

Textual Retrospection: Reflexivity of Gothic Parody in *Northanger Abbey*

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Introduction

Northanger Abbey (1817), as Austen's 'Gothic parody', was subject to informed and energetic debate amongst literary critics and apologists, although no consensus was reached. It is partly received wisdom that Austen mocked the Gothic adventure in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and satirised the form and conventions of the popular Gothic novels that were its contemporaries. For Mudrick, 'The problem is to write simultaneously a Gothic novel and a realistic novel, and to gain and keep the reader's acceptances of the latter while proving that the former is false and absurd'.¹ Morgan enthuses that 'Austen mocks sentimental and Gothic conventions because they are unnatural and therefore incredible'.² This essay sets out to illustrate that Austen is in fact an heiress of Radcliffe; not quite a parodist, almost an imitator. Her purpose of seeming parody is not to mock or satirise but to point out the power of sense over excessive sensibility and to make the anxieties of common life serious. There is parody of Gothic in this novel with some comic effects,

¹ Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 39.

² Susan Morgan, *In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 59.

but the true purpose of parody here is not to destroy or deny but to inherit and preserve – that is, to preserve reason, which inspires awakening to middle-class realities and common anxieties. Several conventions of Gothic are used to illustrate Austen’s inheritance of Radcliffe’s Gothic. They are the programmatic Gothic setting, the isolated and tyrannical villain, the ruined church and the over-imaginative heroine, which will be further explored in this article.

Critics largely but not exclusively see *Northanger Abbey* as a ‘Gothic parody’. For instance, McKillop argues that the Gothic description in the novel is subject to the characters’ interpretation, and not to disparage the Gothic novel.³ Johnson says that ‘Austen is not simply disavowing Gothic. Instead, she juxtaposes the “alarms of romance” to the “anxieties of common life”’.⁴

‘Gothic or Anti-Gothic’⁵ discussion has been a crucial topic upon this novel. However, when it is considered in a more complex way, it is advisable to view this novel as a critical heritage of the Gothic novel. On the one hand, Austen imitates the writing style that Radcliffe has used in her Gothic novels, and describes her heroine’s visit to the Abbey as a horrible adventure, especially the first night she stays there. On the other hand, she criticises the excessive Gothic imaginations as they will induce people to lose their common sense. Her aim is to tell people to face reality no matter

³ Alan D. McKillop, ‘Critical Realism in *Northanger Abbey*’, in *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad*, ed. by Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinman Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 35-46 (p. 36).

⁴ Claudia L. Johnson, ‘Introduction’, in *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sanditon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 14-15.

⁵ Ibid.

how bad it is; what should be done is to fight against it, whilst not mixing it with fictional imaginations.

The 'Gothic novel', according to Darryl Jones, refers to 'a genre of literature that combines elements of both horror and romance. Most Gothic novels are set in ruined castles with ghosts, and were written in the late-18th or early-19th centuries,' whilst 'Gothic parody' is consistently defined negatively as 'a form of satirical criticism or comic mockery that imitates the style and manners of a particular writer, often employing, self-consciously and ironically, the narrative devices of the Gothic'.⁶ Some parodies could express some sympathy for their alleged targets, confirming Stones' recent contention that romantic parody involves a 'simultaneous commitment to exalted vision and to a renegade impulse which mockingly dissolves them'.⁷ Parody, Levine remarks in a penetrating essay on *Northanger Abbey*, is a dangerous game for a novelist: 'novels cannot remain parodies exclusively'.⁸ The impulse of parody is too mechanical to be sustained; either the parody will cease to govern the life of the novel, or the convention being parodied will reassert its genuine life, as in Austen's parody of the Gothic. The distance between *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Northanger Abbey* can be quite small or even nonexistent for an artist. It is a staple of Gothic tales to argue that transformation processes can be bewildering, self-activated, or self-reversing. From the Gothic point of view, the form shows a disquieting facility for

⁶ Darryl Jones, 'Gothic Parody', in *The Handbook of Gothic Literature*, ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 270-271.

⁷ Graeme Stones, *Parodies of the Romantic Age* Vol. 4 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), p. 783.

⁸ George Levine, *Translating the Monstrous: Northanger Abbey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 337.

switching into its opposite and back again.

Udolpho at Northanger

Austen wrote an often misunderstood paragraph in *Northanger Abbey* that seems to disqualify England itself as a programmatic setting for the Gothic, and lightly repudiates the book and the author at the centre of her parody. Apparently recovering from the ‘humiliation’ of her mistaking General Tilney for a murderer, Catherine remonstrates with herself in the narrator’s voice:

Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe’s works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators [...] Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country [...] [b]ut in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence even of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age.⁹

Several important elements seem to make this passage a complex admission rather than rejection of the Gothic. First, Catherine has had the worst shock of her young life in discovering that the master of the Abbey did not, as a Radcliffean villain, seek to murder his wife, and that his son, whom Catherine loves, knows she had thought he did. This ferocious application of the scourge of reason has the effect, carefully underscored by Austen’s sly humour, of boxing the soul even further into its claustrophobic fortress of security; that being the central part of England, its laws and its manners. Yet neither General Tilney nor Radcliffe’s Montoni possess law nor manners, but instead a nasty temper and an overweening desire to keep his property

⁹ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey: A Novel* (London: Penguin Classics, 2007), p. 200.

and his family at his own disposal.

Another point to be noted is Catherine's dismissal of Radcliffe's knowledge of human nature. After the passage quoted, Catherine takes comfort in the mixed character of the English as opposed to the unmixed evil or good in Radcliffian Gothic. Yet as Catherine comes to see, General Tilney is totally ill-natured; his character is not even enlivened by the wit and sorrow of Montoni. On the other hand, the character of Radcliffe's young gallant, Valancourt, is as variegated as Austen's Henry, and her Emily is a model for Catherine in the most important respect of all: hers is a rational, principled mind battling with its own shadow side, the 'causeless terror'¹⁰ embedded in her mind – while 'superstition'¹¹ is Radcliffe's word. Only her villain encourages the heroine to erase that recognition of the shadow: 'I recommend it to you to retire to your chamber, and to endeavour to adopt a more rational conduct, than that of yielding to fancies, and to a sensibility', urges Montoni, quite reasonably.¹² Significantly, Emily's father has a slightly wider perspective: 'I would not annihilate your feelings, I would only teach you to command them; for whatever may be the evils resulting from a too susceptible heart, nothing can be hoped from an insensible one'.¹³

The point is that in her attack of reasonable sensibility, whatever Catherine may deny of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*'s conclusions, Austen has in fact spent the first

¹⁰ Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho: A Novel* (London: Penguin Classics, 2001), p. 330.

¹¹ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 200.

¹² Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, p. 230.

¹³ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 20.

section of *Northanger Abbey* establishing an appreciation of that charming book as the touchstone of good character. Seventeen-year-old Catherine has two suitors in her first days out in Bath: John Thorpe has not read *Udolpho* and would not read any novel written by a woman, while on the other hand, Henry's well-informed and flexible mind includes a shivery two days' engagement with *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 'my hair standing on end the whole time'.¹⁴ Catherine makes two female friends there, both of whom have read *Udolpho*; Isabella Thorpe gives Catherine a list of other Gothic novels to read, such as *Castle of Wolfenbach* and *The Mysterious Warning*, while Eleanor Tilney has joined Catherine against Henry's mockery. She also has room for the study of history.

Their discussion of history is significant to the uses of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as a machine, a carrier of power from outside the novel's world. Both young women recognise that 'invention' is at the core of both historical writing and novel writing and they wonder why history is nevertheless dull. Catherine naively hits the nail on the head: 'The men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all'.¹⁵ This observation describes many of the central works in the Gothic as well, as it is Radcliffe, not male authors like Horace Walpole or Matthew Lewis, who makes the Gothic available to the great novelists of the nineteenth century because she treats subtly both the terrors of the antihero, the 'good for nothing' man, and those of the victim, the woman. By contrast, as Eleanor muses, the historian will 'display

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 108.

imagination without raising interest'.¹⁶ At once more forbearing and discriminating, Eleanor is willing to take the dull and true with the false; she is able both to distinguish them and to harmonise them, resisting Catherine's youthful wish to avoid the merely true and intelligent but also resisting the educated Henry's drift toward mockery of the imagination.

If the machinery of *Udolpho* is on one level meant to represent the novel and its special width of sensibility and to act as a discriminating touchstone of character, it is on another more strictly mechanical level meant to provide a prophetic foreshadowing of the progress of Austen's own novel. Radcliffe's men and women are near-aristocrats, the fortunes and properties at stake are huge ones, the secret sins run to adultery and murder and the landscapes of the mind are as foreign. In Radcliffe's tale, Emily St. Aubert's protective father dies, her young lover is sent away to the dissipations of Paris; she is in the farthest room in the most inaccessible castle in the wildest mountains in the most foreign country in the world. As protector against her stupid and brutal suitor, Court Morano, she has only the fearsome Montoni, whose project in inviting her to Udolpho is to terrify her into marrying that same stupid and brutal henchman and eventually murder his wife and take her property for himself. In Austen's novel, unlike Emily's father, Catherine's father is alive, though absent, and Henry Tilney's disappearances are for distances of a few miles; the fearsome General Tilney, misled by Catherine's stupid and brutal suitor John Thorpe, purposes to marry Catherine to her young lover, his son, even to provide the Abbey with a new mistress

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 109.

to gloss over the fact that he may have bullied his wife to her grave. Emily suffers terrors such as Catherine can only wish for: the progress of her distress is from innocent enjoyment of life, to puzzled wonder, to sensitive apprehension, to ‘this exhausting suspense’¹⁷ – whereas Catherine’s progress is so smooth that she keeps forgetting her terrors.

As Andrew Wright remarks, ‘What makes Emily credible is the range and solidity of her experiences; what makes her coherent is self-enhancing avoidance of anything that could bring self-reproach’.¹⁸ Far more than passion, remorse is the mind-killer in the Gothic world. Self-reproach is the distinguishing mark for Austen’s Catherine, since she makes false steps almost immediately; she follows the journey not of the Gothic heroine but of the Gothic antihero, trying to cut that destructive emotion down to size.

The Programmatic Gothic Setting

In the struggle for a thorough perspective on one’s terrors, the labyrinthine nature of the setting is significant. The protagonist’s confused perspective demonstrates the instability of the material world as perceived and hints at the more terrifying instability of the material world as it exists in itself, so that at the heart of the machinery of Gothic setting is the intuition that living amid the bewildering changes in the external world is a matter of continuous perception of a world always

¹⁷ Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, p. 319.

¹⁸ Andrew Wright, ‘Introduction’, in *The Castle of Otranto by Horace Walpole, The Mysteries of Udolpho by Ann Radcliffe (Abridged), Northanger Abbey by Jane Austen*, (Boston: Holt, Rinehart and Wilson, 1965), pp. 2-25 (p. 3).

in motion; things that are A are also B, or will soon be. In such a world, repeatability, even the repetition of sin and conventions, even the machines of terror, are comforting – or would be, if they always delivered what they promise. What distinguishes Radcliffe’s Gothic set pieces is that they always deliver less than they promise: the ‘something’¹⁹ that enters Emily’s bedroom is someone she knows; the spectacle in the portal chamber is only the body of a stranger; the black veil discloses not a murdered woman but a wax simulacrum. Austen is not parodying Radcliffe; she is imitating her when the mysterious silver-locked chest at the Abbey turns out to contain only the extra bed linen and the difficult-to-open cabinet contains only the washing bill. Nor is Catherine’s humiliation and rage at herself Austen’s invention; Emily feels the same way when she finds her imagination inventing more terror than circumstances legitimately provide. What distinguishes Austen’s Catherine is that rage and humiliation are allowed to turn into self-reproach, which generates self-examination, and finally generates self-forgiveness and growth.

Setting is important in both *Northanger Abbey* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and it works similarly. Catherine, like Emily, moves from childhoods familiar setting, to an intermediate series of exotic settings in which she is ignorant, exhilarated, and bewildered, to a final lonely crisis-setting in which the apparently frightening and the truly frightening alternate to bring terror and anxiety to its height. To be sure, since setting is one of the Gothic conventions apparently most parodied, Austen seems to give it shorter shrift here than almost anywhere else. ‘Home’ does not receive the

¹⁹ Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, p. 261.

eloquent rendering that gives *Mansfield Park* an urgent signification almost equal to the Radcliffean sublime. The vivid picture of Fullerton Parsonage is of Catherine ‘rolling down the green slope at the back of the house’,²⁰ which is more an anticipation of Emily Brontë than an echo of Emily St. Aubert. But the middle ground of Bath and its environs, where unfamiliar anxieties begin, is the same significant isolating Gothic labyrinth, even subtly more frightening because it is filled with ghostly intimidating crowds of ‘no acquaintance’.²¹

Austen begins the Bath chapters with a satiric reference to ‘the difficulties and dangers of a six weeks’ residence in Bath’,²² but when Catherine and Mrs. Allen first enter the assembly rooms, they are nearly ‘torn asunder’.²³ The crowd absorbs them, carries them along, and only by ‘unwearied diligence [...] a continued exertion of strength and ingenuity’²⁴ can they achieve both a comfortable separation from the crowd. If the upper rooms are hateful to the stranger, they are even more charged and labyrinthine, when it is a question of keeping oneself in view for the possible invitation of Henry Tilney while hiding from the hideous gallantries of John Thorpe. And if the Pump Room parade is lonely with no acquaintance, it is horrible when Catherine is staked out by the side of the friendly, scheming Isabella Thorpe in the very seat that commands the eyes of all comers and goers. This terror of being used and this sense of being coaxed down a dark path by an invisible hand is pure Gothic,

²⁰ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

and are at the heart of Austen's plots.

The Isolated and Tyrannical Villain

Though Northanger Abbey is not as dark and dangerous place as Udolpho, it inspires Catherine's great interests, allusion and imagination, partly due to General Tilney, who is a Gothic villain. Here in the ruined church, the evil father still seems to reign, exercising a constant 'check upon his children's spirits'.²⁵ Even in his rented quarters in Bath, General Tilney's petulant violence of expression to his children and his mysterious incessant attentions to Catherine make tranquility in his presence impossible, and his normal behaviour at the Abbey, requiring strict punctuality at meals and thorough concentration on his own conversation at all times, is such that any seventeen year-old would shrink from it. However, this does not add up to a certainty that he murdered his wife; but Catherine's arithmetic is not too far faulty. When she knows the whole story, she considers that her vivid imagination 'had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty'.²⁶ The General is a Gothic villain, a materialist; happiest when he can feel contempt over the comparative smallness of the Allen estate, which he thinks Catherine will inherit. The plot of the novel hinges on the General's mistaken notion that Catherine is an heiress and his heavy pleasantries are a courtship of her for his son. And if it seems a contradiction for him to scheme on behalf of an estate that it makes him happy to think is less considerable than his own, that would be a contradiction only for a reasonable villain.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 156.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 247.

The Gothic antihero is obliged to acquire and devour everything. When Tilney is misinformed by John Thorpe that Catherine has a necessitous family bent on acquiring his substance, the terrified General retreats.

He fails to carry his son with him, however; the lovers stand firm, and the marriage is made. But Henry Tilney is a curious lover, even for a parody. The Theodores and Lorenzos, the Valancourts and Vivaldis are accustomed in Gothic tales to a rather passive role, and at first Henry seems to fit this model. Charming and experienced, handsome and good-humoured, he has only to make kind and common conversation to the naïve Catherine for her to fall in love with him. Nonetheless, after acquaintance, readers may feel that ‘nothing could be more natural than Catherine’s being loved’.²⁷ This comes partly from Austen’s steady insistence that naivety is Catherine’s great charm. In addition, Henry is not merely an unromantic lover; he is the first of a peculiarly-Austen series of lover-mentors. Like Knightley, whose Emma is sixteen years younger,²⁸ like Edmund, whose Fanny had her mind formed by him as a child in his house,²⁹ Henry acquires early a formidably psychological advantage over his heroine.

This psychological advantage of the old over the young, the strong over the weak, again dates back to the Gothic. Austen’s young men are not saints, but they are not fathers either and therefore do not possess the sanction for psychological shaping. Henry and Edmund are still getting daily lessons on the terrors and frustrations that a

²⁷ Ibid., p. 249.

²⁸ Jane Austen, *Emma: A Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁹ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park: A Novel* (London: Penguin Classics, 2007).

man in that role both inflicts and suffers. But to forego that advantage entirely seems too much for a man; it may even be, as the case of Emma and Knightley suggests, immoral. A look at three similarly sinister sequences in *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma* – sequences of the deliberate manipulation, and almost terrorisation of the lover-student by the lover-mentor – shows how Austen has taken the inherited Montoni and Emily situation, the primary *Mysteries of Udolpho*, and transformed it into the recognisable anxiety of common life.

One's memory of Catherine Morland's distress in *Northanger Abbey* – the expectation of the sublime and terrible thwarted, then re-established and thwarted again until the recognition that she has actually come to suspect her host of murder sends her rushing away in miserable tears – is that she did all that to herself; she and Mrs. Radcliffe. And certainly she is not blameless. But the real culprit is Henry, who embarked on a deliberate Gothic tease with Catherine as they approached the Abbey in order once again to figure as the deflator for the innocent and frightened girl. The amiability of his 'Dear Miss Morland [...] what have you been judging from?'³⁰ rebuke does not disguise his glee in the enjoyment of the joke that he has foisted on his father and Catherine. If his joke turned real, his Abbey is legitimately horrid, and his father a true ogre. And it did serve him well, for faced with a Montoni-father, Henry turned into a genuine Valancourt, found his real will to love Catherine, not just to tease her, and stood up a hero. But Austen hints at a very mixed motive in the lover: 'As much in honour as in affection' is his proposal at the end, because he believes

³⁰ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 199.

‘that heart to be his own which he had been directed to gain’.³¹

We may argue that Henry is, peculiarly, the hero of the book, but actually, perhaps we should not expect to find this Montoni-like quality of pursuit in the lovers of Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*. At her invitation to the abbey, Catherine is exhilarated, but she does not think she will be frightened at the Abbey because it is her friend’s home. Henry disabuses her of that notion, mostly for his own entertainment, until he ‘was too much amused by the interest he had raised, to be able to carry it further’ and ‘was obliged to entreat her to use her own fancy’.³² Thus insensibly directed, she experiences all of his fancies when alone in the Abbey, concluding with one of her own about the General. Fortunately Henry sees later how he has hurt Catherine and takes pains to show her more affection than ever. At this point his carelessness turns into something more serious, strong enough to enable him to stand up to the General. And, fortunately, Catherine emerges from her misery with a modicum of independent judgment. In fact, the narrator is convinced that the General’s cruelty strengthened their attachment rather than endangered it and sees them on the last page embarked upon perfect happiness. To the inevitable undercut of that adjective, one need only add that Henry too is a clergyman to feel again that their happiness will be a stroke of tremendous good fortune.

The Ruined Church

Parody can also find its proof in *Northanger Abbey*. The most deliberately

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 160.

parodic element is the great Gothic place, the ultimate haunted house and the ruined church – the Abbey itself, the crisis setting in *Northanger Abbey*. Catherine comes to the Tilneys' home prepared to find a ruined church: crumbling walls, dirty leaded windowpanes, inconveniently-small passageways connecting formidably-huge chambers fit for congregations rather than families. She is surprised at almost every turn by the imagination of the General's improvements: everything was in good repair, servants were polishing and scraping, the anticipated echoing spaces were scaled down to comfortable size, and the approach to the Abbey, 'along a smooth, level road of fine gravel, [was] without obstacle, alarm or solemnity of any kind'.³³

Catherine's initial efforts to supply obstacle, alarm and solemnity right out of Mrs. Radcliffe in order to objectify her discomfort at the Abbey are amusing, but her feeling is dead right. There is something ominous in the Northanger setting; a hollow at the inward prospect that draws out all the poisons of the imagination. It is no longer a ruined church, but its restoration is not simply in the direction of comfort and 'domestic economy'. The furniture is overbearing and lavish: 'The elegance of the breakfast set forced itself on Catherine's notice'.³⁴ Under the General's direction she tours the crushingly extensive gardens, enters 'the real drawing-room, used only with company of consequence', and the library: 'an apartment, in its way, of equal magnificence',³⁵ ascends the richly carved staircase, and treads obediently through still more magnificent bedchambers. The whole place is 'fitted up in a style of luxury

³³ Ibid., p. 160.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 125.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 182.

and expense which was almost lost on the unpractised eye of Catherine'.³⁶

Given the satiric nature of Austen, we can see that her parody of Gothic in *Northanger Abbey* is not to satirise or mock but to inherit and preserve. To Austen, whose temperament preferred fresh air and sunshine, her use of Gothic elements in this novel is to illustrate her imagination and joy; to experiment and achieve comic effect.

The Over-Imaginative Heroine

There is, finally, another crucial perspective that Radcliffe's Gothic inheritance can shed light on Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. A classic figure in Gothic is the over-imaginative heroine; the young woman whose burning hyper-sensibility catches every tremor of dread in the ethos and imagines it into concrete horrid form. Life for these heroines seems a constant battle against the 'superstition' (as Radcliffe's Emily calls it) that gives vivid shape to the 'causeless terrors' (as Austen's Catherine thinks them) that surround or arise from the soul. Yet, 'caused' or not, the terrors are there, and in classic Gothic, 'superstition' or not, one's imaginings are always true, either 'really' as in *The Monk*, or 'ironically' as in Radcliffe. As Duckworth suggests, in spite of Austen's 'ironic defense' of the rational, 'wholly to affirm a life without terrors, wholly to reject the function of the imagination, was not part of her intention'.³⁷ Austen's Catherine is linked backward to Radcliffe's Emily in the explicit grounding of the imagination in activities arising from terror. Emily sees corpses all around, and

³⁶ Ibid., p. 166.

³⁷ Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), p. 98.

corpses there are; different ones than she had thought. Catherine sees murders all around, and so it proves in its way. And if there is something to the notion that in the serious novel of the nineteenth century marriage replaces Gothic murder, then we can see why Catherine's sister-heroine Emma sees marriage all around. If both young women are caught looking in the wrong direction when the actual 'attempts' come, it is because the Gothic heroine is always looking in the wrong direction, or else where would the plot be?

Both Catherine and Emma spend a great deal of time fashioning specific clumsy plots to carry off the unmistakable charges of intrigue, of outside manipulation and inner contradictions, of plotlines that make up the anxiety of common life. In this apparently irrational sensibility, this wilful clumsy activity of impregnation is rather better fitted to cope with life than the rational and cynical. In common life too, the fact that one is paranoid does not mean that there are no monsters in pursuit.

Catherine's chaperone, Mrs. Allen, gives advice like 'Do just as you please, my dear',³⁸ and 'young people do not like to be always thwarted', but this lack of outward check to her thoughts and plots is felt by Catherine to be a handicap: 'I always hoped you would tell me, if you thought I was doing wrong'.³⁹ And we are invited by the narrator of *Northanger Abbey* to trace Catherine's imaginative bent in the direction of castles, villains, and murder to the 'training for a heroine'⁴⁰ she received in books and to her total unpreparedness for the actual dangers a young

³⁸ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 61.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

woman meets. The material of Catherine's elaborate fantasy about General Tilney points to her fears both about not being married and about being married, and the fantasy is activated by the confounding concealment of intent she senses all around her in the common conduct of adult life, from Isabella's masking familiarity, to Henry's ironic tenderness, to the General's terrifying amiability.

Conclusion

The works of Austen are concise, comic and acutely satirical. With her particular female sensitiveness, she always depicts idyllic love and marriage between gentlemen and ladies. Finished in 1818, *Northanger Abbey* is also a love story. However, in spite of love disputes, it differs from her other novels in that inheritance and supposed parody of Gothic novels run through it. The heroine Catherine reads *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which was a popular Gothic novel at that time. Then, during her stay in Northanger Abbey, her reading of Gothic novels continues. For Catherine, Northanger Abbey symbolises an imagined ideal. As soon as she enters the Abbey, she begins to think of herself as the heroine of a Gothic novel. Unlike Bath, which is simply a pleasant tourist town, the Abbey is a place of mystery and perhaps even adventure, at least in Catherine's mind. When the Abbey turns out to be disappointingly normal, Catherine uses her memory of the abbeys from her novel-reading to make it more frightening.

Gothic novels and their conventions permeate the novel. Several conventions of Gothic are applied to illustrate Austen's inheritance of Radcliffe's Gothic. Northanger Abbey and Udolpho are both ideal places for Gothic illusion, and setting

works similarly in the two novels. Catherine, like Emily, moves from a familiar childhood setting to ignorant and bewildered settings, and then to a final lonely crisis-setting. General Tilney is as Gothic a villain as Montoni while Henry Tilney is not merely an unromantic lover; he is a threatening one. Catherine is naïve and young. This psychological advantage of the old over the young, the strong over the weak, again dates back to the Gothic. The two over-imaginative young heroines, Catherine and Emily, both find their imagination inventing more terror than circumstances legitimately provide. They both need reason and commandment of feelings. To some extent, it is true that Austen's novel is a parody of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, but parody is not satire or mockery. Parody creates new utterances out of the utterance that it seeks to mock.