

Metafiction in *Northanger Abbey*: How Austen Legitimizes the Novel

by

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This thesis is dedicated to
Austin Melgar and Merla Wolk

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Abstract

In Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, she uses her characters, their conversations, opinions, upbringings, and ways of thinking to call attention to the fictionality of her work, all in an effort to legitimize the stigmatized novel genre. She first defends the works of authors who have been commonly criticized. After having positioned herself as the novels' defender rather than its critic, she then allows that part of the stigma might be justified by the common absurdities found in many novelistic works, particularly the Gothic genre. By discussing the ways in which the genre succeeds as well as the ways it fails through her own novel's interaction with and integration of many of its prescripts, Austen refashions the genre to her own purposes. Not only does she call for a more realistic novel, a novel worth defending, but to an extent, she creates a more realistic novel, with more believable characters and plot. Finally, Austen recognizes that half of the battle in legitimizing the novel is not just changing the genre itself, but changing its reception. Because it has been so long denigrated, non-readers and readers alike will continue to disparage the works because contempt for the genre was simply the popular sentiment at the time. Austen has to stop novel readers from disparaging novels and denying their own reading of such works.

In Chapter 1, I will first discuss the ways in which Austen's novel works in opposition to the Gothic genre, how it situates its characters and events antithetically from the genre, and how doing so allows Austen to express the changes she would like to see. I will then discuss those aspects of the novel that Austen incorporates into her own work, to not only grant merit to certain aspects of the Gothic, but to expose some of its artifice as being ridiculous, through her own dramatization or even anticlimactic mode of employing its devices.

Chapter 2 will be divided into three sections, the first discussing, at greater length, the various ways in which Austen defends the genre against its critics, including the famous 'defense of the novel' contained in Chapter 5 of *Northanger*. The second section will discuss the ways in which Austen refashions the novel using her own work as an example. The third section will touch on the way novels are read, and how Austen uses Catherine's education as a reader, both her mistakes and her eventual realization of her mistakes, to exemplify the imperfect reader, who has thus far been one of the critic's prime illustrations of the inferiority of novels when compared to periodicals, histories, plays, poetries, and *belles lettres*. Austen asks her audience to read more objectively by displaying the ways in which Catherine, and to a greater extent, Isabella, allow their reading to cloud their judgment and cause them to behave with foolishness and impropriety.

CONTENTS

Short Titles	i
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: <i>Northanger Abbey</i> 's interaction with the genre (recreating the novel)	10
I. <i>Northanger Abbey</i> 's opposition to generic conventions	13
II. Generic aspects of <i>Northanger Abbey</i>	26
Chapter 2: Austen's dialogue with the canon and its reception	38
I. Austen's defense of the novel	38
II. Austen's critique of the novel/Transforming the novel	49
III. Educating readership	74
Conclusion	81
Works Consulted	84

Short Titles

NA: Austen, Jane. *The Norton Critical Edition of Northanger Abbey*. Boston: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004.

“JAC”: Hopkins, Annette B. “Jane Austen the Critic.” *PMLA* 40, no. 3 (Jun 1925): 398-425.
<http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/>.

JAD: Rigberg, Lynn R. *Jane Austen's discourse with new rhetoric*. New York: P. Lang, 1999.

PM: Rose, Margaret A. *Parody//Metafiction: An Analysis of Parody As a Critical Mirror to the Writing and Reception of Fiction*. London: Croom Helm, Limited, 1979.

“CAM”: “The Customs and Manners of Common-Place People.” In *The Norton Critical Edition of Northanger Abbey*, edited by Susan Fraiman, 243-8. Boston: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004.

MTP: Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. Boston: Methuen & Company, Limited, 1984.

Introduction

In beginning a thesis about metafiction, I found myself rather at a loss for any authoritative accounts of the term. I thought it would only require a brief introduction, after which I could focus on my primary texts and analyze them in relation to the term. However, the task proved not to be as simple as I had naively expected. While I was able to find a few sources on the topic, and only a few, they contained somewhat varying accounts of what qualifies a work as metafictional rather than just fictitious. For the purposes of my thesis, I have decided that, given the fluid nature of the word, and the many different interpretations of it, I will have to construct my own definition of the word with which to operate. I have relied heavily on the works of Patricia Waugh and Margaret A. Rose. However, where they disagree, I act as arbiter, taking the term into my own hands and molding it as I see fit. At other points, I depart slightly from both Waugh's and Rose's interpretations. The nature of the term seems to be its malleability, and it can be molded to fit almost any situation, and Waugh even contends that "metafiction is a tendency or function inherent in *all* novels".¹ Sometimes we try to define it, give it form, and sometimes it seems to be defining itself. The only consistent aspect of the term seems to be the idea of self-consciousness, and we all have our own ideas of what that means in the literary world.

According to Patricia Waugh, "*Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 2). That is, when a work of fiction repeatedly reminds the reader that he or she is reading a work of fiction, whether it is done blatantly or more subtly. In *Northanger Abbey*, for example, Austen provides a short

¹ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (Boston: Methuen & Company, Limited, 1984), 5. Hereafter cited in the text with the prefix "MTP".

description of Catherine Morland “for the reader’s more certain information”.² In mentioning the reader of the text, Austen is boldly calling attention to its fictionality. Her statement not only jars the reader out of his generic preconceptions, but also purposely interrupts the flow of the story. Austen could have simply stated that, “[Catherine’s] heart was affectionate, her disposition cheerful and open” and “her mind[...]ignorant and uninformed” (NA 9). However, Austen prefaces this statement, “lest the following pages should otherwise fail of giving any idea of what [Catherine’s] character is meant to be” (9).

While Austen provides many examples of this more blatant novelistic self-consciousness, she provides many subtler examples as well. In the text, following the passage I just discussed, the narrator speaks of Mrs. Morland’s “maternal anxiety” at seeing her daughter off with the Allens. The narrator comments that, “the maternal anxiety of Mrs. Morland will be naturally supposed to be most severe” (NA 9). The narrator discusses a general expectation of Mrs. Morland’s distress and immediately follows it with a laundry list of fears that one might expect of Mrs. Morland upon Catherine’s departure. However, the narrator concludes the list in stating that Mrs. Morland “was wholly unsuspecting of danger to her daughter” (9). While the casual reader might not even be aware of what he has come upon, the careful observer will note that the mentioned “expectations” are metafictional by nature. Austen could be referring to the expectations of the novel reader, whose education in Gothic romances would have prepared her (presumably female) for a very different and rather formulaic reaction from the heroine’s mother. Austen could also be speaking of the expectations of the genre itself—the prescripts so often adhered to.

² Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* ed. Susan Fraiman (Boston: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), 9. Hereafter cited in the text with the prefix “NA”.

While at first it might seem odd that the writer of a work of fiction should wish the reader to become further removed from the text, there *is* an authorial intent in so doing, whether it be something grand and all-encompassing—for example, to “explore a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of fiction”—or whether it has smaller aims to “comment on a specific work or fictional mode” as is “often in the form of parody” (Waugh 2, 4).

Waugh takes the idea of metafiction even further by stating that novels, in critiquing “their own methods of construction...not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction” but can also “explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary text” (Waugh 2). Waugh believes that metafiction “explores the problematic relationship between life and fiction” through its use of language (4). Because language is so important to our experiences in the world, because through language we communicate our *perceptions* of the world, we are *creating* the world. We ‘construct’ reality the same way we ‘construct’ fiction—through the use of words. Waugh believes that, “If our knowledge of this world is now seen to be mediated through language, then literary fiction (worlds constructed *entirely* of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of ‘reality’ itself” (3).

It is true that much of human experience is mediated through language. Our perceptions of the world are products of our own observations and the observations and conclusions of those around us. It is human nature to observe and then put into words what we see. We then express our *perceived* reality, for there is no general *true* reality, to others through our speech. Furthermore, we *receive* the perceived realities of others through the language through which they choose to express their views. Whether we deem credible and adopt these perceptions, or whether we discredit them as foolish, irrational, simplistic or pessimistic, they are important in constructing our own *individual* realities and in situating ourselves within the world. And just as

there is no true reality but rather individual constructs of a *perceived* reality, in the world of fiction, it is “possible only to ‘represent’ the *discourses*” of the world rather than represent the world itself (Waugh 3). When viewed this way, everything that we deem a truth comes to us through language, and must somehow form itself so that it can be communicated through language. Thus language is not only the *representation* of our realities, but actually helps shape our realities in the process. “Metafiction pursues such questions” as “how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience in the world” by “drawing on the traditional metaphor of the world as book” (2). Thus people become characters who “may provide a useful model for understanding the construction of subjectivity in the world outside novels” (3). Because Waugh notes that “it is impossible to describe an objective world because the observer *always* changes the observed,” the inherent subjectivity of a novel does not detract from its reality, or its ability to depict reality, because “reality” is inherently subjective as well (3).

Waugh refers us to the linguist L. Hjelmslev whose term ‘metalanguage’ is defined as “a language which, instead of referring to non-linguistic events, situations or objects in the world, refers to *another* language” as its object (Waugh 4). Keeping in mind Saussure’s semiotics, here metalanguage serves as the signifier and that which it signifies is “*another language*” (4). Simply stated, the term ‘metalanguage’ means that, if someone were to refer to the word *banana* (the signifier), the signified would not be the yellow fruit that is typically brought to mind by the word, but rather someone else’s use of the word, whether ‘other’ language be “the registers of everyday discourse” or the language of another work of fiction (4). Hjelmslev’s ‘metalanguage’ “results in writing which consistently displays its conventionality, which [explicitly] and overtly lays bare its condition of artifice, and which thereby explores the problematic relationship between life and fiction” (4).

Waugh details different types of metafiction with different emphases, “termed ‘the introverted novel’, ‘the anti-novel’, ‘irrealism’, ‘surfiction’, ‘the self-begetting novel’, ‘fabulation’,” all of which “offer different perspectives on the same process” (Waugh 13, 14). An example of the “self-begetting novel” is Esther’s narrative in *Bleak House*, a first person account of the narrator’s life from a position of reflection, as if the narrator of the story were the person authoring the text from a point in the future, removed from the action of the story. While Waugh’s different terms help to determine metafiction in its different forms, they can get confusing, and it is important to remember that they all fall within the category of metafiction. Other texts use other terms, or focus on metafiction as a whole. Margaret A. Rose has written a text entitled *Parody//Meta-fiction: An Analysis of parody as a critical mirror to the writing and reception of fiction*, the entirety of which focuses on parody as a sort of subgenre to metafiction, similar to the subgenres Waugh mentions in her text. According to Rose, there are “two main theories about the nature of the attitude of the parodist to the text quoted [or referred to].”³ “The first [theory] maintains that the imitation by the parodist of his chosen text has the purpose of mocking it”, that the parodist is contemptuous of the work he is parodying (*PM* 28). The second theory “holds that the parodist imitates a text in order to write in the style of that text, and is motivated by sympathy with text” (28). While Rose’s first definition of parody is in keeping with the commonly understood definition of the word, and is demonstrated in contemporary society by television shows such as “Family Guy” and “The Simpsons”, the second definition is a bit more obscure. Parody is generally thought to be comedic and also denigrating and one does not expect a parody to be sympathetic in tone. A good example of this second type of parody

³ Margaret A. Rose, *Parody//Metafiction: An Analysis of Parody As a Critical Mirror to the Writing and Reception of Fiction* (London: Croom Helm, Limited, 1979), 28. Hereafter cited in the text with the prefix “*PM*”.

might be *The Final Solution* by Michael Chabon, a story that uses Doyle's detective, Sherlock Holmes, and a similar plot structure, but without being deriding in tone.

Waugh's text seeks to prove that "metafiction is a tendency or function inherent in *all* novels", and I would actually beg that, given *her* point of view, she could even call it a tendency or function inherent in all fiction, including films and plays (*MTP* 5). If one considers metafiction only to be the interaction of language within a work of fiction with an "other language", then Waugh's claims may be true, and metafiction may be truly pervasive (5). However, for the purposes of my discussion, my definition of metafiction won't be quite so broad, focusing on the interaction Austen's narrative in *Northanger Abbey* with the language, characters, plots, and ideas of other *written* texts, though I will not reserve my discussion solely to works of fiction. I still consider it to be metafictional when an author interacts with non-fictional works, such as journals and literary publications, even histories, as Austen variously does throughout her narrative

As I am looking at metafiction and not specifically parody, it is important to note that metafiction is not *always* an interaction with other texts or languages, as Waugh and Rose would seem to conclude at different points in their discussions. As Waugh states on only the second page of her text, "[Metafiction] is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously...draws attention to its status as an artefact" (*MTP* 2). There are many ways in which a work can be self-conscious without interacting with any works other than itself. And it is this definition to which I will always refer back when my sources come to seem contradictory, as they inevitably will at one point or another.

Given Waugh's early definition of the term, a work of fiction within a work of fiction would be considered one mode of metafiction, an example being The Mechanicals' play within

Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Another example is a work of fiction about someone reading or watching a work of fiction, such as *Neverending Story* or "2001: A Space Odyssey". A novel where the author is a character, such as *Slaughterhouse Five*, or the movie "Stranger than Fiction" in which the protagonist is aware that he himself is in a work of fiction, are all examples of metafiction. R.L. Stine's popular children's novella series *Goosebumps* has an offshoot of fictional puzzle books called *Give Yourself Goosebumps*, written in the second person, in which certain pages will give the reader a choice as to what he thinks the character in the book, or rather he himself, should do given the situation. Each different choice tells the reader to continue to a different page in the book, so that each choice determines the action of the story. Not only by the use of second person, but by giving the reader the ability to interact with the story, R.L. Stine is calling attention to the fictionality of the novella while actually *increasing* his reader's involvement in the text rather than detracting from his experience. At times, it does appear as though metafiction were omnipresent, and Patricia Waugh would have us believe it true.

It is important to have a working knowledge of metafiction to be able to analyze Austen's text within these parameters. However, the purpose of this thesis is not to *define* metafiction, for there are many working definitions from which I can borrow and interpret for the use of my discussion, nor is it to simply prove *Northanger Abbey* to be metafictional. I will rather be looking at definitions of parody as not only a *form* of metafiction, but as being representative of one whole aspect of the genre in that, "the work to be parodied is decoded by the parodist, and offered again (encoded) in a 'distorted' form to another decoder, the reader, who—knowing and having previously decoded the original—is in a position to compare it to its new form in the parody" (PM 26). I position Austen's work as first *decoding* texts—in Austen's case these texts

would be Gothic Romances such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or contemporary publications like *The Spectator*—and then *encoding* her opinions of these texts, her personal readings of them, into her own works, only to be later decoded by her readers who *may* have read the original text, though in all cases of parody this isn't necessary. A basic understanding of the general ideas of the work being parodied is all that is necessary. I will also use various other aspects of metafiction to decode Austen's message.

Throughout Austen's text, her characters, their behavior and conversations, the plot, Austen's own use of language, and even the setting, can be seen as her interacting with and questioning an art form. Given that *Northanger Abbey* was one of Austen's first novels, and given the negative reception of the novel genre at the time she was writing, Austen found it necessary to write a novel about novels—about the ways they are written and the ways they are received, and to question both. Austen's text interacts with Gothic novels to first, establish *Northanger* as an exercise within the genre, being careful not to position herself so far from previous works as to be considered something completely new, because second, she seeks to legitimize the genre with her text. However, while legitimizing the genre, she simultaneously seeks to improve it, and calls attention to some of its more absurd prescripts. Finally, part of Austen's path to legitimizing the genre is not just through simply defending it, nor is it in improving it so that the format might gain respectability, but by educating her readers. She asks them to expect more from novels, not to blindly accept their truncated language and overdrawn, unnatural characters and plots. Instead, readers should read objectively if they want to shake off the stigma attached to the novel as well as its readers. Austen recognizes that part of this stigma is solely because readers allow for the ridiculousness of some of the baser novels, and in so doing, sometimes because ridiculous themselves. Part of this stigma comes largely from the

young women, with average or below-average education, who read novels and allow them to be corruptive influences. The character of Catherine Morland exemplifies such readers, and she allows her imagination, fueled by her reading of Gothic romances, to run away with her, and lead her to make foolish decisions and suppositions, and blind her to her own reality. Austen knows that it is important to read with a discerning eye, and not to accept the content of a novel as fact, or even as representing reality, and through various tactics of the metafictionist, effects the education of her readers.

Chapter 1: *Northanger Abbey's* interaction with the genre

Austen's interaction with the Gothic genre is both complementary and supplementary, and while at times it might seem to take an antagonistic view of the genre, at other times it is defensive, as I will discuss in greater detail in my discussion of Chapter 5 of *Northanger Abbey*. "it open to critical attacks," it makes sense that some of Austen's critics have dismissed *Northanger Abbey* as a young writer's failed attempt to create a work that parodies the Gothic, while others see her as failing to create a coherent story because of her delineations on rhetoric, authorship, and language. (MTP 9). A. Walton Litz believes that "the chapters primarily concerned with parody—the first two and the five concerned with Catherine's Gothic fantasies at the Abbey—'form detachable units'."¹ Furthermore, he finds that the "expression of the novel's main themes is 'hampered by lapses in tone and curious shifts in narrative method' and concludes that 'Jane Austen was experimenting in *Northanger Abbey* with several narrative methods she had not fully mastered, and the result is a lack in consistency of viewpoint'" (Williams 11).

While there does seem to be a lack of consistency throughout the novel, it is my contention that the lack of consistency is intentional. Austen is using *Northanger Abbey* as a vehicle for expressing many different opinions, some of which are, as they appear, contradictory. Her novel begins as a parody of the Gothic novel, with a very un-heroic description of Catherine, who displays Austen's perception of the 'norm' through her own opposing characteristics to that norm. Furthermore, the novel ends as a parody with its overly simplistic conclusion. As a parody, *Northanger* seeks to interact with the genre, call attention to its methods, and expose

¹ Michael Williams, *Jane Austen: six novels and their methods* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1986), 11. Hereafter cited in the text.

some of its more ridiculous aspects. However, as I discussed in my introduction, there are two types of parody. While the first seeks to disparage through mockery, as do the two examples above, the second “holds that the parodist imitates a text in order to write in the style of that text, and is motivated by sympathy with text” (PM 28). *Northanger* might be confusing to readers who try to determine Austen’s opinion of the Gothic novel because, through these two types of parody, Austen seems to be both deriding and defending the genre at different points in her narrative. However, while one is correct in reading Austen’s text as both sympathetic and disapproving, confusion is unnecessary—it is based on the presumption that Austen has one finite opinion on the genre that she seeks to explicate in her novel. This inconsistency is not a problem because it is intentional, and Austen means to both deride and defend the novel within this single text. While Austen might disparage certain generic conventions, she simultaneously attempts to overcome them by expanding the genre with her own work, which, though rather different from the commonality, was still, in fact, a novel, and proved itself thus by utilizing different generic aspects one might be used to encountering in one’s reading and assimilating them into her text. That is, Austen operates *within* the genre, thus respecting its form and showing an understanding of its worth, while using her work to question the very existence of ‘norms’ or conventions within a genre that purports to be fresh and creative, and particularly examines the more absurd aspects of plots, characters, and even narrative style.

While Austen is interacting with the genre in *Northanger Abbey*, she is also transforming it. According to Lynn R. Rigberg, Austen’s discourse in *Northanger*, “announces its intention to transform the novel in the very first sentence, when the narrator warns the reader against being deceived by the appearance of the heroine, whom no one ‘would have supposed...born to be a heroine’” (JAD 30). By juxtaposing Catherine with the typical Gothic heroine, Austen is not

only commenting on the genre, but is operating against its precepts, while at the same time allowing Catherine, as well as other characters and events in the novel, to reflect generic conventions. By thus “using itself as an example, it [*Northanger Abbey*] redefines the parameters of the genre” (30). Consequently, my discussion of Austen’s interaction with the genre must inherently include the ways in which *Northanger* stretches its boundaries.

Patricia Waugh seems wholly receptive to the duality one finds in *Northanger Abbey*. Waugh states that metafiction, “offers both innovation *and* familiarity through the individual reworking and undermining of familiar conventions,” which is perhaps another explanation for why Austen feels it is necessary to include some conventions of the genre while working against others (*MTP* 12). Those conventions Austen includes in her narrative are reworked and reformed to her taste, while their conventionality still remains apparent and thus ties them to the genre. Waugh details that, “Very often realistic conventions supply the ‘control’ in metafictional texts, the norm or background against which the experimental strategies can foreground themselves,” important because they allow for, “a stable level of readerly familiarity, without which the ensuing dislocations might be either totally meaningless or so outside the normal modes of literary or non-literary communication that they cannot be committed to memory” (18). Furthermore, “it might also be maintained that the love of the parodist for the object of his parody can often not be separated from his desire to change and modernise it” (*PM* 30). That is, Austen’s seeking to change the limits of the genre through metafiction cannot incontrovertibly be determined as an avowal of her own contempt of the Gothic. It is perfectly reasonable to simultaneously like something and desire to change it.

I. *Northanger Abbey*'s opposition to generic conventions

"It [metafiction] may, often in the form of parody, comment on a specific work or fictional mode" (*MTP* 4).

Austen was an avid reader of Ann Radcliffe, a contemporary author of Gothic novels. Clearly she did not detest the genre, thus one cannot conclude that her parody seeks to denigrate the Gothic. While she seeks to widen the genre, she seeks to do so from the inside. In so doing, she displays her understanding of generic conventions, an understanding based on her own reading, as well as the necessity of widening the genre while simultaneously legitimizing it, and so purposely juxtaposes her novel with those more formulaic and overwrought plots of the romance writers. While she enjoyed the genre, it contained little originality at the time. People were essentially copying the same prescribed plot outlines, the same flat characters. *Northanger Abbey* interacts with these prescribed plots, these flat character types, by contradicting them, by opposing convention.

The best place to begin one's discussion of *Northanger Abbey* is at the beginning. The first line, "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine," sets the stage for the entire novel, and particularly the first two chapters, which proceed to enumerate all the reasons why this statement is true (*NA* 5). Her father was "a very respectable man" of good fortune, rather than being "poor and pitiable" or "rich and tyrannical" as was the convention (5). Her mother didn't die in childbirth and is still alive at the beginning of the action of the novel, and remains so throughout (5). And Catherine herself is "as plain as any", with a "thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour, dark lank hair, and strong features," (5). Worse yet, we are told, is her mind, seemingly "unpropitious for heroism" (5). The fact of her preferring boys' games to playing with dolls, "nursing a dormouse,

feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush,” is most unbecoming for a heroine. She is not smart, beautiful, or “exquisitely sensitive” but rather mischievous, “inattentive, and occasionally stupid” (6). The list goes on and on.

Austen’s narrator calls it unfortunate that Catherine has not had the chance to fall in love prior to her adventures in Bath, but it is explained by the fact that, “There was not one family among [the Morlands’] acquaintance who had reared and supported a boy accidentally found at their door” and that “Her father had no ward, and the squire of the parish no children” (NA 8). Clearly Austen has noted a Gothic convention: a hero of less than ideal circumstances who, in reality, would be a rather pitiable choice for a husband. Austen instead substitutes Mr. Tilney as her hero, who is by no means the typical Gothic lover, but who must nevertheless play the part.

This brings me to my broad discussion of heroism in *Northanger Abbey*. The root word, “hero” appears thirty-five times within Austen’s thirty-one chapters; variations include ‘heroine’, ‘heroic’, ‘heroism’, and ‘hero’. Specifically looking at passages in which these words are used, we can tell a lot about how Austen perceived the typical hero and heroine. Austen is once again addressing pre-conceived notions of heroism. She is aware that Catherine is not the typical heroine, but that is entirely the point, and Austen uses this awareness to discuss the canon. While Austen’s discussion of heroism serves to both contrast and analogize her characters with those of Gothic novels, this section will only discuss their contrasting aspects, while section II of this chapter will discuss the ways in which Austen integrates generic conventions into her text.

The most common usage of the word ‘hero’ is simply to compare Catherine to Gothic heroines. In her drawing, “she fell miserably short of the true heroic height” (NA 8). Catherine’s feelings upon parting with her family to attend the Allens to Bath are, “rather consistent with the common feelings of common life, than with the refined susceptibilities, the tender emotions

which the first separation of a heroine from her family ought always to excite (9). There are many more such examples in which a form of the word 'hero' is employed to note some Gothic convention the reader can expect to be either countered or exploited by Catherine, and her dissention from the typical heroine's role is discussed in the frame of what the Gothic romance, thus simultaneously elucidating Catherine's character and generic prescripts. It is not difficult to note Catherine's departure from the norms Austen points out just as clearly, especially during the first few chapters of the novel, during which Austen is less than subtle. Once again particularly noting Austen's use of the word 'heroine', the following depiction of Catherine might be easily examined: Upon overhearing two gentleman pronouncing herself to be a "pretty girl", Catherine "felt more than obliged to the two young men for this simple praise than a true quality heroine would have been for fifteen sonnets in celebration of her charms" (*NA* 13). In this simple clause, Austen has both depicted Catherine as a girl grateful for any compliment and easily made happy, while simultaneously depicting the "true quality heroine" of the Gothic as someone who quite often inspires the regard and admiration of men, and who has become somewhat immune to their attentions.

In noting Gothic conventions, Austen is defining the Gothic, outlining the formulas that have presented themselves to her throughout her reading. Austen's work becomes metafictional by simply referring to her characters as heroes or heroines because, in so doing, she is comparing them to other more formulaic literary heroes, thus calling attention to their own fictitiousness. According to Margaret A. Rose, "parody has been able to transform the limits of other genres in the act of defining them," as does Austen when writing of Catherine's heroic failings (*PM* 158). She does so to prove that a heroine need not necessarily fit within a particular, narrow definition. Catherine may be the anti-heroine, but she remains a heroine at the same time. A true anti-

heroine would be a non-entity, would not be the protagonist of a novel, and would not garner sympathies or interest. The very term almost implies a villain, which Catherine most certainly is not. Catherine is in the position of a heroine; she is only an anti-heroine in the sense that she is so different from, and at times diametrically opposed to, the Gothic heroine, and for no other reason. In this instance, for the purposes of Austen's story, "it is fit that the anti-heroine should exhibit more life and individuality than the stock heroine."² It all depends on one's definition of the word 'heroine'. Austen, understanding that the word has certain connotations, plays with it to both call attention to those connotations while displaying them as foolish and stretching the label to fit her own heroine.

The word 'heroine' is not always used in the context of a comparison between Catherine and other literary protagonists but is sometimes employed simply in reference to Catherine as a substitute for her name. In these cases she is quite often "my heroine" or "our heroine" (NA 10, 50). Austen is not comparing or contrasting, is not speaking of any generic convention at all, at least not directly. By constantly using the word, however, Austen is redefining it. When Austen refers to Catherine as *her* heroine, she is not only reminding the reader that Catherine is her own invention and is also different from *other* heroines, but that she is, in fact, still a heroine—that the term does not have to connote a Gothic heroine, does not have to connote any particular traits or virtues, and should not connote anything at all besides a female protagonist. In the same way that one might build up immunity to bacteria, Austen is immunizing her readers against their own previous expectations by barraging them with contradictory examples. Waugh agrees, stating that, "parody in metafiction can equally be regarded as another level of positive literary change, for, by undermining an earlier set of fictional conventions which have become

² Robert Liddell, *The Novels of Jane Austen* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd, 1963), 9. Hereafter cited in the text.

automatized, the parodist clears a path for a new, more perceptible set" (*MTP* 64). Furthermore, by calling Catherine a heroine, Austen is somewhat removing her readers from the action of the story. While authors like Walpole and Radcliffe wrote their novels as if they were manuscripts relating real events, and Walpole even claimed that *The Castle of Otranto* had been discovered in the "library of an ancient Catholic family in the North of Ireland" rather than written by himself, Austen's discussion of 'heroicism' invites the reader to consider the act of *creating* a heroine rather than simply reading her text for plot.³

The narrator's possessiveness of the heroine, as well as the discussion of novel heroines and the ways in which they are typically depicted, combine to, while clearly exposing the text as artifice and operating in opposition of Gothic norms, involve the reader in an ongoing discussion on the merit of the novel genre itself, a genre that was still in the process of emerging as a legitimate art form. Austen is right in stating that novelists, who in "degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding", are hurting the genre's reputation, and that by "scarcely ever permitting [novels] to be read by their own heroine", they are denying the genre any merit, and trying to establish themselves as being separate from it rather than allowing their works to operate, as Austen's did, as exemplifications of the genre's worth (*NA* 22). Austen's 'defense of the novel' in Chapter 5 only lays the groundwork for her novel, and epitomizes Austen's interaction with generic texts and archetypes that have barraged the reader from the opening sentence. If the intentions of Austen's novel weren't clear before, the reader now knows that *Northanger Abbey* is to be a novel about novels.

³ Robert Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), xv. Hereafter cited in the text.

Owing to the fact that *Northanger Abbey* is essentially a novel about expectations—Catherine’s expectations, the expectations of Austen’s readers, the expectations of the genre—as with the word ‘heroine’, there are various examples of which Austen speaks of ‘expectations’ in the context of comparison. In the first chapter, while Austen is still juxtaposing Catherine’s life to that of a Gothic heroine, she tells us that her mother, “Instead of dying bringing the latter [Catherine] into the world, as any body might *expect*, she still lived on” (NA 5). The first question one must ask upon his first reading of this novel is, why might one *expect* Mrs. Morland to have died in childbirth? This question might be exceedingly difficult to answer for someone unfamiliar with Austen’s works or the Gothic novels. However, contemporary readers of Austen would likely have had a working knowledge of Gothic novels and have read enough to know exactly what one might *expect* from them. According to Susan Fraiman, editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *Northanger Abbey*, “Austen is mocking several sentimental and/or gothic literary conventions,” in this passage, one being the death of the heroine’s mother during childbirth, leaving the heroine with no female companion, and furthermore, no mother to raise her (NA 5, n. 3). This particular usage of “expect”, as is here used with regards to Mrs. Morland, is evident throughout, and calls the reader’s attention not only to the ways in which *Northanger Abbey* illuminates the reader’s own expectations, but also to its own delineations.

Looking at the ways in which Austen uses the word ‘expect’ within the text is as useful in calling attention to generic conventions as analyzing her use of the word ‘hero’. The mode of analyzing the purport of Austen’s text through a close analysis of word use tells us that the work is metafictional, as the only way to understand these passages is to withdraw oneself from the *action* of the story to think about the *language* of the story. Austen’s allusion to the Gothic is quite obvious, and forces her readers to address their own expectations. She calls attention to

convention while simultaneously supplanting it with her own invention. Furthermore, by calling her readers' attention to their own expectations, she is educating them on how to properly read a novel, pointing out the ways they tend to passively read by forcing their own removal from the text and a more active interpretation of the material, as I will touch more on in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

While words have their own efficacy regarding Austen's intended commentary, or commentaries, as it were, her characters themselves provide as sturdy a means of critique. General Tilney, for example, proves to be a rather flat character, and quite in keeping with Gothic prescript, and would be "immediately recognisable to the modern reader as he must have been at the turn of the nineteenth century as the archetypal domestic tyrant."⁴ In many senses, he is exactly what one might expect of a villain—cold, selfish, revered—and thus the second section of this chapter will contain a greater dissection of his character. However, the General is not always the ideal antagonist, at least not according to Gothic standards. After his first meeting Catherine, she reflects that he had seemed rather to admire than dislike her, "and she joyfully thought, that there was not one of the family whom she need now fear to meet.—The evening had done more, much more, for her, than could have been expected (*NA* 65). While this sentiment proves not to be accurate to the General's character throughout the novel, as demonstrated by his subsequently unkind treatment of Catherine and his mercenariness with regards to herself and his deceased wife, as the reader later discovers through Mr. Tilney's explications of his father's behavior, the kindness of temper and regard the General shows Catherine upon their first meeting is unexpected, not only by Catherine, but by the reader as well. The General's behavior toward Catherine upon making her acquaintance is seemingly

⁴ Mary Waldron, *Jane Austen and the fiction of her time* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31. Hereafter cited in the text.

unimpeachable. And subsequently the General, though in so doing remains rather stoic and removed, treats Catherine with civility, and not until Catherine is unceremoniously expelled from Northanger does the reader learn that the General's kindness has only been a means for manipulating a girl he thought to be in line to inherit a great fortune. However, even when the General *does* turn out to be the 'bad guy', he is *not* the villain one would expect from a Gothic novel, and thus disappoints reader expectations yet again. He is a far cry from Ambrosio in Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*, who violates his vow of celibacy, and subsequently murders his mother and rapes and kills his sister, or Schedoni, in Radcliffe's *The Italian*, who hires assassins to kill his brother and subsequently attempts to kill his wife himself, and even had plans to kill his niece and the heroine of the novel until his own motives of greed prevented the act. General Tilney, in contradistinction of characters like Ambrosio and Schedoni, has not killed anyone, as Catherine suspected and as readers might have expected, but neither is he wholly innocent⁵.

While in her interactions with other novels and the canon as a whole, Austen tends to stray from the well-trodden path, she may not be doing so to "reject Radcliffe's scenarios of terror, so much as reconfigure them; *Northanger Abbey* finds danger for girls not in spooky ruins but in fashionable resorts, slow moving carriages, and comfortable middle-class homes".⁶ Through General Tilney, Austen is able to simulate the suspense and intrigue of a Gothic romance, while not subscribing to its more unrealistic prescriptions. She is providing her readers with an equally entertaining alternative. Austen's writing was, "dominated by attempts to

⁵ Here I must note that Catherine's expectations of the General and the reader's expectations are one and the same because they are both based on their readings of Gothic novels. Catherine suspects the General of treachery because her instincts tell her he is being secretive, but instead of coming to the correct conclusion, she is misled by her reading, and decides that he must have committed some terrible atrocity with regards to his wife. The reader is left believing the same.

⁶ Susan Fraiman, "Introduction," in *The Norton Critical Edition of Northanger Abbey*, ed. Susan Fraiman (Boston: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), ix. Hereafter cited in the text.

refashion fiction as she knew it” (Waldron 16). *Northanger Abbey* is her attempt to refashion fiction. The way she manipulates conventions while simultaneously adding her own wit and humor—her entire interaction with the canon is her way of not only discovering herself as a writer, finding her niche within the genre, but broadening its definition. While *Northanger Abbey* might not have accomplished these ends, it was a stepping-stone for Austen. Because the novel wasn’t published until 1818, after her death, and after the publication of her most popular novels, its effect on the genre was not quite so staggering as her more mature novels such as *Pride & Prejudice*.⁷ Her other novels served to make *Northanger*’s reception less than astonishing, as readers, at this point, were familiar with the author’s style. However, analyzed in the context of the time during which Austen was writing, and given that she is clearly commenting on a genre whose popularity was at its height when she is thought to have begun writing *Northanger Abbey*, one can see the novel as not only her own attempts to discover herself as an author, but to take stock of what would be expected of her and how she meant to deal with those expectations (Fraiman ix).⁸

One way in which Austen reconstrues the Gothic is by “shifting its motif of sexual exploitation into a more subtle and probable register” (Fraiman x). Returning our conversation to Mr. Tilney, a great reason why he is an anti-hero is because he is not impassioned, does not profess his deep and passionate love for Catherine, and his speech, instead of expressing his idolatry in the most poetic language, is rather sarcastic, and he quite often teases Catherine for her foolishness rather than fawning at her feet. The fact of his affection having, “originated in

⁷ *Sense & Sensibility*, *Pride & Prejudice*, and *Mansfield Park* were her most popular works at the time, published in the autumn 1811, January 1813, and June 1813 respectively.

⁸ Fraiman posits the book’s origins to have been in the late 1790s, with two of the works discussed in this thesis being published around the time Austen would have started writing, *The Monk* being published in 1796 and *The Italian* in 1798.

nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of [Catherine's] partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought," is, as Austen puts it, "a new circumstance in romance," and "dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity" (NA 168). While Mr. Tilney's father, General Tilney, is characterized as the Gothic villain, his actions are less provocative than the model, and while Mr. Tilney holds the place of a hero, he is not a hero in the Gothic sense. According to Patricia Waugh, "metafiction represents a response to a crisis within the novel—to a need for self-conscious parodic undermining in order to 'defamiliarize' fictional conventions that have become both automatized and inauthentic, and to release new and more authentic forms" (MTP 65). By parodying Gothic convention, using its outlines while bending the rules, Austen is creating her own "new and authentic forms" (65).

When Austen gives an account of Mrs. Thorpe and her family in an apt two sentences, she follows it in stating that "[t]his brief account of the family is intended to supersede the necessity of a long and minute detail from Mrs. Thorpe herself, of her past adventures and sufferings, which might otherwise be expected to occupy the three or four following chapters", she is *clearly* metafictional in *several* ways (NA 20). Firstly, she is again speaking of reader expectations. However, these expectations are not of the characters or their actions, but of the narrative itself. Thus secondly, Austen is noting her own delineation from generic *narrative* convention rather than simply generic character and plot conventions. Convention is not only within the characters or action of a novel, but can also be found in the way it is written. The fact that Austen so blatantly and constantly demonstrates fictionality is a clear delineation from novels such as Radcliffe's, whose narrative is never intentionally ironic or parodic and seems to have been a precursor to realist fiction, though her plots and characters were rather unnatural. In this particular example, Austen notes what one would expect to see written, and therefore, what

an author is expected to have written, thus defying written style and therefore inventing a new style of narrative, in this case, a narrative that describes a woman (Mrs. Thorpe) in two simple and straightforward sentences rather than three or four drawn out chapters detailing the events of her life as background for the character of the woman Catherine is confronted with upon meeting the Thorpes. While the reader does not know a detailed history of Mrs. Thorpe and her family, Austen has given the reader the same conclusion as to their characters that he might have come to had he spent an hour reading about the family rather than a few seconds.

There are many more examples in which Austen's voice becomes highly intrusive.⁹ Rose states that, "In many parodies, the author himself [or herself] appears in some guise, to add self-parody to satire" (*PM* 97). It is my contention that, by inserting herself so often into the narrative, Austen is calling attention to her position as author, "[reminding] the audience of the author's privileged position as creator of the text" (*JAD* 32). Throughout *Northanger Abbey*, Austen is exploring the dictates of the genre, the role of the reader, and most importantly, the role of the author. After having spent the preceding chapters detailing Catherine's exploits in Bath, Austen redundantly states the following to recapitulate:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday have now passed in review before the reader; the events of each day, its hopes and fears, mortifications and pleasures, have been separately stated, and the pangs of Sunday only now remain to be described, and close the week. (*NA* 65)

In this passage, her position as author enters into the action of the novel, and she positions herself as both author and narrator, in this case one and the same, and as someone who has detailed what has passed, and who will describe what is to come. While she does not explicitly

⁹ I am operating under the premise that we can consider Austen's voice and the narrator's voice to be one and the same within this text, as can reasonably be done with little likelihood of harm.

mention herself, she calls attention to the fictionality of the novel by firstly, mentioning the reader, and secondly, writing that, “hopes and fears, mortifications and pleasures, have been separately stated,” and the person in the role of stating what has happened must necessarily be the author (65). Furthermore, she is in the position to “describe” the upcoming events. Every aspect of this sentence calls attention to its textuality, and even its removal from the general action that precedes and succeeds it exposes Austen’s position as not only author, not only observer, but an actual part of the text itself.

Austen also uses her own voice, not simply for its narrative uniqueness, but for its ability to compare and contrast her own novel with the prescribed norms of the genre. Austen’s narration elucidates the prescripts of the canon in passages such as the one below, which first clearly states what one would expect at this point in the story, and then what Austen has chosen to do:

A heroine returning, at the close of her career, to her native village, in all the triumph of recovered reputation, and all the dignity of a countess, with a long train of noble relations in their several phaetons, and three waiting-maids in a travelling chaise and four, behind her, is an event on which the pen of the contriver may well delight to dwell; it gives credit to every conclusion, and the author must share in the glory she so liberally bestows. But my affair is widely different; I bring back my heroine to her home in solitude and disgrace; and no sweet elation of spirits can lead me into minuteness. A heroine in a hack post-chaise is such a blow upon sentiment, as no attempt at grandeur or pathos can withstand. Swiftly therefore shall her post-boy drive through the village, amid the gaze of Sunday groups, and speedy shall be her descent from it. (*NA* 160)

While this paragraph is long and contains much to dissect, it is a rather serviceable example of Austen's metafiction. Firstly, Austen's mention of the "pen of the contriver" is a clear reference, not just to the textuality of the passage, but to the *existence* of a contriver, a word that clarifies the position of the author as creator rather than simply storyteller, relating actual events.

Secondly, Austen directly references herself when she writes, "*my* affair is widely different; *I* bring back my heroine". Thirdly, she has juxtaposed *her* position as author to the position of an author who writes of a heroine's joyous homecoming, and by creating Catherine's situation in direct opposition to the situation of *other* heroines, Austen is positioning herself as a different kind of writer. Finally, the end result of all I have just detailed is that Austen has compared the Gothic homecoming to her own heroine's homecoming. Not only has she positioned authorship against authorship, but also the action of one story against the other. While at this point in the text Austen has juxtaposed Catherine to the conventional heroine many times, her comparison here is made most explicit. She rather clearly states what it is she sees other writers as doing, and variably what it is that *she* does herself, what other stories are like, and conversely, what *her* stories are like.

Finally, at the end of the action of the novel, everything seems wrapped up quite neatly and rather quickly. The happy ending for the heroine and all those of her acquaintance is quite in keeping with the genre. However, instead of applying the umbrella of a moral lesson to the end of her story as would Radcliffe, Austen leaves off with no narrative pontification but rather leaves the reader with a question which he must answer for himself: "whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience" (NA 174). In one sense, it is as if the narrator recognizes that there are two very different conclusions one could come to at the end of a basic reading of the text, and yet leaves these conclusions to be

determined by the reader. In another sense, it is as if Austen is mocking the idea that one should so easily be able to summarize an entire work into a simple phrase, a simple lesson. Mary Waldron believes that Austen found Radcliffe's moral conclusions to be, "more than a touch simplistic", which "is clear from her [Austen's] alternative, which is a bundle of oblique and uncommitted comment on the unstable nature of accepted social mores and their treatment in fiction" (Waldron 35). It is the idea itself of gleaning a simple moral truth from a novel that Austen finds overly simplistic, not only because the moral atmosphere at the time was in flux and varied depending on where one lived and how one was raised, but because it is foolish to think that the entirety of a novel could exist solely to promote a single idea. Even *Northanger*, which sets out to legitimize the novel, does so much more. At times Catherine is foolish, and yet her childlike innocence and affectionate manner, though they may get her into trouble, serve her well in other aspects of her life. And while Mr. Thorpe's lying to General Tilney about Catherine's fortune was the reason for Catherine's being unceremoniously expelled from Northanger Abbey, it was also the reason why she was invited by the General in the first place, and thus Thorpe, through all his scheming and vying for her hand, is one of the greatest reasons why Catherine ends the novel as Mr. Tilney's bride. To Austen, while each character might serve to express a different opinion or might come attached with a morale lesson, she is careful not to make too great of claims, and sometimes her 'lessons' are seemingly contradictory, or perhaps aren't lessons at all. Though her novel is far from being wholly realistic, its ambiguities, the questions it raises, all seem to display "the most thorough knowledge of human nature [and] the happiest delineation of its varieties" (NA 23).

II. Generic aspects of *Northanger Abbey*

Austen does not always place her characters and their actions in opposition to generic

conventions. She can equally expand the genre while utilizing its stereotypical aspects. However, she does not sincerely do so, but rather, “burlesques and satirizes the conventions of the sentimental and gothic species of novel to dramatize its departure from them” (*JAD* 39). When the action of the novel seems in keeping with the canon, it is to serve as an exemplification of the ridiculousness of such formulae. Take for instance, the example of Austen’s sarcastically expressing disappointment at Catherine’s not having more heroic pursuits, and then proceeding to express pleasure at Catherine’s being “in training for a heroine; [for] she read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives” (*NA* 7). Austen follows this passage with quotes from Alexander Pope, Thomas Gray, James Thomson, and three from William Shakespeare. With quotations from their works—“To the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady”, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”, *The Seasons*, and finally *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Twelfth Night*, respectively—“Austen continues to ironize her budding heroine” (8). The quotations Austen has chosen all contain within them some sort of lesson, a proffer of truth added to a heroine’s store of knowledge to be called upon when advice is needed. The most ridiculous seems to be from *Twelfth Night*, where Austen prefaces, “that a young woman in love always looks—‘like Patience on a monument/Smiling at Grief’” (7). This quotation seems to better represent the new class of heroine Austen is creating with this novel than the sentimental heroine, who is better represented by Isabella, “whose sufferings are histrionically imitative of the Gothic ideal.”¹⁰ When Catherine is unceremoniously expelled from Northanger, she tolerates her humiliation and sadness with “quiet and unobtrusive dignity,”

¹⁰ Waldo S. Glock. “Catherine Morland’s Gothic Delusions: A Defense of *Northanger Abbey*.” *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1978): 37, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/>. Hereafter cited in the text.

thus better exemplifying Shakespeare's expression than the Gothic heroine (Glock 37). In this way, Catherine is the modern heroine, suffering inwardly, while Isabella is the sentimental heroine. Thus it seems, while Catherine has read the material required of a heroine in training, she has gleaned the wrong lessons for a sentimental heroine. In this way Austen has created her new heroine from the framework of the old, and Catherine's is recommended by its good sense. However, while bearing her grief quietly might have at least seemed a societal virtue, if not a sentimental one, Catherine is more often than not the picture of *impatience*, thus proving herself human rather than simply another extreme representation of an ideal.

Isabella, in contradistinction to her friend, suffers outwardly, and is more likely to allow her sentimental education in the Gothic to control her life. While Catherine has been known to read and appreciate various works by various authors, Isabella's interests do not stray from the Gothic romances that seem to take up so much of her time, whether she is reading them or not. While Catherine notes that Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, "is not like *Udolpho* at all; but yet I think it is very entertaining," it speaks well of her more rounded education, and while Catherine allows her fantasies to run away with her at times, especially while at Northanger, she seems perfectly capable of distinguishing reality from fiction during her time in Bath, even if she is rather naïve about human nature in general (NA 26). For example, when Catherine "exclaims that she would not have abandoned *The Mysteries of Udolpho* except to meet her dear friend, Isabella," she has been drawn away "from the illusionistic world of fiction" by real life (Glock 38). In fact, "It is Isabella, not Catherine, who most convincingly embodies the dangers of romantic illusion in the modern world, and whose transparent insincerity functions as a social equivalent of the equally false reality of the sentimental novel" (37). While Catherine is at times silly, in the end she is Austen's ideal of a heroine: a bit flawed, but based in reality,

and altogether likeable enough. When Catherine is foolish, it is when she is allowing Gothic ideas to intrude on her perceptions of reality, and Isabella allows this to happen far more often. While Austen might find the Gothic entertaining, she obviously sees the need for it to be distinguished from reality, and understands, “that the romantic and sentimental type of heroine is no longer relevant for the nineteenth century” (37). Austen equates “The deceptive values of sentimental fiction” to the “selfish mercenary values of society” (37). We see this in both the General, whose monetary motivation I will discuss later, and in Isabella. Catherine is able to find happiness when she accepts the “ordinariness of life, as epitomized by the witty and original, yet totally unromantic Henry Tilney,” while the last we hear of Isabella is in a letter to Catherine in which it is clear she is still operating under vast delusions, again outwardly expressing her grief in attempts at gaining the sympathy of others, and unaware of her own impropriety (38).

When Isabella deceptively tells Catherine that, “Had [she] the command of millions, were [she] mistress of the whole world, [Catherine’s] brother would still be [her] only choice,” instead of seeing through her artifice, Catherine believes that Isabella is speaking in earnest, and, “This charming sentiment, recommended as much by sense as novelty, gave Catherine a most pleasing remembrance of all the heroines of her acquaintance; and she thought her friend never looked more lovely than in uttering the grand idea” (NA 83). While Isabella’s statement, in the course of the novel, turns out to be untrue, it is unclear whether she was aware of its fallaciousness when it was uttered. Isabella has become so deluded by her reading, that she is actually *trying* to be the Gothic heroine. She expresses feelings of utter anguish when she discovers that James Morland will only be receiving four hundred pounds a year as a living from his father, and furthermore, that he and Isabella must wait two or three years before being married. She

expresses her disappointment that James should only receive four hundred a year, and yet clarifies that her disappointment is only on his account, for she could be happy on much less if only to be with the man she loves. She then attempts to position Mr. Morland as the typical Gothic tyrant of a father, trying to keep the young lovers apart on the pretense of their waiting for James to take his inheritance and by offering so little money as a deterrent to either of their wishing to marry the other. However, Catherine feels her father attacked, and Isabella's awareness of this fact causes her to quickly and carefully retract her statement so as to remain the victim in the situation, rather than victimizer of Mr. Morland. Isabella's goal is accomplished when her mother says: "[W]e perfectly see into your heart. You have no disguise. We perfectly understand the present vexation; and everybody must love you the better for such a noble honest affection" (93). Isabella is only acting a part, and it is not clear that she actually believes what she has expressed. However, it is clear that the sentiments expressed above were, in her mind, those she *ought* to have felt, even if they were not *actually* felt. She is trying to be the ideal Gothic heroine because that is who she thinks she should be. Unfortunately, it is in aspiring to an ideal that she makes her greatest mistakes, betraying the confidence of a friend as well as the love of a fiancé, and thus fails to be a sympathetic character, or a heroine in Austen's sense of the word

Isabella is not the only character to successfully emulate the Gothic ideal. Her brother, John Thorpe, is probably the greatest example of a Gothic villain within the novel, greater even than the General, though his villainy might not be so keenly felt, except on one particular instance. His pursuit of Catherine is evident from their first meeting when he tries to impress her with his gig and his charitable nature as supposedly exemplified by his willingness to pay fifty guineas for it because the seller was in need of cash. When Mr. Thorpe, along with James

Morland and Isabella, arrives at Catherine's door, ready to set out on a daytrip to Bristol, her excuse of being previously engaged to go on a walk with the Tilneys is "vehemently talked down as a reason at all" by John Thorpe, who proceeds to tell Catherine of all the attractions of his idea (NA 56). He then tempts her with the idea of seeing Blaize Castle, knowing that she is a fan of the Gothic and that it would interest her greatly. However, she is still unable to accept, as she intends to honor her plans with the Tilneys. When John becomes aware of this, of her principled nature, he fabricates a chance encounter that has supposedly happened only moments before, in which he saw them in a phaeton on their way to Wick Rocks. Were this statement true, Catherine had no hope of seeing them that day, as Wick Rocks was quite a distance off. Thorpe then procures her consent, though falsely obtained, and the party sets off. Setting aside the impropriety of Isabella's riding alone in a carriage with James while Catherine is alone with John, the trip promises to be pleasant. However, when John's gig passes the Tilneys on their way to meet with Catherine, she realizes his lie and begs him to stop so that she might chase after them and explain herself. However, instead of slowing down, he lashes the horse to go faster. The scene, with Catherine's pleas for him to stop the gig and let her off as the gig races through the marketplace and away from the Tilneys, is reminiscent of the scene in Radcliffe's *The Italian* in which Ellena is kidnapped and kept from her love, Vivaldi. John Thorpe plays the part of kidnapper in Austen's narrative, and, throughout, he schemes and lies in his pursuit of Catherine. The General's reason for sending Catherine away from Northanger is a direct result of something John Thorpe has said, and thus he might be held equally responsible for the General's cruelty. However, Austen tries not to give John Thorpe too much significance. Catherine is able to apologize to the Tilneys the very next day and explain that, had she known they were coming to meet her, nothing could have convinced her to leave. And though Thorpe is responsible for her

being expelled from Northanger Abbey, he is also the reason she was invited in the first place, the circumstance of which is the likely reason that events were able to turn out so happily in the end, that Mr. Tilney was able to recognize his feelings toward Catherine and then subsequently overcome his father's tyranny. In both Radcliffe's and Austen's novels, villains are to be overcome, even if the circumstances of *Northanger Abbey* are a bit more realistic. However, Catherine clearly *allows* herself to be victimized by being too trusting and naïve, and one has only to look at Ellena in *The Italian*, who is equally as trusting of the man who intends to kill her, or Antonia in *The Monk*, who remains ignorant as to Ambrosio's intentions until the very end, to see that Austen finds heroines to be equally culpable in their own demise, and equally capable of overcoming their aggressors only by employing common sense. While Catherine is not the ideal Gothic heroine, here she is in company with the most archetypal of them. It is my belief that Austen understood the need for a certain amount of suspense, drama, intrigue, as well as the need for there to be obstacles in the way of her heroine. While aspects of the Gothic might be ridiculous, the point of a novel is not to perfectly emulate reality and the tedium of the everyday. Events must occur to entertain, and all Austen has done is translate them into the nineteenth century. While Catherine's foolishness never endangers her life, she serves her purpose nobly, and in her stereotypical behavior, with her "mind about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is," she simultaneously represents the real life girl, possibly the reader of such a text, and the sentimental heroine, and finds a common ground between the two (9).

Thus the Thorpes are not the only Gothic characters in *Northanger Abbey*. Catherine's inquisitive nature, coupled with her suspicions of something dark and mysterious contained within the abbey, lead her on a hunt for answers, much like a Gothic heroine. At the beginning

of their friendship, Isabella recommends *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, a classic Gothic romance by Ann Radcliffe, in which the main character, Emily, finds herself living in an Italian castle full of mysteries which Emily proceeds to investigate, much like Catherine in the abbey. Part of the abbey's mystery and intrigue is its Catholic origin, as was the case with many Gothic romances, often set in Catholic countries such as Italy, Spain, or France, a country particularly disliked and distrusted by the English at this time. Another of Radcliffe's novels mentioned by Isabella, *The Italian*, is also set in Italy; Lewis' *The Monk* is set in Spain. The 'otherness' of Catholicism is part of what incites Catherine's conjectures, not only because of her English Protestant prejudices, but because it has become synonymous with the mysteries of her novels. Thus Catherine finds herself searching for something, though she doesn't exactly know what, in the way Emily searches the castle for signs of Montoni's villainy, and she even remarks on how the scenery in Bath reminds her of France; though she has never been, she feels right in stating its likeness as she has read of Emily's adventures in France with her father in *Udolpho* (NA 72). When Catherine finds a roll of paper in a drawer of a Japanese cabinet, "pushed back into the further part of the cavity, apparently for concealment," she is convinced that she has found some "precious manuscript" (116). However, when she is about to read it, her candle is snuffed and she is left in complete darkness. "A violent gust of wind rising with sudden fury, added fresh horror to the moment" and depicts ideal Gothic imagery (117). Catherine thinks she can hear retreating footsteps and the creak of a door. She immediately seeks comfort deep beneath her the clothes of her bed, but, "With a curiosity so justly awakened, and feelings in every way so agitated, repose must be absolutely impossible" (117). We are told that she hears, throughout the night, the howling of wind, the crashing of thunder, the attempts of someone to enter her room, "hollow murmurs", and "distant moans"—all Gothic prescripts (117). Upon a first reading of the

novel, and without too intimate a knowledge of Austen's writing, one might actually expect Catherine's suspicions to be realized, and this scene might have all the terrible import of the scenes it imitates in true Gothic novels.

Like Emily, who thought she had stumbled upon a body twisted in agony that has, in actuality, only been a waxen figure, Catherine awakes to find that the manuscript that inspired so much fear the night before, that caused her to imagine, not just the contents of the letter, but many horrors taking place within the abbey, was simply a washing-bill. In this instance, Austen borrows a device from Radcliffe, who was known to explain away the supernatural at the end of her novels, after leaving her readers in suspense for a length of pages, though while the supernatural might be explained away, some evil plot has always been the reason for the misunderstanding, as is *not* the case with Austen's washing-bill. While Austen only leaves her readers, and Catherine, in the dark for the length of a night, the similarities between Austen and Radcliffe's events only serve to highlight Austen's contempt for the over-simplification of Radcliffe's conclusions. In *Northanger Abbey*, the only question that remains unanswered until the close of the novel is that of General Tilney's abrupt dismissal of Catherine from the abbey. However, as this does not occur until Chapter 28, and is subsequently answered in Chapter 30, it can hardly be considered as suspenseful as the questions that build throughout Radcliffe's romances. The only true suspense is created by Catherine's own foolish musings on the General, before he has proven himself a villain. She creates suspense not because the circumstances imply something sinister, but because she manipulates them, and works on an insufficient amount of information. Catherine has suspected him of murdering his wife, or in some way taking part in her disappearance or demise. However, even these suspicions are explained away before the close of the narrative. When Mr. Tilney finds her after she has just quit his mother's

apartment where she was searching for clues to that might support her suspicions, she confesses her conjectures and he immediately and satisfactorily refutes them; there is no possibility of the General's foul play in the death of his wife. Austen creates a more diluted suspense, and does not allow it to last nearly as long. However, the fact of her using Radcliffe's model for these scenarios "marks herself as a reader of the text, the value of which she is questioning, and—in refunctioning its plot—also assumes the role of independent author" (*PM* 70). Austen creates similar illusions within her text, and these "mysteries that remain unsolved after all Catherine's exaggerated fears turn out to be fatuous serve as the selling points of Austen's contract with her readers" (*JAD* 34). She has created a similar experience for her readers while the answer to the true remaining mysteries, those concerning General Tilney, proves "as recognizable in nature as it is thoughtlessly evil, and is too realistically motivated to be denied" (35). Thus Austen has transfigured Radcliffe's plot into a more realistic set, in which the events are more wholly believable, and more toned down. The only implausible events in the narrative come at the end, when Austen tries to quickly wrap up the story.

As I said before, Radcliffe has a tendency to explain everything rather simply at the close of her narrative. In so doing, she also allows her heroines a 'happy ending'. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily is reunited with Valancourt, and at the end of *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine is reunited with Mr. Tilney, though only after a relatively brief and uneventful period of time. When Catherine and Mr. Tilney are reunited, and after he has secured her hand, he explains away his father's behavior. However, Mr. Tilney gives such a detailed account of his behavior: he explains that Mr. Thorpe led the General to believe Catherine was to inherit a great fortune and further purports that John Thorpe had spread this information when he had hoped to marry Catherine, and that, upon her rejection of his affections and the end of his sister's engagement to

Catherine's brother, he confronted the General and led him to believe quite the opposite from what he had before, and furthermore, that he had been intentionally misled by the Morlands themselves. While the General's disapproving the union of Catherine and his son, on the basis of her lack of fortune, resembles that of the Marchese and Marchesa in Radcliffe's *The Italian* who refuse to allow their son to marry Ellena, this problem is quickly resolved. In the mean time, however, Mr. Tilney's explanation is succeeded by Austen's narrative insertion:

I leave it to my reader's sagacity to determine how much of all this it was possible for Henry to communicate at this time to Catherine, how much of it he could have learnt from his father, in what points his own conjectures might assist him, and what portion must yet remain to be told in a letter from James. (NA 170)

The length of Mr. Tilney's explanation, spanning four pages, and the information it contains, though reminiscent of Radcliffe's conclusions, is overly simplistic, and Austen clarifies this opinion by essentially telling her readers *not* to trust her as an author because of the unlikelihood of Mr. Tilney having all the information necessary to shed light on what has occurred. Mr. Tilney could not have possibly known *why* John Thorpe had lied to his father on those two separate occasions, as the General himself could not have known. Austen leaves it to the reader to decide whether she is telling the truth, whether what Austen has allowed Mr. Tilney to have said is actually plausible, whether he actually could have known everything he told Catherine upon that particular meeting, whether he *would* have told it all. This single clause speaks volumes about the novel and the role of its readers. Had she not left the plausibility of Mr. Tilney's statements to her "reader's sagacity", the reader might not have noticed its implausibility, especially because such implausible conclusions were commonplace at the time.

This clause, tacked onto the end of Mr. Tilney's explanation, calls attention to a canonical practice they may never have noticed, and in so doing, changes the reader's role.

Though, in the first section of this chapter, I spoke on how Austen's conclusion does not apply the umbrella of a moral lesson, that was not to say that Austen doesn't borrow *other* simplistic aspects of the canon for her conclusion, as is made evident by the above. Austen chooses to hasten to a felicitous end, and thus outlines, in less than a half dozen paragraphs, all that which occurs in favor of the novel's 'deserving' characters. The man that Eleanor is in love with, of whom we are hearing only now, suddenly acquires a great fortune, making their marriage possible, and in the General's good humor, Eleanor is able to convince him to forgive Henry and give him permission to marry. The reader is also told that Eleanor's lover is the same man whose servant left the washing-bill in Catherine's room, thus Austen has explained one of the mysteries of the novel that had originally inspired suspicion, while simultaneously explaining his relation to the family. In the end, Austen seems to explain absolutely everything—everyone's behavior, who did what, and the purport of every word and action.

The fact of Eleanor's escape from Northanger with the man she loves Austen expects "to give general satisfaction among all her acquaintance" (NA 172). Henry and Catherine are married shortly thereafter, and, "the bells rang and every body smiled" (174). This 'happy ending', however, coincides with Austen's refusal to moralize her tale, and thus she gives us the action of the Gothic conclusion—the marriage of our hero and heroine, the explanation of all that had until thus remained a mystery. A moral lesson at the end of a novel is almost an excuse for the quickness and impracticability of its close, and without it Austen exposes the artifice of Radcliffe's conclusions by mocking her own style.

Chapter 2: Austen's dialogue with the canon and its reception

One of the most recognizable and widely discussed aspects of *Northanger Abbey*, aside from its Gothic parody, is Austen's 'defense of the novel'. While she is not so much interacting with the genre itself as she is discussing the stigma attached, I believe the 'defense of the novel' contained in Chapter 5, as well as other instances in which the narrator discusses the stigma attached to novels and their reception by society, can help us better understand Austen's intentions in writing *Northanger Abbey*, the questions she intended to pose, and the messages she the work contains. Furthermore, a discussion of authorship, and the role a writer plays in the creation of the canon and in its reception is a useful preface to this chapter, in which I will discuss how Austen uses her characters to educate readership and argues for the more active and skeptical reading of novels.

According to Patricia Waugh, "Parody appears again and again at points of crisis in the development of the novel. In *Northanger Abbey*, for example, Jane Austen parodies the gothic novel and in so doing sets up a dialogue about the function of novels" (MTP 71). Obviously Austen recognizes that the novel is at a point crisis—while she is an avid reader herself, she recognizes its flaws, and understands thoroughly that to move forward as a genre, and engender respect rather than contempt, it will have to expand its horizons. However, Austen does not place all the blame of its sorry reputation on authors, but also recognizes that the foolishness of the genre's readership and their role in disparaging the very works in which they find so much pleasure.

I. Austen's defense of the novel

In Austen's famous 'defense of the novel', she recognizes that the stigma attached to the genre is so great that even novelists often disparage the genre as a whole in their own works, as if

to distance themselves from the genre's negative connotations. She sees novelists as "joining with their greatest enemies"—any generic depreciator—"in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine" (NA 22).

Though today novels are a respected art form widely consumed by the proletariat as well as the highly educated, it is important to keep in mind the ignominy attached to them during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At the time, they were regarded with the same sort of contempt people now have for "reality" television. Histories, poetry, and periodicals such as the voluminous *Spectator*, which Austen mentions or alludes to at various points in her story, would have been "proudly" produced and referred to by their readers, even though they might seem irrelevant, "unnatural", and not in the least bit interesting or entertaining (23). In regard to those novelists whose heroines are too "good" to read a novel, Austen asks, "If the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard?" (22). She also notes that, on the occasion that a heroine actually *does* pick up a novel, she "is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust" (22). In contradistinction, Austen creates a heroine who devours novels, and an intelligent and thoughtful hero who reads them as well, as a means of legitimizing their value. That is, "The 'censure' that she attributes to other writers, who refuse to allow novel-reading in their works, is actually best accomplished by her own method of including it."¹ It is her opinion that the novel's enemies are such by either "pride, ignorance, or fashion," and have not based their contempt on their own perusal of such works as *Cecelia* or *Camilla*, both novels written by Frances Burney, or *Belinda*, written by Maria Edgeworth:

¹ Michele Hannoosh, "The reflexive function of parody," *Comparative Literature* 41, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 120, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/>. Hereafter cited in the text.

[O]r, in short, only some works in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language. (NA 23)

Novelists were already fighting an uphill battle against men of the more esteemed forms of writing, including William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge. In Wordsworth's preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, he states that, "[t]he invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakspeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse".² By German Tragedies, "Wordsworth presumably means Gothic novels such as those by Ann Radcliffe" (NA 219, n. 2). Furthermore, in Samuel Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, published the year Austen died, he echoes similar sentiments to those of Wordsworth, and dares not even compliment the act of perusing a novel—the kind one might get from a circulating library—with the title 'reading'.³ With such enemies of the novel, it is clear why Austen saw a need to defend it if she were to become a novelist herself, and when she began writing *Northanger Abbey*, she was still in the early stages of becoming a author, and was years from having her first work published. Thus Austen pleads, "Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body" (22). She

² William Wordsworth, "From Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*" in *The Norton Critical Edition of Northanger Abbey*, ed. Susan Fraiman (Boston: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), 219. Hereafter cited in the text.

³ Samuel Coleridge, "From *Biographia Literaria*" in *The Norton Critical Edition of Northanger Abbey*, ed. Susan Fraiman (Boston: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), 219. Hereafter cited in the text.

refuses to do as so many authors before her, to disparage the works comprising the genre with the same harsh language as its critics, and she was “boldly iconoclastic...in defending a widely denigrated form” (218, n. 1).

With poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge denouncing the value of the novel, and critics who were equally as harsh in their praise of Austen’s novels, it is no wonder Austen saw it fit to write a novel to defend novels.⁴ While the ‘defense of the novel’ I discussed above was a rather blatant attack on its detractors, throughout the novel, Austen also sets up her characters in defense of the novel, as can be seen throughout the text. In a conversation between John Thorpe and Catherine, Thorpe echoes many of the same sentiments of the genre’s critics that Austen notes in Chapter 5. Catherine, at a loss for conversation, with a mind highly distracted by the novel she has just left off reading, asks Thorpe if he has read *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. His response would likely have come as no surprise considering the genre’s reputation, and considering he was an ‘Oxford man’: “Udolpho! Oh, Lord! not I; I never read novels; I have something else to do” (NA 31). Of course, his response humbled and shamed Catherine, but as she was about to apologize for even posing such a question, Thorpe further states, “Novels are all so full of nonsense and stuff; there has not been a tolerably decent one come out since Tom Jones, except the Monk: I read that t’other day; but as for all the others, they are the stupidest things in creation” (31). The strength of Thorpe’s previous statement is instantly compromised when he contradicts himself in saying that, not only *has* he had the time to read a few novels at

⁴ “The Customs and Manners of Common-Place People”, in *The Norton Critical Edition of Northanger Abbey*, ed. Susan Fraiman (Boston: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), 243. Hereafter cited in the text with the prefix “BC”. This unsigned review originally printed in the *British Critic* in 1818 praises the realism of Austen’s two most recently released works, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. In his backhanded compliment, he enumerates the many formulaic plots he had to go through to find a decent novel, thus praising Austen but disparaging the genre as a whole. I will discuss this review at greater length at a later point in this thesis.

least, but that he has actually found enjoyment in reading them. Also, according to the editor of the Norton Critical Edition, both *Tom Jones* and *The Monk*, written by Henry Fielding and Matthew Lewis, respectively, “were accused of immodesty,” and furthermore, that in Henry Austen’s biographical notice on the death of his sister contained within the original published book containing *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, he noted that his sister disliked Fielding on “moral grounds” (31, n. 6). Thus John Thorpe has clearly proven himself, not only to be an untrustworthy character, as well as a representation of the genre’s more ridiculous critics, but also to be a contemptible character, not only in Austen’s opinion, but also in the eyes of any of her readers who might have been put off by Fielding’s or Lewis’ immodesty.

As if Thorpe’s second interjection hadn’t already negated the validity of his first, upon Catherine’s insistence that he must like *Udolpho*, he replies, “No, if I read any, it shall be Mrs. Radcliff’s; her novels are amusing enough; they are worth reading; some fun and nature in *them*” (NA 31). *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was in fact a novel of Mrs. Radcliffe, a fact that the sweet Catherine hesitates to point out for fear of embarrassing Mr. Thorpe. His statement further deteriorates his authority on the subject, as well as his disregard for the genre, which thus far he has proven himself able to enjoy frequently enough. His sentiments are like those Austen attacks in Chapter 5, the ways in which novelists and novel readers alike will denigrate the very genre from which they find so much enjoyment so as to simply echo popular opinion. The only difference between the character of Mr. Thorpe and those real people who show contempt for the genre and deny finding pleasure in any of its works, is that Thorpe is foolish enough to list the novels he *has* enjoyed after stating that he never reads novels at all. Thorpe’s hypocrisy is exposed while the hypocrisy of the latter remains concealed, though not very well, as Austen points out.

When Catherine does tell Thorpe that *Udolpho* was written by Radcliffe, he concedes that he must have been thinking of another book, and lays it out to have been *Camilla*, a work by Frances Burney, and one which Austen has already expressed her opinion of its being a “work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed” (NA 23). In his opinion of Burney Thorpe remains firm, commenting on Burney’s marriage to Alexandre D’Arblay, a French emigrant, saying, “as soon as I heard she had married an emigrant, I was sure I should never be able to get through [*Camilla*]” (32). However, after having supposedly decided he would be unable to tolerate Burney’s work, apparently he still began to read it, and in his conversation with Catherine, mentions the old man playing at séesaw, which happens early in the novel. In Thorpe’s subsequent treatment of Catherine, as I detailed in the last chapter, as well as his ridiculous opinions on novels, he has proven himself the clear villain of the text. Austen has created a truly contemptible character as the embodiment of the novel’s critics.

While Mr. Thorpe embodies the novel’s critic, Catherine embodies its typical reader, and unfortunately, the fact that she is a young woman, sometimes silly, who allows her reading of novels to affect her judgment and to lead her into various misperceptions, she is not the novel’s ideal defender because her mere association with the genre, and the tendency of young women to be the most common purveyors of novels, is part of what has given the genre such a stigma. Silly girls read silly books. Furthermore, her behavior could also be seen as *resulting* from her reading of novels, and it is true that novels were often considered a corrupting influence, especially on young women such as Catherine, who allowed them to color their perception of the world. Catherine’s presence falls somewhere between Mr. Thorpe, a common critic, and Mr. Tilney, the ideal reader. While Mr. Tilney defends the novel, Catherine argues the necessity of reading more objectively through her own inability to do so, and the trouble that might have been

prevented were it not for her own naïveté, as I will discuss at greater length in section III of this chapter.

Catherine, while honestly professing the enjoyment she finds in a good novel, still considers them to be inferior, and is often ashamed of her own reading. Unlike Austen, she hasn't the courage or the fortitude to defend it, and while walking with Mr. Tilney and his sister, Catherine makes the assumption that Mr. Tilney must never read novels, her reason being, "Because they are not clever enough for you—gentlemen read better books" (NA 72). A common sentiment to be sure, but the expression of which shows how gendered was the genre. Men, especially gentlemen, with their educations and their superior intelligence, did not read novels. Novels were for silly little girls and silly young women, with inferior education and inferior intelligence; any woman with a better than average education would not stoop to read such filth. Even though Mr. Thorpe has admitted to enjoying novels from time to time, Catherine still cannot think that a man such as Mr. Tilney could do so simply because she finds him to be vastly superior to any other man she has met, particularly Mr. Thorpe. This conversation between Catherine and Mr. Tilney is also following the scene in which Thorpe 'kidnapped' Catherine, thus Thorpe has been lowered greatly in her mind, so the fact of his having enjoyed a few novels has not changed her opinions. However, Mr. Tilney's response to Catherine's assumption is such that one might expect Austen to have made herself, and throughout the novel we can assume that Mr. Tilney, in many ways, is the embodiment of the author herself, and operates in fulfillment of many of her goals in this text. Mr. Tilney's response is thus:

The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid. I have read all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and most of them with great

pleasure. The Mysteries of Udolpho, when I had once begun it, I could not lay down again; I remember finishing it in two days—my hair standing on end the whole time.

(72)

The most obvious significance of Mr. Tilney's reply is the fact that he does, in fact, read novels and finds pleasure in them. He has established himself as a novel reader, and furthermore, as an unashamed novel reader. He makes no excuses for his having read Radcliffe, and additionally, thinks anyone who does *not* enjoy a good novel "must be intolerably stupid" (72). Here he has reversed the common role of novel reader and novel critic. He, the intelligent and well-educated young Oxford graduate, well-bred of a respectable family, not only *enjoys* novels but considers them a worthy employment. The non-reader, or critic, is thus situated, in Mr. Tilney's estimation, in a similar role to that society would designate for novel readers. This is not the first instance in the novel that Austen has created this sort of role reversal as, in her 'defense of the novel', she writes about the tedium of reading *The Spectator*, or the work of the "nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England," and compares them to works of Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth, novelists whose works are not only vastly more entertaining, but "in which the *greatest* powers of the mind are displayed," the implication being that their creations take more creativity and intelligence than the previously mentioned texts (22). Though Austen most likely does not intend to completely disparage journals, poetry, and history, she makes her point by being equally as stubborn and narrow-minded in her own overarching judgment, in her own critique of *other* genres, as critics have been in their critiques of her own.

To further clarify his opinion of novels, Mr. Tilney, with the interjections of his sister, relates his reading of *Udolpho*, which he had actually been reading aloud to his sister. When she was called away for five minutes, he was unable to wait for her, and continued to read the novel,

her novel, until its completion, while she was forced to wait. He is not even ashamed of having thus treated his sister, evidenced by his saying, “I am proud when I reflect on it, and I think it must establish me in your good opinion” (NA 73). Mr. Tilney’s pride, coupled with Catherine’s high estimation of his character, convinces her that she will never be ashamed of liking *Udolpho* again.

While Mr. Tilney has made his *own* opinion on the matter very clear, Catherine still insists that she had “really thought before [that] young men despised novels amazingly” (NA 73). Mr. Tilney’s response is that men read nearly as many novels as women, and that he himself has likely read many more than Catherine, and with pride. Whether this statement was true of the time cannot be surmised, especially because, as Austen notes, so many people hid their novel reading, and because there was no census taken to discover, in fact, the ratio of male novel readers to female novel readers. However, possibly Austen perceived this to have been the case—perceived men to be as likely to be avid readers as women. It is also possible that Austen only had Mr. Tilney say this as a contrivance to further substantiate her own opinions. However, the veracity Mr. Tilney’s statement is not so important as understanding that, at least in the world of *Northanger Abbey*, novel reading was not just for young women, but a pursuit enjoyed by all sorts of people from various walks of life, including clergymen of “four or five and twenty” who had been educated at Oxford (14).

While the narrative, dialogue, and characters of *Northanger Abbey* all serve to defend the reputation of the novel genre, and to repudiate its stigma, the most powerful defense of the genre is Austen’s work as a whole, and for that matter, all of her novels. The quality of her work inspired the admiration of critics, like the review I mentioned before in the *British Critic*, “The Customs and Manners of Common-Place People”, in which the anonymous reviewer makes his

contempt for the genre as a whole rather explicit, though he finds Austen's work to be refreshingly different, and particularly cites the realism of her work as it forgoes the improbable plots, settings, and characters that one so often encounters in other generic works (BC 243). Furthermore, he allows "that a good novel, such for example, as that at present before us, is, perhaps, among the most fascinating productions of modern literature" (244). However, this critic still contends that the novel is still not "quite so improving" as some other productions of modern literature (244). Thus I find it necessary to discredit him in the way Austen might have done. In writing of Austen, he cites a complete lack of imagination, and decides that "her characters, her incidents, her sentiments, are obviously all drawn exclusively from experience," and "she seems to have no other object in view, than simply to paint some of those scenes which she has herself seen," though he contends that she succeeds well in her depiction of these scenes (244). According to this critic, on the occasion that Austen *does* attempt invention, she "falls at once to the level of mere ordinary novellists" (245). Finally, he writes, "our authoress never dips her pen in satire," and further makes the mistake of saying that it is Mrs. Allen, rather than Mr. Allen, who needs to go to Bath for her illness, thus clearly informing anyone familiar with Austen's text that he has not done a very close reading of *Northanger Abbey* (245). One need only read *Northanger Abbey* and the accompanying "Biographical Notice of the Author" written by Austen's brother, Henry, to find this critic's claims to be unjust. According to Henry Austen, his sister, Jane, invented all her characters, and "drew from nature...never from individuals".⁵ Furthermore, a thoughtful reading of *Northanger Abbey* finds dozens of examples of satire, and it is hard to imagine a critic unable to see that. His failure to award Austen the proper accolades

⁵ Henry T. Austen, "Biographical Notice of the Author" in *The Norton Critical Edition of Northanger Abbey*, ed. Susan Fraiman (Boston: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), 194.

for her talent, combined with his own careless reading of her works, proves him to be as foolish a reviewer as any Austen might have created herself, and very much like Mr. Thorpe.

While the aforementioned critic was writing in 1818, only three years later in 1821, Richard Whatley, the Archbishop of Dublin, anonymously published a review in *Quarterly Review* entitled “Hardly Exceeded by Shakespeare” in which he begins with the sentiment that, “The times seem to be past when an apology was requisite from reviewers for condescending to notice a novel”.⁶ Rather than apologizing for reviewing a novel, he notes that novels are now “readily acknowledged by men of sense and taste” (Whatley 248). However, it is not his contention that there has been a change in public taste, but rather that the quality of the genre has been improved upon by authors such as Austen, whose works exemplify this “new style of novel” (249). The new novel is not wild, exciting, romantic, and unnatural, all of which were aspects of the younger genre, which, though entertaining for a time, “had lost much of their poignancy by the repeated and injudicious use of them” (249). Whatley rather praises Austen for her realism, as did the latter reviewer, and yet he also admits the extreme talent that it takes to write so realistically, with such detail, and while still serving to entertain. According to Whatley, it takes someone of extreme intelligence, “To invent, indeed, a conversation full of wisdom or of wit,” while it similarly takes a person of intelligent to so accurately portray the fool. Austen’s narration is conducted “with a regard to character hardly exceeded even by Shakespeare himself” (251). Whatley also notes other authors attempting to write realistically, and contends that their

⁶ Richard Whatley “Hardly Exceeded by Shakespeare” in *The Norton Critical Edition of Northanger Abbey*, ed. Susan Fraiman (Boston: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), 248. Hereafter cited in the text.

works have also helped to give merit to the genre, though he will allow none to be so wonderful as Austen herself.⁷

Clearly Austen had a vast impact on the public reception of the genre. Not only did her novels legitimize the genre, but they inspired followers, and she cleared the way for a different kind of novel, and similarly for a much better public opinion. Through her own works of fiction, she was able to prove that novels did not necessarily have to be silly things for silly young women. However, to do so, her works of fiction required a different take on the genre, and what she wrote was something entirely new, if not in its realism, then in the utter success of its realism.

II. Austen's critique of the novel/Transforming the novel

Austen wrote a novel to not only defend novels, but to participate in the debate. Her parody of not just Gothic novels, but of works by authors such as Frances Burney⁸, serves not simply to ridicule their works, but to examine those aspects that work in their favor and those that don't, and also to model her writing on what had already been done successfully, so as to relate her own works to the genre while recreating it from the inside, and to "explore a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction" (MTP 2).

As I discussed at length in Chapter 1 of this thesis, parodying the Gothic romance was one of the most prominent ways in which Austen used *Northanger* to explore fiction. In

⁷ The only author Whatley mentions by name, besides Austen, is Maria Edgeworth. Though he found her work to be similar in many ways to Austen's (not surprisingly because Austen was a reader of Edgeworth's), his contention remained that Austen was superior to *all* others within the genre.

⁸ Frances Burney's title character in *Evelina* undergoes similar adventures to *Northanger's* Catherine. After having grown up in the country, raised by a clergyman, she finds herself in London, rather than Bath, for the first time, experiencing all the joys and horrors of finer society. At a ball, she also attracts the attention of an unwanted suitor (compare to John Thorpe) and another whose attentions are much more agreeable (compare to Henry Tilney).

parodying the Gothic, however, Austen was not necessarily trying to distance herself from it, or reject completely that literary form. Ann Radcliffe, for example, was often very descriptive, painting scenes of the Italian countryside most illustratively, and also displayed a thorough literacy and knowledge of aesthetic theory, and aspects of her novels can be seen as precursors to the attention to detail and realism that would characterize Austen's works.⁹ Furthermore, Radcliffe's works entertained, and one need only read Austen's novels or her *juvenilia* to understand that to entertain was one of her greatest motivations in writing, and she would quite often write little stories with which to entertain her family, and her novels often contained family jokes to that particular purpose.¹⁰

As I have already mentioned, critics praised Austen for her realism, and this essentially new and characteristic aspect of Austen's fiction was no authorial accident. Austen's niece, an aspiring novelist, would send her aunt pieces she was working on and Austen would return the works with her own notes, which commented almost solely on what Austen thought would serve to make the work more realistic. She tells Anna not to introduce a Lord to a country surgeon because it would be unrealistic given their differing ranks.¹¹ This and that is said to be rather unusual, rather unlikely, and these characters would not have thought to go here but rather there. The only suggestions Austen makes that do *not* pertain to reality instead pertain to generic

⁹ I take this information from *The Italian*, in which a conversation between Ellena, Vivaldi, and Paulo take turns describing the scenery. Each of their responses is in keeping with aesthetic theory: Ellena notes the beautiful and picturesque, conventionally gendered feminine, while Vivaldi notes the sublime, masculine, and Paulo's nationalistic response is indicative of his inferior social class (Radcliffe 485, n.). Also in *The Italian*, Radcliffe proves herself well read by referencing travels and histories, as well as Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare.

¹⁰ For example, in *Northanger Abbey*, when Austen writes that Catherine's father was, "a very respectable man, though his name was Richard," she is referring to a family joke, as is evidenced by a letter to her sister, Cassandra, in which she similarly states a distaste for the name, writing "Mr Richard Harvey's match is put off till he has got a Better Christian name" (NA 5, n.).

¹¹ Annette B. Hopkins, "Jane Austen the Critic," *PMLA* 40, no. 3 (Jun 1925): 404, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/>. Hereafter cited in the text with the prefix "JAC".

conventions she would rather be done away with. She tells her niece not to have her lover speak in third person because, “it is too much like the formal part of Lord Orville” (“JAC” 404). The Lord Orville that Austen mentions is more than likely the hero of Frances Burney’s *Evelina*, which, though one of the better novels at the time, clearly had its drawbacks in Austen’s opinion, likely because the characters were somewhat overdrawn or drawn to form. Returning our focus back, for a moment, to the ‘defense of the novel’, while Austen *seems* to be defending another of Burney’s works, in this case *Camilla*, when Mr. Thorpe disparages the same work, Austen attributes justness to his critique—this even though she has previously called it one of the works, “in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed...in the best chosen language” (NA 23).

George Levine believes:

It is no accident, I think, that in the only direct parody in any of her major novels, Jane Austen includes explicit and unequivocal praise of the very fiction she seems to be mocking. She does not pretend to be writing a true history, but to be a novelist writing a novel. Rejecting solemnity, she praises novels—in the delightful excursus in chapter 5—as products of ‘genius, wit, and taste’ which afforded more ‘extensive and unaffected pleasure’.¹²

It is as if Austen completely and indefatigably defends these novels simply to contradict differing opinions, similarly displaying the same obstinacy of the novel’s detractors. I will discuss this idea further within this chapter. However, it is important to constantly keep in mind that Austen’s work, though not always realistic or honest, is promoting realism and honesty in fiction.

¹² George Levine, “Translating the monstrous: Northanger Abbey,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 30, no. 3 (Dec 1975): 336, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/>. Hereafter cited in the text with the prefix “*TTM*”.

Some of what Austen detested most about novels was the implausibility of their plots, and the extraordinariness of both their heroes and villains, and is noted as having found the idea of physical perfection in heroes and heroines of a story to be ridiculous ("JAC" 409). Included in J.E. Austen-Leigh's *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, and drawn up by Austen herself, is a "Plan of a Novel According to Hints Received from Various Quarters", the original of which even contained notes in the margins giving credit to those relatives and friends who contributed their ideas (408). Clearly the document is supposed to be humorous, as it echoes the common plot and character structures of baser novels. The opening line begins, "Heroine to be the daughter of a clergyman," and we clearly see Austen playing with this cliché in *Northanger Abbey* in which Catherine's father, while a clergyman, is lacking the qualities one might expect from the father of a heroine (408). This clergyman, according to the advice of Austen's friends and family, should be "[t]he most excellent man that can be imagined...without the smallest drawback or peculiarity to prevent his being the most delightful companion to his daughter," and furthermore, the heroine ought to be "faultless in character, beautiful in person, and possessing every possible accomplishment" (408). Clearly Catherine and her father fit neither of these stipulations, but the simple situation of his being a clergyman would have been enough to bring to mind other common formula, and to evoke certain expectations, which Austen rather quickly denies. Furthermore, according to Austen's sketch, the characters are supposed to converse "in long speeches, elegant language, and a tone of high serious sentiment" (408). While a vast deal of *Northanger Abbey*, and all of Austen's novels for that matter, concern themselves with language in general, and the use of language conventions in the novel, I will discuss that at greater length later in this chapter. However, it is important to note that the simple inclusion of the statement

above in Austen's sketch is evidence of her contempt for its construct, and it is true that, "No better compendium of directions on how not to write a novel could be well formulated" (408).

Austen also writes, in her "Plan of the Novel", that the majority of the first volume of the novel should be taken up with the father's narrative of his previous life ("JAC" 408). Austen's protestation of this literary banality is clarified in a letter to her sister, Cassandra, in which she writes a mock-critique of *Pride & Prejudice*:

The work is rather too light, and bright, and sparkling; it wants shade; it wants to be stretched out here and there with a long chapter of sense, if it could be had; if not, of solemn, specious nonsense about something unconnected with the story; an essay on writing, a critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparte, or something that would form a contrast and bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness and epigrammatism of the general style. (407)

The purport of Austen's statement is that the inclusion of "specious nonsense about something unconnected with the story" was completely extraneous, and in no way added to the delight of the reader, and rather had the effect of taking a work that was "light, and bright, and sparkling," and making it less so. Sir Walter Scott, a poet and novelist at the time, for whom Austen showed contempt more than once, is Austen's exemplification of the superfluity and vapidness of such insertions, though he was by no means their only perpetrator. In *Northanger Abbey*, the introduction of Eleanor Tilney's suitor and subsequent husband, though not quite the extensive superfluous detail one might find in other works, had to be related back to another point in the story. Though he played an important role in bringing about Catherine and Mr. Tilney's marriage, Austen finds it necessary to insert that, being "aware that the rules of composition forbid the introduction of a character not connected with [her] fable," she finds it necessary to

add that it was this man whose laundry list Catherine found in the black cabinet at Northanger (NA 173). The “rules of composition” Austen refers to, however, seem to be her own, and thus she serves to parody not only *other* works and forms of fiction, but her *own*. While it is not Austen’s contention that everything ought to be wrapped up neatly in the end, she does not believe in including irrelevant detail in her narrative for its own sake, and was rather known for her policy of “lopping and cropping” until a work could stand as a whole and consistent entity (“JAC” 408).

Austen’s “Plan of a Novel” next dictates that the father and daughter should be constantly travelling in the father’s efforts to protect her from “some totally unprincipled and heartless young man” whose unrelenting passion has put him in pursuit of her throughout her travels in Europe, to the point that she and her father are never able to stay in one place for very long. This device could easily come from any number of novels, given that heroines were, by nature, always being pursued. To add to the problem of her pursuer, everywhere the heroine goes she inspires more passion, and is constantly receiving marriage offers (at least so says Austen’s “Plan”). Here we have a typical Gothic convention—the heroine whose beauty is almost more fault than virtue—though in the end it inspires the love of the one man who will save her. Austen notes this convention at the end of her plan, where the heroine is saved in the nick of time by the hero himself, “who having shake off the scruples which fettered him before”—noted to have been “some excess of refinement”—has just set off in her pursuit (“JAC” 409). Radcliffe gives us an example of this type of heroine in Ellena Rosalba who, in the beginning of *The Italian*, inspires the love of Vivaldi, who was at first drawn to the “sweetness and fine expression of her voice,” though he could not even see her face, hidden beneath a veil.¹³ Of course, when

¹³ Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2001), 9. Hereafter cited in the text.

he pursues her, hoping for a glimpse of her face, she is modest and reserved, and when he finally does get an accidental view of her face, though only for a moment, it is a “countenance more touchingly beautiful than he had dared to image,” with features that “expressed the tranquillity of an elegant mind” (Radcliffe 10). Compare this image of Ellena to Catherine Morland, who is only “almost pretty” (NA 7). On Catherine’s first night in out in Bath, though she was “seen by many young men who had never been near her before,” she inspired no attentions whatsoever and was not even asked to dance (13). When Catherine finally overhears a slight compliment, it has the effect of greatly increasing her happiness and her mood, and she is more thankful for two men having declared her “pretty” than a “true quality heroine would have been for fifteen sonnets in celebration of her charms” (13). Catherine’s countenance barely inspires any attention at all, and while Isabella is no great beauty, it is her openness of character results in the attentions of men. The only two men Catherine attracts are Mr. Thorpe, interested principally in the money he expects her to inherit from Mr. Allen, and Mr. Tilney, whose interest is controlled if at all romantic, and is more inspired by Catherine’s character and her affection for him than her beauty or carriage. The idea of beauty or physical attraction inspiring anything more than lust is rejected by Austen, as is the idea that *anyone* should be so strikingly beautiful to inspire such raptures under so little acquaintance. Love at first sight does not exist in Austen’s world. Indeed, Catherine “almost forgot Mr. Tilney while she talked to Miss Thorpe” (19). And Mr. Tilney seemed perfectly willing to quit Bath for a week after making Catherine’s acquaintance, without even thinking to tell her of his departure. We see similar situations in Austen’s other works as well. Elizabeth Bennet is determined to loathe Mr. Darcy for his arrogance and conceit until halfway through *Pride and Prejudice*. And while Fanny Price loves Edmund Bertram for the whole of *Mansfield Park*, he has been her friend since she was ten years old. Emma

Woodhouse takes almost the entirety of the novel to discover her feelings for Mr. Knightley, and even finds herself attracted to someone else for a while. The only instance in which one of Austen's heroines might be said to have discovered love upon first sight is Marianne Dashwood, being rescued by the sentimental hero, Mr. Willoughby. However, he proves to be as equally a villain, and Marianne eventually finds herself with Colonel Brandon, for whom she shows little regard throughout the novel.

While *Northanger* plays with the idea of rewarding the good and punishing the bad, it doesn't go very far in either direction, with Catherine's 'happy ending' only so-so and Isabella's loss of James only a minor drawback rather than an increasingly painful affliction. Austen also doesn't take up the idea that "all the good will be exceptional in every respect" while the wicked will be "depraved and infamous, hardly a resemblance of humanity left in them" ("JAC" 408). Austen was opposed to the "meting out of justice regardless of human psychology and the law of cause and effect," and as a result, wicked characters in her other novels often end up on top, while the good are not always rewarded as they should be. While *Northanger* is not the greatest example of this statement because it is, as a parody, still aiming to reflect convention, Lucy Steele of *Sense and Sensibility* succeeds in marrying Robert Ferrars, though she is wholly undeserving of such an outcome. Furthermore, Edward Ferrars is disinherited for having affianced himself to Lucy, and yet his brother does not receive the same punishment, though he marries Lucy, and Edward's inheritance is not restored to him when his own engagement to that woman is broken. Moreover, Lucy's cunning and grasping obtain for her everything she could desire, including a husband with a similar love of money, fashion, and the 'finer things in life'. Likewise, Mr. Wickham's cunning in *Pride & Prejudice* secures him a very large sum of money from Mr. Darcy, though Wickham himself could not have foreseen such a fortunate event when

he ran away with Lydia. Austen's novels are full of instances in which her characters would not, by novelistic standards, be considered proficiently punished or rewarded. At that time in history, moral ambiguity like Austen's hadn't really been seen before, and the very last sentence in *Northanger Abbey* is a perfect example of her refusal to melt down the contents of a story into one simple and easy to digest moral truth. She writes, in closing, "I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience" (NA 174). Thus, while one could interpret all of her novels to have some sort of moral lesson, Austen will not clarify one specifically, and her reader is left to analyze the events and characters of her novel and create his or her own lessons in the same way one would do in one's own life with one's own experiences.

While Austen was lauded for her realism, and to an extent her works were realistic, especially her characterizations (though General and Captain Tilney are a bit flat), in actuality, "the guidelines according to which Jane Austen constructs her world are less 'reality' than the opposites of the position she is attacking; she implies an alternative ideal which requires an alternative literary program—the ideal of practical, rational sense."¹⁴ While Austen is not necessarily creating a work of fiction that could be termed 'realistic', she is creating a work that opposes the unrealities of the novel genre, and that argues for more realistic texts in general. The foolishness and unreality of some of the events of her novel are as such because she attempts to directly oppose the unrealities of others, while reality, in fact, lies somewhere between these extremes. However, there *are* points in the narrative, and in the characters, in which Austen finds this compromise, and gives examples of what, "are essentially the qualities that will

¹⁴ George Levine, "Realism, or, in praise of lying: Some nineteenth century novels," *College English* 31 (Jan 1970): 358, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/>. Hereafter cited in the text with the prefix "RPL".

dominate the realistic conventions of the nineteenth-century novel” (*RPL* 358). For example, “Catherine’s whole created being is a compromise between the extremes of adventure and joy and the extremes of suffering and misery” (358). Instead of countering extreme joy with extreme misery, Austen settles somewhere in between, in the realm of reality, or at least reality as it can be aspired to within the mode of fiction. The reason Austen is unable to achieve *true* novelistic realism in this novel is that it is simultaneously attempting a burlesque, and while a burlesque calls attention to that which is ridiculous and unrealistic, it does so by being ridiculous and unrealistic itself. It is more in what the novel purports to *say* about the works it discusses that is “based on a sometimes painful sense of verisimilitude.”¹⁵ Thus Austen suggests an alternative to the more implausible and sentimental aspects of fiction through her discourse with it rather than leading by example.

This leads perfectly into a discussion of Austen’s use of language and rhetoric in *Northanger Abbey* as a construct to further discuss the canon. As important as was the action in the works that made up the genre, the language that characterized the genre was equally important and equally conventional. Simple, everyday words, when consistently used in certain contexts, can take on other meanings, and rather than signifying that for which the word was originally intended, words can come to signify something extremely different in the language of a novel, that is, “rather than reflecting reality, [language] can create its own reality: what we see becomes defined for us by our manner of seeing,” and the mode through which we are seeing becomes defined “by the kind of language we draw upon to make our definitions” (Stone 31). Donald D. Stone warns that our own perceptions can become “enslaved in an unconsciously held

¹⁵ Donald D. Stone, “Sense and semantics in Jane Austen,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 25 (Jun 1970): 37, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/>. Hereafter cited in the text.

mental jargon”, that is, words can habitually take on a meaning and power of their own, and we passively accept them:

In the sentimental and Gothic novel, certain situations and key words had come to be used to evoke an automatic response in fictional characters. Ruined castles and abbeys, extinguished candles, precipitous mountains, and other ‘picturesque’ scenes called for expressions of horror and fear. In a similar way, various kinds of ‘pathetic’ situations brought an immediate response of tears and fainting. As sentimental and Gothic novels grew less and less well-written, the responses to these stock situations began more and more to have the character of a formula. Everyone responded in the same way.

Distinctions between individuals broke down, and the language they used grew increasingly vague and imprecise. (42)

With this background on the development of the language of novels leading up to the time when Austen was writing, it is clear that novelists, in general, became essentially lazy. Instead of paying attention to the words they used and the descriptions they gave, they used preformed words or phrases to evoke commonly occurring generic images or emotions. Thus the simple word ‘abbey’ would not simply connote buildings inhabited by monks or nuns, but since the English Reformation, would have held certain horrors because of its inherent ‘otherness’. The reason for so many Gothic romances having taken place in countries such as France or Italy was the fact of their being Catholic, and attached to Catholicism, in the minds of the English, was superstition, mystery, and intrigue. It is an abbess, in *The Italian*, who keeps Ellena locked up in the abbey to keep her away from Vivaldi, and it is a monk who is sent to kill her. However, switch the focus to an English abbey, and it immediately connotes ruins, a place almost lost in time, usually uninhabited except maybe by spirits. Images of overgrowth, crumbling walls,

cobwebs, and dark corners come to mind, and the presence of an abbey in a novel would have been a likely indicator of its being a Gothic romance, in which case one could expect the abbey to be much more than simply a building, to rather be the source of some sort of horror for the heroine. Catherine's expectations of *Northanger Abbey* are such that it is clear that, like actual readers of the Gothic romance, that her readings have also colored what she expects from the novel, and in this case, her own life.

The work most consider to have been the first Gothic novel is Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, which, though its events might now seem ridiculous, was first published under the guise of being a manuscript rather than a novel, and purported to relate actual events. The preface to the first edition begins thus:

The following work was found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529. How much sooner it was written does not appear. The principal incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of Christianity; but the language and conduct have nothing that savours of barbarism. The style is the purest Italian. (Walpole xv)

Walpole then suggests the possibility of its having been written by a monk during the Crusades. Walpole wasn't the only author to suggest his novel was a relation of fact or some old document, as Radcliffe wrote a prologue to *The Italian* in which she sets up the story to be a manuscript detailing the life of a assassin who has, in the course of the prologue, attracted the attention of some tourists, and who is said to be seeking sanctuary within the abbey's walls. This manuscript, supposedly dictated to a student from Padua, is said to have been related by the friar, who is first seen leading a tour group around the abbey at the beginning of the prologue. While, at the time, Radcliffe was already well known as a fiction writer and her name was printed on the

cover of the novel, she still borrowed the idea from Walpole that works of fiction should be written as if they were real, no matter how unlikely their events. However, Walpole's intention had actually been to deceive, and he even published his novel under a pseudonym, claiming himself only the translator. Because such novels purported a sort of reality, they succeeded in blurring the lines between reality and fiction, between reality and the supposed depiction of reality.

Authors eventually came to rely on the instabilities between the world of fiction and the real world. The purpose of metafiction is to expose these instabilities and also expose "the fact that novels are constructed through a continuous assimilation of everyday historical forms of communication" (*MTP* 5). Thus Austen's motivation is to expose the conventionalities of the genre, which she achieves by interacting with the language of sentimentalism and warring against it, through turning, "the humor of her mind upon the abnormal in fiction—bombast and pedantry, affectation, vanity, absurdity, falseness of feeling, and offense against sound reason. Thus she performed the serviceable act of pointing out to the world of the novel what ailed it" ("JAC" 425).

Isabella's rhetoric can be seen as representing that of the Gothic genre, the language of sensibility, while Mr. Tilney's character seems created to oppose the Gothic. Though he delights in reading Gothic novels, he is not one to, "attempt to impose a formula on his surroundings; he rather seeks to discern the essential or unique characteristics of each situation as he meets it," unlike Isabella, and at times Catherine.¹⁶ Tilney displays his mode of thinking critically and analytically when he compares a country dance to an emblem of marriage: "Fidelity and

¹⁶ Cynthia Griffin. "The development of realism in Jane Austen's early novels." *ELH* 30, no. 1 (Mar 1963): 42, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/>.

complaisance are the principal duties of both; and those men who do not choose to dance or marry themselves, have no business with the partners or wives of their neighbours" (NA 51). Mr. Tilney has the ability to think logically and rationally; he is a man of sense rather than sensibility. However, while Austen seems to be arguing in favor of Mr. Tilney's way of thinking, sense over sensibility, it can be argued that she is using him only to demonstrate the other extreme. It is Catherine who falls between Isabella and Mr. Tilney, who, through all Mr. Tilney's reasoning, refuses to consider marriage and dancing in the same light. Catherine "succumbs neither to the romantic jargon—with its resultant selfish behavior—of Isabella nor to the irony-overladen rhetoric of Tilney" (Stone 39). Stone argues that either one is ineffectual without the other. While Catherine, "learns to awaken from her momentary 'visions of romance' to a commonsensical view," she does not completely abandon her sensibilities (39).

Austen was working on *Sense and Sensibility* at the same time as *Northanger Abbey*. The characters of Marion and Elinor Dashwood can be likened to Isabella and Mr. Tilney, respectively, and are probably a better clarification of Austen's opinion on the subject. Marion, like Isabella, allows herself to be all sensibility, all affectation, while Elinor attempts a logical approach in all aspects of her life, even love, and her application of sense to matters that should be approached with sensibility makes her seem, at times, reserved and cold. The message Austen gives is that, "The conduct and language of 'good sense' may be overdone as much as the conduct and language of innocent sensibility. Jane Austen's assault is...upon the hardening of either view into a selfish, unmeaningful jargon" (Stone 40). Austen expresses this opinion by slowly educating each of the sisters in the ways of the other, until they each have become more balanced, for it is balance between the two modes of thought that Austen is arguing for, in both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*. However, in *Northanger*, rather than exemplifying

this idea through the education of Isabella and Mr. Tilney, it is through their educating Catherine that the novel achieves its ends.

Catherine seems to learn as much from Isabella as she does from Mr. Tilney, each of whom seems to recommend she think with more commonsense and operate less within the realm of sentimentalism, and yet each of whom, in their own ways, gives merit to her sensibilities. Isabella is the one to introduce Catherine to Gothic novels, which so color her sensibilities, and it is after Catherine's introduction to the Gothic that we first see the danger of them.

Isabella's language is that of exaggeration. After having waited for Catherine at the pump-room for less than five minutes, her exclamation upon Catherine's arrival is that she has been waiting "ten ages at least", calculated by Isabella to have been an entire half hour (*NA* 24). And when she speaks to Catherine of Mr. Tilney, she suddenly grows somber. Isabella tells her, "where the heart is really attached, I know very well how little one can be pleased with the attention of any body else. Every thing is so insipid, so uninteresting, that does not relate to the beloved object! I can perfectly comprehend your feelings" (25). This exclamation is severally important; first, in that Isabella has so fixed upon Catherine's love for Mr. Tilney, though the two have only met once, and Isabella has never met him at all; second, that by stating that she knows "perfectly well" how Catherine must feel, Isabella implies that she herself feels the same about someone else, and that that attachment has all the effects that Isabella has assigned to Catherine; and finally, the idea that Isabella could perfectly comprehend Catherine's feelings, that her sensibilities are so honed as to understand someone better than that person can understand herself. While the reader of *Northanger* sees Isabella's affect as humorous, she is mimicking the heroines of her acquaintance whose expressions of similar sentiments are taken quite seriously. While the reader doesn't yet know that Isabella imagines herself to be in love

with James Morland, upon being acquainted with him and observing his and Isabella's interaction, it becomes even clearer that what Isabella has said was simply affectation—Isabella only echoes the sentiments of Gothic heroines without truly feeling them herself, though it is possible she imagines that she truly does feel as she has said. It is just as when, later in the story, Isabella tells Catherine that she cares nothing for money, and would live on nearly nothing if only to have James the sooner. And yet, before this exchange and still after she has become engaged to James, Isabella has already been tempted by another, in this case, the exemplification of the Byronian hero that is Captain Tilney, whose "florid complexion and dark eyes" are remarked upon by herself (92). While her story to Catherine is that she refused to dance with him until she could see that nothing she could say could cause him to relent, the reader knows better, not because we witness more than Catherine, but rather because Catherine is so blinded by her affection for Isabella, and the reader is not so blinded. Isabella explains that Captain Tilney would not think of dancing with anyone else—a fact that, if true, would have been a compliment that Isabella could not resist. She also notes that, he being handsome, the whole room was watching them, and while her mode of expressing this fact would imply its undesirability, the reader's knowledge of Isabella's character is, at this point, such that it is clear she rather enjoyed the attentions of all involved, and subsequently enjoys positioning herself as a victim in Catherine's eyes so that she might be thought well of by everyone while still doing exactly as she pleases.

It is immediately succeeding the scene in the ballroom that Isabella receives the letter in which she discovers that James' living will be four hundred pounds, clearly a smaller sum than Isabella hoped for, and furthermore, that they will have to wait two to three years to marry. While James is able to understand the necessity of their waiting, even though he might not wish

it, he is not discontented. He has expected such a response and accepts it rationally. However, Isabella's response is highly dramatized, and once again she plays the victim. No amount of reasoning will work on her, and she is all sensibility and no sense. Isabella attempts to imply that Mr. Morland has not done all he could do for the couple, and has acted greedily. However, when Catherine defends her father rather than consoling her friend, Isabella immediately retracts what she has said, realizing that it will not inspire the sympathy she is after. Isabella then admits that the real reason for her vexation is having to wait two years to marry, and not the smaller than expected living James will receive. Her mother's response is exactly what Isabella would hope for, and is as the reader's response to Isabella would be if she were a heroine in a true Gothic romance and her sentiments were thus assumed to be in honesty: "[W]e perfectly see into your heart. You have no disguise. We perfectly understand the present vexation; and every body must love you the better for such a noble honest affection" (NA 93). After Mrs. Thorpe's statement, Catherine consciously *tries* to believe that the delay of the marriage is the only thing distressing her friend. We can assume that it is a combination of Catherine's innocence, not knowing anything of ill-nature upon her entering Bath, and her relationship with Isabella and Gothic romances that causes her to negate fact, reason, and appearances in favor of believing Isabella's sentiment to be true. Catherine displays her sensibility, and yet displays her want of sense.

While they were dancing, Mr. Tilney has already called the reader's attention to the fact of Catherine's lacking sense, or rather, allowing her sense to be overruled by her wanting to think well of others: "your attributing my brother's wish of dancing with Miss Thorpe to good nature alone convinced me of your being superior in good nature yourself to all the rest of the world" (NA 91). It is true, as Mr. Tilney says, that Catherine is good natured, and yet her good

nature is misguided without sense, just as Jane Bennett in *Pride & Prejudice* refuses to think ill of anyone, even Mr. Bingley's sisters who speak so ill of her behind her back, or even Edmund Bertram of *Mansfield Park*, who cannot see Mary Crawford's many faults, and even allows her urging to cause him to act out against what he knows to be his father's wishes.¹⁷ Throughout her six novels, Austen argues for not just sense *and* sensibility, but a sensibility that is guided by sense, rather than the other way around, for characters like Edmund Bertram, who try to rationalize decisions that have been made based solely upon their own feelings on the matter, are little better than characters who act with no sense at all, or characters like Catherine whose sense tells them one thing, and yet whose sympathies and generosities compel them to overlook their own rational urgings.

While it is partially Catherine's own good nature that urges her to think well of Isabella, part of this instinct can be blamed on her reading of novels. After Isabella tells Catherine that, even if she were "mistress of the whole world, [Catherine's] brother would be [her] only choice," Catherine finds herself comparing Isabella to a literary convention: "This charming sentiment [of Isabella's], recommended as much by sense as novelty, gave Catherine a most pleasing remembrance of all the heroines of her acquaintance" (NA 83). However, Isabella's sentiment is not recommended by sense but rather only by novelty, and Austen's inclusion of the word "sense" seems simply to call attention to a complete want of sense. A woman of sense would not utter such a statement, and would not choose to marry a man with no money, the imprudence of

¹⁷ Mary Crawford convinces Edmund to participate in the play being put on at Mansfield Park while his father is away, even though he knows his father would disapprove. He tries to rationalize his participation on the grounds that it would be better that he participate than for someone else to be solicited and brought in, the impropriety of which necessitates his participation as the lesser of two evils.

which Isabella claims would have no bearing on her decision.¹⁸ While clearly Isabella would not actually marry a man with no money, showing that she does in fact, have *some* sense, or maybe only showing her once again to be greedy, it is not so much Isabella's statement that is nonsensical, but rather Catherine's attributing it with sense that is so wholly ridiculous. Furthermore, Catherine's is blind to her friend's insincerity, though that is one matter that can be easily understood, as Catherine is not only young and naïve, but Isabella is often so self-assured in her sensibilities, that at times she seems to believe herself, and at this point Isabella's actions have not yet exposed her selfishness and inconstancy, but only a seemingly harmless penchant for exaggeration and frivolity. However, Catherine's likening her friend to a Gothic heroine is a completely different matter, and the fact that the simple resemblance between the two recommends her friend in her higher esteem shows that Catherine's reading has caused her to artlessly "[reconstruct] her own world in the terms of *Udolpho*" ("JAC" 412).

Not until Catherine has been some time removed from Isabella and Bath is she able to apply some sense to her Gothic fantasies, and it is Mr. Tilney who has this effect. When Catherine tells him of her suspicions of the General, he not only refutes their merit and proves the impossibility of anything having happened as she had suspected, himself having been a witness, he continues to explain the foolishness of her suppositions. After explaining the impossibility of his father's involvement in his mother's death, and that his father was afflicted by his mother's death, Catherine simply replies that she is "glad of it" for "it would have been very shocking" had the General not shown remorse upon his wife's death (*NA* 136). At this point, while her musings are proven to have been unfounded, Catherine does not see the fault in

¹⁸ As the reader learns later, Isabella is *not*, in fact, willing to marry a poor man—is not even content with four hundred pounds a year, a thoroughly tolerable living, not to mention James would receive more later from his inheritance.

them, does not see how foolish she has been. It is when Mr. Tilney gives the “Remember we are English” speech that Catherine feels how horribly misguided she was. Mr. Tilney thus remonstrates:

Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting? (NA 136)

He asks her to use her own intelligence and sense to analyze the situation, and insists that if she had, she could not have suspected such atrocious behavior from the General. By asking her to consult her *own* understanding, her own sense of the probable, her *own* observations, he implies that her suspicions were not motivated simply by the facts, or her own senses, but simply by the novels she has read. He also reminds her that they are English and Christian, thus in clear opposition to the world of the Gothic, if in no other way. The fact of her having applied Gothic ideas to an English society, especially when such novels are generally set in Italy, France, or other Catholic countries, only makes her seem more ridiculous. After Mr. Tilney’s remonstrance, Catherine’s “visions of romance were over,” as “Henry’s address, short as it had been, had more thoroughly opened her eyes to the extravagance of her late fancies than all their

several disappointments had done” (136). Thus it is Mr. Tilney who finally instills some sense into Catherine.

However, that same speech that inspired Catherine with some sense displays Mr. Tilney’s somewhat skewed sense. While Catherine has been led to expect atrocities, Mr. Tilney’s speech is entirely too forgiving and assumes that the English are superior beings and that nothing so horrendous could happen in such a country. The ridiculousness of such an opinion is highlighted by his mentioning that, “every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies,” which creates a sense of menace, for not only are people constantly being watched, but the presence of spies implies some *reason* for their being watched (NA 136). Furthermore, the presence of spies resembles a Gothic convention in which the hero and heroine are always being watched by some unknown entity with malicious intentions. It is not that Mr. Tilney uses too much sense, nor that he lacks sensibility, but rather that his own sensibilities, like Catherine’s, are somewhat skewed, and he uses logic to try to justify what he feels to be true. It is partially Mr. Tilney’s anger at Catherine’s presumption that causes him to paint such a positive picture of England, and it is clear that his portrayal is altogether *too* positive. The extremity of Mr. Tilney’s speech becomes even more apparent when Catherine learns that the General has, in fact, been vastly unjust, and that though he had not acted according to her suspicions, had Catherine employed only her sense, she might not have been so accurate in her suspicions of his character, as she turns out to be. Once again, Austen argues for sense *and* sensibility, and the two in the right measure, sense governing sensibility, instead of the reverse. Austen has made her point, that “Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe’s works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for”—a realization that Catherine comes to herself (137).

After her encounter with Mr. Tilney, Catherine is changed. She is able to acknowledge that even Eleanor and Mr. Tilney might have a few imperfections of their own, and that, though he might not be a murderer, the General was not perfect either (*NA* 138). She is able to learn from her lesson without dwelling on it, and is rather happy to have gained such good sense. And while memories of her own folly are still embarrassing, she understands the use of them in reminding her to think rationally. And yet it was not long before, “The anxieties of common life began soon to succeed to the alarms of romance” (138). Catherine became desperate to hear from Isabella, and was shocked at not having done so, as Isabella had promised, “and when she promised a thing, she was so scrupulous in performing it!” (138). While Mr. Tilney may have educated her sense *against* accusing others of maliciousness, it appears that it did not educate her in the reality of some people’s unscrupulousness. Though Isabella has yet, in the action of the novel, to solemnly keep a promise, Catherine has become convinced that Isabella can be trusted simply because she *has* promised, and Catherine cannot imagine someone making a promise she hadn’t every intention to keep.

When Catherine receives a letter from her brother, the second half of her education in sense is brought about. Though he dramatizes his feelings, imagining that he will never find another woman like Isabella, that it is, “a heavy blow” and that he will be “miserable forever”, he does Isabella’s character no unjust discredit (*NA* 139). Though it turns out Isabella was not truly engaged to Captain Tilney, as James wrote in his letter, she was operating under the assumption that she was or that she was soon to be so. Her treatment of James, whether its effect on him was so great as his letter purports, was unjustifiable and cruel, and her behavior was calculating. Mr. Tilney’s expectations of Catherine’s grief upon hearing of her brother’s disappointed hopes and the betrayal of a friend are somewhat misplaced. While Catherine feels sorry for her brother, she

does not feel herself quite so afflicted as she might have imagined. Mr. Tilney assumes that she must feel all that which a heroine might feel upon, not only losing a friend, but being betrayed—that Catherine must feel as if she has lost half herself, that there must be an emptiness that nothing could fill, and that all her wonderful memories of Bath must have been tarnished forever (142). However, Catherine finds that, surprisingly, she does not feel any of these things. Tilney notes, “You feel, as you always do, what is most to the credit of human nature” (142). Instead of allowing herself to feel the overwhelming affliction her brother seems to express in his letter, instead of allowing herself to make her emotions exaggerated in the way Isabella was wont to do, in the way of all the heroines of whom she had read, Catherine allows for her own natural sensibilities to come through, and is even surprised at their moderateness. Whether Tilney’s assumption that she should be much more downcast is his own intentional satirical commentary on the role of a heroine, or whether it is supposed to be a narrative parody in which Mr. Tilney is genuinely serious, either way it has the effect of pointing out the ways in which Catherine differs from the Gothic, more completely now than before.

When Catherine finally receives a letter from Isabella, it contains the usual artifice in the usual form. Isabella explains that she is to blame for nothing, and furthermore, that she cannot even imagine what might have made James so distempered. She flatters herself by mentioning Captain Tilney’s attentions, while simultaneously dismissing them as odious to her. And in between her discussion of the issues of greatest importance, she finds time to mention the current fashions. In short, Isabella’s letter contains nothing the reader or Catherine hasn’t heard before. Her artifice is neither weaker nor strong than before, and yet Catherine is finally able to see through it. While Austen writes that “[s]uch a strain of shallow artifice could not impose even upon Catherine,” the fact is that such shallow artifice, until very recently, had often imposed on

Catherine, and was the basis for her friendship with Isabella from the beginning (*NA* 150). Thus clearly Catherine has made strides in her abilities of comprehension and her employment of good sense.

While the events I have just related had the greatest effect on Catherine's perceptions, there are many other instances in the novel in which the language of Austen's characters expresses Austen's opinion that novels should be more realistic, and that to be realistic, they cannot be all sentimentalism and sensibility. There are situations in which Henry makes it clear that he "deplores Catherine's chaotic distortions of the real world; and he recognizes that distinctions must be preserved—distinctions among different individuals' ways of responding to situations and distinctions among the various possible uses and meanings for a word" (Griffin 42). While the former distinction is more abstract and is a theme occurring throughout the reader's acquaintance with Mr. Tilney's character, the latter might be exemplified in a conversation involving Mr. Tilney, his sister, and Catherine, in which Catherine makes the mistake of using the word 'nice' in a way Mr. Tilney cannot allow. She asks Mr. Tilney whether he does not think "Udolpho the nicest book in the world?" (*NA* 73). His response is mocking and yet playful, in his usual tone, and he clearly understands himself to be the superior intellect of the group. According to Eleanor, Mr. Tilney is "for ever finding fault with [her], for some incorrectness of language", and is now doing the same with Catherine (73). He would seek to correct Catherine's language, and that of his sister, but he only succeeds in making himself unpleasant to his sister, while Catherine never seems to comprehend her mistake. Within this same passage, there is another example of Catherine's misusing a word, in this case, 'amazingly', and Mr. Tilney is similarly mocking, and yet Catherine, again, does not catch on. Mr. Tilney would seek to establish order in the world, and yet he takes it too far, rejecting

colloquialisms and laying too much importance on one's words, even if he is perfectly capable to comprehend their import. Mr. Tilney is too much the man of sense.

Isabella first introduces Catherine to Gothic novels, and as a result, Catherine reconstructs her own world, at least her perception of her own world, in terms of *Udolpho* ("JAC" 412). And yet it is this skewed worldview that has her perceive General Tilney as the Montonian villain.¹⁹ While she was wrong in suspecting that he had some reason to feel guilty about his wife's death, when she found out his reason for sending her away from Northanger, she felt that, "in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty" (NA 170). Austen thus acknowledges that the sentiments contained in novels *can* be instructive, and furthermore, that they, in a sense, do represent a form of reality, though not quite the form Austen would hope. Furthermore, the novels Austen discusses only have the ability to instruct one's sensibilities, not one's sense, for Catherine's logical conclusion of the General's particular mode of villainy is wrong, and while her sensibilities may have told her he was suspect, had she equally as much sense, she would not have suspected murder but might rather have picked up on the clues suggesting the actual reason for his behavior. Thus Austen is recommending a better fusion of the two concepts, for which she has set her own novel as an example. Her contention is simply that, "The novel derives strength from realistic characterizations, conversations, and circumstances, a point *Northanger Abbey* very consciously reinforces by contrasting expectations of the unrealistic...with realistic action and dialogue among lifelike characters" (JAD 39). While Austen has clearly displayed her opinion of the importance of realism, it is not simply based on the idea that it makes for more entertaining novels, but also that it will serve to

¹⁹ Montoni is the villain in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

legitimize the genre. However, in the end of her argument the corrupting influence turns out not to be novels themselves, but rather the reading of such novels as displayed by Isabella and Catherine. Mr. Tilney allows novels to be simply entertainment, and though he could stand to learn something from their expressions of sensibility, *he* is in no way affected by his reading as are Catherine and Isabella. Thus the final contention of Austen's discussion of the genre is that, equally as important as the way novels are written, is the way they are read. She is arguing both for a revision to the genre as well as a revision in the way it is received, not just by critics, as I discussed before, but by the very people who were already enjoying novels at that time. While more respectable content is one half of the path to legitimizing the genre, the other half is a respectable audience.

III. Educating readership

Another reason novels, and novel readers, had such a bad reputation was because many of these young women had a tendency to read novels and only novels, and were unable to take pleasure in more 'worthy' pursuits such as histories and periodicals (NA 75). Catherine, taken to be the typical novel reader, thinks *Udolpho* to be the "nicest book in the world", while, in spite of wishing that she could find some pleasure in histories, regrets that she cannot, even if they are principally invention, and "invention is what delights [her] in other books" (73, 74). Austen was harsh in her censure of both histories and periodicals alike, noting that even the "nine hundredth abridger of the History of England" receives more than his just desserts, while the efforts of the novelist are undervalued and cast aside (22). Evidence of her contempt for histories, or at least popular histories, such as Oliver Goldsmith's *The History of England*, is not only displayed through Catherine's own dislike for the genre, but by some of Austen's *juvenilia*, specifically her parody of Goldsmith's history, written when she was fifteen (23, n. 3). The subtitle of Austen's

personal history of England, from Henry IV to Charles I, states the history to have been written, “By a partial, prejudiced, & ignorant Historian.”²⁰ The history contains very few dates, and Austen often inserts her own opinion, calling Henry V “amiable” and Elizabeth I as “wicked” (HE 198, 202). Returning our focus to *Northanger Abbey* and to the subject of periodicals, Austen particularly references *The Spectator*:

[T]hat voluminous publication, of which either the matter or manner would disgust a young person of taste: the substance of its papers so often consisting in the statement of improbable circumstances, unnatural characters, and topics of conversation, which no longer concern any one living; and their language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it. (23)

Clearly she has established herself to be separate from those people who, while professing the merit of histories and periodicals, persist in “decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist” (22). Furthermore, her portrayal of *The Spectator* that she gives in its condemnation might also be applied to the Gothic genre, full of “improbable circumstances” and “unnatural characters” (23). Thus, while she makes attempts to defend the novel genre as a whole, in actuality, Austen ends up positioning herself between two extremes, two opposing ends of the spectrum. If Austen cannot wholly defend the genre as it is—and clearly she cannot for, at various points in her narrative, she calls attention to any number of ridiculous conventions, and fashions her own novel as a better example of what a novel should be—then she cannot wholly defend its readers either. While *Northanger Abbey* might argue for a new type of novel, it also argues for a new way of reading—a more responsible and objective reading.

²⁰ Jane Austen, “The History of England from the reign of Henry the 4th to the death of Charles the 1st,” in *The Norton Critical Edition of Northanger Abbey*, ed. Susan Fraiman (Boston: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), 197. Hereafter cited in the text with the prefix “HE”.

Austen's first step in educating her readers might be the least obvious, and yet it is present throughout the text. We know that she herself was a reader of all sorts of novels, and was often entertained by Radcliffe's stories, thus we cannot take her parody to be a complete rejection and denigration of the works with which she is interacting. Austen rather uses her parody to remind readers, first, of the fictionality of the text they are reading, and secondly, to call attention to the fact that they have come to unquestioningly accept the genre in all its faults. By constantly referring to Catherine as a heroine in the first few chapters, and by comparing her life to one's expectations, that is, the reader's expectations, Austen is not only letting her readers know that there might be any number of different types of heroines, but she is calling their attention to the formulaic heroine so often employed. One cannot read *Northanger Abbey* without noticing Austen's many allusions to generic conventions. In the first chapter alone, she calls attention to a number of prescripts: the clergyman father whose wife died in childbirth; the enchantingly beautiful and accomplished heroine, inciting admiration everywhere she goes, and who enjoys reading books of information rather than invention; and a hero, whose origin, parents, and rank is unknown (NA 5-8).

To understand Austen's narrative, one *must* read objectively, and she affects this by constantly forcing her reader to step back through her use of various tactics of the metafictionist—primarily parody, as I have discussed throughout this thesis, but also 'surfiction', in which the narrator enters the text (MTP 14). "Parody, as a literary strategy, deliberately sets itself up to break norms that have become conventionalized," and we can see this throughout Austen's text, whether the parody is in the form of a burlesque and she over-emphasizes certain actions, events, or characters to the point of being caricatures of Gothic norms, or whether as a satire, in which she distinguishes conventions through her creation of counters that might be

equally extreme in their opposition to the norm, or that might serve as counters by refusing to be extreme at all (65). Austen's use of 'surfiction' is often also a sort of parody. She rarely, if ever, inserts herself, or her narrator, into the story simply for the metafictional effect. While just the act of presenting herself as author is enough to remind the reader of the text's fictionality, and furthermore, to distinguish her work from the works of Lewis or Radcliffe, Austen's commentary generally calls the reader's attention to some convention, various examples of which can be found throughout this thesis.

All that I have thus stated refers us back to everything I have said before. Every aspect of Austen's work that I have discussed in a metafictional light has the effect of distancing her readers from the text. They then read, not simply for plot, but to piece together a puzzle, to bring meaning to Austen's words. As I mentioned before, "rather than reflecting reality, [language] can create its own reality: what we see becomes defined for us by our manner of seeing," and the mode through which we are seeing becomes defined "by the kind of language we draw upon to make our definitions" (Stone 31). As novelists became lazy, certain overworked ideas, phrases, even simple words had to signify much more than they were originally intended to do. The simple word 'hero' conjures images of a virile, strong, and handsome man, a 'heroine' is dainty and stunning, with strikingly blue eyes and skin as white and delicate as paper.²¹ However, Austen uses the same words and yet gives them different meaning. She forces her readers out of their passive reading from the instant that they discover that neither Catherine nor Mr. Tilney are particularly handsome. And when the abbey contains none of the mysteries and intrigue one expects of an abbey, the reader feels much as Catherine does: foolish for having expected to find

²¹ Ellena in *The Italian* is described as having "dark blue eyes [that] sparkled with intelligence" (Radcliffe 10) while in *The Monk*, Antonia is described as having fair hair and fair skin, though she is Spanish (Lewis 12), and later Virginia is described as a "perfect beauty" (348).

that which must be rather unnatural and uncommon to human nature. Yes, the General is a villain in his own right, but it is not in the way of the Gothic, nor has he committed the atrocities of which Catherine suspects him. The General is a more realistic villain in that his actions, his mercenariness, might often be found in English society—his quiet and condemning demeanor not unlike that of Mr. Darcy, the hero of another of Austen's novels, and the General's pride nothing less than what one might expect of a man of his position, were he an actual person. He represents less the Gothic villain than the typical hurdle, often in the form of the hero's father, which the couple must overcome. In *The Italian*, while Vivaldi's father at first opposes his marriage to Ellena because of her circumstances, it is his mother who connives at having Ellena kill, and the Marchesa's confessor, Schedoni, who is to enact the plot. The General's crimes seem more to resemble those of Vivaldi's father, the Marchese, who eventually gives in and allows the marriage to take place, than the vindictive Marchesa or the corrupt Schedoni. The way in which *Northanger Abbey* is written draws upon the language of the Gothic, its different character roles, and its typical images, to create a text with some individuality, while simultaneously forcing the reader to throw away his preconceptions, to read each novel with a fresh attitude and with no expectations, and furthermore, to read it objectively, and to no longer allow the trite and imprecise language of baser novels to rely on convention rather than content.

Austen not only disparages the language of the Gothic and the way it has been passively accepted and integrated into people's ways of thinking, but more generally "portrays gothic romanticism as potentially dangerous to unformed minds," and does so through Catherine (JAD 40). The novels Catherine reads have "undue influence over her because her taste is yet immature and uncultivated," not simply because of their own content (40). Her suspicions of General Tilney are a direct result of her overactive and undiscerning imagination. Catherine has

convinced herself that the General “must have been in some way or other [his wife’s] destroyer” and is shocked that he should even enter a church with the knowledge of his crimes (NA 131). However, Catherine decided that it was conceivable that the General could have killed his wife and still felt no guilt in attending church, as “she could remember dozens who had persevered in every possible vice, going on from crime to crime, murdering whomsoever they chose, without any feeling of humanity or remorse,” though these dozens were in fact only characters in her novels. Catherine also believes that it is possible that the General’s wife is still alive somewhere, though imprisoned by him, and is “perfectly aware of the ease with which a waxen figure might be introduced, and a supposititious funeral carried on” (131). For none of these musings does Catherine consult her own knowledge of the world. She decides that the General might easily enter the church because fictional characters have done so, and because Radcliffe included a waxen figure in *Udolpho* that was so lifelike as to fool anybody, then Catherine imagines that such a thing must be possible. She actually looks to novels, and not even realistic novels, for knowledge about the world. Even Isabella is recommended in Catherine’s favor simply because she resembles a Gothic heroine. The General and Isabella are the two greatest examples of Catherine’s allowing her reading to affect her perception, and as I said before, Mr. Tilney and Catherine’s letter from her brother are the two greatest educating factors in her life. The two combine to wake Catherine from her foolish fantasies with regard to General Tilney and shed light on Isabella’s true character. While Catherine’s letter from James exposes Isabella’s imprudence and inconsideration, Mr. Tilney illuminates his father’s character and behavior.

While the reader has understood Isabella’s character from the beginning, the General has been a bit more of a conundrum, and until, at the end of the novel, Mr. Tilney becomes cognizant of his father’s designs on Catherine, the General’s behavior is rather questionable. His ominous

and harsh demeanor aren't in keeping with his behavior toward Catherine, who is treated with nothing but kindness, a greater kindness than he shows for his own children. In the end, Catherine finds that, though she might have been wrong in suspecting the General of murder, she was doing his character no injustice, as he proved himself to be just as cruel as she had thought him. Mr. Tilney, with all his good sense, never discovered the source of his father's behavior toward Catherine, and though he found it odd, he never seemed all that suspicious. The reader finds that, behind all her foolish Gothic musings, Catherine is sensible enough to suspect the General's true character, even if she does misjudge his actions. Therefore, Austen contends that Gothic novels need not be harmful when read with a discerning eye, and might even afford *some* incite into one's disposition, though they can by no means be unconditionally relied upon. It is the job of the reader to extract his or her own meaning from the individual fibers of the text, and not to indiscriminately bestow veracity on any information within a text. It is this common sense that Catherine lacks, and which Austen teaches her reader. Thus the text "involves the reader in an exercise of discernment between the imagined and the real, between the truly natural and what may seem so, just as it describes Catherine's experiences as exercises in the same discernment" (*JAD* 32).

Conclusion

Though it is easy to get caught up in Austen's story, to find oneself wondering what the future holds in store for her characters, what they will do next and where they will end up, what are their motivations, passions, expectations, her text has much more to offer than simply plot. Austen writes *Northanger Abbey* not simply to entertain her readers, though she succeeds superbly at achieving this end, but to relay a greater message. Each conversation between her characters, not simply the purport of what they are saying, but their choice of words, their expressions, allows Austen to tell her reader, not just about the characters themselves, but about her own opinions. Each event resembles some other that Austen would like to relate it to, that Austen questions or ponders on, and holds a number of details operating towards her own ends.

When Austen was writing *Northanger Abbey*, novels had not been around for very long, and were not yet a respected art form. While histories, plays, poetries, and *belles lettres* were praised by numerous periodicals, and their authors "eulogized by a thousand pens," the novel experienced a completely different reputation (*NA* 22). Its critics being "almost as many as [its] readers," and its readers being ashamed of their reading because of the ignominy associated with such a pastime, Austen perceived a serious problem in need of reparation (22). There was a societal tendency to disparage any and all novels and novel readers, making no distinction between the many different novels and their varying merits and levels of execution. Austen thus used *Northanger Abbey*, not only as her own experimental fiction, not only to discover her own voice, but express her own opinions on the subject of the novel as a genre.

Austen interacts with the canon in various ways, but particularly through her parody of the Gothic. In truth, the Gothic genre was comprised of many different novels, some vastly different, but many very similar. Its authors were not always creative, and relied on the

conventions of the genre to express themselves rather than their own talent and powers of description. As a result, readers became equally culpable in this disintegration of value, as they continued to read such novels, and allowed the conventions to be assimilated into their way of thinking. Simple words, when used in the Gothic context, came to mean so much more. An abbey became a place of mystery and intrigue, a nun or a monk often signifying a villain. These bastardized novels came to represent the genre as a whole, and their readers, foolish enough to read them, and further, to be educated by them, were equally shamed. However, not all novels were complete wastes of time. As is the case today, there were stand-outs and there were their subordinates. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen does not seek to defend the lesser examples of the genre, but the genre as a whole. The word 'novel' should not simply connote one or the other, and thus should not be praise nor disparaged. While at times, Austen appears to be praising the novel, even novels that she later derides, she is doing so to imitate the staunch absoluteness of the genre's critics. She exposes them as being extreme and indiscriminating in their critiques by being equally as extreme and indiscriminating in her praise, the foolishness of the former being exposed by the foolishness of the latter.

By parodying the novel's critics, Austen seeks to remove its stigma, and by parodying novels, Austen calls for higher standards. The writers of inferior works of fiction have been as culpable as their critics in the stigmatization of the genre. Austen recognizes their flaws and exposes them within her text. She chooses to create characters that have never been created before, that do not subscribe to some Gothic prescript, to demonstrate new (and better) ways of writing. At the same time, she also borrows from inferior writers to expose how unnatural are their works. When her characters behave as do Gothic heroes and heroines, they are seen as ridiculous within the context of her novel, where they are surrounded by a rather mild and

realistic English society instead of a sensationalized Catholic society. When her characters' speech resembles the speech of Gothic heroines, when it is highly sentimentalized, emoting deep anguish or great joy, their expressions are exposed as artifice, as being unnatural. In Austen's a novel, an abbey is rather a home housing a wealthy and patriotic English family—no nuns, no monks, no murder, incest, imprisonment. Gothic formulas cannot be applied to her work while maintaining credibility, and the house of cards their credibility has, until thus, been built upon, comes crashing down.

Austen's novel seeks to refashion fiction, not just its form, but its reception, its reputation. She asks its critics and readers alike to simply give it a chance, to expect more from it, while she asks its writers to meet or exceed their elevated expectations, to rise to the challenge, and thus defend works that deserve defending. Without writers like Austen, writers willing to break barriers and tradition, willing to experiment with new methods and completely throw out the old, the overblown, the trite, the genre would never have made steps forward, and novels in general might today have been looked at with the same disdain as so-called 'reality' television. The discourse of Austen's novel allowed for her expression of ideas that all of her novels realized. The quality Austen's works, their narratives, the roundness of their characters, all serve to effect the change that Austen hoped for so early on, a hope she expresses through that same narrative style and those same believable characters in *Northanger Abbey*.

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