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Austen Canon Project

 I chose to write my fan fiction piece based on *Persuasion*. This is one of the two novels by Austen that I had not read prior to this class and it ended up being one of my favorites that we read this semester. I decided that Wentworth is definitely a strong contender with Mr. Darcy for most dashing Austen hero. After reading through fan fiction this semester, I noticed that one technique is to consider a novel from the interior perspective of a hero. This indulges the strong desire of Austen fans for MORE of their favorite hero and also gives creative license, to the writer, to shape an interior of a character that Austen left undone. The only really satisfying scene to enter into and understand Wentworth’s inner thoughts, is when Anne reads his letter that he writes to her. I thought about how much we get to know Anne’s thoughts and feelings as she hears about Wentworth’s return and then meets with him for the first time in the novel. This lead me to consider what maybe Wentworth was feeling about seeing Anne again after those eight years. He had to know that this was an impending reality for himself because his sister had moved to Kyllnch. Anne was about to reenter his world and I chose to write this piece from the internal perspective of Wentworth as he prepares to and meets Anne for the first time after eight years.

Eight Years

 Will she know me? My face is wind burnt, the sun has darkened my arms. Eight years adds age to the weight of shoulders and the look of my eye. I’m older; the ocean has a way of taking time and warping it around the waves that pass so monotonously you hardly notice anymore. What if her time moved differently than mine? What if instead of water, people moved like the ocean through her life and one has carried her away? What if she is gone?

 The port air is salty and oppressive. I’m so tired of the sea. It has been an escape, eight years and the ache has dulled. Eight years after I ran and now I’m returning. I finally want to run from the sea, weary and worn, I welcome the space to walk on the soil of my past and to find the firm grounding the ocean never gives. I’m not moving any more. How far has she moved past me?

 Kyllnch Hall is let by my sister and her husband. Where is her father going? That father that placed himself above the rest. You can live off a status that you gave to yourself and create a world that worships the very ground you walk on when you can’t see past yourself. He made it but now he is leaving it. His money made him, his vanity claimed him. Kyllnch, I never wanted to come back to you. Those hallways that held so much hope eight years past are the refuge of my family today and the ground I will plant myself on tomorrow. I am leaving the port to go back to those halls, back to my family, but I know she lingers there too. Am I going back to her?

 Sophia wants a wife more than I want a wife. She expects it. She does not know I almost had it; she does not know it escaped me so I escaped it. Am I good enough for her now? The navy made me everything that I was not. I was not enough, has my value changed? Sophia will know the women who will see my value. I will meet them, dance with them, maybe fall in love? Will I love them? I owe it to the money, to the success, to the title, to the woman, to get a wife. Maybe she is a wife. Maybe she has the money, has what she wanted. Do I want her still?

 The first few years away I dreamed what it would be like to return. To come home and claim what I wanted so badly. By year six, a distance engulfed me so far I could hardly reach back to the past anymore. I didn’t even know if I could return; I was consumed by the sea. The present took me in and didn’t let me look behind or ahead. The eighth year dulled the sea and my senses became keen to a desire. I ran from the pain but the desire never changed. The pain has dulled but the desire still pulses beneath the surface. My back was to her, for eight years it tensed and walked far away from her. Today my back is to the sea.

 England has changed. Money means mobility and I am walking on a soil that sees me differently. My money gives me a new name. My money gives me a new height; I have risen above. Eight years put me higher than I ever was before. I am covered in a desire I have never known. The desire of others, desire to be known and taken and had. Desirability defines me. Women desire me for my name and men desire me for my claims. Anne desired me for me. Money is my value. Does she value me now?

 The coach to Kyllnch seems to move slower than The Laconia without wind in its sails. The passing countryside drags away. I cannot decide if I feel dread, anger, or anticipation. The closer the coach moves, the more agitated my heat becomes. Could I even face her? She drove me to the sea, how could she ever recapture me? I cannot look at her. The wife I need, Anne could never be. Am I lying to myself? The desire rumbles underneath my voice, underneath my heart. There is something missing every time I move back from her. Can I do that? Can my heart belong to someone else? My soul is no longer whole, it has been pierced through. Can another woman capture it, mend it, hold it? The coach is turning the final bend.

 Kyllnch. The walls stand high and grand before me. The hedges, so guarded by their master, round out the entrance. My sister is not allowed to touch the hedges, or Elizabeth’s garden, or make alterations to the entry way. Strict orders from the landlord. His final grasp at control over an estate his finances have forsaken. Happily, the Croft’s have adjusted to their neighborhood. I’ve had nothing but positive news as I’ve prepared to visit Sophia. She is delighted by the neighborhood, the country, the company, Kyllnch. She is so satisfied by the stability of a home and friends after sharing my life at sea. What is like to walk the halls of a home that sent me away, this time as an equal to its inhabitants? This is one type of a balm to the pain, I will sleep in the chambers of Kyllnch as enough and no one can send me away. It soothes like a balm of unrequited love to stand in the halls of the family that did not value me and realize that I have value higher than their own. They left their home and I have come into it. Am I still angry?

 Sophia has brought me in with such warmth and kindness. The Crofts have altered Kyllnch for the better. The humbled love and open recognition of one another and their acquaintances alter the bleak and self-important hallways. The air of this place is a reflection of its residents not a memorial to its owner. The warmth of Kyllnch catches me off guard. My memory holds it as a hall of rejection and a space of pain but Sophia has transformed it into a welcoming home filled with my family. I walk through the halls that she walked through, into the rooms she sat in, to the dining hall she ate in. It feels more like her now, warm, gentle, and kind. We are not hiding form the imposing form of her father, from the harsh superficiality of her sister; Kyllnch under Sophia is the Kyllnch I could only imagine Anne handling and creating. An intimate connection after so much distance. A home left by one and and taken by the other. the hallways still warm with her presence as I wander among them myself.

 “We’ve become acquainted with Miss Anne Elliott,” remarked Sophia one morning over breakfast, “Delightful girl, so much more approachable than her foreboding father, not like her family at all. Pity that she is still unmarried.”

Unmarried? “Oh,” I replied, “and where is she residing at present?”

“With her sister, Mary, in Uppercross, not but five miles away, if that.”

My head was spinning, unmarried, uncommitted, with her sister, near by. I was sure she would be at Bath with her father and Elizabeth. She is so near me.

“I will introduce you to the Miss Musgroves when we go this evening, they have extended us an invitation to dine with them,” continued my sister.

Young, unmarried women, of course Sophia already has them picked out but Anne, will she be there?

“I think we will just be seeing the Musgroves. You must wait to become acquainted with Anne and her sister later on, together everyone makes the most enjoyable company.”

No Anne. Only the other women, I will turn my attention to them, I will put her out of my mind. If only Sophia knew, it will be no introduction but a reunion of sorts, a coming back together. But I am so altered, so changed. What will she be to me?

 The Miss Musgroves’ enchanted me. They are young, much younger than I expected but pretty and lively and enchanting. Louisa is particularly pretty and particularly inclined to listen to me. Her desire is evident and pleasing to my sister and her own parents. She knows nothing about the sea, I almost believe she fell as much in love with it as I did as I told her about my past. All eight years in a few minutes and this woman was as enchanted as myself with the mystyery of the ocean. Everyone praised Anne, her kindness, her soft brown eyes. I didn’t listen, I didn’t want to hear. Louisa’s eyes are blue, young, attentive.

 We are being endlessly invited to Uppercorss. The Musgroves feel that they owe me some kind of special attention for being commander of their son. None of my behavior towards him warrants gratitude; he was an insubordinate and ignorant member of my crew, but we’re invited daily to his family’s home.

 We walked into Mary’s parlor. Anne is staying here. Louisa is to my left, Henrietta steps ahead of us greeting Mary and Charles. I glance around, my eyes hardly see, there is a figure now standing in the corner by the fire place. A woman, older than I remember, soft grey dress, needlework in her hands. My eyes continue to move around the room, they cannot stop. A second time around, linger longer on the figure. Henrietta is speaking so loudly; Mary is chiding us for not including her in a walk. She turns towards the figure, “Anne, wouldn’t you fancy a walk?” she questions.

Anne.

She looks up, “I’m quite well this morning, thank you, I’d rather stay in.”

Third time around the room, this time my eyes stop on her. Soft brown and gentle, the same. Her face is more hallow, her hair with a little less shine, the eyes are the same. They meet mine and for a brief moment I feel the desire, it rises up higher than before and almost breaks through. I don’t have breath. Louisa is speaking, I can hear the tones of her voice but I don’t hear words. Anne looks towards her and the moment is broken. “Let us go, Captain Wentworth, a little exercise would do me good.”

I turn towards her, the blue eyes searching mine. Young, unknowing, naïve. She does not understand me; she does not understand anything. I offer her my arm without thinking, I see Anne glance towards the hand that is now around it. We turn, Mary is inviting us for tea later, my eyes are on the ground, my body follows the physical pull of Louisa’s hand, and I’m outside.