

Anne Elliot Character Analysis



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Analysis of the Character of Anne Elliot from Jane Austen's "Perfection"

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Persuasion differs from other Austen novels because of its more somber tone and its more insightful analysis of trends in Victorian society. The most distinctive aspect of *Persuasion*, however, is the character of its heroine, Anne Elliot, a woman "silent but full of thought, persuadable yet steady, a model of self-composure yet glowing with emotions" (Muller 20). Anne Elliot is often described as Jane Austen's most mature and perfect heroine; and Jane Austen's use of reserve is a device to contrast her heroine with the people and society around her, and, most of all, to give Anne an air of perfection. Austen uses Anne's perfection to speak out against the attitude of the aristocracy, the inclination of a willful disposition, and a decreasing sense of decorum and to promote constancy in love and a firm yet prudent character. From the opening chapter, Austen uses detailed description to emphasize Anne Elliot's superiority of character and to delve into the novel's themes and emphasize Anne's perfection. "Anne, with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding, was nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way;—she was only Anne" (7). In the opening chapters of Austen's novel, we quickly learn that Anne's perfection is not just a facade.

Anne Elliot is a central character in Jane Austen's novel "Persuasion," which was published posthumously in 1817. Anne, the middle daughter of Sir Walter Elliot, embodies many of the themes prevalent in Austen's works, including the exploration of social status, the complexity of relationships, and the struggle for personal identity. As the story unfolds, Anne's character becomes a profound representation of resilience, introspection, and the quest for true love. This article delves into various aspects of Anne Elliot's character, her development throughout the narrative, and the thematic implications of her journey.

Background and Family Dynamics

The Elliot Family

Anne's family background plays a significant role in shaping her character. She is the daughter of Sir Walter Elliot, a vain and self-absorbed baronet, and Lady Elliot, who passed away when Anne was young. The dynamics within the Elliot family are critical to understanding Anne's position and personality:

1. Social Status: The Elliots are part of the landed gentry, and Sir Walter's obsession with rank and appearance profoundly affects Anne. She is often overshadowed by her father's vanity and her elder sister Elizabeth's assertiveness.
2. Sibling Relationships: Anne has two sisters, Elizabeth and Mary. While Elizabeth is proud and self-centered, Mary is somewhat frivolous and self-pitying. Anne's interactions with her sisters highlight her contrasting qualities of humility and maturity.

Anne's Role in the Family

Anne's role within her family is that of a peacemaker and caretaker. Due to her mother's death, she assumes a nurturing position, often sacrificing her own desires for the sake of her family. This selflessness is both a strength and a weakness, as it leads to her neglecting her own happiness.

Character Traits

Anne Elliot is portrayed as a complex character with several distinct traits that evolve throughout the novel.

Intelligence and Sensibility

One of Anne's most striking characteristics is her intelligence. She is well-read and possesses a keen understanding of human nature. Her sensibility allows her to empathize with others, which often leads her to prioritize their feelings over her own. This quality is evident in her relationship with Captain Frederick Wentworth, her former fiancé, whose rejection left a profound mark on her life.

Resilience and Independence

Despite her initial passivity, Anne demonstrates remarkable resilience. After being persuaded to break off her engagement with Wentworth, she endures years of loneliness and regret. Her ability to navigate societal pressures and family expectations showcases her quiet strength.

- Examples of Resilience:
- Anne remains composed when faced with her family's financial troubles and their eventual relocation to Bath.
- She stands firm in her beliefs, particularly when her family dismisses her opinions.

Self-Doubt and Growth

Anne's journey is also marked by self-doubt. Initially, she is portrayed as a character who lacks confidence, often feeling overshadowed by her more assertive family members. However, as the novel progresses, she begins to reclaim her sense of self:

1. Rekindling Love: Meeting Wentworth again forces Anne to confront her feelings and reassess her worth.
2. Assertion of Independence: Anne gradually becomes more assertive, especially in her interactions with her family and suitors.

Thematic Significance of Anne's Character

Anne Elliot's character serves as a vessel for exploring several key themes in "Persuasion."

Social Class and Mobility

Austen examines the rigid class structures of early 19th-century England through Anne's experiences and relationships. As the story unfolds, Anne's connections with characters from different social backgrounds, such as Captain Wentworth, challenge the traditional notions of class.

- Social Mobility: Wentworth's rise from a naval officer to a wealthy captain demonstrates the changing social landscape, where merit and personal achievement can surpass inherited status.
- Class Consciousness: Anne's reflections on her family's decline and her own place within society highlight the anxiety surrounding social mobility.

Love and Regret

Anne's unfulfilled love for Wentworth is central to her character arc. Their initial separation, driven by societal pressures and her family's influence, leads to years of regret for Anne. The theme of love is intricately tied to her personal growth:

1. The Pain of Separation: Anne's heartbreak is palpable, showcasing the depths of her feelings and the impact of societal expectations on personal happiness.
2. The Redemption of Love: As Wentworth re-enters her life, Anne's evolution from passive acceptance to active pursuit of her desires underscores the novel's message about the resilience of true love.

Individualism vs. Societal Expectations

Anne's struggle between her desires and societal expectations is a core conflict in her character development. Throughout the novel, she grapples with the pressure to conform to her family's standards while yearning for her own happiness.

- Personal Identity: Anne ultimately learns to prioritize her own feelings and aspirations, reflecting a broader theme of individualism within the constraints of societal norms.
- Empowerment: By the end of the novel, Anne embodies empowerment, choosing to follow her heart despite the risks involved.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Anne Elliot is a multifaceted character whose journey reflects the complexities of love, societal expectations, and personal growth. Through her intelligence, resilience, and eventual assertion of independence, Anne emerges as a poignant representation of the struggle for identity in a world governed by social class and family obligations. Austen's portrayal of Anne invites readers to reflect on their own desires and the lengths to which one must go to achieve true happiness. As a character, Anne Elliot continues to resonate with audiences, embodying the timeless quest for love and self-fulfillment amidst the constraints of society.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the key characteristics of Anne Elliot in Jane Austen's 'Persuasion'?

Anne Elliot is portrayed as intelligent, introspective, and resilient. She is thoughtful and often feels overshadowed by her family's vanity and social status, yet she possesses a strong moral compass and deep emotional insight.

How does Anne Elliot's character evolve throughout 'Persuasion'?

Anne's character evolves from a young woman who is easily swayed by others to one who asserts her own desires and choices. By the end of the novel, she becomes more confident and self-assured, ultimately pursuing her own happiness.

What role does societal pressure play in Anne Elliot's decisions?

Societal pressure greatly influences Anne's initial decision to break off her engagement with Captain Wentworth. She struggles between her personal feelings and the expectations of her family and social class, reflecting the constraints placed on women in her time.

How does Anne's relationship with Captain Wentworth define her character?

Anne's relationship with Captain Wentworth is central to her character development. Their past connection and her enduring feelings for him highlight her emotional depth and capacity for love, driving her journey towards self-realization and fulfillment.

In what ways does Anne Elliot represent the theme of regret in 'Persuasion'?

Anne embodies the theme of regret through her reflections on her past choices, especially her decision to reject Wentworth. Her regrets serve as a catalyst for her growth and the eventual reclaiming of her happiness, illustrating the power of second chances.

How does Anne's intelligence contribute to her character's depth?

Anne's intelligence is reflected in her perceptive observations about herself and those around her. This intellectual depth allows her to navigate complex social dynamics and ultimately leads her to make informed choices about her future.

What is the significance of Anne Elliot's relationships with other characters?

Anne's relationships, particularly with her father, sister Mary, and Lady Russell, highlight her isolation and the conflicting expectations placed on her. These dynamics emphasize her inner strength and the contrasts between societal expectations and personal desires.

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