



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures, Faculty of Arts, Charles University

Posudek vedoucí na bakalářskou práci Michaely Lesayové  
“Becoming a Heroine: *Northanger Abbey* as a parody of novel conventions”

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“No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be a heroine.” The charmingly ambiguous opening sentence of Austen’s novel *Northanger Abbey*, as with most of her other, establishes the story that will unfold over the pages that follow. Catherine Morland as a novel heroine (i.e. the protagonist of a piece of prose fiction) does not quite fulfill readers’ expectations of what a “heroine” ought to look like and how she ought to behave. Precisely this gap between traditional expectations (of romance stereotypes?) and the genuine simplicity of what we get instead – a young girl and her first experience of broader social interaction – is the source of the strength and beauty of Austen’s novel. Consequently, this topic has also become the point of inspiration for Ms Lesayová in her BA thesis.

She attempts to tackle the ways the novel treats novel conventions established at the time and comes to terms with the popular genre of the Gothic, which Austen found perhaps interesting but highly problematic in the reactions it elicited in the readers. And, third, she considers the novel as a story of maturation, dealing with the process of growth, reasoning and proper judgement on behalf of the protagonist.

The thesis makes it clear that the novel is not primarily didactic, but its aim is to illustrate the ways in which misapprehensions, based on our sense of wrong judgement, vitiate our impressions of others, which would be more firmly based on observation and understanding. This sizeable gap between what we believe, and what greater knowledge, sympathy and reflection might persuade us to believe, forms the space that allows Austen’s narrator consistently to adopt a tone of irony which is prevalent in so much fiction principally concerned with social interaction.

Ms Lesayová manages to convey the sense of what differentiates Austen’s text from those of her contemporaries: she employs psychological complexity and progression. However, in the thesis we get very little of the characteristics of the contemporary form of writing that Austen was writing against (with the exception of one subchapter on the topos of the Gothic). But this is not enough. Austen was reacting to much more: instead of improbable obstacles of fortune, surprising revelations and sudden reversals of plot, loose episodic structure etc. we get concentration on limited social and inward developments, a blend of behaviour minutely observed and subsequent moral reflection, centred on the consciousness of the heroine (although in this novel rendered more obliquely through the narrative voice). A more careful consideration of what Austen deemed ridiculous in fiction writing would have boosted the analysis in the thesis.

Despite this ridicule of some exaggerated features of contemporary writing, Austen considered fiction to be a very important thing, and she shared this opinion with her sister-novelists, be it those she parodied and/or admired, such as the gothicists Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Smith, the novelists of manners Fanny Burney or Maria Edgeworth, writers of regional, national and historical tales like Edgeworth, Lady Morgan, Jane West etc., moral

educators like Mary Brunton and Amelia Opie: the sense that fiction is a legitimate variation on the discourse of ideas. The novel WAS a space for social comment and engagement, as well as for entertainment. Austen's fiction is a sustained dialogue with and allusive critique of the contemporary novel, it is so on term which endorse the genre's high social and moral purpose even as it satirizes its more extravagant effects.

And *Northanger Abbey* is a most obvious example. One of the earliest finished and the latest published of her fictions, this is, as its final title may imply, Austen's Gothic novel. Its heroine is as socially vulnerable and insecure as any of Charlotte Smith's orphans: she is misled but ultimately vindicated by the fictions she devours. The most important parts of the novel – Catherine's courtship by Henry Tilney - indeed centre on themes of reading and female writers' writing. At the same time the narrative bristles with clues and jokes and allusions at the expense of the naïve romance reader. Reading novels, it becomes clear, if misapplied can be our worst preparation for society. But if properly understood, it is also our best! Hence the defence of the modern novel as “some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed ...”

Consequently, the novel works not only as a parody of novel conventions (i.e. in the sense how novels were written), but also pints out issues of judging, appreciating and reading novels, i.e. ways in which literature is utilized and how it is applied to life. Therefore, I need to ask the question: how – and if – *Northanger Abbey* works as a parody of how novels were read. And then, last but foremost – what is the aim of such parody?

The submitted thesis has undergone several revisions and sustained long-term effort went into the final text. However, there is still some imbalance in quality: some passages offer relatively nuanced insights, such as the role of Henry Tilney etc, however, some are rather simple and do not go beyond the more or less basic. A sorry and pitiful sight is the Czech abstract.

Despite some of the above mentioned reservations, the thesis meets the requirements in terms of form and content. I **therefore recommend it for defence with the preliminary mark of very good (velmi dobře)**.

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PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc., M.A.  
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