edmund, "I like to hear her talk. She entertains me" (61), she eventually realizes that Mary's use of language is suspect. Fanny receives letters in which Mary indirectly communicates with Edmund, inappropriately requests a prognosis for Tom and the prospects of Edmund's inheritance, and frantically attempts to silence her brother's peccadillo, demanding, "Say not a word of it—hear nothing, surmise nothing, whisper nothing, till I write again" (406). Although Mary consciously uses language to conceal her intentions from others, her greatest fault lies in her unconscious use of language to conceal her own intentions from herself. She is able to translate internal uncertainty and insecurity into external ambiguity and mystery. Lionel Trilling identifies this skill as 'insincerity,' for "Mary's Crawford's intention is not to deceive the world but to comfort herself; she impersonates the woman she thinks she ought to be" ("*Mansfield Park*," 302).

Mary's enthusiasm for the play originates in both a desire of exhibiting verbal mastery and a fear of revealing an ill-formed self. By borrowing words, she can impersonate legitimately and be praised for doing so. Why is acting in a play a morally dangerous situation? Trilling suggests that impersonation was believed to spoil one's character. "It is the fear that the impersonation of a bad or inferior character will have a harmful effect upon the impersonator, that, indeed, the impersonation of any other self will diminish the integrity of the real self" ("*Mansfield Park*," 301). Marilyn Butler, on the other hand, suggests that the play is dangerous not because the participants are pretending, but because they are extending their real selves. "In touching one another or making love to one another on the stage these four are not adopting a pose, but are, on the contrary, expressing their real feelings. The stage roles […] imply not insincerity, but liberation" (30). The moral danger of the situation, I believe, is not that Mary's real self will be either contaminated or promoted, but that acting prohibits her

from forming a real self in the first place. Mary does not realize that she lacks a real self because she is too eager to fill up silence with borrowed words.

Although Fanny is also trying to figure out her values, purpose, and place in society, she silently gathers and processes information in order to develop a solid self. Mary, on the other hand, quickly assembles a self out of careless assertions and undeveloped opinions. Edmund blames this habit on herLondon relations, explaining that her character flaw is not due to cruelty. "The evil lies yet deeper; in her total ignorance, unsuspiciousness of there being such feelings, in a perversion of mind which made it natural to her to treat the subject as she did" (423). He censures her empty language, reflecting that "[s]he was speaking only, as she had been used to hear others speak, as she imagined every body else would speak" (423). One feels sympathy with Mary Crawford when, in a rare moment of self-awareness, she refers to herself half joking, half repenting, as a "noisy evil" (266).

By refusing to act, Fanny refuses to create a fictitious self. Her silence allows her to "[look] on and [listen]" (123) not only to her own values asserting themselves, but to the values of the other characters as they are revealed throughout the course of the production. Fanny realizes that although the play is a communal undertaking, each cast member is selfish. She listens to opinions concerning the selection of play, the distribution of parts, and the competency of the performers; she soothes and aids Mr. Rushworth, witnesses the numerous rehearsals between Maria and Henry, and jealously watches the run-through between Mary and Edmund: all acts of listening as others complain in and about words. Fanny metaphorically learns almost everyone's part in the play, and only Fanny reads the entire play and can perceive the intricacies and dangers of the whole (Butler, 28). Fanny realizes the importance of perspective, commenting later to Edmund, "As a bystander...perhaps I saw more than you did" (324). Throughout the novel, as throughout the production, Fanny gains both knowledge of self and knowledge of others not in spite of her silence, but because of it. Fanny reveals her tactics: "I was quiet, but I was not blind" (336).

What does Fanny do with this knowledge? Although Fanny has been described by Auerbach as a self-aggrandizing voyeur "[abdicating] from stardom to assume a more potent control over the action," and "[appropriating] to her solitude the controlling omniscience of the rapt audience" (53), she does not seem inclined to 'control' any of the action. Poovey observes that "Fanny emerges victorious simply because the others falter," (105), and that "...she finally engages Edmund's love, not by aggressively exposing Mary's treachery, but through the irresistible appeal of her constant love" (101). Butlerconfirms the idea of Fanny as constant and stable, remarking that just as Fanny is the geographical center at Sotherton from whom the others stray, so she is the moral center of the novel (26). Fanny's inactivity and silence save Mansfield Park from sin and insincerity. Although the latter might prove more exciting both in life and in a novel, the former represent conservative sources of feminine power. Poovey writes that "[…] Fanny is ultimately able to superintend the moral regeneration of Mansfield Park... simply by the 'comfort' her quiet example provides" (101).

For saving Mansfield Park from flirtation, insincerity, play-acting, and other dangerous effects of linguistic manipulation, Fanny is rewarded with Edmund. In part because of Edmund's early education of Fanny, and in part because of her own inexplicably innate propriety, Fanny and Edmund possess a confluence of thought. Just as Edmund reads signs of fatigue in Fanny, so Fanny witnesses with pain Edmund's opinion of Mary diverge from her own under the influence of corrupt speech: "Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong? Alas! It was all Miss Crawford's doing. She had seen her influence in every speech, and was miserable" (145). Whereas speech is fascinating but deceiving, silence is subtle but true. Poovey comments that "[…] Fanny has become Edmund's conscience, a silent reminder of the principles he is now violating" (100). For Edmund to get over Mary's linguistic influence and listen again to his own conscience, he must listen to Fanny's silence. Deprogrammed and demystified, Edmund realizes that linguistic manipulation is not admirable, that silence is not deplorable, and, finally, that Fanny's "mind, disposition, opinions,

and habits wanted no half concealment, no self deception on the present, no reliance on future improvement" (437). Although Fanny does not confess her affection for Edmund in words, she reveals her feelings and values to any who would not merely observe, but read her silence. When Edmund realizes that "[s]ilence is eloquence for Fanny..." (Meyersohn, "What Fanny Knew," 228), he can then hear in her own words "the whole delightful and astonishing truth" (437).

In *Persuasion*, the silence of the heroine is related to the silence of the text. Implicit in the idea of a rekindled romance is the existence of a first fire: a story known to the characters but not to the readers of the novel. Cheyl Ann Weissman writes that "*Persuasion* is constructed like a palimpsest, an overlay through which we must decipher an original. The dramatic action that occurred in the novel's implied past is reflected and reflected upon throughout the text" (208). The reader must reconstruct the previous romance--a narrative technique by which silence produces the desire to read on to rediscover the past. Whereas limited third-person omniscient narration usually provides the reader with more information than the heroine, in this case the reader must be jealous of the heroine who has access to the greater part of the story. Anne Elliot, however, is not willing to reveal her history, either to the other characters or to the readers. She understands that by relinquishing her secret, she relinquishes power. Through her silence, Anne retains control over our narrative desires, just as within the text she retains control over her relations in society. Whereas it first seems that Anne is overlooked and pressed into silence unwillingly, scarred by the former silencing of her desires by Lady Russell, or penitent for her previous error, it later emerges that Anne is most fluent in her silence. It is her constancy, her stable character, and her strong will—exhibited through silence—which allow her to attract and secure Captain Wentworth's admiration.

At twenty-seven, Anne is accustomed to silence: concerning her musical ability, it is reported that "she had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to" (44). Furthermore, Anne lives with a father and sister who speak only to defer or be

deferred to, and whose attitude towards her inspires the description: "her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way;—she was only Anne" (7). Even the "one short period of her life" (44) when she was listened to by Captain Wentworth has served only to increase her reticence. Like Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, and Marianne Dashwood, Anne compensates for an early error by falling into silence. Unlike these other heroines, however, Anne's mistake occurs eight years before the beginning of the novel. Mooneyham writes that "[h]er falling into chastened silence and suffering has constituted the whole of that intervening period" (166). Anne has become so accustomed to her own silence, and so skilled "in the art of knowing our own nothingness beyond our own circle" (40), that she willingly sacrifices her own voice so that those around her may find her to be of some 'use'. She is necessary because she is a good listener, a disinterested observer, an unthreatening presence, and a secure confidant who "could do little more than listen patiently, soften every grievance, and excuse each to the other" (44). The lack of familial concern, her own regret, and the self-involvement of other characters allow her to fall easily into silence. At the beginning of the novel, therefore, we find that Anne has resigned herself to writing and reading others' lives. According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Anne is "an angelically quiet heroine who has given up her search for a story and has thereby effectively killed herself off" (139).

Although Anne's sacrifice of speech appears to be self-abnegating, her retreat into silence is in part self-sustaining, even self-indulgent. Anne's is a world of garbled speech: criss-crossed confidences, complaints, cajolery, calumny, gossip, fatuous self-congratulation and obsequious compliance. Furthermore, writes Mooneyham, "[t]he world of *Persuasion* is one of oblique, elusive and complex communication. Conversations are overheard; letters are reread; stories are retold by a second- or third-hand narrator" (169). Despite the many categories of speech, actual opportunities for speech are rare. Anne prepares for several crucial meetings that never materialize (Mooneyham, 170), and composes conversations that never occur. Even when Anne prepares for a confrontation with

her sister over Mrs. Clay, her opinion is quickly dismissed and she retreats immediately back into silence. The obstacle to happiness in *Persuasion* is not a single devious female rival skillfully manipulating language, but an entire society totally but unknowingly inept with linguistic transaction. In a world in which speech is distorted by careless speakers, Anne's only defense against nonsense is silence.

Anne and Captain Wentworth had once been able to converse intimately, but Wentworth's speech has been distorted by his resentment, for "[h]e had not forgiven Anne Elliot" (57). Whereas Anne had previously reduced Wentworth to silence with a negative answer to his proposal of marriage, Wentworth now attempts to lock Anne into a position of silence. Even without suspecting that his words will return to her, his initial critique establishes the structure of their renewed relationship. "'Altered beyond his knowledge!' Anne fully submitted, in silent, deep mortification" (57). Mooneyham writes that by avoiding meetings with her whenever possible and by distinguishing her with a marked lack interest, "Wentworth compounds those restrictions which society places on social contact with his own self-restrictions on speech with Anne" (171). When they do speak, Wentworth mocks their former real regard with a mere show of regard. His "to the letter" adherence to verbal etiquette betrays his lack of "spirit". "Wentworth at this point is cold and courteous to Anne. She finds that his forced gestures and speeches are far worse than an absence of communication" (Mooneyham, 174). At Uppercross, Wentworth ignores Anne as much as possible and flirts wildly with Louisa and Henrietta Musgrove, in whom he hopes to find "[a] little beauty, and a few smiles, and a few compliments to the navy" (58). Wentworth captivates his audience with stories of life at sea. Through his naval experiences he establishes both physical and linguistic authority, both legitimized by a ship entry in the navy lists. He attracts Anne even as he repels her, describing the life that could have been but can no longer be her own. His conversation conceals a silent attack: Wentworth communicates his appreciation of the Miss Musgroves with nonchalant speech as he communicates his disdain of Anne with pointed silence.

Influenced by the society into which he has re-entered, he assumes its taste for language manipulation.

Wentworth attempts to belittle Anne with an eloquent display of disregard, but his silent treatment of her eventually reestablishes their relationship. Wentworth is barely polite to Anne--but if Wentworth really is a linguistic virtuoso, he should be able to interact with her as he interacts with others. By refusing to acknowledge their history publicly, Wentworth acknowledges it privately and silently to Anne alone. "Wentworth demonstrates verbal facility at these encounters," writes Mooneyham, "though he will not speak to Anne. Thus he refers to the year '06 as he relates his adventures to general acclaim, and Anne must listen and assume their shared consciousness of that date's significance..." (173). Anne is barred from speech, but she is fluent in silence. She reads the lack of signs and listens to what he will not say: "...and though his voice did not falter, and though she had no reason to suppose his eye wandering towards her while he spoke, Anne felt the utter impossibility, from her knowledge of his mind, that he could be unvisited by remembrance any more than herself" (59). Does Wentworth find that he must respond to Anne in her own medium of communication, silence? Wentworth distinguishes Anne by respecting and upholding her silence: he perceives that she is not part of the verbally nonsensical world and has maintained "[a] strong mind, with sweetness of manner" (58).

Although at first Wentworth values this world and his linguistic authority within it, he realizes its superficiality when he is rendered speechless inLyme. First, Louisa's jump is an act of flirtation, the extension of the verbal bantering begun by him at Uppercross: Wentworth realizes that there is danger to verbal play. Second, Louisa refuses to listen: "He advised her against it, thought the jar too great; but no, he reasoned and talked in vain; she smiled and said, 'I am determined I will'" (102). The value of speech lies as much in its reception as in its delivery. Third, Anne's ability to listen and learn allows her to control the scene: the distance maintained between herself and the rest of the party grants her the necessary perspective at the crucial moment. Gilbert andGubar write that

"[o]nly Anne has a sense of the different, if equally valid, perspectives of the various families and individuals among which she moves" (141). Fourth, realizing the futility of both the physical and linguistic authority flaunted at Uppercross, "Captain Wentworth, who had caught her up, knelt with her in his arms, looking on her with a face as pallid as her own, in an agony of silence" (102).

Anne controls the scene at Lyme as she controls her romance with Wentworth. She avoids flirtatious banter, listens carefully, maintains perspective, and guides Wentworth, who is unused to silent communication. Anne realizes, and gets Wentworth to realize, that their relationship cannot be contained in language. Early in the novel, Anne demonstrates the ability to read more than his words. She discovers his true opinion of Mrs Wentworth's son: "There was a momentary expression in Captain Wentworth's face at this speech, a certain glance of his bright eye, and curl of his handsome mouth...but it was too transient an indulgence of self-amusement to be detected by any who understood him less than herself" (63) at the same time that she discovers that a sincerity of thought motivates even his most insincere conversations, hiding his opinion and talking to Mrs Musgrove of her son "with so much sympathy and natural grace as showed the kindest consideration for all that was real and unabsurd in the parent's feelings" (64). Anne also reads his actions, as when he takes the child from her back and avoids hearing her thanks, rendering her "perfectly speechless" (74), and when he notices her fatigue after a long walk and "without saying a word" (84) quietly assists her into the carriage. Anne unintentionally eavesdrops, once from behind a hedgerow when "she saw how her own character was considered by Captain Wentworth; and that there had been just that degree of feeling and curiosity about her in his manner which must give her extreme agitation" (82), and once at Lyme, when he suggests that only Anne is fit to take care of Louisa. Anne even requests indirect information from Admiral Croft in the form of something in a letter "which might appear, you know, without its being absolutely said" (162).

The most important form of silent communication between the two lovers is visual. When Elliot passes Anne at Lyme and sends her a look of open admiration, Captain Wentworth rallies with his own look: "Captain Wentworth looked round at her instantly in a way which showed his noticing it. He gave her a momentary glance—a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, 'That man is struck with you,—and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again'" (97). If at Lyme Wentworth silently, visually feels and expresses his renewed interest, at Bath his nervous, indirect conversation and lack of visual control reveal his growing attraction. After their discussion at the concert, Anne reflects, "His choice of subjects, his expressions, and still more his manner and look, had been such as she could see in only one light. […H]is 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 least […]—He must love her'" (175).

The progress of their romance is precluded by jealous suspicions, but the entire issue of Elliot's regard for Anne is dealt with in silence. Anne is first aware of the problem: "She saw him not far off. He saw her too; yet he looked grave, and seemed irresolute, and only by very slow degrees came at last near enough to speak to her" (179). Anne asks the crucial questions: "How was the truth to reach him? How, in all the peculiar disadvantages of their respective situations, would he ever learn her real sentiments?" (180). In a world in which speech is misinterpreted, misdirected, and misused, Anne must silently communicate her real meaning through indirect discourse. She employs this method first when she says she will not dine with Elliot and the others in order to persuade Wentworth that his jealousy is unfounded: "She had spoken it; but she trembled when it was done," (210), knowing Wentworth to be "looking and listening with his whole soul" (210). She also employs indirect discourse during her conversation with Captain Harville. In this instance, even though she speaks at great length, it is what she does not say that speaks to Wentworth. The letter is itself a palimpsest both supplying and giving meaning to the concurrent conversation. The lacunae in

both letter and language necessitate a more reliable means of communication: visual. Anne is aware that something is different when Wentworth leaves, sending her neither "a word nor a look. He had passed out of the room without a look!"(222). When he returns, however, his expressive glances more than compensate: he reveals the letter and places it before Anne "with eyes of glowing entreaty" (222). It begins: "I can listen no longer in silence. I must speak to you by such means as are within my reach" (222). He asks her to answer him in their established method of communication "A word, a look will be enough to decide whether I enter your father's house this evening, or never" (223). When they meet, Wentworth reads Anne's silence: he "said nothing—only looked" (224-225). Even after they have renewed their vows they continue on with "smiles reined in and spirits dancing in private rapture" (225).

At the end of *Persuasion,* Anne Elliot is rewarded with Captain Wentworth. Eight years of penitent, empty silence, several months of agonizing, disciplined silence, a few days of hopeful, pregnant silence, and a moment of expressive, blissful silence result in complete happiness. Like Elinor Dashwoodand Fanny Price, Anne Elliot learns how to love and be loved by maintaining, manipulating, and communicating through silence.

In the three novels we have considered, silence turns out to be a source of feminine empowerment. In the beginning, however, silence is actually the origin of narrative trouble. Elinor, Fanny, and Anne are at first separated from their lovers because the silence of both parties has engendered misunderstandings. None of the protagonists realize the depth of their own worth; none communicate their respect and admiration of the other. This lack of transparency renders the lovers vulnerable. Edward, Edmund and Captain Wentworth are seduced by loquacious, flirtatious women, while Elinor, Fanny and Anne concede their rights and accept the social exile of silent celibacy. "It may perhaps be pleasant […] to be able to impose on the public in such a case," says Charlotte Lucas of Jane Bennett's's cool treatment of Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*, "but it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her affection with the

same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him; and it will then be but poor consolation to believe the world equally in the dark" (22-23). She concludes that "in nine cases out of ten, a woman had better shew *more* affection than she feels" (23). The heroines of these novels show *less* affection than they feel, and like Jane risk losing not only their men, but their advantageous marriage matches.

The pragmatic Charlotte privileges social stability over personal sentiment, remarking that when Jane is "secure" of Bingley, "there will be leisure for falling in love as much as she chuses" (23). Elizabeth Bennett does not agree. "Your plan is a good one," she replies, "where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married; and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it" (23). For Elizabeth, as forElinor, Fanny and Anne, marriage must be based on real communication exchanged with a like mind. It is not a social arrangement, but a moral commitment. Unable to obtain this ideal, these self-abnegating but self-sufficient heroines decide to remain single. However, this same silent integrity distinguishes them from their insincere, immoral rivals. In the end, the heroes surrender illusions in false promises, and are seduced by the sincerity, reliability, and constancy of the silent heroines.

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First Response

This essay looks at an important topic—silence and the power it affords the female characters in Jane Austen’s novels. It presents careful and nuanced readings of subtle dialogue and narrative, while teasing out different models of

how silence operates in Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park, and Persuasion. While this paper is focussed on demonstrating Austen's recognition that silence and solitude aren't vacancy, its thoughtful exploration of its subject invites us to consider these matters in other respects and contexts. Silence seems a much underrated and little recognized virtue. Hannah Arendt observes that thought is something that is not only invisible but 'has no urge to appear or even a very restricted impulse to communicate to others' and represents a 'soundless dialogue between me and myself' (Responsibility and Judgment [2003], 8). If the heroines in Austen's novels gain and ultimately communicate moral insight through silence, they remind us that we live in a world full of noise in which we would do well now and then to keep quiet.