Mary Musgrove From Persuasion Essay, Research Paper

In Persuasion, Jane Austen presents her dislike of the English gentry by pointing out the flaws of her characters, which are representative of the class. Mary Musgrove, daughter of Sir Walter, sister of Anne, and wife of Charles personifies these flaws, and is thus the object of Austen s contempt. Through tone, comparison with Anne, syntax, and irony, Austen portrays Mary as a self-absorbed, uneducated, mean, self-pitying person.

Austen s biting tone towards Mary and Mary s own words reveal her self-obsessed nature. Austen first presents this trait in, While well, and happy, and properly attended to, she had great good humour and excellent spirits (p. 33); when Mary is not the center of attention she becomes depressed. This is just how Anne encounters her, unwell and out of spirits (p. 33) because her husband is out hunting, and her friends have not dropped by to visit; there is no one there to make her the center of attention. Like Elizabeth and father, Mary had a considerable share of the Elliot self-importance (p. 33). Here, Austen uses a mocking tone with Mary and her family members. She has neglected her children, which should be the foremost concern of a good wife during this period. She only attends to them when it pleases her, and as long as [she] could bear their noise (p. 34). Austen does not approve of this behavior, which is implied by her scathing tone. Mary then immediately shifts the conversation back to herself by commenting on how unwell she is rather than talk about her children with Anne.

Irony of situation further accents her self-obsessed nature. Mary complains that [The Musgroves] never put themselves out of their way (p. 34), but when Anne first encounters her, Mary is lying on the faded sofa (p. 33). Not only does Mary not take any responsibility and perform her duties, she criticizes Anne by saying, what can you possibly have to do? (p. 34). Here, Austen has Mary project her own lack of work on her smarter, better sister a very unflattering thing to do. By italicizing you, Austen also shows Mary s snobbish tone. In fact, Anne has been doing a great many things (p. 34), as opposed to Mary, who has just feeling sorry for herself.

By setting up a running parallel between Mary and Anne, Austen brings out more negative aspects of Mary s character. Mary had not Anne s understanding or temper (p.33). Here, Austen makes a direct comparison between Mary and Anne, portraying Anne as the better of the two. This shows that Mary is neither compassionate nor cheerful. [Mary] was inferior to both sisters, and had, even in her bloom, only reached the dignity of being a fine girl (p. 33). This direct assault on Mary s looks would be especially hurtful to Mary because she is obsessed with appearances. Anne s selflessness becomes apparent when a little farther perseverance in patience, and forced cheerfulness on Anne s side (p. 35) causes Mary to be well again. This is in sharp contrast to Mary s self-centered nature. Syntax also reveals Anne as the smarter of the two. While Anne uses long, complex and compound sentences, Mary uses short, simple sentences like, It is early (p. 34) and Oh! yes, I went (p. 35). This subtle gibe at Mary reveals a great deal about her command of the English language and ability her to express herself.

Austen brings out Mary s self-pity by having Mary complain about her situation and then downplay its importance. Mary overstates her condition in order to evoke sympathy, as is seen in So you came her at last! I began to think I should never see you. I am so ill I can hardly speak. (p.33). She had told Anne that she was doing very well in a letter, thus by acting unwell she tries to make Anne feel bad for not having come sooner. Her statement is also ironic and a lie because Mary winds up speaking so much that she affords Anne little chance to do so herself. Throughout the conversation between the sisters, Mary keeps bringing up the topic of her condition. She does this in order to evoke more pity. This is overacting on her part because she eventually forgets that she is sick, and even proposes that the two go on a walk. Her desire to evoke pity arises out of her conceited nature and a poor self-image. Mary, being very concerned with social class, feels like less of a person for having married Charles Musgrove a commoner. She needs the compassion of others to reassure her that she is still loved, even though she is no longer as important.

In Persuasion, Austen presents Mary as self-obsessed, worse than Anne, stupid, and self-pitying. She does this through her use of tone, irony, syntax, juxtaposition, and character development. From her depiction of Mary, Austen makes her dislike of the English gentry obvious.