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# Gothic Humour and Satire in Northanger Abbey

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# **Gothic Humour and Satire in** *Northanger Abbey*

**Nom : CHEVALEYRE**  
**Prénom : Aurélie**

UFR de Langues Étrangères

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Mémoire de master 1 professionnel - 12 crédits – Mention Anglais

Spécialité ou Parcours : Professorat des Lycées et Collèges

Sous la direction de Mme BERTONÈCHE Caroline

Membres du jury: Mme BERTONÈCHE Caroline et M. SCARPA Sébastien

**Année universitaire 2011-2012**





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**DECLARATION**

1. Ce travail est le fruit d'un travail personnel et constitue un document original.
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# Introduction

In this dissertation I set out to explore the Gothic Novel from a new satirical point of view and, more precisely, when it is turned into a parody. To achieve this goal, I have focused my research on Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*.

In order to understand the parody, we have to look at the genre we are dealing with: the Gothic novel. There is not one accurate definition of the Gothic novel since its purposes are different according to the various authors. Contrary to what the modern reader may think, the Gothic novel is not intended to terrorize the reader or at least it is not its main purpose. If the reader believes so, it is essentially because the genre is usually associated with supernatural elements which blur its genuine intentions. This quotation describes what any reader might expect to find in a Gothic novel: “*one of the powerful images conjured up by the words 'Gothic novel' is that of a shadowy form rising from a mysterious place: Frankenstein's monster rising from the laboratory table, Dracula creeping from his coffin, or more generally, the slow opening of a crypt to reveal a dark and obscure figure.*”<sup>1</sup> The Gothic novel is constantly misinterpreted by the modern reader who forgets the essential aim of this genre. There are similarities which cannot be ignored and which contribute to this misunderstanding. A great number of scholars and professors have identified and elaborated a list of generalities related to the genre. One can recognize a Gothic novel thanks to these characteristics<sup>2</sup> but it takes more time to understand the underlying meaning: the very “*essence*” of the Gothic novel. First Gothic novels were produced in the mid-eighteenth century. *The Castle of*

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1 Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of The Gothic Novel*, p. 3

2 “Cataloguing of stock characters and devices which are simply recycled from one text to the next: conventional settings (one castle – preferably in ruins; some gloomy mountains – preferably the Alps; a haunted room that locks only on the outside) and characters ( a passive and persecuted heroine, a sensitive and rather ineffectual hero, a dynamic and tyrannical villain, an evil prioress, talkative servants).” Ibid, p. 4



*Otranto* is considered to be the first one<sup>3</sup>. The eighteenth century is characterized by numerous changes; The enlightenment and the scientific discoveries it produced transformed the visions human beings used to have of themselves and of the external world. Philosophers agreed on the issue that men were endowed with reason. The Gothic Novel is born in a world which praised rationality and morality<sup>4</sup>. Those novels have similarities in their plots, narrative techniques and characters, but they often differ as far as literary intentions are concerned. The real purpose of the Gothic novel varies from an author to another but they do have a common goal which is to make the reader aware of the superficiality and the darkness of his own world. In her novels, Ann Radcliffe challenged the eighteenth century values to further establish their legitimacy. Her novels condemn irrationality and dismiss vicious conducts and behaviours. Kilgour suggests that Ann Radcliffe's Gothic stories tend to represent the world in a manichean way<sup>5</sup>. She differentiated good from evil and that way, Radcliffe imposed herself as a moralizing force.

What I will analyse is the way Jane Austen mocks Radcliffean Gothic literature by parodying her famous novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

Jane Austen was born in a family of seven children on 16 December 1775 in the village of Steventon in Hampshire. Her parents ran an all boys' school. She was very close to her sister Cassandra and wrote her numerous letters, thanks to which we now have an overview of the customs of the time and her opinions about them. In 1797, she completed *Pride and Prejudice* but did not manage to publish it, she started *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey* (at the time, entitled *Susan*). The family moved to Bath in 1801 after Jane's

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3 Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction*, p. 12

4 Fred Botting, *Gothic*, p. 21-23

5 Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of The Gothic Novel*, p. 8

father retired, then she moved to Southampton where she stayed for three years. She moved again to Hampshire where she completed her major novels and published the majority of them. *Pride and Prejudice* was published in 1813, *Mansfield Park* in 1814 and *Emma* in 1815. Although *Northanger Abbey* was the first chronologically to be written, it was published posthumously in 1818 by her brother Henry and is well known as the parody of the *Mysteries of Udolpho*.

In *Northanger Abbey* we find many known features of what characterizes her style: her satirical tone, her mastery of language and her wit. She is recognized by many others as an efficient observer of human nature and even considered as an Augustan by some.<sup>6</sup> She is often referred to as a satirist, although the genres of her novels are diverse. Her great achievement is that contrary to previous satirists like Pope or Swift, her goals are perfectly reachable and achievable. She does not describe society according to a moral standard as they used to do. On the contrary, she claims that virtue is at hand, ideals are achievable. Consequently, her novels are rather didactic. They show the reader what is superficial in people's attitude and how they can chase away this superficiality.

She wrote at a period when literature was starting to change. Scientific discoveries, revolutions in France and England, and the renewal of philosophical theories established that men were capable of reason. The Novel was a new genre. Contrary to the epic or the drama, the Novel places the hero at the heart of its reflections. For the first time, we have access to the thoughts and feelings of the hero.

Parody is the device Jane Austen used in the accomplishment of her satire. And such is

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<sup>6</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and The War of Ideas*, p. 1

our definition of the satire: “*A literary attack through ridicule, irony and parody, in verse or prose, and intended to arouse amused contempt for its target.*”<sup>7</sup> Sutherland defines the satire in his *English Satire* as the depiction of “*the follies and imperfections and faults of men and women*”<sup>8</sup>. He says that the main difference between a comedy writer and a satirist lies in the fact that the comedy writer's motive is not to give his personal opinion or judgement about the story he tells. On the contrary, the concern of the satirist is the morality of the object which is described, thus his novel is likely to be both partial and tendentious. He does not tell the story for itself but to make the reader aware of his judgement. “*For him the human shortcomings are not matters for pure contemplation; they must be exposed, held up to derision or made to look as hideous as he believes them to be.*”<sup>9</sup> Consequently, satire is aimed at criticizing something or someone not only to divert people but to make them aware of the author's judgement. The satirist wants the reader to realize that something is wrong in the way society acts and it is his first concern when he writes his satire. He wants to bring to light the shortcomings of society. I suggested here the definition of the type of satire I am going to deal with, taking into account the elements James Sutherland provides us with: satire is the critical depiction of society or of any object of society made by an artist whose aim is to enlighten the reader. In our case, *Northanger Abbey* is a satire in which Jane Austen portrays her society and questions its conventions and values. She mocks eighteenth century literature and more specifically Radcliffean Gothic literature.

We will also study *Northanger Abbey*'s parodic aspects: “*An amusing or mocking imitation of the style of a writer or speaker, usually requiring a basic parallelism of form and style and sudden unexpected twists. Parody often emphasizes and exaggerates typical features*

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7 Definition of Satire – *Oxford Companion for the English Language*

8 James Sutherland, *English Satire*, p. 4

9 Ibid

*of the original text or performance in order to make a point and, whether friendly or hostile, exploits any possible weakness.*”<sup>10</sup>. Jane Austen imitates the style of Ann Radcliffe, by creating similar characters, adopting the same tone in a plot which resembles the original. The popularity of *Northanger Abbey* is in fact mainly due to the success of its parody. Austen managed to incorporate humour in the Gothic Novel, using satirical irony abundantly and transforming a virtuous and talented heroine into a mediocre and plain girl. Indeed, we will see in this dissertation that Catherine Morland is an anti-heroine whose story is a good pretext to mock Ann Radcliffe's heroine. Austen kills two birds with one stone as the protagonist also enables her to achieve her first authentic satire.

This dissertation will therefore be centred on the idea that Jane Austen wrote her parody in order to satirize the Gothic novel and introduce humour in the genre. To some degree, she also intended to satirize the Novel, considered at the time as very fashionable but sometimes threatening to achieve a proper education.

The form of the novel will be first analysed as it is mainly through language and style that a novel by Jane Austen has to be studied. The way narration works, the way the heroine is depicted and the various genres of the novel help us to understand how the novel is constructed. *Northanger Abbey* is indeed multi-faceted and its originality is part of what makes Austen's novel humorous. I will also study the satire, through the study of genders and genres, the importance given to literature and the Gothic affiliation of some characters. Finally, I will examine the parody in a stricter way, linking *Northanger Abbey* to its model, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

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<sup>10</sup> Definition of Parody from *Oxford Companion fo the English Language*

**Part 1**  
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**Formal Mystery**

## Chapter 1 – The Art of Narration

Very often *Northanger Abbey* is studied as a parody and its other aspects are rather neglected. It was long relegated at the end of the list of Jane Austen's best works: “*Northanger Abbey is in some respects the Cinderella among Jane Austen's novels*”<sup>11</sup>. It is true to say that *Northanger Abbey* is not the first novel to be mentioned when talking about Jane Austen. As far as I am concerned, I had never heard about the novel until I became interested in the Gothic genre. What I am willing to show is that this book does not deserve this treatment, for it is on many aspects a brilliant novel. It is not possible to accurately say what Jane Austen's first intention was when she wrote the book. This is why my first analysis will focus on the form of the novel as a mystery.

In *Northanger Abbey*, the narration is quite uncommon. Generally, when the reader is confronted to a novel, he does not really expect the narrator to talk to him or confide in him. When we are dealing with confessions or with a diary, the narrator may talk to his reader directly, but it is not likely to happen in a novel. Jane Austen breaks the rules and makes her narrator intervene in the diegesis more often than not. The narrator dispels the illusion of the novel by intervening several times to comment, explain details and give clues as to the ending. At first, we do not really know whether the narrator is a character of the story or not. The narrator addresses the reader quite naturally: “*it may be stated, for the reader's more certain information lest the following pages should otherwise fail of giving any idea of what her character is meant to be; that her heart was affectionate [...] and her mind about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is*”<sup>12</sup>. The narrator here mentions the reader as if it were quite natural to do so. The reader can infer that he is dealing

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11 David Blair, Introduction of *Northanger Abbey*, p. 1

12 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 2

with an extradiegetic narrator, as he or she does not intervene or take part in the story as a character. Yet, no information is given about this mysterious narrator who keeps telling his opinion and giving advice to the reader. Whoever it is, he is nevertheless omnipresent in the progression of the story. So we have here a mysterious narrator, who writes the story of someone he does not seem to be related to. The effect it produces is the impression that there is no barrier between the author and the narrator. They are one and the same person. I also tend to believe that the author is a true Gothic storyteller. What I mean by true is an author who does not want to mock the genre but, on the contrary, a narrator willing to tell a Gothic story. It is as if Jane Austen were pretending to be another writer, asking us to trust her. She is creating a close relationship between the narrator and the reader to make her narrator legitimate and trustworthy.

Narration is all the more uncommon as some words which would normally not be “allowed” in the diegesis are here said very naturally. For instance, the word “heroine” is constantly employed, like in these two quotations: “*But when a young lady is to be an heroine, the perverseness of forty, surrounding families cannot prevent her. Something must and will happen to throw a hero in her way*”<sup>13</sup>; “*here fortune was more favourable to our heroine*”<sup>14</sup>. A reader would not expect the narrator to tell him who the hero is and why he is a hero. It is part of the literary contract linking the author and the reader. The reader has to guess who the hero is on his own. I suppose it to be very rare that one would find the word “hero” or “heroin” in a novel because it is not supposed to be that explicit. This is a device Austen uses to create a distance between the reader and her heroine<sup>15</sup>. She does not want the reader to identify to Catherine Morland. On the contrary, she wants him to laugh at her and

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13 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 1

14 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 3

15 Henry N. Rogers « *Of Course You Can Trust Me!* »: *Jane Austen's Narrator in Northanger Abbey*.

feel superior to her. By telling “this person is my heroine” the irony is strong. She implies that without this piece of information no one would believe Catherine is the heroine because the appearances all seem to be against her.

Moreover, the evolution in the narration is very transparent. The narrator always intervenes between each twists and turns of the plot to make the reader aware that something new is happening. This device is as unusual in a novel as the previous elements we have just seen. The frontiers between events are usually blurred by subtle transitions. Usually, the narrator of the novel tells his story and the reader will notice where the action starts and where it ends thanks to the clues given by the narrator. But it is implicitly made, through the use of words, breaks in the rhythm and other devices. Sometimes a close analysis is required to really see how the story is divided. Here there is no transition, the narrator says that something will happen, and that this event needs our focus. For instance, as Catherine is about to meet Henry Tilney, the narrator tells us: “*and now was the time for an heroine*”<sup>16</sup>, and later: “*every young lady may feel for my heroine in this critical moment*”<sup>17</sup>. It is as if the narrator felt the need to guide the reader in his reading. This device is aimed at fooling the reader. Because the narrator announces that something is to happen, the reader expects something great but he soon realizes that it is not that important. This is what happens after reading: “*now was the time for an heroine*”. Catherine goes to her first ball, she is nicely dressed, we expect a man to talk to her or compliment her, but all that happens is: “*Not one, however, started with rapturous wonder on beholding her, no whisper of eager inquiry ran round the room, nor was she once called a divinity by anybody*”. The expected event is missing from the page, it is as if the narrator was playing with narration and with the reader. Another instance is the use of

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16 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 2

17 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 10



negatives forms which emphasizes the fact that “nothing” happens. As a consequence, the reader is toyed with. By the creation of these false announcements, the narration or meta-narration announces a new prospect to him: “you're reading a Gothic novel, trust me”. Therefore Austen's narration reinforces the character's naiveté and her blatant disabilities as a heroine.

## **Chapter 2 – A Heroine in Disguise**

The heroine is a mystery, just like the narration and the genre of this novel are mysteries. The narrator keeps repeating Catherine is a heroine, but she is what we can call an anti-heroine. She misunderstands everything, gets excited and ultimately becomes disappointed. She believes herself to be educated and sensible because she reads books and yet she is the one who is fooled by everybody. She is supposed to look like Emily St Aubert from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* but they clearly have nothing in common. Emily St Aubert is endowed with special gifts, for instance, poetry writing and drawing, whereas Catherine is not able to draw anything and certainly cannot write. The irony of being called a heroine is that she believes herself to be one. Because she reads Gothic novels, Catherine is transported in an imaginary world where she is a heroine as well. But there is nothing heroic about her story: she leaves her parents, visits Bath, visits Northanger Abbey, goes back to her parents' and gets married. The narrator has a definition of “heroic” which is rather odd as it does not fit usual standards. The traditional hero is someone who has a special gift to accomplish heroic purposes: ingenuity, courage, brilliance. For the narrator, the hero is someone who has been educated through books: “*But from fifteen to seventeen she was in training for an heroine; 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.”<sup>18</sup> Such a heroine is also supposed to have a special ability for the arts: “Her greatest deficiency was in the pencil – she had no notion of drawing – not enough even to attempt a sketch of her lover’s profile, that she might be detected in the design. There she fell miserably short of the true heroic height”. The definition given by the narrator is, of course, ironic - a definition Emily St Aubert is the illustration of. The narrator needs to explain why Catherine is a “heroine” so he justifies his claim by saying that although Catherine does not excel at drawing, she reads enough books to be a literary heroine. Jane Austen is mocking two elements in just a few lines: she mocks the heroine of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and mocks the link between heroism and literary education. Catherine herself believes the definition given by the narrator since she is convinced that she reads enough books to be able to have the main role in one. She thinks she knows what to expect and how to react in similar real situations she reads in novels. For instance, the reader has access to Catherine’s mind when she wants to explore the Abbey’s secret chamber:

The erection of the monument itself could not in the smallest degree affect her doubts of Mrs Tilney’s actual decease. Were she even to descend into the family vault where her ashes were supposed to slumber [...] Catherine had read too much not to be perfectly aware of the ease with which a waxen figure might be introduced, and a supposititious funeral carried on.<sup>19</sup>

Catherine expects to find horrid things in these apartments because it is precisely the kind of details she notices in her novels.

The theme of the heroine is highly problematic in this novel because we cannot know whether Catherine is an actual heroine or not. She is not endowed with traditional attributes.

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18 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 1

19 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 24

She is an anti-heroine because she succeeds in spite of her disabilities and her shortcomings. She is the main protagonist of the story and the story revolves around her. Moreover, even though the appearances seem to be against her, she does accomplish heroic acts. Throughout the novel, Catherine avoids traps: she does not become superficial like Mrs Allen, she defeats the villains embodied by the Thorpes and the Tilneys and eventually gets married with the man she loves. Marilyn Butler argues that *Northanger Abbey* must be considered as a novel first, before being read as a parody<sup>20</sup>. The story of Catherine leaving her native village and her parents to go to Bath, her progression towards reason and awakening constitute a fictional story on its own, which can exist beyond the humorous aspects: she “*may not be a 'heroine' in the idealized mode of sentimental fiction, but she is a very good heroine at the level which matters*”<sup>21</sup>.

What is implicit is that Catherine is supposed to represent the typical lady of the eighteenth century. Jane Austen mocks the idea according to which young ladies have to read Gothic novels for their education. She makes a clear criticism of Mrs Radcliffe's novels and the effects it produces on girls at that time: “*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.*”<sup>22</sup> Society thought it was fashionable to read Gothic novels because it was entertaining, well-written, moralizing and showed the true face of human nature. Nevertheless, Jane Austen does not agree with that. For her, the Gothic Novel does not provide a faithful representation of life. One of the goals she probably had in mind when writing *Northanger Abbey* is to provide a true representation of the human mind. It also foreshadows the importance of remembering that literature is not

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20 Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and The War of Ideas*, p. 178

21 Ibid

22 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 25

real life. There is a reflection about literature itself and how it influences people, especially young ladies.

### Chapter 3 – The Questions of Genre

Like many Gothic Novels, *Northanger Abbey* is not characterized by only one genre, it is multi-faceted. The various genres we are going to examine are very efficient in making the novel amusing.

The first genre we can associate *Northanger Abbey* with is, first and foremost, the Gothic Novel and this for several reasons. First, the title tells us something about the atmosphere of the novel. Like many Gothic stories, the title mentions a location. In such novels, the main location is never a mere house or a random construction, it is meant to be gloomy and mournful. That is why the characters often visit places like castles, abbeys, churches or monasteries. Here we are presented with an abbey, which soon becomes a cold and dark place where any creaking sound becomes the cry of the worst creature in the characters' imagination. Incidentally, it is what Henry Tilney suggests when he teases Catherine about her mental representation of his home: “*And are you prepared to encounter all the horrors that a building such as “what one reads about” may produce?*”<sup>23</sup> It is even more explicit in this quotation: “*Will not your mind misgive you, when you find yourself in this gloomy chamber – too lofty and extensive for you,[...]its walls hung with tapestry exhibiting figures as large as life, and the bed, of dark green stuff or purple velvet, presenting even a funeral appearance. Will not your heart sink within you?*”<sup>24</sup> The name of the place inevitably conveys mystery and darkness, especially because these locations are usually

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23 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* Chapter 20

24 Ibid

where the murders and the horrid events take place.

In the story, Northanger Abbey is also a mystery for Catherine because it is where Henry's mother died in mysterious circumstances. The place is made even more mysterious because of this tragic event. The plot in itself can be interpreted as Gothic. They are several tendencies one can notice in the majority of the Gothic novels and it is precisely what Jane Austen is mocking. The young heroine is naïve and from a modest family and the villain is a seducing aristocrat. Social difference is a recurrent theme in Gothic novels. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine is the archetype of the Gothic heroine in the sense that she represents the perfect victim. She is a young, naïve girl from a family of ten children, the daughter of a clergyman from the countryside. She meets greedy villain, thirsty for her fantasized fortune such as the Thorpes and ends up trapped in the abbey by the ultimate villain. General Tilney represents the archetypical Gothic villain, a predator who reminds us of a powerful, proud and violent Montoni in Ann Radcliffe's fiction, or even a Dracula – although *Dracula* was written later than *Northanger Abbey*.

The plot is also undoubtedly Gothic in the sense that the order established by society and by the family sphere is no longer real and the hero has nothing to rely upon. In *Northanger Abbey* Catherine is confronted with sinful characters, vices and selfishness. She comes from a peaceful atmosphere and arrives in Bath, where people never act innocently, for they always have some kind of motivation. When she eventually leaves Bath and arrives in Northanger, she realizes how dark the human mind can be. She discovers in one of her brother's letters how her friend Isabella broke her brother's heart by deceiving him with Captain Tilney. She also finds out that General Tilney, after he graciously invited her, chased her away from his abbey, because she had no money and no title. At the end, order is restored and the words of moral wisdom from the author inevitably follow: “*I leave it to be settled by*

whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of his work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience.”<sup>25</sup> Here Austen's recommendations echo Ann Radcliffe's in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*: “O! useful may it be to have shewn, that, though the vicious can sometimes pour affliction upon the good, [...] and that innocence [...] finally triumph over misfortune!”. It reminds us of Richardson's *Pamela*. His eponymous heroin is rewarded at the end of the novel after she resisted her master. Ann Radcliffe and Richardson have the same intention, that is to encourage their readers to always be virtuous as villainy is in the end always punished and virtue rewarded. Jane Austen's fiction also resembles a Gothic novel in that way. Like in Radcliffe's novels, virtue triumphs over villainy. Isabella Thorpe for instance, plays with James Morland's feelings and her crime is punished when Captain Tilney uses her like she used James Morland.

But the novel is multi-faceted and thus it is not a purely Gothic. The reader will not be deceived by the story of *Northanger Abbey*. If it resembles so much a Gothic Novel it is because it is a parody. All the elements are chosen to resemble Gothic Fiction but they are actually meant to mock *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and other novels written by Ann Radcliffe. In Gothic novels, characters are usually expected to make a morbid discovery. I have in mind late Gothic novels: Egaeus<sup>26</sup> discovering Berenice's teeth in a box, Basil<sup>27</sup> unveiling Dorian's hideous portrait in the attic or Clara Wieland<sup>28</sup> finding someone in her closet. When Catherine Morland gets up in the middle of the night awakened by a storm, she seems to be driven by strange forces to open the wardrobe, such suspense is unsettling. In *The Romance of the Forest*<sup>29</sup>, Adeline finds a strange manuscript recounting the story of a former captive of the

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25 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 30

26 Edgar Allan Poe, *Berenice*

27 Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

28 Charles Brockden, *Wieland*

29 Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*

Abbey in which she is herself held prisoner<sup>30</sup>. Jane Austen makes her own passage hilarious since Catherine's discovery is an inventory of linen:

Her quick eyes directly fell on a roll of paper pushed back into the further part of the cavity, apparently for concealment, and her feelings at that moment were indescribable. Her heart fluttered, her knees trembled, and her cheeks grew pale. She seized, with an unsteady hand, the precious manuscript [...] Her greedy eye glanced rapidly over a page. She started as its import. Could it be possible, or did not her senses play her false? - An inventory of linen, in coarse and modern characters seemed all that was before her!<sup>31</sup>

Like many novels of the eighteenth century, Austen's work mocks the sentimental novel. Jane Austen teases Ann Radcliffe's style from beginning to end. Yet she does not totally reject the model she is mocking. Indeed, by mocking Ann Radcliffe's moral substance, one cannot be sure whether she praises virtue or villainy. This issue is actually what is put into question in her own work. Throughout the novel, Catherine is not always virtuous and Austen tends to “reward filial disobedience”. Nevertheless, Catherine Morland does triumph over villainy. She may not have been so virtuous in the beginning, because she was mistaken, naïve and ignorant, but at the end, she has an epiphany and she becomes enlightened and capable of reason. She may not have performed any noble or heroic deed or sacrificed herself but she did defeat the villains.

Another genre could characterize *Northanger Abbey* and it is as such compatible with the Gothic novel: the *Bildungsroman*. Indeed, the novel recounts a girl's journey from childhood to womanhood. By meeting different people and going to different places like Bath's Upper rooms, Pump Room and Northanger Abbey, Catherine learns about life. It is part of her training as a lady and as a heroine. Henry Tilney is like a mentor to Catherine, she

30 J.M.S Tompkins, *Ann Radcliffe and Her Influence on Later Writers*, p. 146

31 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 22

admires him and wants to impress him. Isabella is a kind of inspiration as well. It is her who tells Catherine what she should read and how she should behave with men. Catherine discovers what friendship really is, Isabella is like a sister to her, showing her how to act in society and teaching her how to become a lady. She also discovers that sometimes people are not what they seem to be and that they act out of pure spite. Her most important achievement is when she understands that reality does not necessarily resemble the reality she read in books. Isabella Thorpe makes Catherine read Gothic novels as they are very popular amongst young ladies. This kind of books is very appealing to Catherine because it is scary and erotic: villains try to seduce young ladies and young ladies manage to resist them. It is a kind of fantasy for her to become the heroin of a Gothic novel and get trapped in a castle. Unfortunately, she is so absorbed in her reading that she cannot distinguish what she reads from reality. When she eventually realizes it, she experiences a kind of epiphany as all the pieces seem to come together like a jigsaw puzzle. She understands why everybody was suddenly showing interest in her. Catherine also discovers love and the story ends with her wedding like in most of Jane Austen's novels.

Finally, the aspect of the genre that interested most people when they read and studied *Northanger Abbey* was the satire. It was meant to satirize behaviours, conventions and literature as we will see in our second part. We can call it a satire because it is a distorted portrait of society, whose aim is to enlighten the reader by showing its defects. Jane Austen denounces superficiality, through the portrait of Mrs Allen, greed and avidity through the portraits of the Thorpes and naiveté through the portrait of Catherine. In her novels, Jane Austen often deals with specific behavioural features like pride in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, or cupidity, hypocrisy and jealousy in *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility*. It



is also a satire criticizing literature. As I said before, this novel is a reflection on literature. Catherine Morland is the archetype of the dreamy lady who wants real life to resemble the novels she reads and who wants to model her attitudes and thoughts on the characters she reads about. It is not just a Gothic novel or a parody. *Northanger Abbey* is an essay on literature.

**Part 2**  
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**Satire and Women**

## Chapter 1 - Genre & Gender

What I am going to analyse in this part is the way the sexes and the relation between one gender and another is depicted in *Northanger Abbey* and how conventions and practices at the Regency Period are satirized by Jane Austen. Genre and gender in *Northanger Abbey* are treated in an interesting way often making the novel more comic. The term “gender” could be easily dividable into several genres when we look at the novel, as if it was meant to illustrate the diversity of women during the Regency Period. Jane Austen does not create an opposition between men and women but between a woman and other women. The term woman encompasses different definitions, ranging from the inexperienced innocent lady about to become a woman, to the diabolical conceited woman. Between these two extremes we have many other portraits of women.

Mrs Allen epitomizes the superficiality of the eighteenth century, the interest in appearances and representation. The Regency period is a period when people attached great importance to fashion. Rules had to be respected: women had to wear gloves when going outside and it was required that they owned several dresses for different activities and that they wore them accordingly<sup>32</sup>. As the textile industry was prosperous, designers experimented new styles and shapes and they ended up with some original fabrics such as the “*cage crinolin*”. It is a century of fashion and appearances: Women wanted to wear fashionable dresses, made of muslin and flannel as a proof of their taste and wealth. About fashion, the narrator says: “*Dress is at all times a frivolous distinction, and excessive solicitude about it often destroys its own aim.* »<sup>33</sup>.

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32 Daniel Pool, *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew*, p. 214

33 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 10

Mrs Allen is wealthy and has taste, but the only thing she she can talk about is dresses. At the Lower Rooms, she cannot help but judge the other women's dresses and comment on them. She cares about nothing else and the emphasis is put on this obsession: “*with more care for the safety of her new gown than for the comfort of her protégée, Mrs Allen made her way through the throng of men by the door*”<sup>34</sup>, “*Mrs Allen congratulated herself, as soon as they were seated, on having preserved her gown from injury*”<sup>35</sup>, “*what an odd gown she has got on! - How old fashioned is it!*”<sup>36</sup>. She embodies the superficial old lady whose taste for fashion makes up for her lack of sensibility and intelligence: “*Mrs Allen was one of that numerous class of females whose society can raise no other emotion than surprise at there being any men in the world who could like them well enough to marry them. She had neither beauty, genius, accomplishment, nor manner.*”<sup>37</sup>

When a chance is given to her by the narrator, to act and show brilliance, she inevitably fails. Catherine wants an excuse for not going to Claverton Down because she wants to see Eleanor. She desperately hopes that Mrs Allen will understand it and forbid her to go. But she does not understand Catherine's signs and fails in her role as a chaperon: “*Catherine's silent appeal to her friend, meanwhile, was entirely thrown away, for Mrs Allen, not being at all in the habit of conveying any expression herself by a look, was not aware of its being ever intended by anybody else*”<sup>38</sup>. A.M. Duckworth considers Mrs Allen as a comic version of the villainous chaperon, like Mrs Jewkes in *Richardson's Pamela*, which reinforces the burlesque image we already have of Mrs Allen.

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34 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 2

35 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 2

36 Ibid

37 Ibid

38 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 9

Despite her brief appearance, Catherine's mother, Mrs Morland, is important to analyse as she is a sort of anti-heroic mother. About her, the narrator writes in the opening chapter: "*Her mother was a woman of useful plain sense, with a good temper; and, what is more remarkable, with a good constitution*", "*instead of dying in bringing the latter into the world, as anybody might expect, she still lived on [...] to enjoy excellent health herself*". The narrator purposely insists on her well-being and her health as opposed to her expected death, as she is a parodied version of the mother figure in Gothic novels. What is implied is that to create a Gothic heroine you need to have the initial story result from a great misfortune such as a mother who dies or who catches a lethal disease obliging the heroine to cope with a horrible step-mother. It is necessary to create a heroine who has known death and the sorrows that ensue in order to become stronger and determined. If the novel were a true Gothic novel Mrs Morland would be dead.

Nevertheless, she is a typical mother-figure. Her benevolence, for instance, is noteworthy: she worries about Catherine's departure and at the end when Catherine is rejected from Northanger. She tries to make her feel better by keeping her busy: "*Mrs Morland watched the progress of this relapse; and seeing, in her daughter's absent and dissatisfied look, the full proof of that repining spirit to which she had now begun to attribute her want of cheerfulness*"<sup>39</sup>. Although she manages to hold her family together and proves herself to be a loving mother who encourages her children and loves them whatever they choose to become, she fails to give Catherine any form of common sense.

Eleanor Tilney is also a character who could have been cast in a Gothic Novel. She is actually the true heroine of the novel. By her upbringing - her mother died from a mysterious disease, her father was a tyrant, but her story ends well. Like Radcliffe's Emily - she would

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39 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 30

make a perfect heroine for a Gothic Novel. Concerning her attitude and behaviour they only lay greater emphasis on this status of hers, as they present Eleanor as an example of virtue and purity:

Miss Tilney had a good figure, a pretty face, and a very agreeable countenance; and her air, though it has not all the decided pretension the resolute stylishness of Miss Thorpe's, had more real elegance. Her manners showed good sense and good breeding: they were neither shy, nor affectedly open; and she seemed capable of being young, attractive, and at a ball, without wanting to fix the attention of every man near her, and without exaggerated feelings of ecstatic delight or inconceivable.<sup>40</sup>

She is, by opposition to Mrs Allen and Isabella Thorpe, the very example of virtue; she is innocent and modest, beautiful and sensible.

We also have a portrait of the educated woman conveyed by the narrator's presence. Jane Austen is inevitably unveiled through her writing. She is a witty woman who can illustrate the shortcomings and the defects of society faithfully enough to amuse her reader. She represents the intellectual woman who cannot be misled by the superficiality of people and their hypocrisy. What she is trying to say is that women and men have secrets and act out of their own interests. The novel was not really written with such a moralizing aim but more of a didactic one. She mocks human defects to show that they are intellectually empty. She denounces the open sexuality of her contemporaries and criticizes the Prince of Wales' behaviour<sup>41</sup>. But another facet of Jane Austen's is unveiled by the reading of her novel. She feels the need to intervene in the story-telling more than she is expected to. But her interventions are not only meant to tell her story they are also aimed at telling her opinion. The story suddenly becomes an essay in which Austen expresses her views on literature.

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40 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 8

41 *Jane Austen's Society*

Chapter five is a striking example. The chapter starts in the theatre with Catherine and Isabella. The narrator relates how the two girls share confessions and become friends and, all of a sudden, the narrator changes subject and decides to praise the form of the Novel:

If a rainy morning deprived them of other enjoyments, they were still resolute in meeting in defiance of wet and dirt, and shut themselves up, to read novels together. Yes, novels; for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel-writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding—joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. Alas! If the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? I cannot approve of it.<sup>42</sup>

This extract is actually well-known under the name: *The Defense of the Novel*<sup>43</sup>. What is said in this short essay is that books do not have to be read because critics say they had to be read. What Austen tends to say is that novels are works of art in any circumstance and that they deserve to be read as much as any other book: “*there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them.*”<sup>44</sup> She was very attached to the literary value of novels and although she criticizes the genre for its unachievable goals, she nevertheless praises the novelist and his creation.

Several critics attempted to explain the underlying meaning of such a chapter on literature within the story, formulating the theory that Jane Austen was establishing a literary contract between the reader and the author. Others critics argue that she is simply showing

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42 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 5

43 Appendix 1

44 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 5

what one can do with language.<sup>45</sup> The woman we have in front of us is thus a witty woman who wants to reform literature and change the vision people have of novels.

Austen also deals with the other gender and offers several facets for the same gender.

I will start with Henry Tilney. Henry Tilney is a gentleman, he is humble, educated, cultivated and has very good manners. As we saw in the first part, he is like a mentor for Catherine. He frequently guides her in her learning of life and teaches her how to use language more appropriately. For instance, in chapter fourteen, Henry mocks Catherine's excessive use of the word "nice":

“ 'I am sure,' cried Catherine, 'I did not mean to say anything wrong; but it is a nice book, and why should not I call it so?' 'very true', said Henry, 'and this is a very nice day, and we are taking a very nice walk, and you are two very nice ladies. Oh! It is a very nice word indeed! - it does for everything.' ”

He is charming but he is not a womanizer. He quickly understands that Catherine is in love with him and he plays with her to see how far she can go. Nevertheless, it is all pretty innocent, he never tries to rush her or openly talks about feelings. He likes Catherine's innocence and naiveté, and takes pleasure in letting her believe that *Northanger Abbey* is the way she imagines it. He describes a Gothic abbey, full of mysteries and secrecy where a dead body might be hidden and chains on ghosts can be heard at nights: “*and are you prepared to encounter all the horrors, that a building such as “what one reads about” may produce? - Have you a stout heart? - Never fit for sliding panels and tapestry?*”<sup>46</sup>. Moreover, Henry Tilney does not hold grudges against Catherine when she implies that his father might have committed the murder of his mother. On the contrary, he lectures her and tries to understand why she was mistaken and how to resolve her mistake. Thanks to him, Catherine realizes that

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45 Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction*, p. 160-171

46 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 20



she has substituted the reality she lives in with the reality she has discovered in novels: *“the visions of romance were over. Catherine was completely awakened. 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.”*<sup>47</sup>

John Thorpe is the complete opposite of Henry Tilney. He is uncouth, proud, conceited and boring in Catherine's eyes. The narrator thus creates a strong ironic opposition between Mr Tilney and Mr Thorpe when he is taking Catherine to Northanger Abbey. Unlike Mr Thorpe, Mr Tilney: *“drove so well—so quietly—without making any disturbance, without parading to her, or swearing at them: so different from the only gentleman-coachman whom it was in her power to compare him with!”*<sup>48</sup>. On many occasions, Catherine tries to avoid him but he always manages to come back which makes him the story's millstone: *“the extreme weariness of his company, which crept over her before they had been out an hour, and which continued unceasingly to increase till they stopped in Pulteney Street again, induced her, in some small degree, to resist such high authority, and to distrust its powers of giving universal pleasure”*<sup>49</sup>. She tries to avoid him, and when she has to cope with his hubris, she does not argue with him since he is of no interest: *“it was finally settled between them without any difficulty, that his equipage was altogether the most complete of its kind in England, his carriage the neatest, his horse the best goer, and himself the best coachman.”*<sup>50</sup> He fails to interest her with his proud behaviour so he tries to find something else: Blaize Castle. But this attempt at showing Catherine a true Gothic castle will fail. Ultimately, all his efforts make him look ridiculous.

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47 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 25

48 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 20

49 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 9

50 Ibid

He is not a nasty character in the sense that he does not hurt Catherine but his intentions are not innocent. Like Isabella, he is a predator who wants to get Catherine's money: "*To escape, and as she believed, so narrowly escape John Thorpe, and to be asked [...] by Mr Tilney, as if he had sought her on purpose!*"<sup>51</sup>. Catherine seems to be escaping him like a prey would escape his predator.

When the reader understands John Thorpe's true intentions, it is interesting to note that although they are more than obvious, his intentions are never uncovered by Catherine: "*Thorpe's saying very abruptly, "Old Allen is as rich as a Jew – is not he? [...] And no children at all? [...] A famous thing for his next heirs; He is your godfather, is not he?"*"<sup>52</sup>.

Some scholars go even further by calling him the "*creator of mayhem*"<sup>53</sup>. What they suggest is that he is the one who creates chaos amongst the other characters. First, his violent behaviour, is visible in the scene of the carriage<sup>54</sup>: "*Thorpe only lashed his horse*"; "*Mr Thorpe only laughed, smacked his whip, encouraged his horse, made odd noises, and drove on*"; "*Thorpe defended himself very stoutly*"; "*"It is all one to me," replied Thorpe rather angrily*". Austen unveils the facets of a man who eventually proves to be more menacing than just what he seemed to be. Then, this very scene illustrates the theory of "*the creator of mayhem*". Catherine was about to go for a walk with Eleanor and Henry Tilney but the Thorpes managed to convince Catherine that because of the weather and the mud, the Tilneys would cancel the walk and not come over to the Allens. Mr Thorpe then takes Catherine to Blaize Castle in his carriage, after him and Isabella strongly insisted for her to go. On the road to Blaize Castle, John Thorpe sees Eleanor and Henry walking and says quite casually: "*Who is that girl who looked at you so hard as she went by?*". Catherine suddenly realizes that the

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51 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 10

52 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 9

53 Johanna L. Thaler, *The Mayem of John Thorpe and the Villain*.

54 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 11

Tilneys were outside, walking while she was going to Blaize Castle with Mr Thorpe. She begs him to stop, but he does not, and Catherine ends up ashamed of herself and the Tilneys disappointed by her behaviour. This scene is a turning point as it is the first attempt by the Thorpes to separate Catherine from the Tilneys, and John Thorpe is the main cause for this misunderstanding.

Other scholars will argue that John Thorpe is Austen's villain by way of a buffoon.<sup>55</sup>; a “*grotesquely comic anti-villain*”<sup>56</sup>. Him and General Tilney, at first, seem to be Gothic villains but throughout the reading of the novel we realize that they are certainly “*ambitious and vengeful braggarts*”<sup>57</sup> but they are not dangerous. They are made ridiculous by the situations. General Tilney did not kill anyone as he is supposed to, and John Thorpe ultimately commits no crime, contrary to Captain Tilney who is the true villain of the story, has all the characteristics of the Gothic villain and actually commits a “crime”.

## Chapter 2 - Realism and Literature

Some scholars pointed out that, quite ironically, Jane Austen chose to write realistic novels whereas the popular genre of her times was the unrealistic Gothic novel.<sup>58</sup> This very irony is the reason why *Northanger Abbey* seems to be a compromise. *Northanger Abbey* is, in a sense, a realistic novel. Catherine Morland evolves in a world which is our own: we discover with her the landscapes, society, and real English locations. Fullerton, Catherine's birthplace, is a small hamlet located in the county of Hampshire in England, Bath is obviously a real place, that thousands of tourists visit every year. Blaize Castle also exists and is situated in Bristol. For the twentieth-century reader, the novel is a true testimony of what Bath looked

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55 Nancy Yee, *John Thorpe, Villain Ordinaire: The Modern Montoni/Schedoni*.

56 Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*

57 Nancy Yee, *John Thorpe, Villain Ordinaire: The Modern Montoni/Schedoni*.

58 Kirsten A.Hall, *Mrs. Radcliffe's Imitator: When Catherine Creates her own Mysteries*

like. Catherine visits the “Upper Assembly Rooms”<sup>59</sup>, the “Lower Rooms”<sup>60</sup>, and mentions the “Crescent”<sup>61</sup>. We are instantly transported back to eighteenth-century Bath. With Austen, the reader becomes acquainted with the premises. It makes the story more realistic and credible. Jane Austen has a special gift for giving colour to the texts she creates. In most of her books, she manages to recreate the local colour by giving accurate descriptions of the landscapes and of the places her characters are evolving in:

Her conviction of being right, however, was not enough to restore her composure; till she had spoken to Miss Tilney she could not be at ease; and quickening her pace when she got clear of the Crescent, she almost ran over the remaining ground till she gained the top of Milsom Street.<sup>62</sup>

They determined on walking round Beechen Cliff, that noble hill whose beautiful verdure and hanging coppice render it so striking an object from almost every opening in Bath.<sup>63</sup>

There is realism in the locations but also in the characters. The customs are real, the master of the ceremony of the Bath Upper Rooms did exist and introduced Henry to Catherine as it would have happened in the late eighteenth-century. The most interesting touch of realism is when she mentions real books and real authors. As we know, characters in *Northanger Abbey* make explicit references to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Monk* and *The Italian*. Undoubtedly, the novel is realistic, Jane Austen is concerned with details and verisimilitude and achieves her goal in providing a faithful portrait of society. Nevertheless, being a Gothic parody, *Northanger Abbey* deals with the supernatural and the artificial. We are in a Gothic novel in the sense that the novel challenges reality and Catherine Morland

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59 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapters 2, 3, 5 and 8

60 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapters 3, 5, 11

61 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapters 5, 9 and 13

62 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 13

63 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 14

believes herself to be evolving in a Gothic novel. And, Gothic novels tend to explore a supernatural world characterized by dark forces. They are meant to represent the obscure side of the human soul so they tend to be slightly realistic in that sense. The point of contact between realism and the supernatural enables Jane Austen to educate her readers and teach us about human nature, using *Northanger Abbey* as a “an instrument of enlightenment”.<sup>64</sup> She tries to tell us that the “ideal reader” is the one who will surpass everyone she has been portraying in the novel. As a Gothic novel would divide the world into two categories, good and evil, *Northanger Abbey* makes a typology of people and makes us understand what the world really looks like. She also shows us that the novel fails when trying to teach us what the reality is. By writing *Northanger Abbey* she proves that one can be fooled like Catherine or like the reader who is fooled by this fake Gothic novel. She raises several debates revolving around literature such as the problem of reality in novels. She also points out that novelists were highly criticized. They were considered inferior, for the great majority of them were women.<sup>65</sup>

Her famous *Defense of the Novel* in chapter five highlights the problem at that period which was that many novelists were criticized for the lack of depth in their works.<sup>66</sup> Novels were considered to be stories with no interest. At the time, philosophy praised reasoning and the novel was starting to become dangerous<sup>67</sup>. It was now possible for novelists to circulate such ideas as moral relativism, feminism or other revolutionary ideas. Novels which did not tackle revolutionary subjects were considered shallow by some critics. Austen argues that any novel is a work of art and that it deserves to be read as any other production would.

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64 Melissa Schaub, *Irony and Political Education in Northanger Abbey*

65 Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction*, p161

66 Appendix 1

67 Marylin Butler, *Jane Austen and The War of Ideas*, p170

*Northanger Abbey* includes a satire on literature and mocks the conventions of the sentimental novel.<sup>68</sup> The sentimental novel was a popular genre in the eighteenth century: “*it concentrated on the distresses of the virtuous and attempted to show that a sense of honour and moral behaviour were justly rewarded. It also attempted to show that effusive emotion was evidence of kindness and goodness*”<sup>69</sup> Catherine's effusive emotion may be an evidence of kindness and goodness but the narrator tends to show that it is rather an example of her naiveté and her ignorance. As to the theory of kindness and goodness in the expression of emotions, Isabella Thorpe's hypocrisy enables us to discard it quite easily:

It is not the want of more money that makes me just at present a little out of spirits; I hate money; and if our union could take place now upon only fifty pounds a year, I should not have a wish unsatisfied. Ah! My Catherine, you have found me out. There's the sting. The long, long, endless two years and half that are to pass before your brother can hold the living.<sup>70</sup>

The novel also mocks the educational aspect of novels recently discussed by Dr Johnson. Novels were seen as “*lectures of conduct*”, aimed at “*acquiring the right moral percepts and sentiments*”<sup>71</sup>. What Catherine learns from books does not help her gain any new sense of reason. Unconsciously, they get her confused, blurring the limits between reality and fiction.

By showing us an immoral society, Jane Austen tries to educate her reader and shows the conduct that needs to be adopted to be sensible and lucid: “*Jane Austen has progressed by a series of nons*”<sup>72</sup>. From Fullerton to Bath and Northanger, Catherine is confronted to the diversity of people and behaviours. She is showing, throughout the novel, what society looks

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68 Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction*, p. 163

69 Definition of the Sentimental Novel by the Cudden Dictionary

70 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 16

71 Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction*, p. 163

72 Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, p. 81

like and she is sanctioning its shortcomings. By depicting Mrs Allen she says that superficiality means ignorance. Isabella is the embodiment of amorality and vanity.

The novel we are dealing with depicts different aspects of the society in which Jane Austen lived. Since *Northanger Abbey* was approximately written in 1799, the period we are interested in is the late eighteenth century. At the time George III was king, from 1760 to 1801 and his son, the Prince of Wales was about to take the throne. This has its importance because the way society acted at the time was highly influenced by the attitude and the behaviours of the Royal family. According to historians, it is not a coincidence that adulterous relationships became so frequent in people's lives<sup>73</sup>. The king's son, the Prince of Wales, was well-known for his numerous mistresses. As the king set an example for his people, it is probably why so many noble men could afford to be unfaithful. It became a sort of fashionable behaviour that Jane Austen criticized and that she implicitly evoked in her novels. In *Northanger Abbey*, this behaviour is reflected in some of the Gothic affiliation of certain characters.

### **Chapter 3 - Gothic Affiliations**

Henry's brother and father are not really what we can call gentlemen. If we were in a Gothic Novel, Henry's father, General Tilney, would be the archetype of the Gothic Villain. At first Catherine is fascinated by him and his manners :

Soon after their reaching the bottom of the set, Catherine perceived herself to be earnestly regarded by a gentleman who stood among the lookers-on immediately behind her partner. He was a very handsome man, of a commanding aspect, past the bloom, but not past the vigour of life; and with his eye still directed towards her, she saw him presently address Mr Tilney in a familiar whisper<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> *Jane Austen's Society*

<sup>74</sup> Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 10

He first appears to be a gentleman: *“their father's great civilities to her – in spite of his thanks, invitations, and compliments”*<sup>75</sup>, *“that he was perfectly agreeable and good-natured, and altogether a very charming man, did not admit a doubt, for he was tall and handsome, and Henry's father”*<sup>76</sup>. Then gradually, through Catherine's imagination, he becomes the Gothic villain of the story. General Tilney invites her to visit his Abbey and spend time with his son and daughter. She seizes the opportunity to come over because she will then be allowed to see a true Gothic Abbey like she read about in her novels and she will have the opportunity to spend more time with Henry and Eleanor, his sister. But when Eleanor tells the story of her mother to Catherine, the latter makes up foolish causes to unreal effects: She is so absorbed in her Gothic universe that she feels the need to act like a detective who, thanks to clues, can infer that the mysterious death of Henry's mother is actually a murder, General Tilney being of course, the main suspect: *“of her unhappiness in marriage, she felt persuaded. The General certainly had been an unkind husband. He did not love her walk: - could he therefore have loved her? And besides, handsome as he was, there was a something in the turn of his features which spoke his not having behaved well to her.”*<sup>77</sup>

Although the Gothic nature of General Tilney appears to be fictitious, his true nature is interesting to analyse in relation to Austen's satire. He epitomizes the kind of people who are greedy for money and who cannot help but to show off their fortune and talk about other people's possessions: *“He was enchanted by her approbation of his taste, confessed it to be neat and simple, thought it right to encourage the manufacture of his country; and for his part, to his uncritical palate, the tea was as well flavoured from the clay of Staffordshire”*<sup>78</sup>.

What General Tilney attempts to do is to flatter Catherine, to enquire about the Allens' fortune

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75 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 16

76 Ibid

77 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 22

78 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 22



– he thinks Catherine is Mr Allen's godchild - and about the possibility for Catherine to be welcomed in the family so he would become acquainted with the Allens. Ultimately, Austen imitates Ann Radcliffe by punishing the villain. When General Tilney discovers that Catherine has actually no money and that she is not related to the Allens, he chases Catherine away from Northanger Abbey. Nevertheless, Henry Tilney disapproves his father's behaviour and meets up with Catherine in Wiltshire where her family lives in order to propose to her. General Tilney ends up with nothing and loses a son and a daughter.

Captain Tilney, his son, the true Gothic villain, is an illustration of the behaviours which the period of the Regency started to give birth to, in other words, a form of satyr within the satire. He attracts women and obtains what he wants from them. His behaviour is reminiscent of Choderlos de Laclos's Valmont. He knows quite well that Isabella Thorpe is engaged to James Morland but he flirts with Isabella anyway.

For centuries, women have been a symbol for evil and vice. This is due to Catholicism and the Bible's Genesis. Eve is considered to be the first sinful woman to have lived on earth and it is suggested that she gave the forbidden fruit to Adam. I would be tempted to describe Isabella Thorpe as the essence of the diabolical woman, the Eve from Garden of Eden. Her beauty is praised by many and suggests purity and, at the same time, danger. Catherine admires her for her natural beauty, her graceful walk and her knowledge of books and men. Isabella's mother insists on the fact that she is the most beautiful in the family: “*the tallest is Isabella, my eldest; is not she a fine young woman? The others are very much admired too, but I believe Isabella is the handsomest*”<sup>79</sup>. The use of superlative forms is not coincidentally redundant: she possesses a kind of sickly beauty. Her beauty is Isabella's major asset and weapon to obtain what she wants from people and particularly from men. She does not fool

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79 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 4

anyone when she pretends to be pure and innocent. She knows too much about men and about their desire to be considered as an innocent girl: *“I shall not pay them any such compliment, I assure you. I have no notion of treating men with such respect. That is the way to spoil them”*<sup>80</sup>.

She gives discourses on friendship and on what it implies *“There is nothing I would not do for those who are really my friends. I have no notion of loving people by halves, it is not my nature. My attachments are always excessively strong”*<sup>81</sup>. She becomes Catherine's friend for one purpose: that Catherine is the sister of Isabella's fiancé, James. Later, she introduces Catherine to her brother, John Thorpe, hoping they would make a good match, this match being of course, only a motive to obtain the Morlands' fortune through marriage. Her relationship to Catherine is rather peculiar too. It is Isabella who introduces Catherine to Gothic literature. She is thus the reason why Catherine becomes so obsessed with novels. It seems to me that she gave Catherine a forbidden fruit, a Gothic novel, the source of Catherine's future illusions and confusions.

Isabella is diabolical in the sense that she deceives people around her, she acts out of greed for money and hurts people who trust her. Like Eve, she is ultimately punished for her crimes. She flirts with Captain Tilney as she is engaged to James Morland, thinking that she will make a better match with him as the Tilneys seem to be quite a wealthy family. She thinks she has him wrapped around her little finger but Captain Tilney does not have any intention to get married.

As a consequence, Isabella is the type of woman Jane Austen would make fun of, a woman acting as if she were untouchable and in a position of power even though she is just as naïve as the others. Therefore, Isabella can be considered as a Gothic figure because of the

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80 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 6

81 Ibid

fascination she exerts on Catherine, her sexual drives which causes her to lose her fiancé and her responsibility as regards Catherine's misreadings and misunderstandings. One can also consider that, like Catherine, she was lured by Gothic novels and that it is her misreadings of them that led her to believe that she could manipulate the people around her.

## **Part 3**

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## **Gothic Literature's Sense of Humour**

## Chapter 1 - A Parody of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

In a parody, the writer will imitate “*the words, style, attitude, tone and ideas*”<sup>82</sup> of another writer. Jane Austen is a great imitator who managed to mimick the various elements which characterize Ann Radcliffe's style while creating a fiction which can exist without the original. Ann Radcliffe's style is characterized by three main elements: the creation of suspense, the ghostly elements to convey a strange atmosphere and the Romantic elements suggested by a sublime scenery.<sup>83</sup> Jane Austen reproduces Radcliffe's style, first by recreating suspense in *Northanger Abbey*.

Traditionally, a Gothic novelist will build a scary atmosphere by making natural elements go wild and grow strong, as if Nature were full of wrath. Ann Radcliffe creates this kind of atmosphere in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, reinforcing the suspense contained in the announcement of Montoni's past secrets:

Her melancholy was assisted by the hollow sighing of the wind along the corridor and round the castle. The cheerful blaze of the wood had long been extinguished, and she sat with her eyes fixed on the dying embers, till a loud gust, that swept through the corridor, and shook the doors and casements, alarmed her, for its violence had moved the chair she had placed as a fastening, and the door, leading to the private stair-case, stood half open.<sup>84</sup>

Before this passage, Emily heard several stories about her uncle in law from the maid, Annette. So when she is about to go to bed as the door leading to a stair-case suddenly opens, suspense is suddenly building up. Before going to bed, she places a guard in front of the door to make sure it remains closed. On the following morning, a strange event occurs, the door

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82 Cuddon dictionary of literary terms

83 Jacqueline Howard, Introduction of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

84 Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Volume 2, Chapter 5

has been fastened during the night. The circumstances are that neither Emily nor the reader know what all of this is about, until we know what happened. The reader is left hanging like Emily, a victim of the suspense and anxious to know what happened. Jane Austen creates a similar atmosphere by fooling both her heroine and her reader. This is displayed, for instance, in chapter twenty-one:

The night was stormy; the wind had been rising at intervals the whole afternoon; and by the time the party broke up, it blew and rained violently. Catherine, as she crossed the hall, listened to the tempest with sensations of awe; and, when she heard it rage round a corner of the ancient building and close with sudden fury a distant door, felt for the first time that she was really in an abbey.<sup>85</sup>

She associates the situation, a lonely girl in a castle by night with a tremendous storm in order to create a tense atmosphere. There is a great number of words which relate to the Gothic atmosphere: “*stormy*”, “*wind*”, “*blew and rained violently*”, “*tempest*”, “*heard it rage*”, “*sudden fury*”. Usually, after such a description, something is likely to happen. In *Northanger Abbey* something does happen but the circumstances are so ridiculous that the suspense does not have the same role. The reader expects something to occur as all the elements seem to suggest. He already knows by now that the parody is at work and that all of it is just a joke. The effect produced is inevitably comical. As we expected, after reading the previous chapters, the reader is being played with. Only one person is fooled by all these elements and it is obviously Catherine.

Regarding the narration, what we observed in the first section is relevant in this section as well because the tone used by the narrator in *Northanger Abbey* is copied from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. The numerous interventions of the narrator in Jane Austen's novel are reminiscent of Ann Radcliffe's novel, except that in Radcliffe's they prove to be useful in the

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85 Appendix 2

progression of the story. Whereas, in *Northanger Abbey*, their aim is to emphasize the lack of action, contrasting it with the original version. When the narrator of *Northanger Abbey* intervenes, he brings new information about the characters: “it may be stated, for the reader's more certain information”<sup>86</sup>, “It is now expedient to give some description of Mrs. Allen”<sup>87</sup>. The narrator of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* however tells us about important events, seen from another point of view and thus unknown to the heroine: “We now return to Valancourt, who, it may be remembered, remained at Tholouse, some time after the departure of Emily”<sup>88</sup>. By doing so, the narrator provides a new piece of information to the reader which is indispensable for the understanding of the story. In this passage, the narrator focuses on another character to explain what happened to him while we were focusing on Emily. Jane Austen mocks the tone used by the narrator in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, using the same tone in *Northanger Abbey*. She turns it into ridicule, as if she were giving the reader some precious information. And yet she does not tell us anything that needs our undevoted attention.

There is another similarity in the attitude adopted by Ann Radcliffe in her novels and Jane Austen's attitude. Ann Radcliffe wrote a sentimental novel to educate and moralize, to convince the reader that virtue triumphs over villainy. Jane Austen mocks this moralistic aim by providing, a parodied version of Radcliffe's work. Ann Radcliffe hopes her reader will become more sensible and educated thanks to the reading of her novel, confronting him to a human dilemma. Jane Austen however does not present us with such a moral dilemma. In the last events of the story, when she mentions “parental tyranny”, she refers to General Tilney's reluctance to marry his son and daughter. She also refers to the fact that neither Eleanor nor Henry obeyed their father and married whoever they wanted. She asks the reader whether he

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86 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 2

87 Ibid

88 Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Volume 2, Chapter 8

should “reward filial disobedience”. Yet, this declaration does not have as such any virtue. There is no glory in being tyrannical with children or disobeying one's parents. True virtue is to accomplish something, like Emily St Aubert does. Indeed, she achieved her goal to discover the truth about her family. Nevertheless, Austen does give a moral aspect to her novel as she makes her reader realize that what is said in novels must be read with caution as they are not necessarily a faithful reflection of reality. Jacqueline Howard argues that this enables the narrator to raise the question of reception.<sup>89</sup> The reader is “invited to evaluate” the characters' reading of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and their reception of it.

Because she imitates the Radcliffean style, Austen also uses her ideas and transforms them. Some authors go further in calling *Northanger Abbey* a parody, they call the novel a “*Burlesque*.”<sup>90</sup> The characters, the plot and the places are turned into ridicule, their initial form is distorted and tends to become ugly and vulgar. Austen's strategy is to take her fellow writer's characters and to exaggerate their traits. Emily St Aubert serves as a model for Catherine Morland. Emily is beautiful and virtuous: “*In person, Emily resembled her mother; having the same elegant symmetry of form, the same delicacy of features, and the same blue eyes, full of tender sweetness.*”<sup>91</sup> Catherine however is not very attractive: “*She had a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour, dark lank hair, and strong features*”<sup>92</sup>. Moreover, as we noticed with the portrait of Mrs Morland, Catherine's family does not resemble Emily's. If Jane Austen insists on the fact that Mrs Morland has a good composure and had many healthy children, it is presumably to draw a contrast between her and the St Aubert family. Emily is her father's “*only surviving child*”<sup>93</sup> and her mother's constitution

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89 Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction*, p.168

90 Jacqueline Howard in the introduction of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

91 Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Volume 1, Chapter 1

92 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 1

93 Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Volume 1, Chapter 1



“being too weak to throw out the disease immediately”<sup>94</sup>. Emily is bound to be a heroine because of her tragic past: the loss of her mother, then of her father. The narrator of *Northanger Abbey* on the contrary tries to create a heroine out of nothing. Moreover, as a child Emily is already a clever and sensible girl who is endowed with gifts for music and drawing and who already reads selected pieces of advanced literature: “*She discovered in her early years a taste for works of genius*”<sup>95</sup>. Catherine Morland's portrait as a child is not that brilliant: “*was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid*” and “*the day which dismissed the music-master was one of the happiest of Catherine's life. Her taste for drawing was no superior*”<sup>96</sup>. When comparing their two portraits, it seems that they hardly have any similarities.

We saw that unlike Emily, Catherine is more of an anti-heroine, she is not prepared to be a heroine as nothing “*would have supposed her born to be a heroine*”<sup>97</sup>. Emily St Aubert has been preparing to be a heroine all along. Her father raised her to become one: “*He endeavoured, therefore, to strengthen her mind; to ensure her to habits of self-command; to teach her to reject the first impulse of her feelings, and to look, with cool examination, upon the disappointments her sometimes threw in her way.*”<sup>98</sup> From the start, Emily is someone capable of reason and who will be expected to rationalize the elements that need to be explained. Jane Austen's heroine only rationalizes events at the end. Her education is reversed compared to Emily's. It takes her twenty-four chapters to grow up and realize that reality is different from what she perceived.

Emily St Aubert is not the only character to be parodied. Mrs Allen can be seen as a burlesque version of Mrs Montoni<sup>99</sup>. When her father dies, Emily has to live with her selfish,

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94 Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Volume 1, Chapter 1

95 Ibid

96 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 1

97 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 1

98 Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Volume 1, Chapter 1

99 Before being married to Montoni, she is Madame Cheron, the sister of Emily's father.

conceited aunt. Like Mrs Allen, she thinks of her own interest and does not care about her protégée. Contrary to Mrs Montoni, Mrs Allen does not pretend to care about Catherine. Both of them are useless. They are important for the story because they allow its progression, but they are of no real interest. Mrs Montoni seems to be clever at first and greedy for money and recognition. She wants to marry Emily and Valancourt mainly because she wants to become better acquainted with Valancourt's aunt, Madame Clairval. She protects her own interest first and foremost. She proves it when she marries Montoni all the while cancelling Emily and Valancourt's wedding. She is supposed to look after Emily as her guardian but she fails. In *Northanger Abbey*, Mrs Montoni becomes Mrs Allen, a chaperon incapable either to protect or help Catherine and whose greediness for fashionable dresses makes the character more burlesque and more comical. Even if Mrs Montoni may appear manipulative because she makes decisions for Emily's future, she is herself manipulated by her husband and not really able to take decisions for herself or anyone, which is more or less the case of Mrs Allen, who would be nothing without her husband.

Captain Tilney and General Tilney remind us of Montoni. They have the same physical and mental attitude conveying secrecy and mystery. Catherine makes an analogy between Captain Tilney and Montoni when she sees Captain Tilney for the first time:

From the latter circumstance it may be presumed, that, whatever might be our heroine's opinion of him, his admiration of her was not of a very dangerous kind; not likely to produce animosities between the brothers, nor persecutions to the lady. *He* cannot be the instigator of the three villains in horsemen's great coats, by whom she will hereafter be forced into a travelling chaise and four, which will drive off with incredible speed.<sup>100</sup>

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100Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 16

Contrary to Captain Tilney, Montoni is undoubtedly the villain in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Captain Tilney does not intend to commit any crime at first, he only responds to Isabella's inappropriate behaviour. General Tilney is very similar to Montoni because of his thirst for money and his severe attitude, but he does not kill anyone. He is a burlesque version of Montoni and this is characterized by his manifestation of violence in trivial events. Montoni gets angry and has a tyrannical attitude whereas General Tilney is violent for the sake of being violent: "*General Tilney was pacing the drawing-room, his watch in his hand, and having on the very instant of their entering, pulled the bell with violence, ordered 'Dinner to be on table directly!' "*". In other words, he is like a villain who lost his authority and who feels the need to remind us constantly that he is the master.

The plot in itself is a parody of Radcliffe's plot. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Montoni wants the family's properties. In Catherine's case, everybody wants the money she has not. What is quite ironic is that the other characters believe she is the wealthy daughter of the Allens, the truly wealthy aristocrats with whom she came to Bath. As soon as they find out that she has actually no money, they are no longer interested in her. Catherine's initial departure from Fullerton to Bath is also characteristic of this parody. It looks like a heroine leaving her family to accomplish her quest. Therefore Jane Austen uses irony and a tone usually found in adventure stories: "*A thousand alarming presentiments of evil to her beloved Catherine from this terrific separation must oppress her heart with sadness, and drown her in tears for the last day or two of their being together*"<sup>101</sup>. Her departure for Bath is put forward by the narrator once again to make the heroine look ridiculous reinforcing thereof the lack of mystery and adventure:

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101 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 2

Under these unpromising auspices, the parting took place, and the journey began. It was performed with suitable quietness and uneventful safety. Neither robbers nor tempests befriended them, nor one lucky overturn to introduce them to the hero. Nothing more alarming occurred than a fear on Mrs Allen's side, of having once left her clogs behind her at an inn, and that fortunately proved to be groundless.<sup>102</sup>

The use of negative forms emphasizes the irony that, as a heroine, Catherine does not come across the dangers she expected to find during her expedition. It is meant to contrast with chapter four of *the Mysteries of Udolpho* in which St Aubert and his daughter travel on an “unfrequented road” which “wound among rock precipices” expecting “numerous banditti, that infested the Pyrenées” and where an incident does occur since St Aubert accidentally shoots at Valancourt.

Similarities in the characters and the plots are frequent in parodies. Nevertheless, one of the devices used by Jane Austen is rather original: her heroine is convinced that what she reads in Gothic novels is the actual reality.

## **Chapter 2 - Catherine Morland's Misreadings**

Catherine's misreadings are proof that she misunderstands the way her favourite heroine, Emily, reacts to the strange events which occur in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Indeed, one of the characteristics of Radcliffean fiction is that the author always celebrates reason. For her heroine, things are logical and explainable, she always tries to find answers and reasonable explanations to discard the supernatural and the strange phenomena she is experiencing. This is mainly due to the eighteenth-century philosophy according to which imagination and excessive credulity have to be curbed in order to preserve reason and

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102 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 2

morality.<sup>103</sup> Jane Austen also proves in her novel that there is always a rational explanation for unruly events. Ultimately, the strangeness that pervades Northanger Abbey is rationalized and nothing is left unexplained. Nevertheless, Catherine Morland does not understand what underlying force comes out of her novels and does not put into practice the lessons she should have learnt from them. The main proof is that instead of looking for rational substance in inexplicable events like Emily, she is looking for inexplicable explanations to trivial events and ultimately has a revelation about how wrong she was: “*the anxieties of common life began soon to succeed to the alarms of romance*”<sup>104</sup>. The fact that she believes that General Tilney killed his wife, proves her naiveté and her misreading of others. She does not understand what is at stake in the novel and cannot perceive the essence of the book.

Emily St Aubert is discovering things in her pursuit for truth. When her father dies, he leaves her with a mysterious secret, a pile of written papers which she has to burn without even looking at them, and a tiny portrait of a lady with whom she is not acquainted. She then learns from the maid that the former owner of the castle of Udolpho went in the forest one night and that she was never found again. Her ghost is said to appear from time to time. Vallancourt and Morano warned her about Montoni, that he had killed several men. When Catherine arrives in Northanger Abbey, she expects to find such bizarre manifestations because she considers herself to be a heroine, she is not living in the real world any more, she is living through her books and pursuing some other truth. Like Emily, she tries to be a detective, to look for clues and pieces of evidence: “*Here was another proof. A portrait—very like—of a departed wife, not valued by the husband! He must have been dreadfully cruel to her!*”<sup>105</sup>. But the explanations are leading to a different truth. What is comical is actually quite gloomy and realistic. By discovering the reasons why strangeness occurs, Emily fills the holes

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103 Fred Botting, *Gothic*, p. 3

104 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 25

105 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 22

in her life. She understands the secrets of her father and her story ends with a truth revealed. Catherine had no truth to find in her existence which deserves to be unveiled, except her epiphany that literature is not as such real life and that she cannot rely on literary truths.

Catherine's "*book-fed*"<sup>106</sup> imagination misleads her. When Blaize Castle is mentioned, she is thrilled with impatience and excitement to discover it. The conversation between John Thorpe and Catherine shows how she is manipulated both by her imagination and by John Thorpe.<sup>107</sup> The name "Blaize Castle" itself conveys everything she reads in her novels. John Thorpe is playing with her. He wants her to come with him and he knows very well that, by saying "Blaize Castle", he will arouse Catherine's interest. Catherine falls into the trap and is immediately captivated by the idea. She is mistaken on two levels. First mistake: Blaize Castle is nothing like a castle, it is more like a chapel in ruins where there is nothing to see.<sup>108</sup> Someone who knows that would undoubtedly smile at the idea that John Thorpe is making a fool of Catherine: "*The finest place in England—worth going fifty miles at any time to see.*". Second mistake: to believe what she reads in books. She thinks she will obtain an accurate description of the building just by asking "*But is it like what one reads of?*". She builds a myth out of her readings and the simple words "*castles*" and "*abbeys*" create in her mind a fantasy, associating real to fictional places in her novels.

The same phenomenon happens at Northanger Abbey. The simple word "*abbey*" has an effect on Catherine's mind and troubles begin. Although Henry does point out the problem - "*You have formed a very favourable idea of the abbey*"<sup>109</sup> - Catherine does not realize how wrong she is. She expects so much from an abbey after what she read, that when the abbey

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106 Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen*, p. 44

107 Appendix 3

108 *Jane Austen's Society*

109 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 20

happens to be a house similar to any modern mansion, she does not understand. When she arrives in the Abbey, her first reaction is to be surprised at the quietness of the journey: “*She knew that she had no right to be surprised, but there was a something in this mode of approach which she certainly had not expected. [...] driven so rapidly along a smooth, level road of fine gravel, without obstacle, alarm or solemnity of any kind, struck her as odd and inconsistent.*”<sup>110</sup> This arrival strongly contrasts with the arrival of Emily at the castle<sup>111</sup>: the castle's grandeur and darkness conveyed by its appearance and the landscape have a sublime effect, therefore conveying both beauty and danger. The narrator is already warning us when Catherine arrives at the Abbey, by offering such a description of a Gothic castle. The reader knows by then that Catherine will be disappointed and yet it takes a long time before she realizes that she is mistaken. The Castle of Udolpho is the archetype of the Gothic castle, full of secrets, distorted like a maze, rather dark and cold. This is a very frightful place where Emily is bound to be confronted to the “*uncanny*<sup>112</sup>” (*Das Unheimlich*). Her bedroom is large and one of her doors leads to a secret narrow staircase, which conveys a certain mystery about what can be hidden there. The decoration is old and dusty and evokes the past memories of a wealthy family: “*it opened into a suite of spacious and ancient apartments, some of which were hung with tapestry, and others wainscoted with cedar and black larch-wood. What furniture there was, seemed to be almost as old as the rooms, and retained an appearance of grandeur.*”<sup>113</sup>

Catherine's behaviour when she arrives at the abbey is paradoxical. She is relieved that her bedroom does not resemble the description Henry gave her, and, at the same time, she is reassured: “*it was by no means unreasonably large, and contained neither tapestry nor*

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110 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 20

111 Appendix 4

112 “The Uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.”, Sigmund Freud, *Art and Literature, The Uncanny*

113 Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Volume 2, Chapter 5

velvet”, “the air of the room altogether far from uncheerful”<sup>114</sup>. She is disappointed as well because it was not the kind of bedroom she was accustomed to in her readings, and she secretly expected it would look like Emily St Aubert's bedroom. Her bedroom is simple and has no secret to hide and yet Catherine creates a mystery out of thin air: “her eye suddenly fell on a large high chest [...] “This is strange indeed! I did not expect such a sight as this! - An immense heavy chest! - What can it hold? - Why should it be placed here? - Pushed back too, as if meant to be out of sight! - I will look into it – cost me what it may, I will look into it”<sup>115</sup>. Her naiveté and her resolute wish to find something in this abbey blinds her. She does not rationalize events, she derationalizes them. This prevents her from seeing the real purpose of her visit to Northanger Abbey. She cannot find the right relation between cause and effect. She should have been worried about General Tilney's mysterious interest in her. Instead, she dreams of adventure and spends her time in the abbey searching for something bizarre to investigate. Tony Tanner argues that when she realizes that the abbey does not resemble the Gothic castle she imagined, “the building loses its 'evil' and the owner gains it.”<sup>116</sup> It actually sounds as if Catherine were trying to find some legitimacy to her books. Gothic novels cannot be wrong, abbeys must hide some secrets; “Is not it a fine old place, just like one reads about?”<sup>117</sup> When she realizes that the Abbey has nothing to do with what she expected, she decides to find something else to feed her expectations and her knowledge of Gothic novels. So she transfers her fantasies to General Tilney and starts to imagine what mischiefs he might have committed.

Catherine cannot distinguish fiction from reality. Catherine is constantly confused and

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114 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 21

115 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 21

116 Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen*, p. 44

117 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 20



compares her friends and the people surrounding her with the characters in her novels:

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.<sup>118</sup>

And, when she saw him in the evening, while she worked with her friend, slowly pacing the drawing-room for an hour together in silent thoughtfulness, with downcast eyes and contracted brow, she felt secure from all possibility of wronging him. It was the air and attitude of a Montoni!<sup>119</sup>.

For her, what she reads in novels is a representation of real life, she seems to be living in a novel where she would be the heroin and her friends would be the different protagonists following her.

The famous episode in chapter twenty-two which I described in the first section is also a good illustration of Catherine's misunderstandings. When she discovers the manuscript she instantly compares it to the other manuscripts she read about in Radcliffe's novels: "*She now plainly saw that she must not expect a manuscript of equal length with the generality of what she had shuddered over in books*"<sup>120</sup> - thus comparing herself to the heroine. The reading of her Gothic Novels created in her mind the absolute necessity to find an object leading her to adventure, such as a manuscript like in *The Romance of the Forest* or in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

What is so comical about the novel is that after many failures, Catherine never gives in. She feels a necessity to discover something about the abbey. After she has been fooled by

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118 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 15

119 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 23

120 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 22

the abbey and the manuscript, she will be fooled by the story of Henry's mother. When she reads *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Catherine surely did not fail to ignore the passage about the veiled picture: “*she paused again, and, then, with a timid hand, lifted the veil; but instantly let it fall – perceiving that what it had concealed was no picture, and, before she could leave the chamber, she dropped senseless on the floor.*”<sup>121</sup> During her stay at Northanger Abbey, Catherine hears from Eleanor that there is a portrait of their mother in her father's bedroom. The coincidence is too obvious, she needs to see it. Yet, when Catherine sees the portrait of Eleanor's mother, there is nothing “*uncanny*” about the portrait which is rather normal. She has been fooled once again by her readings.

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121 Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Volume 2, Chapter 6

## Conclusion

As Tony Tanner points it out, “*there is a good deal of defence of novels and reading in this novel*”<sup>122</sup>. Indeed, Austen's novel is not only a literary work, but also a novel about literature. What I tried to demonstrate is the impact literature may have on the reader. It is part of the message Jane Austen delivers in *Northanger Abbey*, as she tries to “*exorcize the naïve clichés of sentimental 'women's' fiction*”<sup>123</sup>. Catherine Morland learnt a lesson about the consequences misreadings may have. Indeed, the reader may not understand her if he is not educated enough and not used to certain forms of languages which make the message more subtle. *Northanger Abbey* is a novel which can be interpreted “*readerly*” or “*writerly*”<sup>124</sup>. When I first read the novel my interest was different from now. It is quite complicated for me to remember what I did not notice the first time I read it because as of now, I am able to grasp some of the subtleties of the novel that I did not perceive before. When I opened *Northanger Abbey* for the very first time, my goal was to be entertained. I was curious about how a Gothic novel could be turned into a parody. What I find very strange now is that I did not perceive the effects of the parody and the satire until I reached the episode of the abbey. I was entertained by the novel because I read it like I read *Emma*, smiling at the girl's naiveté and laughing at her inner reflections but there were several aspects of the books which I did not understand. On the surface, I could seize the meaning of the novel and recognize its humourous aspects, especially when Catherine's overactive imagination leads her to a faulty reasoning. On the contrary, the underlying meaning was not so simple to find. Then, I made some research about the Gothic novel and on *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and when I reopened the book, I noticed a

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122 Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen*, p. 44

123 Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction*, p. 147

124 Barthes' theory according to which a work can be *lisible* and *scriptible*. A readerly text can be read easily by anyone, the writerly novel imposes to the reader a reflection, thus forcing him to produce a meaning different from the original one.

multitude of details. I think we can consider *Northanger Abbey* as a “writerly” text, first because the reader has to be educated and aware of the context to understand some of the subtleties of the text and then because its underlying meanings are interpretable in many ways. Therefore, *Northanger Abbey* may not be as accessible as it seems to be. In order to understand the different meanings which overlap, one has to keep in mind that we are reading a book by Jane Austen, and that we must expect sarcasm and irony. The reader will also have to be acquainted with the Gothic novel to understand what is mocked and why it is source of mockery, otherwise a great deal of the comical effects will disappear. Concerning confusion, Jacqueline Howard emphasizes the feminist claim according to which Catherine's misreadings of Romantic novels can confuse the reader.<sup>125</sup> It can be arguable that what seems obvious in the novel - that the heroine awakens from illusion to reality - also raises the issue of what is “real” and what is “illusory”<sup>126</sup>

The study of this novel enabled me to become more familiar with the workings of parody and the comical devices used to achieve a satire which are numerous. First, the study of the art of narration and genres in *Northanger Abbey* demonstrated that such forms could create humour. The “unreliable narrator” mocking his heroine, making sarcastic remarks about the characters and trying to fool the reader is one of the devices we studied. The genre of the *Bildungsroman* is another device. It enabled Jane Austen to create humour in the story partly because a naïve heroine is often bound to make a fool of herself but also because the character she created was specifically meant to be mocked at. Amongst other devices we also noted that Jane Austen's signature - the use of irony - was used on many occasions in the novel and, for our greatest pleasure. The parody itself is a device that renders the story extremely humorous. When confronted to elements of parody, the reader automatically finds a

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125 Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction*, p.169

126 Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen*, p.50

source of amusement because he pictures the characters and makes an instantaneous comparison with the original characters. The distorted version – Austen's successful pastiche of Ann Radcliffe's work - creates a comical effect because it makes the characters sometimes ridiculous, sometimes vulgar.

Jane Austen is not the only author who embraced the theme of humour in Gothic novels. She had an influence on other authors: Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine* (1813) went even further in the satire of the Gothic novel using exaggerations and a more radical tone<sup>127</sup> and so did Thomas Love Peacock in his *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), itself an homage in the form of a parody to Jane Austen. Nevertheless, insofar as she is one of the first writers who audaciously committed herself to reinvent, sometimes even transgress, conventions by introducing humour in the Gothic Novel, Jane Austen established a new tradition and proved that the notions of humour and the Gothic were perfectly compatible.

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127 Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction*, p. 147

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# Appendix



## Appendix 1: The Defense of the Novel

### Chapter 5

They were still resolute in meeting in defiance of wet and dirt, and shut themselves up, to read novels together. Yes, novels; for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel-writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding—joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. Alas! If the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? I cannot approve of it. 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. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers. And while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens—there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them. "I am no novel-reader—I seldom look into novels—Do not imagine that I often read novels—It is really very well for a novel." Such is the common cant. "And what are you reading, Miss—?" "Oh! It is only a novel!" replies the young lady, while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. "It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda"; or, in short, only some work 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. Now, had the same young lady been engaged with a volume of the Spectator, instead of such a work, how proudly would she have produced the book, and told its name; though the chances must be against her being occupied by any part of that voluminous publication, of which either the matter or manner would not 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 anyone living; and their language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it.

## **Appendix 2: Jane Austen Building up Suspense**

### **Chapter 21**

The night was stormy; the wind had been rising at intervals the whole afternoon; and by the time the party broke up, it blew and rained violently. Catherine, as she crossed the hall, listened to the tempest with sensations of awe; and, when she heard it rage round a corner of the ancient building and close with sudden fury a distant door, felt for the first time that she was really in an abbey. Yes, these were characteristic sounds; they brought to her recollection a countless variety of dreadful situations and horrid scenes, which such buildings had witnessed, and such storms ushered in; and most heartily did she rejoice in the happier circumstances attending her entrance within walls so solemn! She had nothing to dread from midnight assassins or drunken gallants. Henry had certainly been only in jest in what he had told her that morning. In a house so furnished, and so guarded, she could have nothing to explore or to suffer, and might go to her bedroom as securely as if it had been her own chamber at Fullerton. Thus wisely fortifying her mind, as she proceeded upstairs, she was enabled, especially on perceiving that Miss Tilney slept only two doors from her, to enter her room with a tolerably stout heart; and her spirits were immediately assisted by the cheerful blaze of a wood fire. "How much better is this," said she, as she walked to the fender—"how much better to find a fire ready lit, than to have to wait shivering in the cold till all the family are in bed, as so many poor girls have been obliged to do, and then to have a faithful old servant frightening one by coming in with a faggot! How glad I am that Northanger is what it is! If it had been like some other places, I do not know that, in such a night as this, I could have answered for my courage: but now, to be sure, there is nothing to alarm one."

She looked round the room. The window curtains seemed in motion. It could be nothing but the violence of the wind penetrating through the divisions of the shutters; and she stepped boldly forward, carelessly humming a tune, to assure herself of its being so, peeped courageously behind each curtain, saw nothing on either low window seat to scare her, and on placing a hand against the shutter, felt the strongest conviction of the wind's force. A glance at the old chest, as she turned away from this examination, was not without its use; she scorned the causeless fears of an idle fancy, and began with a most happy indifference to prepare herself for bed. "She should take her time; she should not hurry herself; she did not care if she were the last person up in the house. But she would not make up her fire; that would seem

cowardly, as if she wished for the protection of light after she were in bed." The fire therefore died away, and Catherine, having spent the best part of an hour in her arrangements, was beginning to think of stepping into bed, when, on giving a parting glance round the room, she was struck by the appearance of a high, old-fashioned black cabinet, which, though in a situation conspicuous enough, had never caught her notice before. Henry's words, his description of the ebony cabinet which was to escape her observation at first, immediately rushed across her; and though there could be nothing really in it, there was something whimsical, it was certainly a very remarkable coincidence! She took her candle and looked closely at the cabinet. It was not absolutely ebony and gold; but it was japan, black and yellow japan of the handsomest kind; and as she held her candle, the yellow had very much the effect of gold. The key was in the door, and she had a strange fancy to look into it; not, however, with the smallest expectation of finding anything, but it was so very odd, after what Henry had said. In short, she could not sleep till she had examined it. So, placing the candle with great caution on a chair, she seized the key with a very tremulous hand and tried to turn it; but it resisted her utmost strength. Alarmed, but not discouraged, she tried it another way; a bolt flew, and she believed herself successful; but how strangely mysterious! The door was still immovable. She paused a moment in breathless wonder. The wind roared down the chimney, the rain beat in torrents against the windows, and everything seemed to speak the awfulness of her situation. To retire to bed, however, unsatisfied on such a point, would be vain, since sleep must be impossible with the consciousness of a cabinet so mysteriously closed in her immediate vicinity. Again, therefore, she applied herself to the key, and after moving it in every possible way for some instants with the determined celerity of hope's last effort, the door suddenly yielded to her hand: her heart leaped with exultation at such a victory, and having thrown open each folding door, the second being secured only by bolts of less wonderful construction than the lock, though in that her eye could not discern anything unusual, a double range of small drawers appeared in view, with some larger drawers above and below them; and in the centre, a small door, closed also with a lock and key, secured in all probability a cavity of importance. Catherine's heart beat quick, but her courage did not fail her. With a cheek flushed by hope, and an eye straining with curiosity, her fingers grasped the handle of a drawer and drew it forth. It was entirely empty. With less alarm and greater eagerness she seized a second, a third, a fourth; each was equally empty. Not one was left unsearched, and in not one was anything found.

### Appendix 3: Blaize Castle

#### Chapter 11

“We shall be able to do ten times more. Kingsweston! Aye, and Blaize Castle too, and anything else we can hear of; but here is your sister says she will not go.”

“Blaize Castle!” cried Catherine. “What is that?”

“The finest place in England—worth going fifty miles at any time to see.”

“What, is it really a castle, an old castle?”

“The oldest in the kingdom.”

“But is it like what one reads of?”

“Exactly—the very same.”

“But now really—are there towers and long galleries?”

“By dozens.”

“Then I should like to see it; but I cannot—I cannot go.”

[...]

"I should like to see the castle; but may we go all over it? May we go up every staircase, and into every suite of rooms?"

"Yes, yes, every hole and corner."

[...]

Catherine's feelings, as she got into the carriage, were in a very unsettled state; divided between regret for the loss of one great pleasure, and the hope of soon enjoying another, almost its equal in degree, however unlike in kind. She could not think the Tilneys had acted quite well by her, in so readily giving up their engagement, without sending her any message of excuse. It was now but an hour later than the time fixed on for the beginning of their walk; and, in spite of what she had heard of the prodigious accumulation of dirt in the course of that hour, she could not from her own observation help thinking that they might have gone with very little inconvenience. To feel herself slighted by them was very painful. On the other hand, the delight of exploring an edifice like Udolpho, as her fancy represented Blaize Castle to be, was such a counterpoise of good as might console her for almost anything.

## **Appendix 4: Arrival at the Castle**

### **The Mysteries of Udolpho : Volume II – Chapter V**

'There,' said Montoni, speaking for the first time in several hours, 'is Udolpho.'

Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni's; for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object. As she gazed, the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper, as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendour. From those, too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiness of evening. Silent, lonely, and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all, who dared to invade its solitary reign. As the twilight deepened, its features became more awful in obscurity, and Emily continued to gaze, till its clustering towers were alone seen, rising over the tops of the woods, beneath whose thick shade the carriages soon after began to ascend.

The extent and darkness of these tall woods awakened terrific images in her mind, and she almost expected to see banditti start up from under the trees. At length, the carriages emerged upon a heathy rock, and, soon after, reached the castle gates, where the deep tone of the portal bell, which was struck upon to give notice of their arrival, increased the fearful emotions, that had assailed Emily. While they waited till the servant within should come to open the gates, she anxiously surveyed the edifice: but the gloom, that overspread it, allowed her to distinguish little more than a part of its outline, with the massy walls of the ramparts, and to know, that it was vast, ancient and dreary. From the parts she saw, she judged of the heavy strength and extent of the whole. The gateway before her, leading into the courts, was of gigantic size, and was defended by two round towers, crowned by overhanging turrets, embattled, where, instead of banners, now waved long grass and wild plants, that had taken root among the mouldering stones, and which seemed to sigh, as the breeze rolled past, over the desolation around them. The towers were united by a curtain, pierced and embattled also, below which appeared the pointed arch of a huge portcullis, surmounting the gates: from these, the walls of the ramparts extended to other towers, overlooking the precipice, whose shattered outline, appearing on a gleam, that lingered in the west, told of the ravages of war.—

Beyond these all was lost in the obscurity of evening.

While Emily gazed with awe upon the scene, footsteps were heard within the gates, and the undrawing of bolts; after which an ancient servant of the castle appeared, forcing back the huge folds of the portal, to admit his lord. As the carriage-wheels rolled heavily under the portcullis, Emily's heart sunk, and she seemed, as if she was going into her prison; the gloomy court, into which she passed, served to confirm the idea, and her imagination, ever awake to circumstance, suggested even more terrors, than her reason could justify.

## Appendix 5: Catherine's Misreadings

### Chapter 22

The housemaid's folding back her window-shutters at eight o'clock the next day was the sound which first roused Catherine; and she opened her eyes, wondering that they could ever have been closed, on objects of cheerfulness; her fire was already burning, and a bright morning had succeeded the tempest of the night. Instantaneously, with the consciousness of existence, returned her recollection of the manuscript; and springing from the bed in the very moment of the maid's going away, she eagerly collected every scattered sheet which had burst from the roll on its falling to the ground, and flew back to enjoy the luxury of their perusal on her pillow. She now plainly saw that she must not expect a manuscript of equal length with the generality of what she had shuddered over in books, for the roll, seeming to consist entirely of small disjointed sheets, was altogether but of trifling size, and much less than she had supposed it to be at first.

Her greedy eye glanced rapidly over a page. She started at its import. Could it be possible, or did not her senses play her false? An inventory of linen, in coarse and modern characters, seemed all that was before her! If the evidence of sight might be trusted, she held a washing-bill in her hand. She seized another sheet, and saw the same articles with little variation; a third, a fourth, and a fifth presented nothing new. Shirts, stockings, cravats, and waistcoats faced her in each. Two others, penned by the same hand, marked an expenditure scarcely more interesting, in letters, hair-powder, shoe-string, and breeches-ball. And the larger sheet, which had enclosed the rest, seemed by its first cramp line, "To poultice chestnut mare"—a farrier's bill! Such was the collection of papers (left perhaps, as she could then suppose, by the negligence of a servant in the place whence she had taken them) which had filled her with expectation and alarm, and robbed her of half her night's rest! She felt humbled to the dust. Could not the adventure of the chest have taught her wisdom? A corner of it, catching her eye as she lay, seemed to rise up in judgment against her. Nothing could now be clearer than the absurdity of her recent fancies. To suppose that a manuscript of many generations back could have remained undiscovered in a room such as that, so modern, so habitable!—Or that she should be the first to possess the skill of unlocking a cabinet, the key of which was open to all!

## **Mots clés:**

Austen, Gothique, Humour, Satire, Parodie, Bildungsroman, Northanger Abbey, Radcliffe, Les Mystères d'Udolphe, Littérature, Femmes, Défense du roman, Héroïne.

## **Résumé**

Jane Austen revisite le roman Gothique en créant un univers comique, autour duquel Catherine Morland, le personnage principal de *Northanger Abbey*, évolue physiquement et mentalement. Ce mémoire examine tout d'abord la forme du roman en elle-même, en passant par l'étude de la narration et des techniques utilisées par l'auteur pour rendre son narrateur plus crédible et digne de notre confiance, puis par le portrait de l'héroïne dont le rôle problématique est au cœur des préoccupations du narrateur. Enfin, l'étude de la forme analyse également les différents genres de *Northanger Abbey*, tels que le roman gothique, la parodie, le roman sentimental, le *bildungsroman* et enfin la satire. Le deuxième axe traite de l'aspect satirique de l'œuvre, offrant une typologie des femmes du 18ème siècle, un portrait des mœurs et conventions et enfin une réflexion sur la littérature et son influence sur les lectrices. Pour finir, la troisième partie repose sur une étude comparative de *Northanger Abbey* et *The Mysteries of Udolpho*



## **Keywords:**

Austen, Gothic, Humour, Satire, Parody, Bildungsroman, Northanger Abbey, Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho, Literature, Women, Defence of the novel, Heroine.

## **Abstract**

Jane Austen revisits the Gothic Novel by creating a comic universe, around which Catherine Morland, the main character of *Northanger Abbey*, evolves physically and mentally. This dissertation first examines the form of the novel itself, by studying the narration and the techniques used by the author to make her narrator more credible and trustworthy, then the portrait of the heroine whose problematic role is at the heart of the narrator's concerns. Finally, the study of the form also analyses the different genres of *Northanger Abbey*, such as the Gothic Novel, the Parody, the Sentimental Novel, the *Bildungsroman* and the Satire. The second section focuses on the satirical aspects of Austen's work, offering a typology of eighteenth-century women, a portrait of customs and conventions and finally a reflection about literature and its influence on female readers. Lastly, the third section is based on a comparative study of *Northanger Abbey* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.