In Chapter One I quoted Michael Oakeshott to the effect that “nothing in experience can be said to be immediate; for immediacy and experience are mutually exclusive.” “There is nothing immediate or ‘natural’ in contrast to what is mediate or sophisticated,” Oakeshott went on; “there are only degrees of sophistication.” The belief that nothing in experience comes without concrete embodiment, source, or context is a broadly Romantic one, I would argue. But English Romantic literature testifies eloquently to degrees of sophistication, from Keats's “Do I wake or sleep?” the Old Cumberland Beggar “seeing still,/ And seldom knowing that he sees,” and the feelings “of unremembered pleasure” in “Tintern Abbey,” right up to the intense somatic manifestations that stud *Persuasion*—when the heroine is tormented by her infant nephew, for example:

In another moment...she found herself in the state of being released from him; some one was taking him from her, though he had bent down her head so much, that his little sturdy hands were unfastened from around her neck, and he was resolutely borne away, before she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it.

Anne Elliott's reaction to this event is profound. “Her sensations on the discovery made her perfectly speechless.” “Disordered feelings” and “a confusion of varying, but very painful agitation” are the result—and Austen's prose (“varying...very”) is as agitated as its object. “She found herself in the state of being released from him”: this is a remarkable construction, which no eighteenth-century novelist I know of would have employed. Being released from a toddler's grip is not simply a fact or an event, but a state; and clearly, analogically, symbolically, that state spreads out to incorporate Anne's steady and growing sense of emotional emancipation as that process grows in the rest of novel. “Sturdy hands” are being unfastened from her heart and her mind—not just little Walter's, but her family's: her father's, her sisters,' Lady Russell's. It is all she can do to escape from the room as soon as politely possible:
She was ashamed of herself, quite ashamed of 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.¹

Anne’s initial reaction is highly unsophisticated, and needs a good deal of time and solitude to incorporate itself in a consciousness that it has deeply unsettled—and once more, Austen’s prose patterns mimic and so evoke her agitation: “ashamed of herself, quite ashamed of being so nervous, so overcome by such a trifle.” At its origin Anne’s experience is so close to being immediate that it reduces her to inarticulacy and helplessness.

It is an assumption of empiricist moral sentimentalism that as well as discounting the unconscious and the irrational it should assume the homogeneity and consistency of mental attention as an ideal. Hume is nowhere more dependent on Locke than in the human need “to persevere in a steady adherence to a general and distant interest, in opposition to the allurements of present pleasure and advantage.”² Steady adherence is the result of a stable point of view, looking out into the world or into the self as a spectator. Those “transitory passions” Ruskin spoke of in “The Nature of Gothic,” which the purist artist ignores but the naturalist one reveres, present grave difficulties to post-Lockean thinkers. A mind disturbed by those unknowable forces evoked in the two-part Prelude, or those hysterical ones at work in Northanger Abbey, will not work optimally, and neither will one that wanders or is deflected by stimuli of the kind that Anne Elliott absorbs: “it required a long application of solitude and reflection to recover her”—that is, to restore her proper mental and cognitive equanimity.

Hume had also written about bringing virtue nearer “by our acquaintance or connexions with the persons” who display it, by which process “our cool approbation” would be “converted into warmest sentiments of friendship and regard.” But for him this conversion amounted to an intensification of a moral reaction already in place, rather than a reaction to something seen in new terms by propinquity or susceptibility. Most eighteenth-century protagonists and narrators maintain a highly stable field of perception, accordingly. There are disturbances, of course (“Good heaven! What were the thrillings of my soul at that instant! My reflection was overwhelmed with a torrent of agitation!” as Roderick Random says on re-encountering his divine Narcissa), but normal