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Becoming a Heroine: *Northanger Abbey* as a parody of novel conventions

Jak se stát hrdinkou: *Opatství Northanger* jako parodie románových konvencí

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is universally acknowledged that Jane Austen's novels revolve around courtship, marriage and money. They are love stories and novels about maturation and self-growth. The story is always told from the perspective of a heroine who is the main character of the novel. A heroine can be understood in two ways. If following the older meaning of the word, she is somewhat a courageous and skilled goddess; but traditionally in novels, the word simply means that she is the protagonist of it. A heroine in a novel is most likely someone "who must be on the side of truth and feeling."¹ This is an accurate description of all Austen's heroines: they are usually driven by their feelings and personal truths, which also means that they usually appear as very undisciplined, honest or perhaps even conceited.

Surely, this means that they are not exactly heroic. They do not perform any acts of heroism. In fact, they seem anything but heroines. The only assertion readers get about the state of affairs is the mere fact of having it written plain and simple from Austen herself: this is a novel and the main female character must be a heroine because she always is. Readers are invited on a dubious journey with a dubious heroine. That is also one of the few things Austen's heroines have in common; otherwise each heroine is unique in her own way. They can be divided and defined by means of social and financial background and in terms of characteristics and physical appearances. The second prominent features they all have in common – except for their lack of heroism – are their flaws and virtues: they are always somehow in balance. We have to realise that a heroine's goal – at least when it comes to Jane Austen's novels – is to find her hero and to marry him. In order for her to succeed, there must be something attractive about her. Austen's heroines always have that something special that is at least partially appealing – it is what makes the heroes fall in love with them.

It was already stated that readers are always informed about who is the heroine, and it is done so by the narrator whose role is thus very essential. In each novel, the narrator has a cardinal role and a strong voice. *Northanger Abbey* is no exception. For the most part, we see situations through Catherine's eyes. But there are certain moments when Austen assumes the position of the narrator and uses the first person singular pronoun. Nevertheless, the narrator appears to have a feminine voice and so we can claim the same about his or her gender; the narrator is a female, and we shall address her as one. The key role of this feminine voice lies in the fact that she always directly points at the heroine.

¹ Rachel Brownstein, *Becoming a Heroine* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1994) 101.

In *Northanger Abbey*, the narrator follows the tradition as she begins by saying that Catherine Morland is not a heroine; she says: “No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine.”² In confusing manner, what the narrator actually says is that Catherine indeed is a heroine, despite her unfortunate social background and lack of heroic qualities. Her physical appearance, family’s position in society, interests and lack of knowledge all hinder her from being taken seriously as heroine material. Catherine destroys all previous arguments about flaws and virtues being in balance. She is very much flawed; too flawed that it seems that no one will ever want to marry her. Despite her inauspicious situation, she really is the heroine of *Northanger Abbey* and as one, she will marry her hero.

Stylistically, Austen’s novels are also similar. They are interwoven with irony, satire, elaborate vocabulary, dialogues, indirect free speech and a particular syntax. In terms of genre, they are written as romances. But *Northanger Abbey* distinguishes itself from the rest and appears as a parody. The novel is a parody of two literary genres: English novels and Gothic novels. Concerning the first, as Rachel M. Brownstein in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* records, “her sense of the novel’s limits permeates moral, witty fictions, offering itself – in lieu of any ideal romantic heroine, in place of any clear didactic message – as a moral of human behaviour.”³ Austen was very concerned with the human behaviour of her heroines and characters, a stance that was deepened by her disagreement with the insufficient and negligent representation of heroines in other books. Consequently, Austen focused on the stereotypes attached to characters and she also focused on traditional conventions surrounding characters in novels, such as reader’s expectation of how a story should be narrated and depicted, how reliable the narrator should be and also what a heroine might look like both mentally and physically. This method of mockery of English novels is projected in the main character and the narrative.

Secondly, Austen lived through the Gothic revival; a revival which did not meet with her own beliefs. Her conviction was that situations in novels such as characters, their lives and experiences should resemble real life. She did not believe in the fantasy and the supernatural like the Gothic writers did. Thus she took the idea of a Gothic heroine and twisted her into a plain, real and flawed girl. Austen challenged the conventions and proved that an ordinary

² Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1993) 3.

³ Rachel M. Brownstein, *Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster, *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 35.

character who is obsessed with Gothic fiction can become a heroine. The parody of Gothic fiction is further underlined by Gothic references and imagery.

Lastly, *Northanger Abbey* is also a coming-of-age tale, a Bildungsroman story, which addresses the issue of reading. The novel traces the development of Catherine Morland. Catherine enjoys reading Gothic novels but at the same time, she is unable to read people around her. Through the encounters with different characters and through gaining experience, Catherine matures and learns that reading people is far more important skill than being able to read books. While Catherine matures, she also justifies her position as a heroine, even if a fallible one.

The thesis will aim to prove that Jane Austen projected parody in her novel in order to emphasize the development of her heroine Catherine Morland and to defend her status. The first part will deal with Jane Austen in relation to her style and oeuvre. Shared features will be analysed. The second part of the thesis will focus on the concept of parody and its projection in *Northanger Abbey*. Firstly, the novel will be analysed as a parody of novel conventions. A chapter will deal with Catherine's characteristics; another chapter will deal with the role of landscape, which has two functions: it underlines Catherine's flawed character and limited knowledge, and it also draws a comparison between the Tilneys and the Thorpes in addition to their contrasting views on the Gothic genre. Such an argument will be supported by the analysis of three major locations in the novel: Blaize Castle, Beechen Cliff and Northanger Abbey itself. Secondly, the novel will be analysed as a parody of Gothic fiction, thus chapters on the topos of the genre, on gothic references and imagery and finally a chapter called "A heroine's realisation" will be provided.

The third part of this thesis will be devoted to the idea of *Northanger Abbey* as a coming-of-age tale. An analysis of important and influential characters, including Henry Tilney as her mentor lover, will follow. The second part of this section will discuss the role of the narrator, and it will do so in the following ways: the general nature of the narrator, Catherine's point of view and its significance and irony. The last part will analyse the coming-of-age of Catherine Morland and the process in which Catherine becomes a reformed heroine. The thesis should come to the conclusion that Jane Austen has chosen to parody traditional elements of novels – including a traditional heroine and our expectations of her and the narrator – and traditional elements of Gothic fiction – such as villain and heroine and the imagery – in order to emphasise the realistic development of Catherine Morland which is depicted in a different way than it would be in Gothic fiction or novels.

To support my arguments, comparisons will be continually drawn between *Northanger Abbey* and the remaining five novels of Jane Austen. The following points and aspects will be compared: contrast to other heroines in characteristics and values, depiction of landscape, the role of mentor lover, lack of knowledge and lastly, the employment of irony.

2. *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

2.1. THE PLACE OF *NORTHANGER ABBEY* IN AUSTEN'S NOVELS

Northanger Abbey is Austen's earliest work. The author started it – under its working title *Susan* – when she was seventeen years old.⁴ The novel was finished a year later, with some small revisions made in 1802.⁵ In mid 1803, Austen sold the book to a publishing company in London. However, its publisher refused any publications of it.⁶ Ten years went by and finally in 1812, Austen's brother Henry Thomas Austen managed to get back the original manuscript of *Susan*. Austen began to revise it with hopes that it would be published eventually.⁷ Unfortunately, she died soon and so the novel was published posthumously in 1817.

Jane Austen drew inspiration from several sources, mostly from Sentimentalism, women writers and their courtship novels, and also from previously mentioned opposition to Romanticism. Her period was not only that of the Romantic poets but also of Napoleonic Wars and American Revolution. But as Andrew Wright asserts, political situation have probably influenced *Northanger Abbey* only little because “country life in her part of the world was relatively undisturbed”⁸ and so was her own life. This does not mean that Austen would be completely silent – she did express her concerns because she had two brothers in the Royal Navy⁹ – but she did not feel the need to preserve the fear of terror in her own novels. Furthermore, Austen did not share the Romantics' views and need for emphasis on senses, reasoning, personal feelings, pessimism and adoration of nature. Consequently, as Norman Page asserts, when Austen used the word “Romantic” it was in the sense of “extravagant or foolishly unrealistic.”¹⁰

Austen was also influenced by Sentimentalism and the “representation of the inner life, and its active engagement of the reader's imaginative sympathy”¹¹ as Butler puts it, and also by expansion of novels. Out of the plethora of novels that enjoyed their popularity, it was women writers that provided an immense inspiration for her. During Jane Austen's life, women were criticised for trying to be professional women writers. It was believed that a

⁴ Deirdre Le Faye, *Chronology of Jane Austen's Life*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster, *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 18.

⁵ Deirdre LeFaye 8.

⁶ Deirdre Le Faye 11.

⁷ Deirdre Le Faye 14.

⁸ Andrew H. Wright, *Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967) 25.

⁹ Wright 25.

¹⁰ Norman Page, *The Landscape of Jane Austen* (London: Routledge, 2011) 11.

¹¹ Butler 8.

proper woman, as Jan Fergus puts it, was quiet and domestic; the assumption was that a well-behaved and proper woman would never want to publicly participate in writing; she would never wish to be paid money for it.¹² Consequently, Austen admired those brave women who did not feel shame in trying to write and earn a living by being a writer, including for example Anne Radcliffe, Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth.

Frances Burney's *Camilla* was a book Austen knew well. It is also mentioned in *Northanger Abbey*. John Thorpe describes *Camilla* as "that other stupid book, written by that woman they make such a fuss about, she who married the French emigrant."¹³ It seems that such a stance is Austen's critique of the novel but it is not. It is a proof of John Thorpe's ignorance. In fact, Austen actually makes fun of her own readers because if we compare *Camilla* Tyrold and Catherine Morland, we see that they share more than what was expected, especially regarding their naivety and inability to interpret reality, and thus we are capable of seeing the direct influence of Burney. Maria Edgeworth's social comedies and contrasting styles of representing the mind of a character were an influence, too. Lastly, Anne Radcliffe role was also decisive but in a different way. She was a writer Austen knew well as she was one of the main pioneers of gothic novels. During Austen's life, there was a belief that women should read gothic novels but Austen disagreed with such opinion. She was not inspired by Radcliffe and her writing style. If anything, she found Radcliffe's style repulsive. Because of that, her desire to realistically depict stories was only strengthened.

Lastly, Jane Austen's books were influenced by courtship novels; novels "which reflected the concerns of a culture in change, which debated the nature of authority and personal distinction, and the value of sentiment and the sentiment itself"¹⁴ as Brownstein records. They were concerned with women, marriages and the act of courtship, in other words, themes we find so often in Austen's novels. According to Brownstein, courtship novels, such as *Belinda*, were Austen's favourite reading.¹⁵

2.2. COMMON THEMES

Jane Austen's novels are set among the landed gentry. But the gentry is not explored in its entirety as some aspects, mainly economic concerns – such as the owner of the house or

¹² Jan Fergus, *The professional woman writer*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster, *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 13.

¹³ Austen 44.

¹⁴ Rachel M. Brownstein, *Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster, *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 35.

¹⁵ Brownstein 35.

number of servants – are omitted. The novels can be said to pivot around maturing, marriage, morals, manners and money.¹⁶ At their core, the plots “focus upon interrelationships between characters rather than upon a single individual”¹⁷ as Andrew H. Wright asserts. The focus is not only on the heroine but rather on her interaction with suitors. Suitors constitute a great part of each novel; a novel written by Austen cannot exist without its hero. A heroine always has two suitors. Marianne Dashwood’s suitors are Willoughby and Colonel Brandon; Elizabeth chooses between Wickham and Darcy; Fanny Price loves Edmund but her suitor is Henry Crawford; Emma’s affections are vied for by Frank Churchill but she (eventually) realises she loves Mr Knightley; and William Walter Eliot courts Anne Eliot but she loves Captain Wentworth. Furthermore, each novel always distinguishes between the two suitors; one is a hero and the other is a villain. This description also fits *Northanger Abbey*.

Catherine Morland’s suitors are Henry Tilney and John Thorpe. She is in love with Henry from the beginning of the novel and remains so until the end. She does not fall in love with anyone else. Here the other suitor – John – has a more passive role. In fact, he is so passive that Catherine does not even realise that he is her suitor. Once she learns about his feelings, or rather about his intention to marry her, she immediately turns him down as she says: “I certainly cannot return his affection, and as certainly never meant to encourage it.”¹⁸ In comparison to other heroines, Catherine is similar to Fanny Price who also loves her suitor from the beginning. They are both very consistent with their private feelings.

It is true that suitors play an essential role for heroine and the overall plot but at the same time, they only play a secondary role. As Wright points out, “it is through her heroines that she [Austen] gives exposition to the themes.”¹⁹ In other words, issues, concerns and themes are always projected through the figure of a heroine. Henry Tilney is an exception to this rule because he does not play a secondary role. He is a central character who has an influential role and shapes Catherine’s character more than anyone else. He always provides a lesson for Catherine, and when she herself is in doubt, he provides an insight into a particular matter. He is her mentor lover.

Heroes are supposed to be role models and their perfections are contrasted with heroines’ flaws. Flawed heroine must reform and her personal development should be the climax of Austen’s novels. The plots are not concerned with issues of the world, Austen “calls

¹⁶ Paul Poplawski, *A Jane Austen Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998) 289.

¹⁷ Wright 90.

¹⁸ Austen 151.

¹⁹ Wright 91.

for no general changes in the world”²⁰ to put it in Marilyn Butler’s words, but they are about personal issues and about one’s self-discovery. As Marilyn Butler asserts, “Jane Austen turns and turns about between two plots, which can be crudely characterised as built about the Heroine who is Right and the Heroine who is Wrong.”²¹ The heroine who is wrong makes an intellectual mistake – such as misjudging other characters and situations – and she realises her fault only at the end. Four heroines of Austen are fallible: Elizabeth Bennet, Marianne Dashwood, Emma Woodhouse and Catherine Morland.

Catherine Morland is similar to Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse. She shares their naivety and tendency to make errors in judgement, although we can put it down to the fact that she is only seventeen, and also the youngest of Jane Austen’s heroines. Nevertheless, she is prone to make very crucial mistakes. Firstly, she misjudges people because she is too trusting and cannot decipher people’s real intentions. It happens with the Thorpes and General Tilney. Furthermore, she presents herself as a Gothic heroine: she often imagines gothic horrors and assigns people to villains she has read about, she is eager to see Baize Castle because she expects it to be a mysterious and dark place, and similarly, she believes that Northanger Abbey is a frightening place without having any proof whatsoever.

The outcome of one’s personal development is marriage. A heroine should want to get married. In order for her to succeed, she must realise her errors and finally mature, which partially means she must separate from an acquaintance of the same sex, as when Catherine Morland separates herself from Isabella Thorpe.²² Marriage includes the process of courtship, although we do not usually get the details about it but rather a summary of what has happened and how the hero has proposed. There is always a pair of young lovers who is faced with an obstacle of some sort; and by facing the obstacle and by overcoming it, the pair can achieve their goal. Interestingly, the mere act of falling in love happens very often from distance²³ and *Northanger Abbey* is no exception as Henry Tilney proposes to Catherine after being away from her. By the process of courtship and marriage, other themes emerge.

The issue of money, social ranking and adequate property are the central themes. The author of *Northanger Abbey* was well aware of the class differences because her father was a clergyman and she knew the difficulties of earning money and having the responsibility to provide for a family; thus she employs it in her novels. Readers are usually informed about one’s class through the names attached to characters, such as we read about Lady Catherine

²⁰ Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 1-2.

²¹ Butler 166.

²² Brownstein 109.

²³ Brownstein 85.

de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice*.²⁴ Other method is by informing about the income of the characters. We know, for instance, that Mr Bingley makes 5 000 pounds a year or that the Dashwood women have 500 pounds a year together.²⁵ Generally, the richest people have about 10 000 pounds – as Darcy has – a year while the poor have about 100 pounds a year, as in the case of Edward Ferris.²⁶ Men earn money and women are the ones who take care of the properties. Similarly, Austen always reveals whether a heroine is rich or poor. If not explicit, one's fortune is expressed through his properties – or the lack of it – such as through the depiction of his house, garden or park, or number of servants or carriages. On the other hand, one's lack of money is addressed as well. It is also a source of gossip in the novels. In the world of Austen's characters, people who do not have money can expect that others will criticise them, or at least, that they will be talked about. Money or the lack of it is the main obstacle in one's pursuit of happiness or, as Edward Copeland asserts in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, money is “the love-tipped arrow aimed at the hearts of Jane Austen's heroines.”²⁷

Aristocracy has a place in Austen's novels – there are ladies and sirs – but gentlemen assumes more space. Clergymen and navy men are most likely to be chosen by her. But interestingly, there is a huge difference between the professions of brothers. The eldest son usually inherits a property and money, which also affects him badly as, for instance, we see in the case of Frederick Tilney. On the other hand, the younger son always has to work for his living and for the approval of his family so he can be deserving of a heroine. However, Austen's heroines challenge the traditional conventions because they usually marry clergymen who are the younger sons.²⁸ There is also sometimes a significant difference between sisters. As Juliet McMaster points out, in *Pride and Prejudice*, the eldest sister is also the most privileged member of the family, which is apparent in the fact that she is the only one called “Miss Bennet” while others are called by their first name.²⁹

While allowing the upper gentry to loaf around, Austen is able to send a strong message to her readers. Social status is irrelevant and it does not define a person. What define a person are his traits of character. Anyone can climb the social ladder and can prove his virtues and qualities despite his lower income or lower position in the society. Furthermore,

²⁴ McMaster 113.

²⁵ Copeland 139.

²⁶ Copeland 135-136.

²⁷ Copeland 139.

²⁸ McMaster 120.

²⁹ McMaster 120.

the social status of her novels is of local importance and hardly national³⁰ as Butler asserts and it is also “the source of much of her [Austen’s] comedy and her irony.”³¹ Aristocracy is a source of amusement for Austen and she treats it as such in her stories.

Catherine Morland comes from a middle class family. The position of her family has never been an issue until Bath. But when she meets people from the upper class family, or people who care about money like John Thorpe, she begins to feel that one’s wealth can be a decisive aspect of one’s life. General Tilney or John Thorpe both pride – or rather lie as in the case of Thorpe – themselves on the properties they have. The General judges people in accordance with their finances and it proves to have a crucial effect on Catherine’s life: General believes she is wealthy and thus could be potentially a good match for his younger son. Therefore, he invites her to Northanger Abbey. There she succumbs to her fantasy world, is criticised by Henry Tilney, banished from the Abbey after Henry’s father learns that she is not wealthy at all and is reunited with Henry after he finally parts with his father.

Jane Austen’s novels are also about manners. This can be interpreted in two ways. They have shared features with comedy of manners – as are witty dialogues and focus on young lovers and their strife for happiness – but they are also centred on etiquette. It is apparent in the greetings of people, in the language of people, in treating religion seriously, as well as in their rituals such as balls. Young people behave accordingly and they meet “at evening parties, picnics, concerts, and dances, regulated by a strict code of behaviour”³² as we read in *Becoming a Heroine*. People are always judged by the things they say and do. *Northanger Abbey* is no exception: Eleanor Tilney is an example of a well-behaved person while John Thorpe and Frederick Tilney are her foils.

To conclude this section, it can be argued that Austen’s themes allow interpretation on three levels of meaning. Firstly, they depict what a country life set among the upper middle classes in southern England at the end of the eighteenth century looks like. Secondly, they can be understood as allegories with set virtues and flaws which are contrasted, approved of and commented on. Lastly, they are ironic commentaries where anything means everything and where any comment, reference or note holds some kind of significance. *Northanger Abbey* does not stand aside for the novel can be surely interpreted on all three levels. It is about upper middle classes in Southern England, and upper classes as well, virtues are central to the plot as well as the defects which accompany it, and irony is a consistent method of narrating

³⁰ Butler 2.

³¹ Copeland 129.

³² Brownstein 89.

from the very beginning of the novel. In such light, *Northanger Abbey* is very similar to the rest of the novels.

In terms of themes, *Northanger Abbey* follows the tradition. The novel is indeed about marriage, money, manners, property and maturing. However, in terms of plot structure – heroine, hero and villains – there is a discrepancy. Firstly, the heroine is innovative. None of Austen’s heroines are exactly perfect and flawless but Catherine’s flaws prevail and have serious consequences. Secondly, no other Austen’s novel contains Gothic references. And thirdly, none other novel is about reading and the necessity to understand which is more important: how to approach and read people and novels.

2.3. STYLE

Austen’s critics seem to share the same conviction that the novelist lacks her own style and that she does not evoke interest because her heroines are always faced with trivial problems. Even Charlotte Bronte once said: “She [Austen] ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound. The passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood”³³ and continued in a similar way: “Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands, and feet. What sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study.”³⁴ Such a stance must surely be a result of not so thorough reading of Austen. The trademarks of her style are details, hints and signals, and those who do not pay attention to them, will suffer a limitation. There is always a “disparity between subject-matter and significance”³⁵ as we read in *The Language of Jane Austen*. The subject-matter and the meaning are signalled by particular language features. A reader who cannot see those features will be limited in understanding the true and significant meaning of events and situations and will perhaps come to a similar conclusion to Bronte’s and her followers.

If we talk about Austen’s trademarks, one of the most significant features of her style – parody – has to be mentioned. *Northanger Abbey* begins and ends with ambiguous statements. At the beginning, the narrator says: “No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine.”³⁶ This statement provides two central points. Firstly, Catherine is a heroine; and secondly, Catherine does not behave like a heroine. Similarly, the ending says: “I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it

³³ Margaret Smith, “The Letters of Charlotte Bronte: 1848 – 1851” (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) 383.

³⁴ Smith 383.

³⁵ Page 7.

³⁶ Austen 3.

may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience.”³⁷ While Austen clearly does not sympathise with Henry’s father and does not approve of his methods, she at the same time points out that he is very much the reason why Catherine and Henry married in the first place. Austen makes fun of her readers and offers them the opposites, making hints and insisting on seeing more than just the surface. As Page puts it, “it is a joke upon fictional didacticism, the two alternative offered being equally absurd.”³⁸

Ambiguity appears so often in the novel and is one of the devices Austen employs frequently. It is a marked feature of the novel, yet readers are able to understand the real meaning. In chapter fourteen, Catherine says: “I have heard that something very shocking indeed, will soon come out in London”³⁹ and continues “It is to be uncommonly dreadful. I shall expect murder and every thing of the kind.”⁴⁰ She is, as readers understand, talking about a new book which is to be published. However, Eleanor Tilney does not interpret it this way – she believes that an actual crime is about to be revealed. A dialogue between the Tilneys and Catherine follows. The key words of this conversation such as come out, murder, author, shocking, horrible and dreadful can be construed in more than one way. One meaning is related to a crime, while the other has no relation to it at all.

In other cases, Austen presents reason as unreason and reasonable conclusions and assumptions as unreasonable. Catherine on many occasions believes that her reasoning is logical but in reality, it is based on unfounded grounds. Catherine, for example, thinks that General Tilney is a charming man and altogether a handsome and agreeable man, and she bases her opinion on the fact that he was Henry’s father, which is obviously ridiculous. Even if General Tilney was all of the good qualities Catherine assigned to him, her reasoning is just wrong and cannot be taken seriously.

A second prominent feature of *Northanger Abbey* is irony. It is applied in order to show discrepancy between words and its referents and to state that there are things which Austen has no intention to spend time on.⁴¹ Apart from situational and dramatic irony which will be discussed later, Austen employs two other methods: repetition and projection through a character. An example of repetition occurs when Catherine asks Isabella’s sister Maria about their trip to Clifton and Maria says that “it had been altogether the most delightful

³⁷ Austen 274.

³⁸ Page 15.

³⁹ Austen 117.

⁴⁰ Austen 117.

⁴¹ Lascelles 129.

scheme in the world; that nobody could imagine how charming it had been, and that it had been more delightful than any body could conceive.”⁴² Maria repeatedly uses exaggerations via words such as “the most delightful” and “charming” to describe an experience which might have been delightful but surely not the most delightful experience. By using such obviously exaggerated statements, Austen was able to characterise Maria in far more direct and impressive way than just plainly stating that she is dull, insincere and pompous.

Irony is also projected through a character, such as in the case of Henry Tilney who is a character but also a device. He, similarly to his creator, shares a sense of linguistic correctness and puts emphasis on appropriate usage of words in certain contexts. He always corrects his sister or Catherine of some incorrectness in their language – such as in the case of the word nice – and he mocks their exaggerations – as with the words amazingly or faithfully. Henry Tilney presents himself as a linguistic maturity which is in contrary to Catherine’s immaturity.

In other cases, the novelist takes advantage of employing cases of rattling. It is a device Austen frequently employs in order to characterise people. A character who can be described as a rattler – as an empty chatter – is John Thorpe. He talks in hyperboles, always uses exaggerations and artificial language, and also uses words of a colloquial language such as “famous” or “tittupy”. He is very similar to his sister because they both freely chat while having no ability to control their speech. Isabella’s vocabulary usually contains words which are excessive, such as “delightful”, “horrid”, “charming”, “heavenly” and “vile”. Generally, each character is defined by different mode of speech; a certain speech can only be assigned to a certain character because of its typical features and words. For such reason, Jane Austen relied on dialogues.

In general, dialogues are employed in order to maintain conversation and thus also social relationships, but they also help to depict and classify characters. Each character and each relationship is emphasised with a different style of direct speech. There is a passage in *Northanger Abbey* where the dialogue between Isabella Thorpe and Catherine Morland appears as a comedy. The girl friends were supposed to meet at one o’clock in the Pump Room and when they do, Isabella greets Catherine as follows: “My dearest creatures, what can have made you so late? I have been waiting for you at least this age.”⁴³ Catherine’s sober reply “I hope you have not been here long?”⁴⁴ meets with Isabella’s exaggeration: “Oh! These

⁴² Austen 122.

⁴³ Austen 32.

⁴⁴ Austen 32.

ten ages at least.”⁴⁵ The exchange between the two shows a good deal about their respective styles of speech and different characters. As Page concludes, “although both make much use of questions and exclamations, there is a significant difference between the former’s modish exaggerations and the latter’s sincerity and regard for truth.”⁴⁶

Austen often creates a discrepancy between words spoken and action. Quotation marks do not always signify a simultaneous action. In speeches, we often read about action that took place earlier or will take place later. This is obvious in chapter number twenty-two when Catherine wants to learn more about Mrs. Tilney and asks Eleanor about her mother, which is narrated in the following way: ““Was she a very charming woman? Was she handsome? Was there any picture of her in the Abbey? And why had she been so partial to that grove? Was it from dejection of spirits?”-were questions now eagerly poured forth;- the first three received a ready affirmative, the two others were passed by...”⁴⁷ It is obvious that Catherine did not ask these questions all at once as it is presented but instead, she asked them separately. The reason Austen chose to present it in this way was to avoid lengthy dialogues, to speed action and to emphasize Catherine’s curiosity and eagerness.

Austen was known for the use of free indirect speech. She was not an innovator because writers such as Henry Fielding or Frances Burney started to employ this form before her but she did extend its role and was the first major novelist to use it.⁴⁸ Free indirect speech finds its traces even in *Northanger Abbey*. It is employed, for instance, in chapter number twelve, when Catherine Morland visits the Tilneys, knocks on their door and is greeted with a servant – which is narrated as: “The man believed Miss Tilney to be at home, but was not quite certain. Would she be pleased to send up her card?” This example confirms the patterns of this form of speech and it also shows its extended role because the servant’s question helps to presume the narrative speed. But generally, this form does not necessarily have to have a meaning; there are many instances of meaningless chattering between Isabella and Catherine. Nevertheless, readers can learn a great deal about characters through their engagement in conversation.

Closely related to dialogues is letter-writing, which is a prominent activity in *Pride and Prejudice*. The letter-form was in its decline during Austen’s time and although she was an enthusiastic letter-writer, none of Austen’s novels are epistolary novels like, for instance, Burney’s *Evelina*. But Austen preserved the mode in her novels, too. According to *The*

⁴⁵ Austen 32.

⁴⁶ Page 118.

⁴⁷ Austen 191-192.

⁴⁸ Page 124.

Language of Jane Austen, “letter-writing assumes a major role in the development of relationships and the transmission of news, and material which would otherwise have been conveyed through dialogue.”⁴⁹ Such an activity reveals true natures of characters as well as dialogues. For Austen, they provided an accepted substitution for gossips.

Furthermore, it contributes to the speed of the narrative, or as Mary Lascelles puts it, it allows “her people to be constant without becoming static.”⁵⁰ Its role is thus broad: important actions and information are portrayed in them, characters are revealed, past events are retold and they also substitute gossiping. It was an important device for Austen and despite the fact that she abandoned the epistolary mode in her later novels, *Northanger Abbey* does contain such an activity, even if only scarcely.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen’s preference of letter-writing as a way of life rather than a literary mode is apparent; Catherine Morland spends most of the time in Bath or at Northanger Abbey, yet she does not write home much. She does so, for example, to get a permission to visit the Abbey. By far the most important passage containing letter-writing is when Catherine Morland receives two letters, one from her brother James informing her that he has broken off his engagement with Isabella and one from Isabella herself. It is a turning point for several reasons. Firstly, the letter from James truthfully informs Catherine about what Isabella has done. The second letter serves as an eye-opening for Catherine and is an important moment for her coming-of-age because of Isabella’s insincerity. Lastly, it emphasises the role of Henry as her mentor lover as she relies on his opinion in this particular situation.

Austen’s diction was formed by the combination of two contradicting tastes: taste for the abstract and taste for the concrete. As a result, her novels are spared of unnecessary exaggerations or fantastic places and are rather defined by a sense of concreteness; her novels contain particular people in particular situations and places. Readers do not have to read detailed description about interiors, properties or dresses. It cannot be seen as coincidence but rather as a way to relate “the localized and limited world of the novel to those wider issues of conduct which are, for her, all-important, and which alone justify the claim of the novel to be taken seriously”⁵¹ as Page puts it.

This, however, does not mean that Austen never offers details. She does offer them on special occasions and for specific reasons. For example, during her stay at Northanger Abbey,

⁴⁹ Page 32.

⁵⁰ Lascelles 102.

⁵¹ Page 59.

Catherine discovers papers in a chest but is later disappointed by the fact that those were just laundry bills; we are told about “an inventory of linen, shirts, stockings, cravats and waistcoats, hair-powder, shoe-string, breeches-ball and a farrier’s bill.”⁵² Catherine was trying to find a proof of General Tilney’s fault and she expected a manuscript but “felt humbled to the dust”⁵³ after she had realised how absurd her behaviour was. In this passage, readers are offered a detailed description of laundry bill but it is not a coincidence as it allows Austen to criticise Catherine.

Austen’s novels are also marked by certain words which appear in all of her novels, although their meanings do differ. This is another method how to implicitly describe characters. Austen chooses those words and repeats them to define a person, his physical appearance, manners, social skills and moral virtues. In *Emma*, for instance, the words “pretty”, “elegant” and “rational” appear very often. One’s manners are defined by the collection of following words: agreeable, amiable, civil, courteous or polite. Characters are also often defined by their openness; Mary Crawford from *Mansfield Park*, Mrs Palmer in *Sense and Sensibility* and Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* are all described as being open. It is up to the readers to realise the difference between each of them. Mary Crawford’s openness is more of straightforwardness, Mrs Palmer’s openness suggests the ability to socialise and Isabella Thorpe’s openness means affectation. Although the word is used often, its meaning is actually very different in each case.

Austen employs such epithets very often and it has its purpose. In *Northanger Abbey*, the famous epithet is “nice”. Catherine Morland uses it when she talks about *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. She asks Henry Tilney: “... do not you think Udolpho the nicest book in the world?”⁵⁴ and Henry replies: “The nicest;- by which I suppose you mean the neatest.”⁵⁵ He again proves that he shares linguistic concerns with his creator as he teases Catherine for the use of such a word in such a context. He, to make it more transparent, continues: “and this is a very nice day and we are taking a very nice walk, and you are two very nice young ladies.”⁵⁶ His aim is to show that it is not clever to use a word with so many meanings and a word which can be applied to so many contexts. In such light, Austen’s epithets can be also seen as an attempt to assign concrete and singular meaning to each word.

⁵² Austen 183-184.

⁵³ Austen 183.

⁵⁴ Austen 112.

⁵⁵ Austen 112.

⁵⁶ Austen 112.

Jane Austen's style was innovative as she created new devices which enabled her to express different aspects of one's behaviour and to define situations in a different light. Austen evidently developed her syntax since the beginning of her writing career. It can be divided into two substyles: a colloquial style in the dialogue and a formal style in the narrative.⁵⁷ But more important is the way her style works as it can achieve outstanding variability; Austen "commands a variety of sentence-patterns, the loose as well as the highly-structured, the modern kind of sentence which traces in its construction the outline of a mental or emotional experience as well as the symmetrical and harmonious classical sentence"⁵⁸ as Norman Page asserts.

As for the sentence-patterns, Jane Austen used several varieties. Firstly, it was "the strongly-shaped eighteenth-century sentence."⁵⁹ She was influenced by Samuel Johnson who was keen on using such structure. A strongly shaped sentence is a balanced sentence where phrases are made equal. Austen used it for comic and satiric purposes and frequently employed it in *Northanger Abbey*. This is apparent, for instance, at the very end of the novel when the narrator concludes: "I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience."⁶⁰

Similarly, in chapter number twenty-five, we can again see the way Austen used balanced sentences: "Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they might give a faithful delineation; and Italy, Switzerland and the South of France, might be as fruitful in horrors as they were there represented. Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country, and even of that, if hard pressed, would have yielded the northern and western extremities. But 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. Murder was not tolerated, servants were not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping potions to be procured like rhubarb, from every druggist."⁶¹ Here in this passage Austen uses a balanced sentence, inversion and words such as "rhubarb", "pine forests" and "vices" together to underline Catherine's delusion. This passage also shows that balanced sentences can be used differently as the novelist included it here for other than ironic and satiric purposes.

⁵⁷ Page 91.

⁵⁸ Page 91.

⁵⁹ Page 92.

⁶⁰ Austen 274.

⁶¹ Page 214.

Furthermore, the balanced sentence is taken advantage of for economic purposes or to provide commentary on foolishness or the triviality of some scenes. In such light, such sentence-patterning is also an important tool for characterisation. In the ninth chapter, the narrator, when talking about Mrs. Allen, says: "...whose vacancy of mind and incapacity for thinking were such, that as she never talked a great deals, so she could never be entirely silent; and, therefore, while she sat at her work, if she lost her needle or broke her thread, if she heard a carriage in the street, or saw a speck upon her gown, she must observe it aloud, whether there were any one at leisure to answer her or not."⁶² By means of employing the balanced sentence, the narrator – and Austen – describes Mrs. Allen's character as tedious and limited.

As for the sentence-length, the novelist used both complex sentences as well as shorter sentences, and it was never accidental. The shorter sentences suggest that the reader can relax before the demanding sentences follow. Or, as Page asserts, short sentences can mark a period of excitement or suspense.⁶³ While the effects vary in each novel, general conclusion can be drawn and that is that Jane Austen usually relies on the three-part sentence structure. The reason could be that the structure is long enough to be able to provide variations to be run. Moreover, it also provides a balanced pattern as the two first parts establish a certain expectation which is denied in the third part. This, of course, works together with other devices, such as irony, parody and satire in *Northanger Abbey*.

To conclude this section, in terms of style, we do not find novelty in Jane Austen. What we find is finesse and sureness; and it is exactly for such that Austen managed to describe lives and minds of her characters in the most effective way. Her style has a unique character into it and can be defined as "attention to verbal values, a sensitiveness to a nuances of vocabulary and phrasing, and a flexibility of approach to syntax."⁶⁴

⁶² Austen 57 – 58.

⁶³ Page 106.

⁶⁴ Page 197.

3. *NORTHANGER ABBEY* AS A PARODY

According to J.A. Cuddon, parody is “the imitative use of the words, style, attitude, tone and ideas of an author in such a way as to make them ridiculous.”⁶⁵ This mockery is usually achieved by exaggeration.⁶⁶ Its function and aim is to criticise a piece of writing, to work together in balance with satire and/or to make the author’s own work more enjoyable. *Northanger Abbey* is a parody of two genres.

3.1. *NORTHANGER ABBEY* AS A PARODY OF NOVEL CONVENTIONS

3.1.1. CATHERINE MORLAND’S HEROISM

Catherine Morland might be an innovative heroine but in terms of interests, character or social background, she is very plain. She is not even pretty. Although her physical appearance changes and she is “almost pretty”⁶⁷ by the time the actual story takes place, she can hardly be seen as charming or beautiful. Henry Tilney does not fall in love with her because he would think she was pretty or smart but because she loved him first. Furthermore, Catherine is not keen on feminine activities, such as gardening, learning, drawing or playing instruments. She enjoys sports and can be described as a tomboy. As she grows older, her hobbies change very little. She still enjoys cricket, baseball and running but she starts to train herself for the position of a heroine; as the narrator says, “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.”⁶⁸ She teaches herself to be mild and to accept that a heroine must show a certain degree of knowledge. As a result, she might not like sonnets but she can read them, she might not like playing the piano but she can listen to other people. This is where Austen starts to form her into an actual heroine and where she tries to prove that she rightfully assumed this position.

Furthermore, Catherine lacks miserably in two other aspects. Firstly, she is painfully inexperienced because, as Austen reveals, Catherine “had reached the age of seventeen, without having seen one amiable youth who could call forth her sensibility; without having inspired one real passion, and without having excited even any admiration.”⁶⁹ Secondly, Catherine likes to read Gothic fiction to the point where it seems more like an obsession, rather than just a hobby. She enjoys the supernatural and danger preserved in the books she

⁶⁵ Cuddon 640.

⁶⁶ Cuddon 640.

⁶⁷ Austen 5.

⁶⁸ Austen 6.

⁶⁹ Austen 7.

reads, however, she makes a mistake and expects the same in reality. She always looks for mystery and dangerous places and is disappointed when reality proves her wrong.

To make matters even worse for her, her family is just as plain. Her father is a clergyman and “he had never been handsome”⁷⁰, her mother is “a woman of useful plain sense”⁷¹ and Catherine has nine siblings. The Morlands, to put it in Austen’s words, are in general very plain.⁷² They lack in the same way as Catherine does – their knowledge is limited, they cannot pride themselves on being prudent and they are too rational and practical. Catherine cannot rely on the support of her family to look more like a heroine and less like a plain and dull character.

Furthermore, given that the Morlands have nine children, they were never able to participate in Catherine’s or anyone else’s education; they always let her do whatever she wanted and Catherine always had to rely on herself. Her mother always let her run wild; she “did not insist on her daughters being accomplished in spite of incapacity or distaste”⁷³ as they “were inevitably left to shift for themselves.”⁷⁴ As the narrator says, Catherine’s mother cautions “were confined to the following points. ‘I beg, Catherine, you will always wrap yourself up very warm about the throat, when you come from the room sat night; and I wish you would try to keep some account of the money you spend; I will give you this little book on purpose.’”

In conclusion, at the beginning of her story, Catherine still very much displays unheroic qualities. Although her looks significantly improves and she changes her interests, she is still naive, inexperienced, limited in knowledge and a Gothic fiction enthusiast by the time she meets her hero. Yet, at the same time, she is given the benefit of a doubt and is presented as a potential heroine because she does have some of the qualities to become one: she is fallible and evokes our sympathy.

3.1.2. CATHERINE’S LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

Similarly to Emma from the novel of the same title or Edmund from *Mansfield Park*, Catherine is limited in her knowledge. The consequences of Catherine’s lack of knowledge and limited experience are reflected in her inability to read people and recognise their true

⁷⁰ Austen 3.

⁷¹ Austen 3.

⁷² Austen 3.

⁷³ Austen 4.

⁷⁴ Austen 5.

character, as well as in her inability to understand nature and to distinguish between fiction and reality.

3.1.2.1. CATHERINE'S INABILITY TO READ CHARACTERS

In Bath, Catherine meets five influential characters: Eleanor Tilney, Henry Tilney and General Tilney, Isabella Thorpe and John Thorpe. She makes the fatal mistake of not being able to read the latter three. When she meets Isabella Thorpe, she automatically takes a liking to her. This might partially be due to the fact that Catherine does not have any acquaintances in Bath. In fact, she never had a girlfriend and maybe this is the reason why she is not as socially skilled as Isabella. At the same time, considering Catherine is a lonely and naive girl, it must be hard to resist and reject such warm and affectionate behaviour from someone. Isabella, on the other hand, cannot be excused. She knows what is at stake and she manipulates Catherine: she learns that Catherine's brother is James Morland, that James she has feelings for, or at least, that is how she presents it. It is revealed later that that she perhaps did not love him much. Nevertheless, from the beginning, Isabella understands that her friendship with Catherine could be very beneficial. But Catherine is yet to see it, she believes in Isabella's innocent character because Isabella represents everything that Catherine was hoping to find in a friend: they share hobbies, Catherine can confide in her and most importantly, Isabella also reads Gothic novels. Although, for her, it is not a passion but a chance to show that she is fashionable and understands current trends. Catherine does not see it, of course, and so nothing can ruin her perfect picture of Isabella.

When Catherine meets the Tilneys and forms relationships with them, her friendship with Isabella suffers. Not only they spend less time together, but she also begins to see things from a different perspective. It becomes especially obvious when Isabella and James get engaged. Catherine is surprised by Isabella's reaction, who is clearly unhappy with James's father's decision which requires patience and unconditional love from her, something that she does not possess. Although Isabella assures Catherine that she is happy and in love with her brother, when she is left alone without her fiancé and when Henry's brother Frederick arrives to Bath, even naive Catherine cannot ignore Isabella's scandalous behaviour and flirtation with Frederick. Consequently, Catherine's feelings for Isabella cool down and we can put it down to her growing awareness of reality and the increasing effect of Henry. Later on, it comes as no surprise that when she receives a letter from Isabella while staying at Northanger Abbey – and thus being under the influence of Henry and far away from Isabella herself – she

automatically rejects her, criticises her and wishes to never have met her. She finally sees her true character.

John Thorpe has a lot in common with his sister because they are both manipulative liars who only think about their own benefits. However, the difference between them is that he does not pretend to be nice and friendly. It is true that he is quite pretentious and can never be described as sincere but he does not necessarily pretend to be someone else in order to achieve something; he is not as socially skilled as his sister and does not understand its benefits. Even naive Catherine understands that John is not a likeable person. Moreover, when compared to Henry's father, John actually seems like a quite good character. Catherine does not particularly like him but at the same time, she does not assign him the role of Montoni like she does with General Tilney, and rightfully so. John is an important character but for different reasons.

The reason why his presence in the novel is of immense importance is following. Beside the fact that he is Catherine's girl friend's brother, he moves the plot forward. Firstly, John Thorpe's attempts to "kidnap" Catherine and thwart her friendships with both Tilneys fail. Secondly, his exaggeration of the Morland's income allows Catherine and Henry to spend more time together at Northanger Abbey, and subsequently his confession that he has lied forces Henry to finally admit his feelings for Catherine. In both situations, contrary to what John Thorpe actually wanted to achieve, he contributed to the development of Catherine and Henry's love story.

General Tilney is the main obstacle in their relationship. Interestingly, both General Tilney and Catherine disapprove of each other at different times. At first, although he himself approves of her – even if under a false impression resulting from and strengthened by John's lie – Catherine's opinion of him is an issue. She struggles to read his character, and this is mainly influenced by her issue with distinguishing reality and fiction. She assigns him the role of a villain from Gothic novel. Although he does not differentiate so much from John Thorpe, she dislikes him and notices that his children fear him. Catherine does not know exactly why she does not like him but as Wallace points out in "Northanger Abbey and the Limit of Parody", "all she knows is that the General's behaviour makes her uneasy."⁷⁵

General Tilney truly is a villain because he is selfish, arrogant and a snob. As Rachel M. Brownstein puts it, "he is evil in a commonplace way – a greedy, scheming, rude social

⁷⁵ Wallace 268.

climber.”⁷⁶ But for Catherine, it is not enough; it is as if she needs a real proof of the fault in his character, so she starts to look for something serious. And because they are at Northanger Abbey and she is driven by her Gothic fantasy, Catherine immediately jumps to the first possible conclusion: he has never loved his wife, he has treated her badly and then killed her. Henry is at fault, too, because of his parody tale of a terror which Catherine believes in and which only deepens her expectation of a terrific abbey and a terrible father.

As Wallace records, Henry “gives Catherine no help in interpreting his father’s behaviour.”⁷⁷ At the same time, he is also the one who has to warn her, strongly criticise her and tell her that she should finally awake and base her judgement on reality and common senses. In probably the most famous speech of *Northanger Abbey*, Henry says: “Consult your understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you – Does our education prepare us for such atrocities?”⁷⁸ From that moment on, Catherine no longer succumbs to her fantasy; she might not like General Tilney but she respects him, despite the atrocity he would later do to her. The feelings change and it is General who does not like her because he learns that her family is not as wealthy as he believed.

As it was stated, Catherine misjudges people, for the better but also for the worst. Her innocence, naivety and lack of experience prevent her from seeing the reality. She believes that Isabella Thorpe is a good friend and a good person to be influenced by. She does not see John Thorpe’s real intentions, nor can she predict his role in General Tilney’s opinion. And as for General Tilney, Catherine is able to estimate that he is a villain, but she bases her opinion on wrong impressions and assumptions. The situation with General Tilney is paradoxical: she is wrong in thinking he has murdered his wife, but she is not wrong in thinking that he is a villain. General Tilney is a far worse villain; as Brownstein puts it, “General Tilney is prosaically rather than exotically evil.”⁷⁹ There is a necessary lesson for Catherine to learn: life can be much worse and scarier than fiction.

3.1.2.2. THE PICTURESQUE

Catherine’s limitation is also reflected in her inability to understand and appreciate nature. In other novels, for instance in *Emma*, landscape is an important tool in Mr. Knightley’s mentoring as it is on Box Hill that he criticises Emma. But in *Northanger Abbey*,

⁷⁶ Brownstein 40.

⁷⁷ Wallace 269.

⁷⁸ Austen 212.

⁷⁹ Brownstein 93.

it serves as a sign of lack of experience and knowledge. As Jane Spencer in *Prospect and Refuge in the Landscape of Jane Austen* points out, Catherine “experiences a sense of vulnerability, especially in her social relationships.”⁸⁰ There is a gap between what seems to be and what really is. It is especially apparent in relation to landscape. Such a gap first occurs in chapter eleven when the Thorpes and Morlands want to visit Blaise Castle. Catherine is deceived three times by John Thorpe.

First, he tells a lie about the Tilneys. Catherine was supposed to go for a walk with them but Thorpe lies to her and says that he has seen them turn up the Lansdown Road⁸¹ and thus she is free to go with him, Isabella and James to Bristol. Secondly, he lies to her about Blaise Castle. He tries to amaze her by “the finest place in England – worth going fifty miles at any time to see.”⁸² The castle is also, as Thorpe says, “the oldest in the kingdom”⁸³ and there are dozens of towers and galleries.⁸⁴ Catherine believes him every single word. She thinks that Blaise Castle is the kind of ancient ruins from her books and is extremely eager to go. Thirdly, Thorpe lies about the distance from Bath to the castle. On all three occasions, Catherine cannot comprehend that John Thorpe is not sincere and she, in the latter situation, lets her imagination replace her senses. What does it matter that the reality is different, that Catherine would actually be disappointed to visit the castle because it is only a folly and certainly does not have dozens of dark and terrific towers and galleries; the purpose of this passage is clear. Catherine is too trusting, unable to understand John’s real motives.

Furthermore, this part of the novel also underlines the Thorpes’ characters in relation to their picturesque views. John attempts to persuade Catherine with a folly, with a fake castle; he attempts to dazzle her with a building that carries similar features to his own. Readers who are aware of it can understand John’s character more. However, Catherine does not know that the castle is not real and thus she does not realise the similarities between the castle and John Thorpe. It can be said that Austen’s focus on the picturesque works as a device for characterisation. Furthermore, it draws distinction between characters – mainly between the Thorpes and Tilneys – as the next part about Beechen Cliff suggests.

Catherine, Henry and Eleanor decide to go for a walk to Beechen Cliff. Through their engagement in a conversation about the surrounding landscape, we learn that there is a natural

⁸⁰ Jane Spencer, *Prospect and Refuge in the Landscape of Jane Austen* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006) 44.

⁸¹ Austen 86.

⁸² Austen 85.

⁸³ Austen 85.

⁸⁴ Austen 85.

beauty in the picturesque and that it does not always have to be associated with foolish, insincere and selfish characters. The Tilneys can truly appreciate nature and are capable of manifesting their knowledge about it, which is in opposition to the Thorpes. In this passage, Catherine fully reveals her naive ideas as when she says: “I never look at it... without thinking of the south of France.”⁸⁵ Readers, and the siblings as well, believe she speaks out of a personal experience. However, she continues as follows: “It always puts me in mind of the country that Emily and her father travelled through, in the *Mysteries of Udolpho*.”⁸⁶ Thus she once again bases her observation on her imagination and does not realise the difference between the landscape from the book and the landscape which is surrounding her. As Spencer records, “as she uses her Gothic lens to view the scene, Catherine takes considerable imagination licence in viewing the area around Bath as reminiscent of the south of France.”⁸⁷

Later, Henry and Eleanor engage in a conversation about the country which is described as follows: “They were viewing the country with the eyes of persons accustomed to drawing, and decided on its capability of being formed into pictures, with all the eagerness of real taste.”⁸⁸ But Catherine cannot understand them as their phrases “conveyed scarcely any idea to her.”⁸⁹ On confessing it, she receives “a lesson on the picturesque.”⁹⁰ However, Henry’s words have undesirable effect on her – she blindly believes him – but more importantly, she rejects the whole city of Bath.⁹¹ This is, of course, a mistake because Catherine uses a newly discovered outsider view but it precludes her own personal insider view as Spencer points out.⁹² Thus on one hand, Catherine does improve her limitations in knowledge but she still very much struggles with viewing reality. What she does is trusting Henry without trying to actually understand what he says and claims. She, as Jane Spencer asserts in *Prospect and Refuge in the Landscape of Jane Austen*, “continues trying to find her own way of seeing, still struggling and not yet succeeding.”⁹³

In Catherine’s favourite books, there is usually a dark, haunted abbey or a castle. Thus it comes as no surprise that when she is invited to Northanger Abbey, she immediately pictures the place to be like one from her favourite novels. She explicitly asks: “Is not it a fine

⁸⁵ Austen 110.

⁸⁶ Austen 110.

⁸⁷ Spencer 45.

⁸⁸ Austen 115.

⁸⁹ Austen 115.

⁹⁰ Austen 116.

⁹¹ Austen 116.

⁹² Spencer 45.

⁹³ Spencer 45.

old place, just like what one reads about?”⁹⁴ She pictures it having “long, damp passages”⁹⁵ and “narrow cells and ruined chapel”⁹⁶ and is very eager to visit the place, similarly to her excitement from seeing the Blaise Castle. She even says that it must be boring for Henry to live in his own “ordinary parsonage-house.”⁹⁷

Catherine’s eagerness fully takes its course when Henry starts to use her own idea and attaches even scarier pictures to it; he comes up with what Butler calls “a burlesque Gothic story.”⁹⁸ Catherine does not realise that he is only playing with her. For her, Northanger Abbey is an ideal Gothic place and she believes that all kinds of secrets and mysteries must be hidden in there. Catherine’s foolish ideas are, of course, unfolded and when she sees the Abbey in front of her eyes, she is very much disappointed. Consequently, she feels that she has to create a new, much scarier abbey; she starts to imagine things and slowly succumbs to her imagined world. Catherine, just like in the previous two passages, fails at distinguishing reality and fiction. Austen uses landscape and its exaggerated description as a tool to provide a moral lesson and to teach Catherine that “gothic novels must be dismissed as mere fantasies.”⁹⁹

3.2. *NORTHANGER ABBEY* AS A PARODY OF GOTHIC FICTION

3.2.1. THE TOPOS OF GOTHIC FICTION

Gothic novel combines features of fiction, horror and Romanticism. They are “tales of mystery and horror, intended to chill the spine and curdle the blood”¹⁰⁰ as Cuddon puts it and are not meant to resemble real life. They contain element of the supernatural. The setting is of exceptional importance; that is an antiquated place, usually an abbey or a castle¹⁰¹ with a dungeon, mountains and dark and dangerous buildings, desolate landscapes, winding stairways and torture chambers.¹⁰² There is an emphasis on specific vocabulary: words such as “horrid”, “terrible”, “danger”, “dark”, “wind”, “storm”, “supernatural” or “bleak” are used very often.

⁹⁴ Austen 165.

⁹⁵ Austen 147.

⁹⁶ Austen 147.

⁹⁷ Austen 165.

⁹⁸ Butler 175.

⁹⁹ Brownstein 94.

¹⁰⁰ Cuddon 356.

¹⁰¹ Cuddon 2.

¹⁰² Cuddon 356.

There are also ghosts and generic or historical figures, witches, wicked tyrants and overall atmosphere of doom and gloom.¹⁰³ The main character is haunted by a secret or secrets from the past. As Hogle asserts, “these haunting can take many forms but they frequently assume the features of ghosts or monsters.”¹⁰⁴ Traditionally, there is a villain who is insincere, tyrannical and has done something very wrong but there is also something attractive and tempting about him; it is extremely hard for a heroine to resist him. Moreover, there is a contrasting character – a hero – who challenges the villain and saves a woman in distress, who is usually a young, kind and mysterious woman who fears the villain.

Despite its success, the genre also received much criticism for its focus on the dangerous and supernatural, as well as controversial depiction of physic lives of characters. Jane Austen was one of those critics. *Northanger Abbey* parodies the genre and its conventions. The central aspect of the parody lies in the fact that the novel focuses on characters who wish and desire for the similar dangerous and mysterious feelings we are presented with in Gothic novels – and as a result being unable to distinguish between fiction and reality – by creating characters who mock the very same desire, and by incorporating and criticising elements typical for Gothic novels.

3.2.2. NORTHANGER ABBEY’S GOTHIC REFERENCES AND IMAGERY

Northanger Abbey contains several passages which somehow refer to Gothic novels and which are exaggerated, ironic or satirical. It all begins with Catherine’s interest in reading Gothic novels and her discussions about them with other characters: once with Isabella, once with John, once with Eleanor and Henry and twice with Henry. These dialogues reveal essential information about the characters. It proves Eleanor and Henry’s refined taste and thirst for knowledge, John’s ignorance, and lastly, Isabella’s superficiality and obsession with the latest fad. As Marilyn Butler points out, this is an overall strategy of *Northanger Abbey* where the character of the heroine is revealed, as well as there is a contrast between her friends.¹⁰⁵

The conversations between Catherine and Isabella contain many words which can be linked to the Gothic tradition. It is a result of their thorough reading. Talking about *Udolpho*, Isabella creates an atmosphere of fear typical for gothic novels; she says: “I would not tell you what is behind the black veil for the world.”¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Catherine is sure that something

¹⁰³ Cuddon 356.

¹⁰⁴ Hogle 2.

¹⁰⁵ Butler 174.

¹⁰⁶ Austen 32.

scary is behind the veil, a skeleton must be there.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, they discuss the “Horrid novels” – novels they plan on reading – such as *Castle of Wolfenbach*, *Clermont*, *Mysterious Warnings*, *Italian* or *Horrid Mysteries*.¹⁰⁸ This is a direct reference to some of the best known Gothic novels. Moreover, this passage contains the word “horrid” which is used multiple times. Interestingly, Catherine’s idea of the meaning of the word differs from Isabella’s.

As Karalyn Skinner records in “Horrid Gothicism: Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*”, “Catherine uses the word horrid to describe the thrill and fright of the amplified emotions, dark characters, and chilling scenes of Gothic novels.”¹⁰⁹ However, Isabella chooses this word to describe a book she does not like, as when she says: “Sir Charles Grandison! That is an amazing horrid book, is it not?-I remember Miss Andrews could not get through the first volume.”¹¹⁰ They both manipulate the word. They, to put it in Skinner’s words, “apply it as an adjective to describe their emotions and distastes.”¹¹¹ This is apparent, for instance, in chapter number ten, when Isabella says: “Oh, horrid! Am I never to be acquainted with him?”¹¹² when talking about Henry Tilney and describing the fear or rather insincere disappointment of not having met him yet.

Places are described as if taken from Gothic novels, too. There is Blaise Castle described as the ancient ruin, and Northanger Abbey, an old castle with long and damp passages, narrow cells and a ruined chapel. The abbey is dark and terrific, and the atmosphere is further underlined by the depiction of stormy nights. Therefore, as Kathleen Ann Miller puts it, “her [Catherine’s] Gothic imagination is given full rein in the environment of Northanger Abbey.”¹¹³ Henry strengthens Catherine’s expectations as when he asks her: “Are you prepared to encounter all the horrors that a building such as ‘what one reads about’ may produce”¹¹⁴ or “Will not your mind misguide you, when you find yourself in this gloomy chamber – too lofty and extensive for you, with only the feeble rays of a single lamp to take in

¹⁰⁷ Austen 33.

¹⁰⁸ Austen 33.

¹⁰⁹ Karalyn Skinner, “Horrid Gothicism: Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*”, *Explicator* 71.3 (2013): 230, EBSCO <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=89978818&lang=cs&site=ehost-live>, 28 Apr. 2016.

¹¹⁰ Austen 35.

¹¹¹ Skinner 230.

¹¹² Austen 68.

¹¹³ Kathleen Ann Miller, “Haunted Heroines: The Gothic Imagination and the Female Bildungsromane of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and L. M. Montgomery”, *Lion and the Unicorn: a critical journal of children's literature* 34.2 (2010): 133, Literature Online <http://literature.proquest.com/pageImage.do?ftnum=2079986901&fmt=page&area=criticism&journalid=01472593&articleid=R04416103&pubdate=2010&queryid=2929390107878> 28 Apr. 2016.

¹¹⁴ Austen 165.

its size – its wall hung with tapestry exhibiting figures as large as life, and the bed, of dark green stuff or purple velvet, presenting even a funeral appearance.”¹¹⁵

All this creates a certain expectation; for Catherine, Northanger Abbey is supposed to be an ideal ancient abbey filled with locked rooms and chambers. Consequently, the climax happens at the abbey. As Miller puts it, “one of the most memorable and well-crafted scenes in the novel involve many of the most familiar tropes of late eighteenth-century Gothic: a dark and stormy night, a sealed chest, and a very excited and impressionable heroine.”¹¹⁶ During a stormy night, Catherine catches a sight of “a high, old-fashioned black cabinet”¹¹⁷, very similar to the one described by Henry. She manages to open it and discovers empty drawers in there. She also finds a manuscript but at the very moment, her candle expires. Catherine is “motionless with horror”¹¹⁸ as “darkness impenetrable and immovable filled the room”¹¹⁹ during a “violent gust of wind, rising with sudden fury, added fresh horror to the movement.”¹²⁰ Again, the scene is described as if taken from a gothic novel.

Even when Catherine discovers that those were just clothes and bills, her imagination does not let her stop. She believes that there is something strange about the way Mrs. Tilney’s death has been presented to her. Perhaps, she thinks, Henry’s father had murdered his wife. Or, she believes, Mrs. Tilney is still alive and imprisoned in one of the secret rooms: all signs and suspicions favour “the supposition of her imprisonment.”¹²¹ Therefore, she decides to search on her own and she finds herself in a room General Tilney has hindered her from entering before. But to her disappointment, the room does not show any sign of a prison. Despite such clear proof of his innocence, Catherine thinks that this is only because General Tilney is too clever to leave any proofs behind. She believes she has to search more eagerly and thoroughly. But at the very moment, Henry appears up the stairs. She hesitates but finally admits that his mother’s sudden dying was odd, that no one was present at home – only their father – and she believes that something had to happen. Henry quickly understands what kind of serious accusations Catherine is making and harshly but also rightfully criticises her. It is a turning point in their relationship because Catherine clearly must improve her knowledge and learns how social secrets work.¹²²

¹¹⁵ Austen 166.

¹¹⁶ Miller 133.

¹¹⁷ Austen 177.

¹¹⁸ Austen 180.

¹¹⁹ Austen 180.

¹²⁰ Austen 180.

¹²¹ Austen 201.

¹²² Miller 135 – 136.

Last feature of Gothic fiction presented in the novel is the image of Catherine as a female character who is in danger; Catherine represents a woman in distress. This happens on several occasions at the Abbey: when Catherine is going through the chest during a stormy night, when she is searching in Mrs. Tilney's room and lastly, when General Tilney orders Eleanor to send Catherine home. The journey is long, dangerous and dreadful but Catherine manages to arrive home safely without ever being too scared. Catherine was so woeful to leave the Abbey that she did not have the time to think about the terrors awaiting her on the road. The journey represents her reformation and rejection of her old naive self. Before, Catherine was in a mental danger which was her own fault; she was thus her own villain. But during the journey from the Abbey, she finds herself in a real physical danger caused by someone else and strikingly, she is not afraid and she does not picture any horrifying scenes like she used to before.

In conclusion, in terms of setting, there are abbeys, ruins, dark places, ruined landscapes and locked room at Northanger Abbey. There is overall feeling of doom and gloom. As for the plot, there is a seemingly tyrannical father who killed his wife. The female protagonist is in distress. And lastly, the vocabulary contains many words associated with the Gothic tradition. For the most part, everything that can be somehow seen as dangerous and terrifying happens only in Catherine's head but despite that, the traditional conventions of Gothic novels are still preserved in *Northanger Abbey*.

3.2.3. A HEROINE'S REALISATION

Throughout the novel, Catherine manifests many unheroic qualities and the most dangerous one is her reliance on fantasy. Her knowledge is based on novels she has read, and she applies it on a daily basis: when she makes acquaintances, when she receives a "lesson on landscape" or when she visits new places such as Northanger Abbey. As Miller points out, Catherine "begins to script her life and her interactions with people as though she were living in a Gothic novel, instead of in reality."¹²³ Catherine does not realise that her favourite novels do not correspond with reality, and thus she feels that it is only natural to rely on them. Such attitude causes her to make the most fatal mistake when she accuses General Tilney of having killed his wife.

She keeps her suspicion to herself but Henry finally exposes her. Of course, as Miller puts it, such "failure to exercise reason, alongside her imagination, jeopardizes her potential

¹²³ Miller 132.

romance with Henry and the fulfilment and joy such union may bring.”¹²⁴ The following passage in *Northanger Abbey* proves to be the most essential and influential part of Catherine’s maturing. Henry says: “Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you – Does your education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?”¹²⁵ Such a direct critique from her hero is an eye-opener for Catherine.

It is principal for Catherine to finally realise her fault and to reject her novels as a source of inspiration and judgement. She attempts to do so successfully. Catherine begins to understand General Tilney’s true nature; she judges people rightly and improves her knowledge of people around her, including Henry. But as Miller points out, the outcome of this passage is twofold. Catherine certainly does realise “social, rather than personal secrets”¹²⁶ but a personal secret is also revealed, and that is Henry’s love for Catherine. Thus the employment of Gothic fiction in the novel is of immense importance. As Miller concludes, it “retains an important educative function”¹²⁷ and not only that. But it does not mean that Catherine all of sudden becomes a perfect character and a perfect heroine. She is still imperfect and is prone to make some fatal mistakes but she rejects her novels and begins to see things in a sober way, and it is precisely for such a change that she justifies her position as a heroine – one she has always been but never acted as.

¹²⁴ Miller 133.

¹²⁵ Austen 212.

¹²⁶ Miller 136.

¹²⁷ Miller 136.

4. *NORTHANGER ABBEY* AS A COMING-OF-AGE TALE

Northanger Abbey tells the story of Catherine's personal development into a wiser and more mature character. As part of the process, the novel also establishes itself as a novel concentrated on reading.

4.1. A NOVEL ON READING

The novel revolves around books, reading habits, different kinds of genres, and it even presents itself as a story. Within the first page, Jane Austen describes Catherine as an anti-heroine figure and makes it clear that Catherine is just a character from a story. The author also forms a connection with her readers, informing them about her heroine, about her flaws and the nature of the story while directly talking to them and expressing her own beliefs and opinions. The distinction between a book and the reality is kept clear; there is fiction and the creator of it. Furthermore, Austen depicts her heroine as an enthusiastic novel reader which allows her to mention several titles of books through her character. The act of writing and keeping journals is mentioned. Austen also parodies English Novel and Gothic Fiction. By creating a novel which is very much concerned on reading, it enables Austen to provide an important lesson for her main protagonist.

In addition to Catherine's problems with distinguishing and reading the difference between fiction and reality, she also struggles with reading people and their true characters. She cannot tell when a person is insincere – as in the case of John Thorpe – or when someone is just teasing her – as in the case of Henry Tilney. She believes anything happens in accordance with her favourite novels, and she judges people on the basis of her favourite characters. However, her fault is not so much concerned with reading as it is but more with the fact that she does take the interpretation of her novels seriously. Catherine does not understand that fiction is just fiction, that people are not so manipulative and tyrannical, that castles are not as frightening as they appear to be. She must learn this lesson and accept that reality is not always as fascinating.

Even worse, reality can be far more dangerous than fiction, and this is a second lesson which Catherine needs to learn. She does not like General Tilney because he is a villain but she does not know exactly why. She is wrong but not as much as one would have expected. The reality is that the General truly is a villain but for more practical or realistic reasons. He is a villain because he only cares about money and reputation, and when he learns that Catherine is not rich – and not the perfect match for his son as he thought – he quickly gets rid of her. The journey is dangerous, inappropriate and true sign of his character. It represents a truly

terrifying scene. It is imperative that Catherine learns that if she dwells too much on books, she might make the mistake of ignoring and not realising some important aspects of her own life, and she might even get herself into danger.

4.2. A COMING-OF-AGE NOVEL

Northanger Abbey is a coming-of-age novel, a novel which depicts Catherine Morland's maturation. Her development is influenced by the people she surrounds herself with.

4.2.1. HENRY TILNEY

Henry Tilney stands as the most important person in Catherine's maturation. Not only does he play the role of her lover, he also plays the role of a mentor. This is not the first time Austen uses the role of mentor lover, we have already seen it for example in *Emma*, with the figure of Mr. Knightley, and in *Mansfield Park* where the mentor is the heroine Fanny Price. In *Northanger Abbey*, Henry strikingly resembles the narrator: apart from already mentioned obsession with language clarity and preciseness, they both share similar views on women, journals and reading. Henry's knowledge comes from a personal experience as he surrounds himself with a female company very often, mostly in the figure of his sister. He is also very clever and likes to mock people. His role can be divided into two parts: stereotypical and generalising comments, and lectures on various issues.

Henry very often mocks traditional conventions. He does so when he firsts meets Catherine and attempts to follow the traditional meeting rituals preserved in novels; he jokingly says: "I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath; whether you were ever here before; whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert; and how you like the place altogether."¹²⁸ Henry clearly finds Catherine interesting but whether she "likes the place altogether" or not, that does not hold much importance to him. As Wallace records, "when Henry Tilney mocks Bath conventions, he does so by adding not new language but new intonations."¹²⁹ That means, we read about "set smile, simpering air or affectedly softening voice"¹³⁰; in other words, Henry uses irony and exaggerations. He even admits it himself when he says: "Some emotion must appear to be raised by your reply, and surprise is more easily assumed, and not less reasonable than any other"¹³¹ or, more directly,

¹²⁸ Austen 16.

¹²⁹ Wallace 263.

¹³⁰ Austen 17.

¹³¹ Austen 17.

“Now I must give one smirk, and then we may be rational again.”¹³² He also makes stereotypical and biased comments about women and their writing as when he describes their style in the following way: “A general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar.”¹³³

By far the most important contribution of Henry Tilney is his mentoring and lecturing of Catherine Morland. Firstly, he mocks her choice of particular words in particular contexts. When Catherine uses “papa and mamma”, Henry uses these two words as well – and in the same context – but a reader cannot ignore the mocking tone of his voice. When Catherine says that men despise novels amazingly, Henry teases her for that particular word. Similarly, when Catherine describes *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as a nice book, Henry clearly criticises her. Henry also offers a lecture on landscape, which has already been analysed.

He also teases her and later criticises her for her fondness of Gothic fiction. On their way to Northanger Abbey, he draws a frightening picture of what the abbey might look like, obviously exaggerated and used for mocking purposes but Catherine does not realise that. And when Catherine reaches her worst moment – looking for evidence of a horrendous murder – he is the one who must take responsibility for his own mistake. Henry teases her, mocks her and acts very irresponsibly. He might have not realised the potential danger of his words but he was the one who deepened and in a way supported Catherine’s fantasy. Once he realises what he has done, he has to own up to it and awaken Catherine.

If we claim that Henry uses irony and satire almost always, we have to also consider the impact of it. Irony defines him and even if he offers a lecture for Catherine, he is always ironical. Consequently, he fails to reach his goal and confuses Catherine, who already in general does not understand much. That is why he has to be partially blamed for her ridiculous and unrealistic views. Henry thinks he knows it all, yet he fails to understand Catherine and does not realise that he cannot afford to include irony to his discourse. On the other hand, while it begins to appear as if he has no control over his words, he proves just the exact opposite. Once he realises that Catherine is unable to follow his irony, he comes up with the famous speech which has already been discussed and which contains no irony. He learns his lesson and realises how to manoeuvre with Catherine. He becomes a good influence and a good mentor.

¹³² Austen 17.

¹³³ Austen 19.

4.2.2. THE OTHERS

Catherine's best friend, Isabella Thorpe, makes her first appearance in the following way: "How excessively like her brother Miss Morland is!"¹³⁴ It is an exaggerated statement which becomes very typical for Isabella's overall discourse. Isabella is pretentious, insincere, self-important and she cannot be trusted. She is not a traditional villain; her figure is rather associated with bad morals. The two girls stand as complete opposite for Isabella is manipulative, experienced, artificial, and follows stereotypes. She is also socially skilled and she uses her skills in order to achieve her goal, which is to marry someone of high class and with money. On the other hand, Catherine is sincere, inexperienced, real, does not have any clue about what kind of stereotypes and trends there are and she never even thought about a man in a romantic way. Aside from such obvious differences – which Catherine does not realise – Isabella is everything Catherine was hoping to find in a friend. However, Isabella still remains a bad influence. Interestingly, she might be even worse than General Tilney.

Firstly, Isabella herself is not a good person, she does not have virtues or views appropriate for her age. She is easily seduced, does not have boundaries and limits and does everything for the mere sake of entertainment. She is a bad influence on Catherine who sees her friend as inspiration and also a role model. Secondly, they both read Gothic novels with Isabella being able to clearly see Catherine's obsession and mistake, yet not warning her about the potential danger resulting from having such a hobby. Thirdly, Isabella repeatedly jeopardises Catherine's relationship with the Tilneys and while lying and manipulating, she behaves as it would be an appropriate behaviour for a young lady.

Isabella is not an influential character in terms of leading Catherine on the way towards development, as for instance Henry is. Her role is in showing what is wrong and inappropriate, even if unintentionally. Moreover, their relationship is a symbol of development; best friends at first and strangers at last. As Catherine receives that bizarre letter from her friend, full of lies and conceit, she finally sees what a kind of person Isabella is which automatically leads to Catherine's rejection, described as follows: "Such a strain of shallow artifice could not impose even upon Catherine. Its inconsistencies, contradictions, and falsehood, struck her from the very first. She was ashamed of Isabella, and ashamed of having ever loved her. Her professions of attachment were now as disgusting as her excuses were empty, and her demands impudent."¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Austen 24.

¹³⁵ Austen 234.

John Thorpe shares similar traits with his sister Isabella. But the difference between them is that he is more clear and open about it. John is rude, proud, loud and boasting and he does not even care. He is the other suitor of Catherine and his role is twofold. Firstly, his characteristics could not be any different from Henry's and thus he puts his rival into a very good light. While readers find John Thorpe annoying, they are also aware of the potential threat he could impose if he married Catherine. At the same time, they understand the qualities of Henry and hope that he can win Catherine. Secondly, John brings Catherine and Henry together. He certainly does not mean to be but his own courtship methods are a complete failure and disaster and have an undesirable effect. John does not have much influence on Catherine but his role is crucial as he moves the plot forward and brings the couple together.

General Tilney is a snob who only cares about money and reputation. He is firm in rules and order and he clearly runs everything in his family. The General is a parody of what he is supposed to be, and that is a Gothic villain. He is a villain in a more realistic view: first he shamelessly treats Catherine as if she already were his daughter-in-law, invites her to his place and spoils her, but when he learns that she is not who he thought she was, he does not hesitate to throw her out of his house. In terms of Catherine's development, he unintentionally speeds her maturation because she accuses him of a murder which leads to her conversation with Henry at the Abbey and subsequently to her coming-of-age. She also learns that "human nature is worse than she first thought."¹³⁶

His daughter, Eleanor Tilney, is the perfect Gothic heroine. She lives with a tyrannical father in a scary castle, her mother died when she was young, she only has brothers and thus no confidant and she is presented as lonely with no lover. But she is not the heroine of the novel because she is not that interesting; her characteristics are too mild and she does not really need to mature. For a common reader, she is just not that interesting. Eleanor already is mature, kind, well-behaved, firm in manners and very experienced. As for her role in the novel, she is the perfect friend and influence for Catherine. Eleanor is the opposite of Isabella and her presence brings a sense of rationality to Catherine's world. She also marks Catherine's development. Once Catherine matures and rejects Isabella, she fully connects with Eleanor.

The Allens are an odd couple with quite different characteristics. Mrs. Allen is similar to Isabella and she is a bad influence, too. She is shallow, vain, and only cares about

¹³⁶ Butler 177.

reputation and her looks. She always lets Catherine do whatever she wants to and fails in setting an example for her. On the other hand, Mr. Allen is, even though he is not given much space in the novel, the guiding figure for Catherine. He is wiser than his wife and knows what is appropriate and what is not; Catherine relies on his opinion from time to time. The difference between Mr. And Mrs. Allen is obvious when Catherine asks them whether it is appropriate for her to drive with her friends about the country. Mr Allen does not think so; he says: “Young men and women driving about the country in open carriages! Now and then it is very well; but going to inns and public spaces together! It is not right; and I wonder Mrs. Thorpe should allow it. I am glad you do not think of going; I am sure Mrs. Morland would not be pleased.”¹³⁷ He then asks his wife and she agrees with him, although she is rather concerned with the difficulties of driving in a carriage while wearing a gown; she does not care about what people might say and what consequences it might have for Catherine’s reputation. She says: “Open carriages are nasty things. A clean gown is not five minutes in them. You are splashed getting in and getting out; and the wind takes your hair and your bonnet in every direction. I have an open carriage myself.”¹³⁸ She is clearly not a good influence as she herself represents foolishness and shallowness.

While shaping Catherine’s character, different characters play different roles. The most influential character is, of course, Henry Tilney. Similarly, Eleanor Tilney and Mr. Allen have a positive effect on Catherine. Alarmingly, the person that Catherine spends the most time with in the first half of the novel – Isabella – is also the most scandalous and inappropriate person to be around. Equally, characters such as Mrs. Allen, John Thorpe or even General Tilney, who appear in Catherine’s presence often, are people who represent bad morals, negative values and who are manipulative. The fact that Catherine does not realise their flaws is a proof of her inability to read people well. Consequently, she surrounds herself with people she should have not. When she finally learns how to read, she lets go of negative influences and most importantly, she rejects people representing such negative values.

4.3. THE NARRATOR

4.3.1. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The narrator of *Northanger Abbey* can be defined in three ways. Firstly, the story is a third-person narrative. Events, feelings and characteristics are discussed and described through the eyes of a third person narrator. For the most part, everything happens from

¹³⁷ Austen 107.

¹³⁸ Austen 107.

Catherine's point of view as we read and are provided an insight into her feelings and thoughts. But this also means that the narrator is limited and that readers are given limited information because Catherine's own views about life and its surroundings are limited. Secondly, readers do not have much access to other characters and to what they think and what happens to them. Even if readers do have access to the minds of other characters, some of the thoughts assigned to them belong to the narrator herself; the narrator is thus also unreliable, similarly to the narrator of *Emma*. Finally, the narrator relies on metatextuality and intertextuality; she relies on our knowledge of particular authors, books or even past or present political situations.

The narrator's role is also defined by number three. She provides a straight narrative. As Massimiliano Morini records, the narrator has "a ponderous weight on our interpretation of the novels – of what is going on, who are the good guys and the villains, what is likely to happen."¹³⁹ Moreover, she is a type of an intrusive narrator because she provides more or less important but always relevant information through her narratorial commentary – usually pointing out Catherine's flaws or the ridiculous nature of general conventions concerning heroines and our expectations of them. And lastly, the narrator appears as an ironist and satirist, with two types of irony: situational and dramatic irony.

Situational irony occurs when a situation has the opposite effect of what was desired, intended or expected, as when Fitzwilliam Darcy falls in love with Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* even though he once said that she was the opposite of handsome and that she could hardly tempt him. Situational irony also occurs in *Northanger Abbey*. In fact, the very first lines of the novel are a manifestation of situational irony. No one who has seen Catherine as a child did expect that she would become a heroine. The expectation was that she would not be a heroine and the effect and outcome was that she indeed became a heroine. Another example is when John Thorpe courts Catherine because he wants to marry her but also becomes the cupid of Catherine and Henry Tilney and fastens Catherine's development and becoming of a heroine.

The other type – dramatic irony – happens when a character does not know something – or has wrong information – that the audience or readers know. An example of dramatic irony in a novel by Jane Austen can be found in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth Bennet hates and despises Darcy because she believes George Wickham's accusations. Despite the fact that readers do not know the truth, they later learn that Wickham has been lying about Darcy and

¹³⁹ Massimiliano Morini, *Jane Austen's Narrative Techniques* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009) 19.

that all the lies he spreads about Darcy are in reality the truth about him; yet Elizabeth is still unaware of all this and she continues to trust him. In *Northanger Abbey*, dramatic irony occurs when Catherine thinks that General Tilney is a villain because he killed his wife. Readers know that he truly is a villain but they also know the real reason: he did not kill his wife but he is a snobbish, pretentious and self-content social climber. Thus the irony lies in the fact that Catherine has the right assumption but the wrong information and reasoning.

The narrator inserts her own views and comments into the minds of the characters. While describing situations and actions, she utters narratorial comments which points out the wrong conclusion or procedure of characters. Lastly, she uses irony to mock some of the characters. In combination, not only does the narrator tell the story but she also emphasises yet again the process of Catherine's development.

4.3.2. CATHERINE'S POINT OF VIEW

Even though the focus is for the most part on Catherine throughout the whole novel, it is done so through a type of omniscient, generalised persona. This means that while the story is narrated through the eyes and mind of Catherine, the language and method of narration is a reflection of the narrator's own discourse and of other characters, not of Catherine's. But there is a significant change in four chapters.

In those four chapters, events are told from Catherine's point of view and the language begins to correlate with Catherine's own discourse; there are exclamations, hastened questions, imagery of storm and dark and expressions such as "a cold sweat", "dreadful", "agitated" and "wearied Catherine", as well as expressions of excitement and words describing the gothic nature of Northanger Abbey. The first chapter is chapter number sixteen where Catherine prepares to leave Bath, and the last chapter is Catherine's awakening at the Abbey.

The chapters mark Catherine's excitement of the prospect of staying at the mysterious and dangerous abbey, her foolishness and decision to search for any proofs of General Tilney's fault and finally, the last chapter describes Catherine and Henry's dialogue where Henry accuses her of being foolish, silly and naive. During these four chapters, the narrator completely disappears and no comment is uttered by her. Everything we read and is told to us is through the eyes of Catherine. After her conversation with her mentor and lover, she is replaced by the narrator who says that "Catherine was completely awakened."¹⁴⁰ The narrator assumes her previous role and is the one who narrates the story until the end. As Morini puts

¹⁴⁰ Austen 213.

it, “it is the narrator who regains control over the story”¹⁴¹, but moreover, it is Catherine Morland who retains control over her senses and who finally matures into a prospective heroine. In conclusion, apart from narrating, the role of the narrator is to emphasise Catherine’s development by means of uttering own opinions and mainly by disappearing and yielding the role of a teller to Catherine herself.

¹⁴¹ Morini 40.

5. CONCLUSION

Jane Austen was heavily influenced by the Gothic fiction, courtship novels and Romantic poets. She disagreed with the fantastic, fabricated and improbable nature of Gothic novels because it did not meet her conviction that situations and characters in books should resemble real life. She also disagreed with the Romantic poets. On the other hand, her novels are clearly influenced by courtship novels as her own plots are about marriage. There is always a heroine in each novel.

Catherine Morland – the heroine of *Northanger Abbey* – follows Austen's conviction. Catherine is a plain, ordinary girl who is fond of reading gothic novels. She does not seem to be the heroine of the novel because she is naive, inexperienced and is limited in knowledge. For a girl who loves reading so much, it is remarkable how bad she is at reading people and her surroundings. She trusts people around her and does not see their true characters. She also does not understand the difference between fiction and reality. She pictures her life as if taken from a gothic novel; places and buildings are scary and people are villains. Catherine also suffers a limitation because she does not understand that reality can be worse than fiction. All in all, it is difficult to accept that she is a heroine because there is nothing extraordinary or attractive about her. Yet, readers know her position because the whole novel was dedicated to her.

The novel traces the maturation of Catherine. Under the guidance of her hero Henry Tilney and his sister Eleanor Tilney, she becomes a fallible woman and finally justifies her position of a heroine. While doing so, Austen establishes *Northanger Abbey* as more than just a coming-of-age novel. *Northanger Abbey* is a novel dedicated to reading – as the story revolves around reading books and people – as well as a parody of Gothic fiction and English Novel. The story is mockingly interwoven with references to gothic novels, situations are referred to through a specific vocabulary; there are villains as well as a woman in distress. The novel as a genre separates itself from the rest. There is a questionable heroine, the story appears to be nothing but a parody and traditional conventions are the source of irony. Throughout the story, the narrator behaves very unconventionally. She continually comments upon traditional conventions regarding heroines, criticises Catherine and emphasis her maturation by disappearing and allowing her to narrate the story through her own eyes.

Northanger Abbey is indisputably a story of many genres: a novel, a parody and a Bildungsroman. Jane Austen manages to succeed in her main aim, which was to realistically depict the maturation of Catherine Morland. But while doing so, she also justified Catherine's dubious position of a heroine.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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