Università
Ca'Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree

in Lingue e letterature europee, americane e postcoloniali

LM-37

Final Thesis

Northanger Abbey

An analysis of the novel and novel readers

Supervisor
Ch. Prof. Enrica Villari

Second Reader
Ch. Prof. Flavio Gregori

Candidate
Giulia Garato
Matricolation number
876570

Academic Year
2019 / 2020

Table of contents

Introduction

I wrote my dissertation on *Northanger Abbey* (1818) by Jane Austen, because at a first reading I was amazed by the way in which the author managed the story: it was so different from the novels I was used to. The interventions by the narrator within the story were sometimes very comic, but on other occasions cruel towards the protagonist and I wanted to understand the reason behind this treatment. So, I thought it would be interesting to study the background from which this kind of words were chosen. In this way, I discovered Austen's intent to make a parody of sentimental and Gothic novels but also to create a work that taught useful notions to her female readers. Furthermore, I loved the passionate defense of novels and novel readers Austen wrote in Volume I, Chapter V, because I agree with every single word. I consider that defence still relevant today, as it is not so rare to hear people discrediting novels and the act of reading as useless or worthless compared to other genres or other occupations. So, I decided I wanted to study Austen's work in order to understand on psychological terms why literature and reading are so important for human beings.

The first chapter, "*Two settings, two parodied genres*", is focussed on the role of parody in Austen's work. After a general introduction on the characteristics of parody, the chapter is divided into two main parts. The first discusses the presence of the parody of the sentimental novel in *Northanger Abbey* by looking at the study of R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress*. The two characters who mostly belong to the universe of sentimental literature are Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe, and I aim to identify the ambivalent characteristics they have in relation to the genre parodied. The second part of the chapter focusses on the parody of the Gothic novel, a genre described in *The Literature of Terror*, by D. Punter. My intent in this part is to analyse the most salient conversations and episodes which made *Northanger Abbey* popular for its parodic function. Furthermore, one of the episodes I analysed is the climactic

point of the novel which will change the protagonist's understanding of the world. I will further discuss this theme in the last chapter of this work.

In the second chapter entitled "*Analysing the characters and their relationships*", I study the most important characters of the novel in detail. I start from Catherine's sweetheart, Henry Tilney, to show that his multiple functions in the novel demonstrate the author's interest in creating such a complex character. Moreover, I also focus on the contrasting interpretations of the commentators regarding the love story between Catherine and Henry, in order to offer my personal comment. The analysis of the characters continues with Isabella and John Thorpe, who are identified by some scholars as the bad characters in the novel. My intent is to demonstrate that the ability of an extraordinary writer such as Jane Austen is to create characters which can assume ambivalent functions in a work of art. My thesis is further argued through the discussion of the characters which are believed to be good, such as Eleanor Tilney and the General. Finally, I demonstrate that the role which the senior Tilney actually performs is that of the villain in Catherine's story.

In the third chapter, "*Reading the novel*", I focus on the protagonist in her role as a heroine. I analyse in detail her characteristics in order to display what kind of intellectual growth she goes through during the novel. In addition, I take Catherine as the example to explain some psychological theories about the reading process. The source for this study is Norman Holland's *5 Readers Reading*, a psychoanalytic work applied to literary theory. There are four principles which explain the workings of the mind while reading: "style seeks itself", "defenses must be matched", "fantasy projects fantasies" and "character transform characteristically". I will connect each of them to Catherine in her role as a reader of Gothic novels. Literature is predominant also in the last part of this chapter, where I discuss Jane Austen's own relationship with it, related to the historical and cultural context in which she lived. The fact that she defended novels and female readers precisely in *Northanger Abbey*

shows how much she cherished the power of literature. Austen was a female writer who wrote about female characters in a world dominated by men: her unique style, her accurate portrayal of eighteenth century middle class society, her fascinating stories, made her the admired writer she is still today.

Chapter 1: Two settings, two parodied genres

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, published in 1818, is known for being a parody of the Gothic novel.[1] Indeed, in the novel there are direct references to Ann Radcliffe's and her imitator's works and the protagonist is a passionate reader of these types of novels.[2] The analyses of the differences from and similarities with Gothic novels will be developed in the last section of this chapter.

What many readers may have difficulty in identifying is the parody of another genre present in *Northanger Abbey*, which is the sentimental novel, a widespread genre in the eighteenth century. Although it was widely read during that century, nowadays it is a quite difficult genre to analyse because its features changed during that period and are very different from what we would expect today, as Brissenden clearly explains in his book, *Virtue in Distress*.[3] This topic will be analysed in the following section, but before that, I would like to focus on the characteristics and functions of the parody itself, being a fundamental instrument in Austen's *Northanger Abbey*.

According to Hannoosh, the parody is a "retelling and transformation of another text" whose main characteristic is reflexivity, which is the self-reflective aspect of the work, being the parodist both a reader (of the genre parodied) and an author (of the new parody).[4] This function allows the readers to interpret the new parody by looking at the use of the sources that the parodist does in his or her own work.[5] Hannoosh then focusses on the self-criticism of the

[1] Cf. M. Williams, *Jane Austen. Six Novels and Their Methods*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1986, p. 12.
[2] Cf. J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* [1818], ed. M. Butler, London, Penguin, 2003, vol. II, ch. X, p. 188. Hereafter referred to as *Northanger Abbey*.
[3] Cf. R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress. Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade*, London, Macmillan, 1974.
[4] M. Hannoosh, *The Reflexive Function of Parody*, "Comparative Literature", vol. 41, no. 2, 1989, pp. 113–127, p. 113.
[5] Cf. *Ibidem*. He reports the theory of M. Rose, *A Parody/Metafiction*, London, Croom Helm, 1979.

parody itself, which justifies the parody from the accuses of having a "destructive effect upon literary traditions",[6] since the parody can be itself treated as the work it parodies.

In Austen's case, the sources for the parody are Ann Radcliffe's works, and the ways in which they are elaborated in *Northanger Abbey* allow to interpret the work itself. Moreover, the function of Austen's parody is to link *Northanger Abbey* to the novels parodied in it, in order to actually support them:

> I will not adopt the ungenerous and unpolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are adding [...] if the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard?[7]

This consideration on the part of Austen shows her awareness of the contribution she is giving to the genre she parodies. Furthermore, Austen is aware that her novel will be read by another heroine who may make a parody of her work as well: at the end, indeed, she leaves the story open to an eventual spin-off by telling readers that Eleanor's husband is the one who left the washing bill on Catherine's cabinet in the Abbey. Austen does not add more about the encounter of the two lovers or about the man's description, except that he is charming and deserves Eleanor, because she knows that the rules of composition forbid her to add new characters at the end of a novel.[8] But in this way, leaving this new couple's story open to interpretation, she allows for the possibility of a new writing directly linked to *Northanger Abbey*, dedicated to Eleanor and her husband.[9]

Another aspects I find interesting in Hannoosh's essay refers to mock-epic, related to *Don Quijote* (1605), which does not mock the epic itself but uses it, to comically reflect upon something else, "usually in the contemporary world".[10] I think this is what happens in *Northanger Abbey* too, not only regarding the aspect of the hypocritical conventions of the

[6] M. Hannoosh, *op. cit.*, p.114.
[7] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. V, p. 36.
[8] Cf. Ivi, vol. II, ch. XVI, p. 234.
[9] Cf. M. Hannosh, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121.
[10] *Ibidem*, footnote 5.

society represented in some episodes set in Bath (i.e., the aim of Mr and Mrs Thorpe in finding rich partners to marry their children off to, while pretending not to care about money),[11] but also regarding a less direct reference to the political and cultural situation of England at that time. There are two main episodes which can be referred to.

The first happens during a conversation between Catherine and Eleanor, when the former misinterprets the sentence "I have heard that something very shocking indeed, will soon come out in London".[12] The protagonist is obviously referring to the only thing which interests her, the publication of a new Gothic novel, while Eleanor, thinking about the bloody riot in the streets of London and about her brother Frederick, who is a Captain, is referring to the turbulent situation in the United Kingdom. This misunderstanding is strictly related to the fear that something similar to the French Revolution might be happening in England. In this regard, Tanner suggests the example of the Gordon Riots of 1780 in London and of another rising against king George III in October 1795, and she also states that Austen overcomes this unstable situation by giving her heroes a landed property to maintain "social peace and order".[13] The sort of conservativism of Austen's domestic novels is partially due to the context in which she lived. For most part of her adult life, Austen lived through war, declared in 1793, between France and the United Kingdom. She also had two brothers in the navy and her cousin's French first husband was guillotined in 1794.[14]

The other episode happens in the climactic scene of the novel, when Catherine discovers she has been a fool in thinking that General Tilney is a murderer and a captor. Henry addresses her by asking if she is aware of the age and place they live in, stating that they are English and Christian,[15] as if these conditions were an equivalent of an irreproachable behaviour. Harding

[11] Cf. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. I, p. 129.
[12] Ivi, vol. I, ch. XIV, p.107.
[13] T. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1986, p. 17.
[14] Cf. R. P. Irvine, *Jane Austen*, London, Routledge, 2005, p. 30.
[15] Cf. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. IX, p. 186.

interprets this passage, especially the lines, "in a country like this [...] where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open?", by saying that it is such an unexpected and unbelievable critique of the current society that many of Austen's readers would not even understand that, indeed she makes fun of that sort of people she generally dislikes.[16] I would go further in the analysis of the mockery of this passage by answering to Henry's question, "Does our education prepare us for such atrocities?". Maybe Henry's education does not, but Catherine's probably does, at least the literary one, permeated by all the criminal episodes present in the Gothic novels she interiorized. Moreover, the author has already told us that Catherine "never could learn or understand any thing before she was thought; and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid",[17] and a careful reader would remember this and would think this completely right, as Catherine (at this point of the story) had already failed twice, in imagining a mysterious Gothic story behind a chest and a cabinet found in her room at the Abbey. I would also link this passage to the later words in Volume II, Chapter X, where Catherine's reflection leads to the conclusion that she would not swear on the good manners of her country, except for the central part of England, where "such atrocities" could not happen.[18] In fact, all the rest of the country, in addition to the Europe described in Gothic literature, would have allow them, at least that was what she had learned from her reading of Gothic novels. In this passage, Henry does not give a reasonable justification for Catherine's mistake, as people could commit such criminal actions in an age of revolutionary change and moral and political instability. No one could have been certain of the opposite, especially a girl with such a reading background. However, these two examples show that Austen not only made a parody of the Gothic novels *di per se*, but also that she did so because she was "aware of contemporary

[16] Cf. D. W. Harding, *A Neighbourhood of Voluntary Spies*, in B. C. Southam, ed., *Jane Austen. 'Northanger Abbey', and 'Persuasion'. A Casebook*, Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1976, pp. 69-72, pp.70-71.
[17] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. I, p. 16.
[18] Ivi, vol. II, ch. X, p. 188.

events, debates and issues, of the wars and domestic unrest [...] and of the radical change taking place on the constitution of English society, that the conventional view allows".[19]

1.1. In Bath: a parody of the sentimental novel

Mansell divides *Northanger Abbey* into two parts, not making the division at the end of Volume I, but at Chapter V of Volume II.[20] I would rather put the division at Chapter IV of Volume II, since in Chapter V the parody of the Gothic novel has already begun. Anyway, what is important is that Mansell clearly divides the novel into two kinds of parodies, of the sentimental one in the first part, of the Gothic in the second. In this section, I am going to focus on the former type of parody, but firstly it is necessary to say something about the meaning of that crucial adjective "sentimental".

The ambiguity of this term starts already with its Latin roots, which are in the verb "*sentire*" and the noun "*sensus*". Basically, they are both related to the perception of physical and corporeal sensations and to their mental elaboration. So, they refer both to physical and mental awareness, in the processes of thinking and feeling, as activities or states.[21] The word "sentimental" first appeared in 1740s, in a letter from Lady Bradshaigh to Richardson and it had a highly favourable meaning, "everything clever and agreeable [was] comprehended in that word", but by the end of the century its meaning had changed into "excessive" and "insincere".[22] Actually, later in the century, the credit for introducing such a word was given to Sterne, thanks to his novel *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), but paradoxically, his use of the word was different, as he thought he was using it in the French way. He was doing "a sort of sense-loan", giving to the current French word "*sentiment*" (which described the art of being

[19] T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[20] Cf. D. Mansell, *The Novels of Jane Austen. An Interpretation*, London, Macmillan, 1974, p. 6.
[21] Cf. R. F. Brissenden, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.
[22] Ivi, pp. 17-18.

virtuous), the meaning of the English word "sensibility" (related to excessive display of feelings).[23] The power of these words lies in the fact that they can be combined to acquire a "high degree of connotative power" if they are charged with moral, sexual, political or religious connotations and this makes them more ambiguous and difficult to define.[24]

The century in which the conception of "sentimental" developed is the same in which a fundamental importance was given, by philosophers such as Locke and Kant, to experience, "the source of all knowledge and all values".[25] And experience naturally derives from our senses, from our sensibility.[26] As a consequence, the role of feelings provoked by experience was essential to create moral judgment. It is not an excessive sensibility which makes a character a sentimental hero or heroine, but they can be defined as sentimental heroes and heroines because of the "belief in the sanctity and authority of their private judgements".[27] From this point of view I would say that even Catherine can be defined as a sentimental heroine. Here are the words written by Clarissa in Richardson's novel:

> My motives [...] arise principally from what offers to my own heart, respecting [...] its own rectitude, its own judgment of the *fit* and the *unfit*; as I would, without study, answer *for* myself *to* myself, in the *first* place; to *him* [Lovelace], and to the *world*, in the *second* only. Principles, that *are* in my mind; that I *found* there; implanted, no doubt, by the first gracious Planter: Which therefore *impell* me [...] to act up to them [...] to the best of my judgment, be enabled to comport myself worthily in both states (the single and the married), let others act as they will by *me*.[28]

Clarissa underlines that her actions and motives are driven by her own judgement and her own opinion is what matters to her in the first place. In a similar way, Catherine's strength is represented in Volume I, Chapter XIII, when she refuses to follow the Thorpes to respect a prior engagement to take a country walk with the Tilneys, "Catherine felt herself to be in the right, and though pained by such tender, such flattering supplication, could not allow it to

[23] R. F. Brissenden, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
[24] *Ibidem*.
[25] Ivi, p. 22.
[26] Cf. *Ibidem*.
[27] Ivi, p. 24.
[28] S. Richardson, *Clarissa or, the History of a Young Lady* [1747-8], ed. A. Ross, London, Penguin, 1985, p. 596.

influence her".[29] Her own answer is indeed, "If I am wrong, I am doing what I believe to be right", and she is not deceived again to follow the Thorpes, even if they have her brother's help to convince her to forget the Tilneys.[30] Her sentence is much easier and simpler than Clarissa's words because she is a simple young girl, however, the meaning is the same, she does what she believes is right for her, even if she might disappoint someone else she cares about. Indeed, as Brissenden states, even if our judgments can be "true or illusory", "they are, ultimately, all we have to work with".[31]

The distinction Brissenden makes between "sentimental novel" and "novel of sentiment" is very interesting as it represents the distinction that I believe Austen also might have done while writing the story. This is strictly related to Richardson's writings, without whom "Austen's achievement would not have been possible", she surely read his books with pleasure and learnt a lot from them.[32] The differentiation Brissenden makes, was not employed in the eighteenth century, but is now used to describe Richardson's type of sentimentalism, which is different from Sterne's sentimentality represented as the attitude to indulge in emotions, sometimes with sexual connotation. Before this shift, for 1740s and 1750s writers including Richardson, sentimental referred to a work which was thoughtful, moral, that presented human passion in a sober and realistic manner.[33] The sentimentalism in Richardson was "moral and instructive", its aim was to soothe the readers and the protagonists in their ordeals, to give a moral example to follow, which justified the pains suffered by his heroines.[34] In *Pamela* (1740) Mr. B. attempts to rape the protagonist and in *Clarissa* (1748) Lovelace dares to perform the vile act. They are both exemplary characters who aims to teach moral lessons to their readers. From this perspective, it may seem that the novels written between the 1740s and

[29] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XIII, p. 94.
[30] Ivi, p. 95.
[31] R. F. Brissenden, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
[32] Ivi, p. 97.
[33] Cf. Ivi, p. 101.
[34] Cf. Ivi, p. 102.

1760s were less dominated by feelings than those written between 1770s and 1780s, a period where the meaning of sentimental shifted its association from mental thought to passionate feeling.[35] For this reason, the moral and instructive novels such as Richardson's are classified by Brissenden as novels of sentiment, where the most important thing was moral discrimination, the correct analysis of "morally intricate and perplexing situations".[36] Moreover, a heroine of a novel of sentiment is described as struggling against what other people want her to do.[37] But this differentiation between the sentimental novel and the novel of sentiment, does not mean that the novel of sentiment had not a deep interest in the characters' feelings. Thinking and reflecting were as important as acting, but they were less pathetic and exaggerated than in the sentimental novels of the end of the century. As Brissenden explains, "by the end of the century the dangers of excessive sensibility had become a literary commonplace" which Austen parodies in her juvenilia writings and takes more seriously in *Sense and Sensibility*.[38]

The example I gave before on Catherine's refusal to follow the Thorpes against her will, can be inscribed in a conception of *Northanger Abbey* as a parody of a novel of sentiment, and the situations which display this genre are mostly related with the protagonist, although the aim of the author is both serious and parodical. The parody in Austen has the same aim of the novels of sentiment, which is acquiring the ability to discriminate between situations, in order to take the most appropriate decision possible, following the reason instead of the sentiments. The problem in *Northanger Abbey* is that Catherine is unable to interpret the world that surrounds her, although to her thoughts great space is given. As a result, she fails in what a novel of sentiment usually does, because of all her false expectations prompted by her reading

[35] Cf. R. F. Brissenden, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
[36] Ivi, p. 119.
[37] Cf. Ivi, p. 129.
[38] Ivi, p. 131.

background and because of her immaturity and occasional stupidity in distinguishing what is happening. In particular, I am referring to her friendship with Isabella and John Thorpe, whose falseness she seems unable to detect and who deceive her to obtain what they want. For example, in Volume I, Chapter VII, Catherine notices that John has terrible manners as he offends his sisters by saying they are "very ugly".[39] But, because he is her brother's friend and because he told her she was "the most charming girl in the world" she fails to understand that his harshness is not only directed at his sisters, but also at her, disguised under a torrent of enchanting words and false manners.[40] Indeed, he will lie and force her to go with them to Blaize Castle in Volume I, Chapter IX, ("I heard Tilney hallooing to a man who was just passing by on horseback, that they were going as far as Wick Rocks")[41] and even when his lies are revealed, he only "laughed, smacked his whip, encouraged his horse, made odd noises, and drove on".[42] As for Isabella, Catherine basically ignores all the signs about her falsity. An example happens in Volume I, Chapter VI, when Isabella notices that "two odious young men [...] have been staring at me this half an hour" and states that she hopes they will not follow them, but, as soon as they go away, she finds an excuse to go in the same direction. To Catherine's ingenuous observation that "if [they] only wait few minutes, there will be no danger of [their] seeing them at all", Isabella answers that she intends to "spoil" them by ignoring them, and the naive Catherine has no reply to make and can only walk as fast as she can to follow the two "odious" young men.[43] These are only two of the many examples in the novel showing how Catherine's understanding, and consequently her judging, can be easily tricked by more clever people, who know how to pretend to be good. In these situations, the narrator makes fun of the protagonist's reflections, which is something odd in a novel of sentiment but

[39] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. V, p. 48.
[40] *Ibidem*.
[41] Ivi, ch. XI, p. 82.
[42] Ivi, p. 84.
[43] Ivi, ch. VI, pp. 41-42.

necessary when the heroine is so unprepared to fulfil her role of giving the example of good and reasoned behaviour to the readers.

Following again Brissenden's classification, I would say that Austen's intent while writing a revisited novel of sentiment was also serious, educative and instructive. In fact, *Northanger Abbey* can also be read as a guide to young lady readers, to teach them to distinguish between fantasy and fiction, and not to make Catherine's mistake of misreading reality because of her passion for Gothic novels. In fact, the novel in the eighteenth century was mostly associated with female readers and writers –"gentlemen read better books"[44]– and the heritage of French romance juxtaposed male heroism to female beauty in a potentially tragic love. The popularity of this type of fiction was thought to influence young readers to indulge in feelings rather than acquiring self-control, which was inappropriate for virtuous ladies, wives and mothers.[45] For the danger of wasting the real life to indulge in literary fiction and fantasy, the narrator often makes fun of the protagonist's reflection and feelings because the situations which provoked them were disproportionate to her reactions. For instance, in Volume I, Chapter II, when Catherine is admired by two gentlemen who say she is a "pretty girl", the narrator comments on her feelings. The intent is ironical because she is so flattered by a simple compliment to feel like one of the literary heroines she so admired:

> She felt more obliged to the two young men for this simple praise than a true quality heroine would have been for fifteen sonnets in celebration of her charms, and went to her chair in good humour with every body, and perfectly satisfied with her share of public attention.[46]

The elaboration Austen does of Richardson's novel of sentiment does not stop here though, as a direct reference to them is present in *Northanger Abbey* when Catherine first meets Henry Tilney, her instant first crush. She soon starts thinking and dreaming about him, which

[44] Cf. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XIV, p. 102.
[45] Cf. R. P. Irvine, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
[46] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. II, p. 24.

was something improper for a young lady, as a well-mannered young lady is not supposed to fall in love before the man and is not supposed to dream about him before she knows that he has dreamt of her before.[47] As Marilyn Butler, explains, Austen read Richardson's letter in the "Rambler" (No. 97, vol. II), where he wrote "that a young lady should be in love and the love of the young gentleman undeclared, is an heterodoxy which prudence, and even policy, must not allow", meaning that the lady should passively wait for the man's declaration.[48] The parody here lies in the fact that Catherine evidently thinks about Henry for the entire duration of the book, while Henry seems never explicit about any preference for her. Catherine behaves as heroine of novel of sentiment should never behave but this makes Austen's creation original and innovative, depicting a sort of feminine emancipation *ante litteram*.

According to Fergus, the sentimental parody –of the second half of the century– in the first part of *Northanger Abbey* is "better received and more discussed" than the Gothic, because it allows the social satire which the residence in the Abbey interrupts. He goes further in his reflection by saying that not only does Austen show the absurdities of the sentimental genre, by pointing out that it has nothing to do with real life, but she also makes the sentimental novel work in *Northanger Abbey*, by exploring what is "genuine and moving" in it.[49] In other words, Austen makes a parody of the sentimental novel, but still uses the genre to describe Catherine's feelings as if she were a proper sentimental heroine. An example of the analysis of the protagonist's feelings happens at a ball, where the protagonist was supposed to dance with John Thorpe, but he has not arrived yet and she has to sit with all the other ladies who do not have a partner, and this makes her feel sad. These are the narrator's words:

> To be disgraced in the eye of the world, to wear the appearance of infamy while her heart is all purity, her actions all innocence, and the misconduct of another the true source of her debasement, is one of those circumstances which peculiarly belong to the heroine's life, and her fortitude under it what

[47] Cf. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. III, p. 29.
[48] Ivi, p. 249, footnote 5.
[49] J. Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel. 'Northanger Abbey', 'Sense and Sensibility' and 'Pride and Prejudice'*, London, Macmillan, 1985, p. 20.

> particularly dignifies her character. Catherine had fortitude too; she suffered, but no murmur passed her lips.[50]

Catherine's sufferings are as real as if she were the true heroine of any sentimental novel, but the narrator makes fun of her, being the situation not so severe as to require such sad feelings. Not by chance, some moments later in Volume I, Chapter VIII, when she is obliged to refuse Henry's invitation to dance, her sorrow is so deep that the narrator directly points it at:

> Mr. Tilney [...] asked Catherine to dance with him. This compliment, delightful as it was, produced severe mortification to the lady; and in giving her denial, she expressed her sorrow on the occasion so very much as if she really felt it, that had Thorpe, who joined her just afterwards, been half a minute earlier, he might have thought her sufferings rather too acute.[51]

Another circumstance where Austen displays her protagonist as a typical sentimental heroine happens in a rather more serious situation in Volume I, Chapter XII, when Catherine, is led by John's lie to go with the Thorpes, instead of keeping her promise to go for a country walk with the Tilneys:

> "Pray, pray stop, Mr. Thorpe. I cannot go on. I will not go on. I must go back to Miss Tilney [...] How could you deceive me so, Mr. Thorpe? How could you say that you saw them driving up the Lansdown Road? I would not have had it happen so for the world. They must think it so strange, so rude of me! To go by them, too, without saying a word! You do not know how vexed I am".[52]

As Waldron identifies, this is a parody of a very serious scene of abduction which happened in *Emmeline* (1788) by Charlotte Smith,[53] a novel with both Gothic and sentimental influences, but whose events are harder to stand up to than those faced by Catherine:

> "No! No! cried she— never! never! I have passed my honour to Lord Montreville. It is sacred— I cannot, I will not forfeit it! [...] Let me go back to the house, Mr. Delamere; or from this moment I shall consider you as having taken advantage of my unprotected state [...] to offer me the grossest outrage".[54]

---

[50] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VIII, p. 52.
[51] Ivi, p. 53.
[52] Ivi, ch. XI, p. 84.
[53] Cf. M. Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 27.
[54] C. Smith, *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* [1788], ed. Z. Fairbairns, London, Pandora, Pandora Press, 1987, p. 159.

Because of a similar event to that of Emmeline, where the protagonist is forces to do something against her will, Catherine feels distressed and anxious, even if her situation was far less dangerous. As I just mentioned, in Volume I, Chapter XII, Catherine has not kept her word of going with Henry and his sister for a country walk because she was tricked by the Thorpes' lies. As a consequence, she feels obliged to make her apologies to Henry as soon as she meets him at a ball, which causes another parody of the strong emotions displayed by the protagonist for a rather simple reason:[55]

> Feelings rather natural than heroic possessed her; instead of considering her own dignity injured by this ready condemnation— instead of proudly resolving, in conscious innocence, to shew her resentment towards him who could harbour a doubt of it, to leave to him all the trouble of seeking an explanation, and to enlighten him on the past only by avoiding his sight, or flirting with somebody else, she took to herself all the shame of misconduct, or at least of its appearance, and was only eager for an opportunity of explaining its cause.[56]

The "note of parody" is strong here, being the feelings exaggerated in comparison to what happened.[57] Moreover, the passage shows that she cares about Henry and his family and that she has the courage to face him to justify her actions, even if she is anxious. In her own way, she is a heroine, so, despite the parody, the plot of the novel works anyways, as Fergus noticed. What is more, the narrator clarifies that she considers Catherine a sentimental heroine, even though her situation is comical, when she comes back home, not full of glory and triumph for her survival, but as a defeated heroine:

> My affair is widely different; I bring back my heroine to her home in solitude and disgrace; and no sweet elation of spirits can lead me into minuteness. A heroine in a hack post-chaise, is such a blow upon sentiment, as no attempt at grandeur or pathos can withstand.[58]

[55] Cf. H. S. Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels. The Fabric of Dialogue*, S.l., Archon Books, 1967, p. 87.
[56] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XII, p. 89.
[57] H. S. Babb, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
[58] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. XIV, p. 217.

The friendship with Isabella is another source of parody of the sentimental genre for two main reasons. Firstly, according to the sentimental tradition, two female characters should become friends as soon as possible,[59] and this definitely happens in the novel:

> The progress of the friendship between Catherine and Isabella was quick as its beginning had been warm [...]. They called each other by their Christian name, were always arm in arm when they walked, pinned up each other's train for the dance, and were not to be divided in the set; and if a rainy morning deprived them of other enjoyments, they were still resolute in meeting in defiance of wet and dirt, and shut themselves up, to read novels together.[60]

The match between the girls appears so perfect at the beginning not only because they share the same interests for novels and boys, but also because Isabella's craftiness is counterbalanced and works thanks to Catherine's ingenuity and kindness. Actually though, as the novel develops, the readers notice that Catherine's friendship is sincere, while Isabella's is an opportunist and she is not afraid of lying to whom she defines a close friend, her "dearest Catherine". Indeed, this is the second source of parody. Isabella appears as an egoistic and exaggeratedly sensitive heroine of the sentimental type, and considering that she is not at all the protagonist, as she believes she is, this is even more comical.[61] A significant passage where Isabella pretends she is the best possible friend is in Volume I, Chapter VI, during a conversation between the two friends:

> "There is nothing I would not do for those who are really my friends. I have no notion of loving people by halves, it is not my nature. My attachments are always excessively strong".[62]

But similar words are also used by Isabella, in Volume I, Chapter XIII, to convince Catherine, against her will, to betray the Tilneys and go to Clifton with her and her brothers the following day, pretending she will not go either without her and displaying feelings of jealousy towards the other family:

---

[59] Cf. H. S. Babb, *op. cit.*, p. 89. Cf. D. Mansell, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
[60] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. V, pp. 35-36.
[61] Cf. Y. Gooneratne, *Jane Austen*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, p. 51.
[62] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VI, p. 39.

> "I, who love you so excessively! When once my affections are placed, it is not in the power of anything to change them. But I believe my feelings are stronger than anybody's; I am sure they are too strong for my own peace; and to see myself supplanted in your friendship by strangers does cut me to the quick, I own".[63]

One of the topics about which the two girls often speak, a part from novels, is boys, and Isabella, "being four years older than Miss Morland, and at least four years better informed, had a very decided advantage in discussing such points".[64] Even with her experience, Isabella is not the best person in giving love advice, and despite her naivety, Catherine soon detects this:

> "Where the heart is really attached, I know very well how little one can be pleased with the attention of anybody else. Everything is so insipid, so uninteresting, that does not relate to the beloved object! I can perfectly comprehend your feelings."
> "But you should not persuade me that I think so very much about Mr. Tilney, for perhaps I may never see him again."
> "Not see him again! My dearest creature, do not talk of it. I am sure you would be miserable if you thought so!"
> "No, indeed, I should not".[65]

Catherine, despite the interest she has had for Henry since the beginning, is not in such a desperate search for a partner as Isabella is, and is not desperate at the idea of not seeing him again (as she will be when she is forced to leave Northanger without saying goodbye to him).[66] Isabella's excessive sentimentality is counter-balanced by Catherine's simple common sense,[67] which doubles the protagonist's function as a sentimental heroine. She is firstly mocked by the narrator when she exceeds in feelings in inappropriate situations, but is also used to mock Isabella's nonsense. Another example of the opposition between the protagonist's common sense and Isabella's excess is to be found in Volume I, Chapter X, when Isabella is describing her perfect harmony with James Morland and dares to suppose what Catherine might have thought:

---

[63] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XIII, p. 94.
[64] Ivi, ch. IV, p. 32.
[65] Ivi, ch. VI, p. 40.
[66] Cf. Ivi, vol. II, ch. XIV, p. 216.
[67] Cf. M. Waldron, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

> "Our opinions were so exactly the same, it was quite ridiculous! There was not a single point in which we differed; I would not have had you by for the world; you are such a sly thing, I am sure you would have made some droll remark or other about it."
> "No, indeed I should not."
> "Oh, yes you would indeed; I know you better than you know yourself. You would have told us that we seemed born for each other, or some nonsense of that kind, which would have distressed me beyond conception; my cheeks would have been as red as your roses; I would not have had you by for the world."
> "Indeed you do me injustice; I would not have made so improper a remark upon any account; and besides, I am sure it would never have entered my head."
> Isabella smiled incredulously and talked the rest of the evening to James.[68]

This passage shows not only that Isabella is the perfect caricature of a sentimental heroine using such hyperbolic vocabulary to describe her relationship with a young man she has just met, but also that her ideas are openly denied by facts. She pretends she knows Catherine better than she does herself, which would be difficult even if they had known each other for more than a few days, which is not the case. She could not know anyone so deep in fact, because all her relationships are false, and when Catherine firmly affirms that she would have never said those words, Isabella is offended and does not speak to her for the rest of the evening.

The stereotype of the sentimental heroine, described in Brissenden, corresponds to a "young girl of unusual sensibility, [...] in pathetic situations, [...] innocent [...] naive and foolish" and I think this can be an appropriate description of Catherine.[69] She is indeed "foolish" in being so fascinated by Gothic novels to misinterpret the real world, she is "naive" in judging people, often believing the best of bad people and she is also "innocent" as she always means well and does not even think of using or hurting anyone else. This is something Henry notices and appreciates in her although she does not seem to be aware of her innate goodness. In Volume I, Chapter XVI, during a ball, while Catherine is wondering why Isabella has changed her mind and has decided to dance with Captain Tilney, Henry tries to explain how he sees her:

> "How very little trouble it can give you to understand the motive of other people's actions."
> "Why?— What do you mean?"

[68] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. X, p. 69.
[69] R. F. Brissenden, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

> "With you, it is not, How is such a one likely to be influenced? What is the inducement most likely to act upon such a person's feelings, age, situation, and probable habits of life considered?— but, how should *I* be influenced, what would be *my* inducement in acting so and so?"
> "I do not understand you."
> "Then we are on very unequal terms, for I understand you perfectly well." [...]
> "Well, then, I only meant that your attributing my brother's wish of dancing with Miss Thorpe to good nature alone convinced me of your being superior in good nature yourself to all the rest of the world." Catherine blushed and disclaimed, and the gentleman's predictions were verified".[70]

Catherine does not take into consideration that other people may have bad motives to guide their actions, because she only has good intentions, thus she thinks the best also of others. In Volume II, Chapter X, always thinking about Isabella and her betrayal of James in favour of Captain Tilney, Henry states that Catherine always feels "what is most to the credit of human nature",[71] to emphasize that she will never understand such girls as Isabella, because she will never be one of them: Catherine is honest and pure in her soul and this is why both he and his sister Eleanor love her. The "pathetic situations" Brissenden refers to can be spotted in *Northanger Abbey*, as in the example I have already given of Catherine being desolated for not having a partner to dance with, and for not being free to accept Henry's proposal because she was already engaged to John Thorpe. Finally, I would qualify her as a girl of "unusual sensibility" as regarding her deep connection with novels, which influence her feelings and emotions in such a strong way to the detriment of her perception of reality on occasions:

> "Oh! I am delighted with the book! I should like to spend my whole life in reading it. I assure you, if it had not been to meet you, I would not have come away from it for all the world".[72]

This extreme sensibility for books is of course linked to the foolishness which brings her to misinterpret her reality, risking the loss of her beloved Henry and her own reputation, but I am going to explore this topic in detail in the next section.

To summarize, I would argue that Austen's parody of the sentimental novel is more complex and articulated than it might appear at first. She makes fun of the exaggerated display

[70] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. I, p. 126.
[71] Ivi, ch. X, p. 194.
[72] Ivi, vol. I, ch. VI, p. 39.

of emotions and feelings demonstrated by the characters of Catherine and Isabella, in their function as caricatures of sentimental heroines. But she also makes fun of the novel of sentiment classified by Brissenden, where the heroine should be a young lady who has gone through a lot of difficulties and survived in order to be an example for readers. Catherine's adventures are just childish experiences in comparison to those present in *Clarissa* (1748) or *Pamela* (1740), of rape and psychological violence, but the narrator's account defines Catherine as "a young lady to be a heroine",[73] so readers are supposed to take her role seriously. In this perspective, the characterization of Catherine as a girl who fights for her rights (not to be deceived by other people) is the only effective demonstration of her role as a possible moral guide of the novel of sentiment. As the story develops, though, the readers will discover that Catherine is just a parody of a real heroine because of the simple life she lives in Bath.

Despite this, I think, two serious intents can be detached in Austen's employment of the parody. The first is a warning for young ladies not to behave like Catherine (or Isabella), overestimating their feelings and confusing fiction with reality (only on Catherine's account), and here the narrator's role as a moral instructor is fundamental to guide reader's judgment of the events. The second regards a critique of the society the author was living in, which is not so direct, but which describes a period of political and cultural turbulence which menaced the order society known until that moment. The misunderstanding between Catherine and Eleanor in Volume I, Chapter XIV, is an example of the hidden fear of a civil war. In addition, the roles of the Thorpes and of the General can be exemplary of the increasing interest for luxury because of their attachment to money and to a new comfortable lifestyle, contraposed to affection, morality and happiness (as I will discuss in the second chapter of this work). To conclude this analysis of the parody of sentimental in Austen's novel, I would like to quote Wallace when he

[73] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. I, p. 18.

writes that, "Austen clearly intends to devaluate sentimental literature, and the laughter evoked by *Northanger Abbey* shows that she succeeds".[74]

1.2. In the Abbey: a parody of the Gothic novel

"The origin of Gothic fiction cannot be separated from the origin of the novel form itself".[75] The novel and Gothic fiction both developed in the eighteenth century, but at a certain moment public taste shifted from realistic to Gothic fiction. The eighteenth century was the era of Enlightenment and rationalism but at the same time, the public taste changed in favour of a genre which contradicted all the progress of knowledge achieved in that period,[76] because of its interest for the supernatural, the unknown, the mysteries and the crime. The name of this genre originally meant "to do with the Goths", who were the northern barbarian tribes which contributed to the destruction of the Roman empire, then becoming a synonym for "Teutonic" and "Germanic". Punter explains that because of the shortened sense of past chronology of the eighteenth century, the term "Gothic" began to describe everything which happened before the seventeenth century, associating a favourable value with anything medieval, primitive and wild. This was a reaction against the modern and rational society characterized by social and civic values.[77] Furthermore, there was also a political implication surrounding the new evaluation of the Goths. The ancient Gothic tribes were seen as an example of resistance against the tyrannical power of the old Roman Empire, embodying values of "purity and liberty".[78] For this reason, they were praised by the Whig Party as an example of rebellion against the

[74] T. G. Wallace, *Jane Austen and Narrative Authority*, Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1995, p. 29.
[75] D. Punter, *The Literature of Terror. A History of Gothic Fiction from 1765 to the Present Day*, Harlow, Longman, 1996, p. 20.
[76] Cf. Ivi, p. 23.
[77] Cf. Ivi, pp. 4-5.
[78] N. Groom, *Introduction* to *The Castle of Otranto*, [1764], ed. N. Groom, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. ix-xxxviii, p. xi.

"Catholic despotism of Tory Royalists".[79] Moreover, the Reformers started to destroy all the signs of the Catholic presence in England as ancient architecture. Paradoxically, this increased the aesthetic taste for ruins and the imaginary world of haunting presences in the ancient buildings such as churches, monasteries and castles, fundamental in Gothic literature.[80]

In the literary context, "Gothic" refers to all the novels written between the 1760s and the 1820s, and it is a term used to refer to works written by different authors. Great differences can be detected among these authors as regarding the variations of the Gothic canon and among them there are Horace Walpole, the author of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the first Gothic novel, Ann Radcliffe, the author of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and many other Gothic authors, Matthew Lewis, C. R. Maturin and Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein* (1823). The Gothic is a non-mimetic genre, which aims to stimulate fear and terror in the readers through the techniques of literary suspense and by portraying the terrifying. Gothic fiction is often set in archaic places as haunted castles or monasteries in remote Southern European countries such as Italy or Spain, where the female heroines are preyed upon through unspeakable terrors by the threatening villain.[81] Other characters of this type of fiction are non-human creatures, such as demons, ghosts, werewolves, doppelgangers, vampires and monsters, and among the themes there is violence, sadism, masochism, necrophilia, bestiality, insanity, hauntings, persecution, obsession, paranoia, revulsion, rape, murder, entrapment, cruelty, torture and claustrophobia. Gothic writers were not interested in the social role of literature and poetry as the Romantics such as Wordsworth. Instead, they wanted to depict vice and violence, to satisfy the readers' most hidden fears and desires through a form of melodrama which allowed for a sort of catharsis thanks to art. It may be interesting to clarify that one of the sources of Gothic fiction was sentimentality itself, which also co-existed with the Gothic for part of the eighteenth

[79] N. Groom, *Introduction* to *The Castle of Otranto*, p. xiii.
[80] Ivi, p. xv.
[81] Cf. D. Punter, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

century. Sentimentalism according to Punter, "dwelt upon the fine emotions of its characters, tracing their feelings minutely, choosing situations to bring out their heightened self-consciousness, situation filled with pathos and anguish", and the Gothic would not exist without this style.[82] In fact, also in the Gothic there is a deep interest and a detailed analysis of the emotions which the terrifying situations cause in the characters, in order to increase the readers' involvement.[83]

The analysis of the passages of *Northanger Abbey* which can be read as a parody of this genre begins precisely with Punter, who quotes the first lines of the novel by pointing out the fact that Catherine does not respond to the requirements of a Gothic heroine, although she is supposed to be one:[84]

> No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine. Her situation in life, the character of her father and mother; her own person and disposition, were all equally against her. Her father was a clergyman, without being neglected, or poor, and a very respectable man, though his name was Richard— and he had never been handsome. He had a considerable independence besides two good livings— and he was not in the least addicted to locking up his daughters. Her mother was a woman of useful plain sense, with a good temper, and, what is more remarkable, with a good constitution. She had three sons before Catherine was born; and instead of dying in bringing the latter into the world, as anybody might expect, she still lived on— lived to have six children more— to see them growing up around her, and to enjoy excellent health herself.[85]

The common Gothic heroine should be an orphan or repudiated by her family, basically she has no help in facing the ordeals that will await her, which is not at all Catherine's situation. She is supported by her family, although they do not comprehend what happened to her in Northanger Abbey, at the end of the book. Her parents are good people who try to do their best in raising their numerous children and for this reason, Catherine is abandoned to herself. Her mother has other little children to take care of, so the girl had no model to teach her how to behave and how to interpret life outside bookish fantasies. Moreover, she has a father called

[82] D. Punter, *op. cit.*, p. 25-26.
[83] Cf. R. P. Irvine, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[84] Cf. D. Punter, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
[85] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. I, p. 15.

Richard, which is not a name of Italian or German origin, as it was usual in Gothic novels, and this is openly a parody of those literary conventions.[86]

The main reason why the whole novel is a parody of the Gothic genre is that although it appears to display the common stereotypical characters such as the shy, solitary heroine who is nonetheless able to survive terrible situations alongside the tyrannical, wicked father, the real plot of a Gothic romance does not take place. The General is tyrannical and wicked but only because he is more interested in richness and appearances than in his children's happiness but he is not so mad as to kill his wife, even if he sends Catherine home without any protection during the journey, "no servant will be offered to you".[87] And Catherine, more than shy, is unexperienced, and has no idea of how to behave in certain circumstances: "Catherine turned away her head, not knowing whether she might venture to laugh".[88] However, at the end she is strong enough to survive the journey and have her happy ending, where the reality turns out to be better than her imagination, with no murderers or entrapments but with her love, Henry. During the story, however, there are precise references to the Gothic, both in the conversations between the characters and in episodes concerning the protagonist herself and the work of her imagination. In particular, Butler identifies five conversations regarding the Gothic in the novel (which will be analysed later),[89] whilst the episodes which strictly concern Catherine are three; the chest episode, the cabinet episode and Mrs. Tilney's chamber episode.[90]

The first conversation takes place in Volume I, Chapter VII, between the protagonist and Isabella and it concerns their habits of reading. Isabella asks if her friend has "gone on with Udolpho",[91] and when Catherine answers enthusiastically, Isabella proposes eight more Gothic readings to share. It is evident from her following words, that she has not a real interest in those

[86] Cf. D. Punter, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
[87] *Northanger Abbey*, vol, II, ch. XIII, p. 210.
[88] Ivi, ch. III, p. 26.
[89] Cf. M. Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 173.
[90] Cf. C. N. L. Brooke, *Jane Austen. Illusion and Reality*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1999, p. 62.
[91] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VI, p. 38.

readings, but that she knows the fashion of the time and wants to display her knowledge even if it is not authentic, as it comes from her friend Miss Andrews, who has read them all. Isabella's words in describing the books point at their length, as if it were an important characteristic to mention regarding any book, whereas the real question for any book lover is, "are you sure they are all horrid?", as Catherine asks.[92] This definition of books as "horrid" refers to the shift of meaning from "horrid" to "horribly beautiful" which is linked to the difference between sublime and beautiful that Burke discusses in his essay *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Everything which is related to "terror" is "productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling",[93] and this is precisely the aim of the Gothic literature Catherine loves. The Gothic is linked to passion more than to reason, so its events, settings, evocative feelings are bound with the irrationality of the sublime and the terror stimulated by it more than with the realistic accounts. The feelings evoked by the cruel and supernatural topics of the Gothic novels are then horrid in a good sense and exciting to Catherine, who is looking forward to reading more of the genre. Isabella's interest, on the contrary, is in other matters, such as boys, love, gossip and that is why, after mentioning her good friend Miss Andrews, she changes the direction of the conversation to dancing, to help Miss Andrews to find a partner and to Catherine's crush on Henry. Here, Catherine again brings back *Udolpho* into the conversation and while talking also of *Sir Charles Grandison* by Richardson (1754), Isabella finally discloses her real self. She is not a true reader, she has not read it, Miss Andrews is her only source, "That is an amazing horrid book, is it not? I remember Miss Andrews could not get through the first volume".[94] In this sentence the use of "horrid" returns and I think it is Isabella's attempt to enter into Catherine's heart by sharing her vocabulary but also a way to divert the attention

[92] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VI, p. 39.
[93] E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. With an Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste; and Several other Additions*, London, 1798, p. 58.
[94] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VI, p. 40.

from the fact she has no idea of what the book is about by trying to describe it in the way which maybe Catherine would have been familiar with. In fact, when Catherine contradicts Isabella's words by saying *Sir Charles Grandison* was "very entertaining", Isabella uses the adjective "readable", which is a too ambiguous term to describe a book, in fact, she immediately changes the topic again by asking her friend what she will be wearing that night.[95] Isabella apparently succeeds in doing this, but the reader knows that "what interested her at that time rather more than any thing else in the world, [was] Laurentina's skeleton", but Catherine is prevented by saying this out loud because of Isabella's chattering.[96]

The second conversation about reading is again in Volume I, Chapter VII, but takes place between Catherine and John Thorpe, and the ignorance of the Thorpe family in literature and the practice of speaking with no knowledge on the subject is even more evident here.[97] Firstly, when Catherine asks about *Udolpho*, John answers that he never reads novels because he has something better to do, but then he continues to say he only appreciated *Tom Jones* (1748) by Fielding and *The Monk* (1795) by Lewis, both known for their sexual content. Secondly, when Catherine insists on *Udolpho* he says that he would only read Radcliffe's novels which *Udolpho* is indeed, as Catherine points out. At this point, John does not admit his mistake but says that he was referring to another "stupid book" written by a woman, *Camilla* (1796) by Francis Burney, described as the "horridest nonsense you can ever imagine".[98] Unfortunately Catherine has not read so she cannot defend it by pointing at the superficial and partial interpretation given by John. From these words exchanged between Catherine and John it is clear that John is similar to Isabella, and to the rest of the family, in the practice of chitchatting and pretending to know things, but John is even less able to hide his ignorance and his superficiality. If someone as naive as Catherine can detect his mistakes it means that he is

[95] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VI, p. 40.
[96] Ivi, p. 41.
[97] Cf. Ivi, ch. VII, p. 47.
[98] Ivi, p. 48.

not at all able to pretend to be better than what he is. In this case, being the topic of the conversation close to the protagonist, she is able to answer him promptly, yet differently from the situations in which the Thorpes' deception regards social behaviour. The Gothic novels here are at first dismissed as something unimportant but then partially appreciated if the topics are crueller than the one of *Camilla*, which is a sentimental novel. Even if the opinions of such a character are of no high value, they probably influence Catherine's approach to the third conversation about novels.

In Volume I, Chapter XIV, admiring the landscape offers the opportunity to speak about novels, and Catherine supposes that Henry does not read novels as men have better books to read.[99] Surprisingly enough for Catherine, Henry affirms that those who do not appreciate novels are stupid and he adds later that men read as many novels as women do and this relieves Catherine from the embarrassment of saying that *Udolpho* is her favourite book. Moreover, Henry quotes *Udolpho*'s characters to show not only that he has read the book but also that being older, he has read even more Gothic novels than Catherine herself. As the conversation continues with Eleanor, other interesting reflections are made upon other genres of books, such as history books. History is boring for Catherine because it is an imaginative reconstruction of what happened in the past, created by historiographers' invention. This may seem strange because that same "invention is what delights [her] in other books".[100] The imagination in historical reconstructions is different from the imagination which creates alternative realities, but it a process so similar that also Catherine recognizes that her strong preference for only one type of invention is odd. Her other reasons for the dislike of history are not so immature, though. She says, "the quarrels of popes and kings, with wars and pestilences, [...] the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any woman at all",[101] which is actually a simple but realistic

[99] Cf. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XIV, p. 102.
[100] Ivi, p. 104.
[101] *Ibidem*.

description of history. The powerful people as popes and kings had the power to start wars or to interrupt them, the diseases had a huge impact on populations and men are described as useful as they fought in war and because they had the power to decide, while women get no mention for the majority of time. They had no power and their duty was to stay at home to raise children and in her simple logical way Catherine both recognizes it and despises it, being a woman fond of novels written by women, about female heroines (to whom she belongs), which was actually a great revolution in a male dominated literature (and society).

The following conversation about the Gothic is perhaps the most important as it lays the foundation of the following episodes, when Catherine believes she is inside a Gothic adventure. It happens in Volume II, Chapter V, between Henry and the protagonist, during the journey to Northanger Abbey. Catherine was at "the highest point of extasy" about going to the Abbey,[102] and making part of the journey with Henry "was certainly the greatest happiness of the world",[103] because "her passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry Tilney".[104] Her consideration of the Abbey is so favourable that she asks Henry how difficult it had been moving to an ordinary patronage-house. Henry quickly understands her strong passion for this type of ancient building so he soon starts mocking her on the basis of her favourite books, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *Romance of the Forest* (1791), both by Radcliffe and *The Castle of Otranto*. He describes the possibility for Catherine of being lodged in a chamber isolated from the rest of the house, where even the servants will be distant from her and the door of the chamber will have no lock. One night during a tempest, with the light of the lamp almost extinguished, she will discover a door which leads to subterraneous communications and going back to the room she will notice a "large, old-fashioned cabinet of ebony and gold" which will contain diamonds and a precious manuscript. Henry leaves the

[102] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. II, p. 132.
[103] Ivi, ch. V, p. 149.
[104] Ivi, ch. II, p. 134.

narration incomplete because he is so amused by her reaction that he cannot go on with the appropriate attitude to narrate the story.[105] This can be read as the most important conversation about the Gothic because Henry increases Catherine's excitement at staying at the Abbey and influences her behaviour once in her room. Henry's intent is to make her laugh at the beginning, but when he realizes she is so captured by the story he stops, and this shows how much he is in contact with the reality of things. Whereas, Catherine at the end is "ashamed of her eagerness" and tries to restore her reputation by saying that she is not frightened, as she thinks such things will never happen to her,[106] which is actually the opposite of her desires.

The last conversation to which Butler refers happens in Volume II, Chapter IX, and it is not about novels, but about the Gothic imagery which led Catherine to create her fantasy about the General.[107] Henry blames her for what she had been thinking about, "what have you been judging from?", but actually he had contributed to her active fantasies during the journey, so she is not the only one who has done something wrong. Furthermore, Henry could be more honest in thinking about his father, as Catherine was not so wrong in believing him capable of cruelty (as will be later discussed in the third chapter of this work). All the conversations mentioned have different functions. On the one hand, they have the parodic function to show how much Catherine is in love with horrid Gothic novels and how much this influences her interpretations of people's words, behaviour and reality in general. For example, when she is waiting for the rain to stop in Volume I, Chapter XII, in order to go to the Pump-room to see the Tilneys, she thinks also about the weather in literary terms, "Oh! That we had such weather here as they had at Udolpho, or at least in Tuscany and the south of France!— the night that poor St. Aubin died!— such beautiful weather!".[108] On the other hand, according also to Butler,

[105] Cf. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. V, pp. 149-152.
[106] Ivi, p. 152.
[107] Cf. Ivi, ch. IX, p. 186.
[108] Ivi, vol. I, ch. IX, p. 80.

the conversations show the difference between the two groups of characters, the Thorpes and the Tilneys (which will be further analysed in the second chapter).

As concerning the real parodic episodes happening in *Northanger Abbey*, two out of three happen in Volume II, Chapter VI. Here, Catherine is in the room assigned to her, which is not at all as Henry described it, in the same way that the Abbey is not a ruined, old, haunted place as she imagined it. They are both modern places, "The furniture was in all the profusion and elegance of modern taste", with all the comforts the General is proud of, although the structure of the edifice is still Gothic, "the pointed arch was preserved– the form of them was Gothic".[109] What surprises Catherine though, is the heavy old chest in her room, which according to her literary imagination should contain something so special that she is not able to resist the temptation of opening it, even if she is worried about the punctuality required by the General to reach him for dinner. Despite the struggle opening it, she only finds a white cotton bedcover, and when Eleanor enters the room, she blushes for being discovered while looking at the family's belongings. Eleanor is nice and avoids making her feel even more embarrassed by providing an explanation for the presence of that heavy chest in that room, but she is actually worried of being late for dinner with her father. This is the first time that Catherine is guided by curiosity and does something which is not so appropriate, being a guest in the house, but the possibility that in the chest there might be something precious or mysterious convinced her to open it, "An immense heavy chest! What can it hold? Why should it be placed here? Pushed back too, as if meant to be out of sight! I will look into it— cost me what it may, I will look into it". [110]

In the same chapter, there is another episode similar to this, but which is even closer to Henry's description of possible adventures at the Abbey. That night Catherine is preparing to

[109] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. V, p. 153.
[110] Ivi, ch. VI, pp. 155-157.

go to sleep but there is a storm outside and the wind is so strong to move the curtains, or at least, this is the logical explanation. But, as predicted by Henry, she has to be sure that nothing scary is moving the curtains so she decides to check. Meanwhile, the woodfire has burnt out and the girl remains only with a candle and by its light she discovers a "high, old-fashioned black cabinet", which was not "ebony and gold" but "black and yellow Japan".[111] Despite the different aspect, it is curious enough to be further investigated. What happens next is that Catherine struggles to try to open first its door, then its empty drawers and finally the small central door, which contains something, a roll of paper. Of course, that could be nothing else than a manuscript – she thinks– but the light of the candle has also burnt out and she cannot read it. Moreover, now she is scared by the wind and the movements she hears at the door and is not able to sleep until the middle of the night, when the storm has blown over.[112] The following morning, the protagonist is able to read her "precious manuscript" which is disappointedly a washing bill and a farrier's bill. "She felt humbled to the dust" and thinks back at what happened in order to explain why she could be so wrong.[113] On her part, there is the fact that the cabinet is so similar to the one described by Henry, but the fact that it was so difficult to open is still a mystery until she realizes that maybe it was already unlocked, and it was she who had locked it, making her feel even worse. She is glad that no one saw what happened and is so ashamed that she completely avoids the topic when Henry asks her about her night during the storm by saying that, on the contrary, the morning is beautiful.[114] These two episodes are highly representative of the presence of the Gothic parody in the book. The protagonist is supposed to be a heroine since the beginning, but everything is against her: she has a family who support her and is unable to understand people and situations, and this amuses the reader, especially when Catherine starts acting like a heroine in non-heroic situations, such

[111] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. VI, p. 159.
[112] Cf. Ivi, vol. II, pp. 160-162.
[113] Ivi, ch. VII, p. 164.
[114] Cf. Ivi, pp. 163-165.

as opening chests and cabinets of a room, as if it were a duty requiring great skill and courage. The disillusion after the discoveries of the bills and the bedcover are very strong for Catherine, but not so strong to wake her up completely from her imaginative situation, because her biggest mistake is yet to come.

Catherine's biggest mistake brings the reader to the climactic scene of the novel, where she risks losing Henry's consideration forever and when she finally grows up and understands life is not fiction. It takes three Chapters to develop, VII, VIII and IX of Volume II, starting when Eleanor and the General are taking Catherine around the garden to show her the vastness of their property, and the man does not follow the two girls along his dead wife's favourite path because it is not good for his health. At the same time his absence is a relief and a sort of curiosity for Catherine, for this reason she asks Eleanor about her mother. When Eleanor answers that she was a good handsome woman, Catherine suddenly decides that Mrs Tilney's husband was unkind to her and that he did not love his latest wife because he avoided her favourite walk. In addition to this, when Eleanor tells Catherine that the General dislikes his wife's portrait and that only Eleanor wanted it, she draws the conclusion that the General must have been cruel to Mrs Tilney because she has "often read of such characters".[115] At this point, Catherine begins to hate him, basing her opinions, as always, on fictional characters. In the following chapter, the General and Eleanor bring their guest on a tour inside the Abbey and the girl is obviously fascinated by the building, its rooms and corridors, but what she is more curious about is Mrs Tinley's old room, where she died. It is just when Elanor is bringing her there that the General prevents her from doing so, which obviously Catherine reads as a demonstration that he does not want to go back to where terrible events happened. She ventures to ask Eleanor how long ago her mother died and she discovers that Eleanor did not see her mother during the short illness. This revelation causes some terrible feelings, "Catherine's

[115] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. VII, pp. 169-171.

blood ran cold with the horrid suggestions which naturally sprang from these words".[116] Catherine's thoughts go directly to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, comparing the General to Montoni, thus presuming the General is guilty of similar crimes. Furthermore, when Eleanor adds that he often walks towards that room, Catherine assumes that it is a proof of his guiltiness. The General then adds that he is going to stay up that night to work on some pamphlets, and his guest concludes that it is not a plausible reason to stay awake, something more must be there, such as that Mrs Tinley is still alive and is being kept prisoner by her husband, who goes to her in the night to give her food as it happens in *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) by Radcliffe. The fact that the illness was so fast, that Eleanor did not see her mother in that period, that the General has such an attitude are all proofs to the fact that Mrs Tinley might be alive and a hostage of her husband, probably in one of the rooms she passed by during the visit of the Abbey. Actually, a doubt that "she had gone too far" passes through Catherine's mind, but her suppositions "were supported by appearances as made their dismissal impossible".[117]

The last episode in which this foolish bookish fantasy is displayed is in Volume II, Chapter IX, where the protagonist decides that she has to see Mrs. Tilney's room alone, after another attempt to visit it with Eleanor failed because of the angry General, again. When the girl finally gets into the room, different emotions run through her, "Catherine had expected to have her feelings worked, and worked they were. Astonishment and doubt first seized them; and a shortly succeeding ray of common sense added some bitter emotions of shame".[118] Nothing suspicious at all could be found in that room, she was wrong and being found there would have made her feel miserable. But what is even more surprising is that she does not give up her theories, she only thinks that "whatever might have been the general's crimes, he had certainly too much wit to let them sue for detection", which means that she still believes he is

[116] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VIII, p. 176.
[117] Ivi, vol. II, ch. VIII, pp. 172-178.
[118] Ivi, ch. IX, p. 182.

an evil man who did something wrong to his wife, but who is too intelligent to let her find it out so easily.[119] What is going to make her quit her supposition is yet to come, thanks to Henry's words at the end of the chapter. They meet in the corridor outside his mother's room and the girl is willing to hide what she was doing there and what she expected to find, but Henry is able to discover that she guessed something terrible had happened to his mother. Henry thus explains that his brother and he were at home during the illness and saw their mother dying, so there is no mystery about that. When Catherine asks if their father was afflicted, his answer is affirmative because he loved and cared about her, and there is no way he would have hurt her. Eventually, Henry delivers the famous speech that opens Catherine's eyes for good and makes her run away in tears:

> "If I understand you rightly, you had formed a surmise of such horror as I have hardly words to— Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you— Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?".[120]

These words have been read by commentators in different ways and I have already mentioned Harding's earlier. Tanner thinks that Catherine detected a partial truth about the General's atrocity, which was directed towards his children and their happiness as it is displayed by their obedience and uneasiness towards him.[121] Also Kirkham points out a similar perspective, because she states that there might have been something evil about the General in his marriage because he had absolute power over his wife and children, so perhaps his wife was unhappily stuck in a marriage to him.[122] Irony which can be identified in Austen's use of Henry's words in defence of his father, because what he affirms and alludes to is not so true and indisputable

[119] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. IX, p. 182.
[120] Ivi, pp. 179-186.
[121] Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
[122] Cf. M. Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, Brighton, Harvester, 1986, p. 89.

as he would like it to be, as the General is in a particular way cruel and manipulative, but Butler focuses on something else about this passage. She states that what is important here is not the content itself or the process behind it, but Catherine's enlightenment, her "suspension of a particular kind of mental activity, her habit of romantic invention".[123] She will soon learn that she was judging human nature in a too optimistic and naive way, especially regarding the Thorpes, and she needs to use more "caution", "scepticism" and "concern" in judging people from this moment on, even though the reader can only imagine her progress because it will not take place in the novel.[124] Another point of view is provided by Wallace as she comments Henry's faults, because it was he who increased Catherine's expectations of Gothic adventures while going to the Abbey. He manipulated her thoughts using her feelings, imagination and desires against her, shaking her confidence and later he had the audacity to ask her "What have you been judging from?".[125] I partially agree with all the commentators, as each of them offers a different perspective from which it is possible to analyse the passage. Henry is unfair in giving Catherine all the fault for her misinterpretation of reality, firstly because he contributed to her imagination and secondly because he knows his father is tyrannical and harsh towards anyone, starting with his children. At the same time though, Catherine has had much evidence that her imagination was running wild on some occasions, especially since she has been living in the Abbey, but she did not control it until it was too late and she had to face reality as directly and harshly as possible, through the reproach of her beloved one. This is also a parodic scene because nothing really dangerous or bad happened in that circumstance, but to such a simple, young, immature heroine a rebuke from a person she admired was enough to open her eyes to reality.

[123] Cf. M. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 177.
[124] *Ibidem*.
[125] Cf. T. G. Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

There is a long tradition regarding this kind of disenchantment, which looks back to *Don Quijote* by Miguel de Cervantes but also more closely to *Waverley* (1814) by Walter Scott. As Levine clarifies, "the natural form of parody [...] is disenchantment", when the hero or heroine stops living in her illusion and accepts reality for what it is.[126] And not by chance the sentimental and Gothic novels are the chosen genres mocked in this novel, because they "pretend to an emotional intensity that are belied by the realities of social and personal relations and that common sense shows to be absurd",[127] in other words, they are the most suitable genres to represent a situation lived by a character which is an illusion itself, but that paradoxically constitutes the reality of the novel narrated. In fact, when the disenchantment ends, the work of art ends too, and often this corresponds to death or marriage, turning points of life from which one cannot go back (in a metaphorical sense).[128] *Don Quijote* ends when Don Quijote recognizes he was living in a lie and dies, which is the most melancholic scene of the novel, where the binomials of life and art and art and illusion are destroyed, but still in a parodic vein. The remedy of the enchantment produced by reading is thought to be reading books of a different genre:

> "Yo tengo juicio ya, libre y claro, sin las sombras caliginosas de la ignorancia que sobre él me pusieron mi amarga y continua leyenda de los detestables libros de las caballerías. Ya conozco sus disparates y sus embelecos, y no me pesa sino que este desengaño ha llegado tan tarde, que no me deja tiempo para hacer alguna recompensa leyendo otros que sean luz del alma".[129]

In a similar way, Waverley recognizes that what he was living was not what he was expecting until it was too late. When he was young, he threw "himself with spirit upon any classical author of which his preceptor proposed the perusal" and choosing only the books which

[126] G. Levine, *Translating the Monstrous: 'Northanger Abbey'*, "Nineteenth-Century Fiction", vol. 30, no. 3, 1975, pp. 335–350, p. 340.
[127] Ivi, p. 337.
[128] Cf. Ivi., p. 343.
[129] M. Cervantes, *Don Quijote de la Mancha* [1605], ed. M. de Riquer, Barcelona, Editorial Juventud, 2005, p. 1063: "My reason is now free and clear, rid of the dark shadows of ignorance that my unhappy constant study of those detestable books of chivalry cast over it. Now I see through their absurdities and deceptions, and it only grieves me that this destruction of my illusions has come so late that it leaves me no time to make some amends by reading other books that might be a light to my soul".

"afforded him amusement" although of many different genres.[130] His "imagination and love of literature" was extremely excited and when he was sent as a soldier to Scotland to fight in the Hannoverian army, he was not aware that the civil war was real and people would die.[131] When he realizes that "the romance of his life was ended, and that its real history had now commenced", it is too late.[132] His old servant died, Colonel Gardiner died as well, Tully-Veolan was destroyed, Fergus was going to be beheaded and both Flora and Rose were miserable for their respective situations, caused by the war in which Waverley had taken part. In *Northanger Abbey* the situation is not so tragic, there are no deaths and no imprisonments, but marriage is yet to come. This type of situation is not new in Austen's novels, as in *Emma* (1815), who builds castles in the air about engagements and relationships during the whole novel, but who realizes her love for Mr Knightley and his love for her only at the end, thanks to his words and thus their marriage is going to happen all too soon. Similarly, "The visions of romance were over. Catherine was completely awakened",[133] and she was ready to live happily ever after with Henry.

[130] W. Scott, *Waverley* [1814], ed. C. Lamont, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 13-14.
[131] Ivi, p. 14.
[132] Ivi, p. 312.
[133] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. X, p. 187.

Chapter 2: Analysing the characters and their relationships

Although some commentators assert that the characters of *Northanger Abbey* are not among the most successful of Austen's creations, I believe they are valuable, especially considering that *Northanger Abbey* is the author's first complete work, after the experiments of her Juvenilia, and her full maturity as a novelist is not achieved yet. The analysis of the characters I am going to provide is based on the characters' relationships in the novel. The first pair of characters is composed of the protagonist and her future husband, and here I am going to focus on the interesting role that Henry has in the novel and in his love story with Catherine, which is different from all the other Austenian love stories. The second group of characters sees the Thorpes in contrast to the Tilneys, because they apparently have opposing functions and roles in the novel. To understand if this is true, a deeper analysis of Isabella and John is necessary, as well as one of Eleanor. In the end, it will be clear that the brother and sister pairs bring completely different lifestyles and moral universes into the novel, which are fundamental for the protagonist's growth, both from the intellectual and from the social point of view. The final section regards the General in his role of the villain, and the reaction and feelings he provokes in the remaining members of his family, starting with Eleanor, his only daughter, passing through Henry, the clergymen who has already left home, to finish with Captain Tilney, the eldest son who is still intimidated by his father despite his work as a soldier. Through the analysis of the major character of this work I aim to demonstrate that Austen created complex and peculiar characters, who construct a web of relationships which allows the story to develop as it does, with its parodic, educative and amusing functions.

2.1. An eccentric couple, Catherine and Henry

In her introduction to *Northanger Abbey*, Butler describes Henry as "a mysterious, almost allegorical figure, who stands for androgynous ideas, youthful play, the comic spirit and romance". She continues to explain that he is named after Austen's favourite brother but that he "doubles for Jane Austen, twice over". Being of her own age while writing the novel, he represents "the voice and creative role of the author".[1] Butler also mentions that Henry plays the role of the educator in the novel, a common figure in eighteenth century manuals, but he does so in a light way. Austen is so good at making him accomplish his role as a guide that Catherine does not even notice that she is learning from him, as he just indicates the right path to follow while he reflects upon things. Nevertheless, Butler have noticed that Henry sometimes bullies and patronises the protagonist, which indeed happens but with a good intent.[2] I believe this analysis by Butler is very exhaustive concerning the principal aspects of Henry's role in the novel, indeed, he presents himself as wiser and older than Catherine from the beginning, and later will use his advantage to make fun of her. As a consequence, the girl looks at him with admiration, not only for his good looks and his physical attractiveness, but also because she considers him more educated and instructed than she is. An example of the fact that Henry knows he is intellectually superior to Catherine, occurs in the first dialogue they have, in Volume I, Chapter III. He suddenly affirms that he knows what she will write in her journal regarding the time spent together and because the girl denies it, he suggests what she should write, "Shall I tell you what you ought to say?", depicting an extremely favourable description of himself:

> "I danced with a very agreeable young man, introduced by Mr. King; had a great deal of conversation with him— seems a most extraordinary genius— hope I may know more of him. *That*, madam, is what I *wish* you to say".[3]

[1] M. Butler, *Introduction* to *Northanger Abbey*, pp. vii- liv, p. xl.
[2] Cf. Ivi, p. xxxix.
[3] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. III, pp. 26-27.

Despite the fact that keeping a personal diary is considered a feminine habit, Henry is not afraid to show Catherine that he is not "so ignorant of young ladies' ways as [she] wish[es] to believe [him]", but rather he is an expert not only on this topic, but also on clothing. Henry professes to understand muslins "particularly well", when interviewed by Mrs Allen, and in fact he knows about prices, materials, washing and usage. This makes Catherine's opinion of him even more articulated, "'How can you,' said Catherine, laughing, 'be so –' She had almost said 'strange'".[4] What appears is a young man with a witty character, a vast knowledge on different topics, who wishes the girl to have a good opinion of him while flirting with her, but who, at the same time, corrects her when she does not make appropriate comments:

> "What are you thinking of so earnestly?" said he, as they walked back to the ballroom;— "not of your partner, I hope, for, by that shake of the head, your meditations are not satisfactory".
> Catherine coloured, and said, "I was not thinking of anything."
> "That is artful and deep, to be sure; but I had rather be told at once that you will not tell me."
> "Well then, I will not."
> "Thank you; for now we shall soon be acquainted, as I am authorized to tease you on this subject whenever we meet, and nothing in the world advances intimacy so much".[5]

In the first conversation they have, Henry suggested to Catherine what to say on two separate occasions, but she is not annoyed by his behaviour. His role as an educator is thus clear, but there is something even more interesting, as Brownstein points out:

> Henry Tilney is the novel's hero because he mocks commonplaces, pronouncing professionally on the style of women's letters and journals [...] and managing to put himself nearly in the frame of the story, alongside the narrator when he [...] anticipates the figure he'll cut in the journal he's sure she keeps.[6]

I think Butler was referring to this when she defined Henry as "androgynous", which is a peculiar way of defining a male hero, especially regarding an early nineteenth century novel. His advantage is having a sister whom he loves. Eleanor will be another good example for the protagonist, but more importantly, she is the instrument by which Henry understands the female

[4] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. III, pp. 27-28.
[5] Ivi, p. 29.
[6] R. M. Brownstein *'Northanger Abbey', 'Sense and Sensibility', 'Pride and Prejudice'*, in E. Copeland, and J. McMaster, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 32-58, p. 41.

universe. He is able to speak with no embarrassment or uncertainty even with Mrs Allen, who is a flat character who can only speak about clothes and acquaintances, repeatedly. Furthermore, the link with the author is emphasized in Brownstein's words because Henry in Volume I, Chapter III, depicts himself directly within Catherine's personal story. In other words, he is a character who attempts to write the story of the protagonist for her, by suggesting what to write in her diary and what sensations to feel, something which only the writer could do.

Another important scene where Henry displays his superior knowledge is in Volume I, Chapter XIV, during an engaging dialogue where life and literature are strictly intertwined, as Babb explains. In Chapter XIV, Catherine believes men read better books than women because novels are not clever enough for male readers, and, in his answer, Henry defends both her and himself from the accusation of not reading clever books and adds that the person "who has no pleasure in a good novel must be intolerably stupid".[7] But Babb notices that the use of "intolerably" collocates the sentence in a sentimental universe, exaggerating the meaning of the adjective to appear a passionate reader and at the same time correcting the girl's mistake.[8] When Henry then uses a juridical language to demonstrate that he appreciated *Udolpho* ("thank you, Eleanor— a most honourable testimony. You see, Miss Morland, the injustice of your suspicions")[9] he appears like a lawyer defending his cause. Yet Catherine is able to destroy his speech with a banal statement, "I am very glad to hear it indeed, and now I shall never be ashamed of liking Udolpho myself. But I really thought before, young men despised novels amazingly".[10] To this use of "amazingly" Henry cannot resist correcting Catherine, by insisting on the fact that he is older, thus he has read more novels than her, and this thing should not surprise her:

[7] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XIV, p. 102.
[8] Cf. H. S. Babb, *op. cit*., p. 99.
[9] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XIV, p. 103.
[10] *Ibidem*.

> "It is *amazingly*; it may well suggest *amazement* if they do— for they read nearly as many as women. I myself have read hundreds and hundreds. [...] Consider how many years I have had the start of you. I had entered on my studies at Oxford, while you were a good little girl working your sampler at home!".[11]

Babb notices that he masters his speech perfectly by providing evidence for his arguments, which the protagonist promptly cancels with an apparently harmless question, "do not you think Udolpho the nicest book in the world?". To this question Henry cannot but answer with irony, trying to correct her misuse of the adjective "nice", "The nicest— by which I suppose you mean the neatest. That must depend upon the binding".[12] Obviously, to the poor Catherine even Eleanor's following explanation of her brother's reaction is not enough to make her change her mind about her choice of words, "I did not mean to say anything wrong; but it is a nice book, and why should not I call it so?", to which Henry needs to provide a final clear explanation:

> "Very true," said Henry, "and this is a very nice day, and we are taking a very nice walk, and you are two very nice young ladies. Oh! It is a very nice word indeed!— It does for everything. Originally perhaps it was applied only to express neatness, propriety, delicacy, or refinement;— people were nice in their dress, in their sentiments, or their choice. But now every commendation on every subject is comprised in that one word".[13]

Catherine is then saved by Eleanor, who changes the topic, but Henry's answer is not to be underestimated. Babb looks at the fact that he makes a critique of the sentimental intensity through which Catherine judges reality, because responding with the same intensity to all the events in life prevents one from understanding the real intensity of human nature.[14] So, the use of words needs to be as accurate as the judgment which Catherine should use in the real world. This may appear an episode as many others in the novel, but actually it can be read as a metaphor of the whole function of the novel itself. In the end, Catherine learns that human nature is not as she expected and that she should have been more careful in judging people, by giving the right interpretation to the signal received, and this is what Henry is really stating by

[11] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XIV, p. 103.
[12] *Ibidem*.
[13] Ivi, p. 104.
[14] Cf. H. S. Babb, *op. cit*., pp. 98-102.

speaking of books and choices of language. I think Austen made an incredibly subtle work in linking Henry's words to the whole composition of the book, without weighing down the narration, and no other character could have done this, because Henry is the male hero, the educator and he represents the voice of the author in the novel.

Further along in the same chapter, Catherine makes a choice of words which Henry corrects by explaining why what she was saying was exaggerated and what were the aspects to consider. More in detail, Catherine uses "instruct" and "torment" as synonyms, explaining that she sees how much her mother's little students are vexed when leaning to read and write. Henry argues that without some years of "torment", no one would be able to read Radcliffe's novels, so all things considered, it was worthwhile. To this statement, the protagonist cannot but agree, and moreover she admits her ignorance and expresses the desire to know more about things, such as drawings, for example. Henry is ready to explain her the basic notions about it and is also very satisfied at the end, "delighted with her progress, and fearful of wearying her with too much wisdom at once".[15] His role as a teacher is openly admitted by his own scholar, Catherine, who is even more fascinated by his knowledge, but does not know that Henry is fascinated too by her ignorance, as the author explains in the same pages:

> Catherine did not know her own advantages— did not know that a good-looking girl, with an affectionate heart and a very ignorant mind, cannot fail of attracting a clever young man. [16]

Henry is an expert also in love affairs, and Volume II, Chapter IV, demonstrates this. When Isabella, who is engaged to Catherine's brother James, starts flirting with Henry's brother Frederik, the protagonist does not understand her friend's behaviour. Catherine is worried for James and does not conceive how Isabella changed her mind so easily on the decision of not dancing with anyone until James was back in Bath. When Catherine confesses her turbulent feelings towards her friend and her brother, Henry is ready to explain such things

[15] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XIV, p. 107.
[16] Ivi, p. 106.

as love affairs and social behaviour. “No man is offended by another man’s admiration of the woman he loves; it is the woman only who can make it a torment” is what he says to make Catherine understand that there is a difference between Captain Tilneys giving attentions to Isabella and Isabella allowing him to do that.[17] She is indeed doing wrong if she allows him to go too far in his courtship, knowing she is engaged. Catherine then answers that “A woman in love with one man cannot flirt with another”, which is a sentence which shows how much she is ignorant about the complexities of human beings and their feelings and behaviour.[18] So, Henry explains that if this were true, then Isabella would not have danced with Captain Tilney, so either she does not love James, or she is not attracted by Frederik and dancing was not flirting to her.[19] Later, Henry adds that anyway James would be happier if he had known that Isabella’s heart is still totally devoted to him even if she has danced with another young man, testing her feelings and still choosing James instead of the other man. To this consideration, Catherine decides to relax, because “Henry Tilney must know best”.[20] Even in another conversation of Volume I, Chapter XIV, when speaking about women’s nature, Catherine’s conclusion is similar, if not stronger, because basically she believes Henry is always right:

> It was no effort to Catherine to believe that Henry Tilney could never be wrong. His manner might sometimes surprise, but his meaning must always be just:— and what she did not understand, she was almost as ready to admire, as what she did.[21]

The last episode in which Henry demonstrates to be the person who contributes the most to Catherine’s intellectual growth is in Volume II, Chapter IX, which has already been largely discussed in the first chapter, and it is clearly the climactic scene of the novel.

What needs more elaboration is the role of Henry as Austen’s double, as argued both by Butler and Babb. Mudrick also discusses this topic, by stating that “Henry Tilney is the

[17] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. IV, p. 143.
[18] *Ibidem*.
[19] Cf. *Ibidem*.
[20] Ivi, p. 144.
[21] Ivi, vol. I, ch. XIV, p. 109.

willfully ironic and detached spectator as no one except the author herself is in any of Jane Austen's novels".[22] He has a clear function in the novel: he is detached from the readers and from the protagonist, and the way in which he is represented makes him appear as Catherine's foil. He is ironical, sophisticated, confident and informed, while Catherine is straightforward, naive, shy and ignorant. Mudrick continues his analysis by saying that Henry is so perfectly constructed because he is the only male character, in this and in future novels, who is allowed to know as much as the author and to act in the novel with such fundamental function as to change the protagonist's life. What he says in the novel is what the author thinks, and what he does is what the author is doing while writing the novel itself. Mudrick sees it as a failure of the novel, especially when he affirms that many of the secondary character, such as James and Mrs. Allen, are useless.[23] I do agree with the fact that Henry is the perfect foil of Catherine, but I do not agree in considering this a failure of the novel. First, there are other important characters, such as Isabella, Eleanor and the General, and although it is true that they have not the same complexity as Henry, they all have a function in the novel, whether favourable or not. Eleanor is another important guide, even if to a minor extent, and Isabella, the General and John reveal another shade of human nature to the protagonist, necessary to free her from book-fed imagination. Second, this is not only an amusing novel, it is also educational and parodic. None of these characteristics would have been satisfied without a character who is able to be ironic and instructive without forcing the narrator to be pedantic as in the manuals popular in the eighteenth century. He is able to teach notions important to the author, such as the importance of reading and of being literate but at the same time he is ironic, especially when he comments on women, with two women (Catherine and his sister):

> "Miss Morland, I think very highly of the understanding of all the women in the world— especially of those— whoever they may be— with whom I happen to be in company."
> "That is not enough. Be more serious."

[22] M. Mudrick, *"Irony versus Gothicism"*, in B. C. Southam, ed., *Jane Austen. 'Northanger Abbey', and 'Persuasion'. A Casebook*, Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1976, pp. 73-97, p. 84.
[23] Cf. Ivi, pp. 82-83.

> "Miss Morland, no one can think more highly of the understanding of women than I do. In my opinion, nature has given them so much that they never find it necessary to use more than half".[24]

The reason why Henry can be seen as the hero in *Northanger Abbey* and as an anti-hero of Gothic novels, whilst Catherine is the heroine of *Northanger Abbey* and an anti-heroine of Gothic and sentimental novels is that they entertain a relationship, which I have described as eccentric, in the title of this section. During my research I have never read so much contrasting opinions on the same matter as on the love story of these two characters. Some commentators believe their love story has no value and is a weakness of the plot, some others believe that this love was meant to be from the beginning and detect some evidence scattered throughout the novel. For example, Williams affirms that Catherine and Henry are unequally in love, and this is the reason why the role of educator and scholar functions so well.[25] Tanner, for instance, while commenting on Austen's explanation on Catherine and Henry's love story, states that the man's feelings display a strong narcissism.[26] These are the author's words on the choice of the marriage:

> I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought. It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity.[27]

Austen directly tells the reader that Henry thought of marrying Catherine because she was already in love with him, otherwise he would have not thought of her as a partner. Fergus in his analysis goes even further than this, by saying that "no other Austen hero is no superior in wit to the heroine", that he only educated Catherine on "consciousness of conventions" without the "emotional and moral resonance" which characterizes Mr. Darcy or Mr. Knightley, for example.[28] I do not agree with Fergus in what he states about the non-pedagogic role Henry

[24] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XIV, p. 109.
[25] Cf. M. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
[26] Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
[27] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. XV, p. 227.
[28] J. Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, cit., pp. 14-15.

plays, but for what concerns the superiority on the male side I think he is not so wrong. Indeed, it is clear that Henry knows more than Catherine, but there are signals that he has liked her from the beginning too. Indeed, she is willing to understand what he explains ("Catherine [...] enjoyed her usual happiness with Henry Tilney, listening with sparkling eyes to everything he said; and, in finding him irresistible, becoming so herself")[29] and this flatters him, but he is also attracted by the purity of her heart. Catherine is good, is sincere, honest and faithful, and these qualities are fundamental for a clergyman such as Henry. He clearly demonstrates this when he makes appreciations of Catherine's character, "your mind is warped by an innate principle of general integrity, and therefore not accessible to the cool reasonings of family partiality, or a desire of revenge".[30] Cornish reads the relationship between the characters in an even more positive light:

> He is amused and attracted by her freshness and gaiety, which is kindled by his half-patronising, half-deferential manner; and the way she plays the game, without sacrifice, of modesty or dignity or humour, is just the kind of thing which may help to fix a young man's fancy. Her delight in her own girlish happiness is charming. She responds to Tilney's irony, is never stupid or sheepish for a moment, and loses her heart with a sweet facility.[31]

The narrator stated that Catherine is sometimes stupid probably because she needs numerous and clear explanations in order to understand something, but the fascination Henry feels is tangible. On their first meeting in Volume I, Chapter III he concludes their conversation by flirting with the girl, saying that they now know each other and he feels authorised to tease her, which is something that increases the intimacy between two people, as Hardy points out.[32]

During their second encounter, Henry displays his need to know that Catherine likes to spend her time with him, by asking:

> "Have I not reason to fear that if the gentleman who spoke to you just now were to return, or if any other gentleman were to address you, there would be nothing to restrain you from conversing with him as long as you chose?".[33]

[29] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. I, p. 125.
[30] Ivi, ch. XII, p. 205.
[31] F. W. Cornish, *Jane Austen*, London, Macmillan, 1913, p. 175.
[32] Cf. J. Hardy, *Jane Austen's Heroines. Intimacy in Human Relationships*, London, Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1984, p. 4.
[33] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. X, p. 75.

Her first answer does not satisfy him, as she confesses that she does not know anybody besides him, so she has not been able to speak with anyone else, but this is not reassuring to him: "and is that to be my only security? Alas, alas!".[34] He is satisfied only when she affirms that she does not want to talk with any other person, which means that he is her favourite person to spend time with there (and probably in general). As Cornish suggests, Catherine's falling in love is "spontaneous" and "natural", and the reader is satisfied with this.[35] The conversation which leads to this confession is about Henry's remark that marriage and dancing are almost the same thing, as regarding social dynamics and involvement. This is an emblematic and philosophical argument, to which Catherine is able to respond with her simple logic, which anyway allows Henry to explain his point of view. She believes dancing and marriage cannot be compared for what concerns the seriousness of the commitment, while he believes they have many points in common, such as "fidelity and complaisance".[36] Butler reads this passage in two ways. The first regards the fact that Catherine is apparently not able to understand and conform to social obligations which society imposes on female and male roles, which is related to the fact that at the end she marries a man who is of a higher social status than she is. The second is that Catherine, despite her ignorance, is able to carry on a conversation with Henry, an anticipation of what will later be developed by Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813).[37] As Brooke affirms, this exchange of ideas which "reshapes each other's character" is characteristic of Austen novels,[38] and in *Northanger Abbey* an initial elaboration can be observed. The level reached in *Pride and Prejudice* is not present here because of Catherine's attitude of worshipping Henry, even if this makes him appreciate her even more, as explained by the narrator in Volume I, Chapter XIV, as already argued.

[34] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. X, p. 75
[35] F. W. Cornish, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
[36] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. X, p. 74.
[37] M. Butler, *Introduction* to *Northanger Abbey*, p. xxxviii.
[38] C. N. L. Brooke, *op. cit.*, p. 59

A last example of Henry's great expectations about his relationship with Catherine is offered by Gooneratne, suggesting that when Henry in Volume II, Chapter VII says "and though the love of a hyacinth may be rather domestic, who can tell, the sentiment once raised, but you may in time come to love a rose?",[39] he is referring to his love affair with Catherine. Indeed, Gooneratne explains that although he is superior in wit and intelligence, he is won by her "innocence", "honesty" and "absence of duplicity". And the fact that they marry in the end, is the demonstration that according to Austen, life cannot be reduced to "the formulae of popular novelist", as it is more interesting and unexpected.[40]

The fact that Austen affirms that Henry loved Catherine because she loved him first, can be seen as a contradiction, when considering all the previous passages in which Henry is evidently interested in her. Moreover, he fights against his father in order to marry Catherine, which means that his feelings are strong enough to go against such a harsh man as his father. I think this contradiction in the last part of the novel can be due to the fact that Austen had not yet acquired her complete maturity as a novelist when writing *Northanger Abbey*. In fact, since at the beginning Austen depicts her heroine in derogatory terms, pointing at her stupidity, her book-fed imagination, her exaggerated sentimental reactions, the author could not change this attitude at the end, even though the facts demonstrated that Catherine has matured, for example when she went back home and survived her broken heart. Another explanation for this contradiction can be offered by the fact that *Northanger Abbey* is a parodic novel, and in the end the author tries to empathize once again Catherine's inadequacy to fulfil her role as a heroine. The fact that she seems not able to provoke strong feelings in the man she loves makes the situation comic, because she does not live the overwhelming love expected in sentimental fiction. From this point of view, Catherine and Henry are an eccentric couple because they are

[39] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. VII, 165.
[40] Y. Gooneratne, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

not equals in knowledge, intelligence or wit, but they are able to shape each other's character. Henry stops being submissive with his father, fighting against his rules, and smooths out his direct and satirical attitude so as not to make Catherine suffer, as in Volume II, Chapter IV when he reassures her about his brother's intentions when he sees her "doubtful and grave".[41] Catherine, instead, acquires the necessary contact with reality which she was missing.

2.2. Two different families, the Thorpes and the Tilneys

Isabella seems to be Catherine's best friend in the novel, or at least in the first volume. On their first encounter, Isabella is described by her mother as the handsomest of her children, while Catherine seems to be immediately mocked when it is said, "How excessively like her brother Miss Morland is!".[42] However, the only moment when Catherine has not been alone in Bath was when she met Henry, but then he left the place for a while, so this new "friendship is certainly the finest balm for the pangs of disappointed love".[43] But what seems the beginning of a new, sincere and strong friendship is nothing more than a lie, not on Catherine's account, of course, but on Isabella's. She is described by Hardy as a "cruel foil to Catherine", because she is driven only by "personal and social aggrandisement".[44] And as Cornish underlines, Catherine's affection is genuine, while Isabella's interest for her is linked to her brother James, whom she believes is an eligible bachelor to marry. But Catherine is so happy to have a new friend that she does not notice, and then ignores, the falseness and vulgarity of her friend.[45] Examples of Isabella's falsity and tendency to exaggerate, making Catherine feel guilty are displayed in various occasions in the novel. In Volume I, Chapter VI, Isabella arrives at the

[41] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. IV, p. 144.
[42] Ivi, vol. I, ch. IV, p. 31.
[43] Ivi, p. 32.
[44] J. Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp. 5 and 9.
[45] Cf. F. W. Cornish, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

appointment five minutes earlier and tells Catherine that she has "been waiting for [her] at least this age!" and that she is sure she has been waiting for half an hour, which is an unnecessary mean lie.[46] In Volume I, Chapter IX, Isabella accuses Catherine of having "been at least three hours getting ready" for no necessary reason except to hurry Catherine to do what Isabella wants to do that day.[47]

Isabella's exaggerations are not even the worst things she does in the novel, but are part of the sentimental pose which allows the egocentric exaltation of individual feeling on her side.[48] In the first chapter, I have already argued that Isabella is not a true friend because she does not know Catherine for who she is, but Isabella is also suspicious of Catherine's faithfulness regarding what interests her most, boys:

> "You must not betray me, if you should ever meet with one of your acquaintance answering that description."
> "Betray you! What do you mean?"
> "Nay, do not distress me. I believe I have said too much. Let us drop the subject."
> Catherine, in some amazement, complied".[49]

Catherine does not even understand the implication of her friend's words, because she is not that type of person who betrays her friends. Isabella is worried that Catherine might steal a possible suitor and she is so proud that she cannot admit it openly, but this is the last thing Catherine could or would do. On the one hand, finding a partner is not a priority for her, on the other hand, she is good and faithful and would never betray a friend in such way. But Isabella would, and that is why she is worried about this possibility. Indeed, as Mudrick points out, Catherine is ingenuous and ignorant and these are the reasons why she cannot detect "Isabella's indefatigable coquetry, her malice toward women, her large foolish generalization about men".[50] Moreover, Catherine is so naive that she believes that Isabella is the heroine of the

[46] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VI, p. 38.
[47] Ivi, ch. IX, p. 61.
[48] Cf. H. S. Babb, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
[49] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VI, p. 41.
[50] M. Mudrick, *op. cit.*, p. 80

story, not herself, "this charming sentiment, [...] gave Catherine a most pleasing remembrance of all the heroines of her acquaintance; and she thought her friend never looked more lovely".[51] This is why Catherine admires her so much and does not think she might be evil and selfish. Moreover, Catherine is characterised by the inability to discriminate what people say and what they really mean, so it seems impossible for her to understand if a person is sincere or false.[52] This is the reason why her friendship with Isabella appears so strong. Only the readers (and Henry) understand Isabella's falseness, not the protagonist. Or at least, this is what appears at a superficial reading of the novel and I will return on this aspect in the last chapter of this work.

Isabella's falseness develops and grows along with the story, especially since she meets Frederick Tilney while she is engaged to the not-rich-enough James Morland. Her flirtation with James can be seen in Volume I, Chapter VIII, together with the "foolish generalization about men" to which Mudrick refers to. She reproaches James who has just arrived by saying "you men have such restless curiosity! Talk of the curiosity of women, indeed!",[53] which is an inappropriate statement, as James was not listening to their conversation but just asking what was happening. Isabella's real aim is to make herself precious and desired, by not speaking too much with him and by refusing to dance with him a second time. In Volume I, Chapter XV, Isabella tells Catherine reassuring things about her consideration of James and her preferences about a future life with him, which appear the better things to say, but which are the falsest, said by her:

> "Had I the command of millions, were I mistress of the whole world, your brother would be my only choice."
> [...]
> "For my own part," said Isabella, "my wishes are so moderate that the smallest income in nature would be enough for me. Where people are really attached, poverty itself is wealth; grandeur I detest: I would not settle in London for the universe. A cottage in some retired village would be ecstasy. There are some charming little villas about Richmond".[54]

[51] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XV, p. 114.
[52] Cf. M. Mudrick, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
[53] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VIII, p. 55.
[54] Ivi, vol. II, ch. IV, p. 144.

Everything sounds perfect, but this is when Isabella is waiting for Mr. Morland's approval of the marriage, thinking he is richer than he actually is. So she can easily pretend to prefer poverty as she think she will not have to deal with it. But when the real income is revealed she tries to hide her disappointment with considerable difficulty:

> "Nobody can think better of Mr. Morland than I do, I am sure. But everybody has their failing, you know, and everybody has a right to do what they like with their own money".[55]

Only when Catherine stands up for her father, Isabella realizes her mistake and tries to fix it by reassuring that "a much smaller income" would satisfy her because she "hates money", and her disappointment is due to the fact that she has to wait two years to marry James, which is terrible for her because she loves him and wants to start their life together.[56] Even in this case, Catherine believes her friend and does not question her words and her love for James.

The last episodes, which change Isabella's life (not in the way she was expecting) and changes Catherine's opinion of her, happen in Volume II. Isabella is finally engaged with James but he is away and she meets Henry's fascinating brother Frederick Tilney, who is a Captain. Obviously, when he makes the first appreciations towards her, she is flattered, and thinks he would be a better husband for her than James. What she does not know is that Frederick's father, the General, will never allow such a marriage, because she is even poorer than Catherine. Unaware of this situation, Isabella promptly accepts the Captain's invitation to dance, even if she has sworn to Catherine that she would not dance with anybody until James comes back and this surprises the protagonist very much. Isabella's explanation is that Frederick is not her type, and that James would have been unhappy to know that she sat alone the entire evening, which would be a plausible explanation, if it were true.[57] In Volume II, Chapter III the situation continues: Isabella looks for Frederick at a ball, and when he arrives

[55] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. I, p. 129.
[56] *Ibidem*.
[57] Cf. Ivi, ch. I, pp. 127-128.

they start flirting openly, to the point that Catherine is disgusted and goes away. Isabella's justification has just been given to Catherine while she was pretending to speak of Catherine's preference for John Thorpe:

> "A little harmless flirtation or so will occur, and one is often drawn on to give more encouragement than one wishes to stand by. But you may be assured that I am the last person in the world to judge you severely. All those things should be allowed for in youth and high spirits. What one means one day, you know, one may not mean the next. Circumstances change, opinions alter".[58]

Isabella is indeed young and wants to enjoy life, that is why she is allowed to flirt and change her preferences. What is missing in this hymn to the youth is the respect which is due to people in general, but especially to those who care about Isabella and could be really hurt by her behaviour, in this case James Morland. As expected, in Volume II, Chapter X, James writes to his sister that the engagement is broken and he is miserable. Isabella lied to him up to the last moment, pretending she loved him while waiting for some security from Frederick, nonetheless, James is still convinced she was the best woman he could ever have.[59] Two chapters later, Catherine receives Isabella's letter and has the occasion to read her absurd words. She pretends the engagement was never broken and wishes that Catherine will write to James to fix things for her. She also pretends to hate Tilney because he followed her like a shadow, which might have annoyed James. Her letter is also full of nonsensical comments about her social life and the places where she has been during the last weeks. To these artificial and contradictory excuses even Catherine does not believe. After all that happened, including her huge mistakes at the Abbey, she finally sees people for what they are. From this point of view, Isabella can be compared to the General, because they both act in search of wealth and richness. She wants to marry Frederick because she knows he is his father's heir, and the General initially courts Catherine in order to marry Henry to her, thinking she can provide him

[58] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. III, pp. 135-139.
[59] Cf. Ivi, ch. X, pp. 189-190.

a good income.[60] They are both selfish people, more interested in money than happiness, and their behaviour will contribute to Catherine's disenchantment.

Isabella is not the only Thorpe in the novel, her brother John is an interesting character too, because despite him being a terrible person, he is part of Catherine's acquaintances in Bath, and is also her suitor. Catherine is not deceived by him in the same manner she is deceived by his sister, as I have mentioned in the first chapter, but she still has trouble because of his presence in her life. John's first appearance is in Volume I, Chapter VII, where his horse brought him and James to Bath. They do not agree on how much time it took them to arrive there, basically John overestimates his poor tired horse. Then he tries to impress Catherine speaking about carriages, horses and prices, things of which Catherine knows nothing and is not interested in. In the first chapter I have explained how terribly rude John is to his mother: he tells her that her hat makes her look like an old witch, and that his sisters are ugly. Catherine, before expressing her opinion about him, considers that he is her brother's friend and Isabella's brother. Furthermore, John told his sister that he likes Catherine, so she is nice to him even if she saw he is rude.[61] He will demonstrate his rudeness also in the following chapter, where, at a ball, he proposes to Catherine to make fun of his own sisters, and Catherine obviously refuses.[62]

John's stupidity is also evident, because he often says nonsensical things, an example is in Volume I, Chapter IX, where he states that "if everybody was to drink their bottle a day, there would not be half the disorders in the world there are now. It would be a famous good thing for us all",[63] to which also the ingenuous Catherine does not believe. And again in Volume I, Chapter X: Catherine tells John that Henry Tilney is in the Pump-Room and John

[60] Cf. C. L. Johnson, *Jane Austen. Women, Politics and the Novel*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 45.
[61] Cf. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VII, pp. 43-50.
[62] Cf. Ivi, ch. VIII, p. 57.
[63] Ivi, ch. IX, p. 62.

wonders is if Henry wants a horse, which is something that Catherine does not know and does not care about. In Volume I, Chapter XI, John is mean to Catherine and lies to her to force her to go to Blaize Castle, and he will do a very similar thing in Volume I, Chapter XIII, deciding something for her before she accepts it, which is totally disrespectful. He spoke to Eleanor before Catherine's approval in order to force her to go with him and Isabella to Clifton.[64] It is evident that John is a self-centred person, who has no real conversations with people because he only focusses on what he wants, and is able to talk about everything just for the pleasure of talking.[65]

His function in the novel, though, goes further than this, because he is the one who indirectly allows Catherine to go to the Abbey. He is so interested in glorifying himself, that he actually damages himself. When he speaks to the General in Volume I, Chapter XII, pretending to know him well, he praises Catherine and her fortune to him, thinking there is a sort of relationship or implicit promise between them. What he actually does is making the General think that Catherine would be a good wife for his son Henry, thus he decides to invite her to the Abbey.[66] This is similar to what happens in Volume I, Chapter XV, during John and Catherine's goodbye, where he is convinced that Catherine is interested in him and wants to see him again as soon as possible, whereas she is only trying to be kind because she is in a hurry and does not want to spend her time talking to him. But he is blind and deaf to her words and attitude.[67] Poor John is also firmly convinced that the Morlands are rich, and if he were able to listen to other people's words, he would have noticed that they were not. For example, in Volume I, Chapter XII, he says that James should have a gig and a horse of his own, and Catherine replies that he could not afford them because he has not enough money. Instead of

[64] Cf. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XIII, pp. 96- 98.
[65] Cf. J. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 5
[66] Cf. H. S. Babb, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
[67] Cf. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XV, pp. 117-118.

asking in what sense he has not enough money, if he is not rich enough or because he spent it in other ways, he takes the second for granted, believing him to be a big spender:

> Thorpe then said something in the loud, incoherent way to which he had often recourse, about its being a d— thing to be miserly; and that if people who rolled in money could not afford things, he did not know who could, which Catherine did not even endeavour to understand.[68]

He is so convinced of his ideas that he does not understand what Catherine meant and she is so bored by his chatter that she does not explain. Indeed, he is the only character who Catherine finds boring, and he represents the anti-type of villainous suitor because of his dishonest behaviour.[69]

I have argued how the Thorpe characters are useful to the story, even though their selfish, dishonest and mean behaviour, and their presence in *Northanger Abbey* is contraposed to the Tilneys' presence. The Thorpes represent the deceiving bad people, while the Tilneys the honest and nice ones, even though nothing is like it seems, in the end. I would say that the other only really kind-hearted character is Eleanor, Henry's sister and Catherine's true friend:

> Various incidents concur to convince Catherine, though unwilling to be convinced, that the Thorpes are not all she fancied them, while she is drawn to Eleanor Tinley not only by her own merits but by the attractive power which may be exercised by a woman who thinks she has found a wife for her favourite brother.[70]

She is the nicest person in the novel, she never lies to Catherine, assumes the role of a guide without mocking her (as Henry does), cares about her safety even when her father does not. Gooneratne thinks the character of Eleanor is a failure, because she he is a heroine, too good to interest the reader, not being the protagonist.[71] I do not agree with this, because I believe Eleanor is also necessary to counterbalance her father's harshness, lifting up the name of the family. She is introduced in Volume I, Chapter VIII,[72] and two chapters later she has the occasion to speak with the protagonist, and the narrator presents her in a favourable way, saying

[68] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XI, p. 85.
[69] Cf. M. Mudrick, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
[70] F. W. Cornish, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
[71] Cf. Y. Gooneratne, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
[72] Cf. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VIII, p. 54.

that it is something uncommon to find someone who speaks with "simplicity and truth" and not "personal conceit".[73] The reference is obviously to Isabella, a completely different person from Eleanor. I have already explained how nicely Eleanor defends Catherine from Henry's lessons on language and education in Volume I, Chapter XIV, and Babb points out that Eleanor is careful not to make a personal attack against Catherine by first admitting her own preferences, "I am fond of history", and then explaining the facts.[74] This demonstrates how respectful and kind she is, because even if she in a superior position, she does not want to offend or denigrate her friend while explaining something. Henry is not worried about this, for example, he just tells what he wants. A reason for this polite behaviour might also be the fact that Eleanor has not many friends, so she is worried not to hurt people's feelings. Henry explains to Catherine that when their father and he leave the Abbey, Eleanor remains alone, and he is sorry for this. "His sister, he said [...] had no female companion— and, in the frequent absence of her father, was sometimes without any companion at all". He is happy that Catherine is going to the Abbey not only because he likes her, but also because he is happy that she and his sister are good friends, and Eleanor will not be alone.[75]

Eleanor is a friend who keeps her promises, when Catherine asks her to see Mrs. Tilney's room, she is "ready to oblige her", even if her father might not be happy about it. Eleanor even explains to Catherine what happened to her mother previously, even if it is painful and private, showing that she likes and trusts her friend Catherine, "a mother would have been always present. A mother would have been a constant friend; her influence would have been beyond all other".[76] What is another sign of benevolence is Eleanor's personal offer of money to Catherine in order to face the journey back home in safety. She was not obliged to do that, but she knows Catherine might have needed some and wants to help her face what her father

[73] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. X, p. 70.
[74] H. S. Babb, *op. cit.*, p. 103.
[75] Cf. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. V, p. 149.
[76] Ivi, ch. VII, p. 170.

caused.[77] "Eleanor Tilney is the opposite of her father",[78] but paradoxically, it is she who gives Catherine the order to leave the house, and this puts her in a terrible position. She has to perform her duty as a daughter against her only female friend, and her pain is evident, "you are too good, I am sure, to think the worse of me for the part I am obliged to perform. I am indeed a most unwilling messenger".[79] This pain is also shown in her last words to her friend, a request of a letter, notwithstanding the General's prohibition.

> "You *must* write to me, Catherine," she cried, "you *must* let me hear from you as soon as possible. Till I know you to be safe at home, I shall not have an hour's comfort. For *one* letter, at all risks, all hazards, I must entreat. Let me have the satisfaction of knowing that you are safe at Fullerton, and have found your family well, and then, till I can ask for your correspondence as I ought to do, I will not expect more. Direct to me at Lord Longtown's, and, I must ask it, under cover to Alice".[80]

To this request, Catherine at first refuses, not wanting to put her in trouble, but then accepts because they care about each other. Another reason why Eleanor is so close to Catherine and vice versa, is that they both hope the latter will be Henry's wife. When Henry describes Eleanor's future sister-in-law referring to Isabella, he ironically says:

> "Prepare for your sister-in-law, Eleanor, and such a sister-in-law as you must delight in!— Open, candid, artless, guileless, with affections strong but simple, forming no pretensions, and knowing no disguise".[81]

To this description, Eleanor replies she would be delighted to have such a sister-in-law, but her answer can be read in two ways. The first is a continuation of Henry's joke, being sarcastic towards Isabella, the second is more interesting, as Hardy points out. Eleanor understood the description perfectly fits Catherine, her other sister-in-law, thus smiles at the lucky possibility.[82]

Although this contrast between the "bad" Thorpes and the "good" Tilneys, at the end the reader will notice this is not the only way to think about these characters. The novel has a well-structured web of relationships: yes, the Thorpes are selfish and false, but their function

[77] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. XIII, p. 214.
[78] H. S. Babb, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
[79] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. XIII, p. 209.
[80] Ivi, pp. 213-214.
[81] Ivi, ch. X, p. 193.
[82] Cf. J. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

is to allow Catherine to go to the Abbey and to be aware of the duplicity of people's behaviour. Whereas among the good Tilneys, a menace is hidden. Apart from Henry's paternalistic bullying towards Catherine, which is not mean and is counterbalanced by his affection towards her, the General is not the respectable man he wants to appear. I think the discussion about the General deserves a section of his own: his role is interesting *di per se*, not only linked to Catherine's presence, and the relationship he has with his children is worth studying.

2.3. The conflict inside the family, the General vs. his children

Tanner states that there are various ways through which to destroy a life, and the General is destroying his children's lives through his repressive behaviour.[83] Indeed, maybe the fact that influenced the most Catherine's misinterpretation of Mrs Tinleys's death was that when the General was around, the atmosphere changed: his children were more anxious and silent. She unconsciously assumed the General was evil but mistook the kind of evil. There are several examples of this strange atmosphere, starting from Catherine's visit to Milsomstreet, where she expected great happiness but was disappointed, because "in spite of their father's great civilities to her", "Henry [...] had never said so little, nor been so little agreeable" and "Miss Tilney[...] seemed hardly so intimate with her as before".[84] Catherine tries to explain at least to herself what happens in the family but cannot:

> It could not be General Tilney's fault. That he was perfectly agreeable and good-natured, and altogether a very charming man, did not admit of a doubt, for he was tall and handsome, and Henry's father. He could not be accountable for his children's want of spirits, or for her want of enjoyment in his company.[85]

The same thing happens when the General asks Catherine to join them to the Abbey, his entrance "put a stop to the civility" and he delivers his speech "without leaving his daughter

[83] Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
[84] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. I, p. 123.
[85] *Ibidem*.

time to speak".[86] The same disrespectful behaviour towards Eleanor is displayed when he asks for her opinion, "what say you, Eleanor? Speak your opinion, for ladies can best tell the taste of ladies in regard to places as well as men", but instead continues to talk to Catherine as if he never mentioned his daughter.[87] The fact that the General has no respect for Eleanor and that the girl is used to obeying him is clear since they are in Bath, and she is forced to avoid Catherine because they were going out together and her father has not time to waist. It is Henry who makes the apologies to Catherine:

> "I was not within at the time; but I heard of it from Eleanor, and she has been wishing ever since to see you, to explain the reason of such incivility; but perhaps I can do it as well. It was nothing more than that my father— they were just preparing to walk out, and he being hurried for time, and not caring to have it put off, made a point of her being denied. That was all, I do assure you. She was very much vexed, and meant to make her apology as soon as possible".[88]

Things only get worse when they are at the Abbey, as the General controls every move Eleanor makes or attempts to make. The first is the reproach he makes when she changes the path they are following in the garden, but in this case he allows her to go there, and he only goes into another direction, which actually causes relief for the girls because they are free from his presence.[89] Later, on two occasions, he prevents his daughter from showing Catherine Mrs. Tilney's old room,[90] the second of them with more anger:

> The name of "Eleanor" at the same moment, in his loudest tone, resounded through the building, giving to his daughter the first intimation of his presence, and to Catherine terror upon terror.[91]

Eleanor then finds an excuse for her father's behaviour, but Catherine understands she cannot ask her friend to bring her to that room again, otherwise she will have to face the General once more. The last example of the change of atmosphere when the General is not around is

[86] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. II, p. 132.
[87] Ivi, ch. VII, p. 166.
[88] Ivi, vol. I, ch. XII, p. 90.
[89] Cf. Ivi, vol. II, ch. VII, p. 169.
[90] Cf. The first occasion in *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. VIII, p. 175.
[91] Ivi, ch. IX, p. 180.

displayed in Volume II, Chapter VI where the "occasional absence of the General" was received with "cheerfulness".[92]

But Eleanor and Henry are not the only ones subjected to their father's will, even Frederick, who is even more independent than Henry, and who is the oldest son, receives the same consideration from the General. When they are still in Bath and have breakfast together, the father is impatient for Frederick's arrival, and his reproofs seems disproportionate even to Catherine, who was not offended by his tardiness as the General was. She felt compassion for Frederick, who "listened to his father in silence, and attempted not any defence", and even afterwards "she scarcely heard his voice while his father remained in the room" except for a revealing sentence he whispered to his sister, "how glad I shall be when you are all off".[93] In her naivety Catherine interprets Frederick's behaviour as something related to Isabella, whom he was in company with the previous night, but actually what happens in this passage is that no one is exonerated from the General's control, even when they are adults. It does not surprise the readers that when the family is in Northanger Abbey, Frederick does not write to his father, and this offends him.[94] But the offence is not so serious as when he was late for breakfast, as punctuality is a priority for the General. Catherine will soon discover this at the Abbey and the experience in Bath I have just mentioned was a warning signal. After a preliminary visit to the rooms of the Abbey with the General's explanations, "Catherine found herself hurried away by Miss Tilney in such a manner as convinced her that the strictest punctuality to the family hours would be expected at Northanger".[95] Later that night, after the chest episode, Catherine is going to have dinner with the family, and

> Miss Tilney gently hinted her fear of being late [...] an alarm not wholly unfounded, for General Tilney was pacing the drawing-room, his watch in his hand, and having, on the very instant of their entering, pulled the bell with violence, ordered "Dinner to be on table *directly*!".[96]

[92] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch, VI, p. 158.
[93] Ivi, ch. V, pp. 146-147.
[94] Ivi, ch. XI, p. 196.
[95] Ivi, ch. V, p. 153.
[96] Ivi, vol. II, ch. VI, p. 157.

What follows is a demonstration that the General is not only severe and strict, but that he pretends not to be like this, thus he is also two-faced:

> The general, recovering his politeness as he looked at her, spent the rest of his time in scolding his daughter for so foolishly hurrying her fair friend, who was absolutely out of breath from haste, when there was not the least occasion for hurry in the world.[97]

This is not the only occasion in which the General shows that he is not so different from the Thorpe family, as he affirms things which make him appear better than he is, but which are not true at all. This is an example regarding punctuality, but there is another important example regarding money, which is strictly related to his evident pride for his social status. Since Catherine arrives at Northanger Abbey, the General is evidently proud to show her his mansion, how he furnished and managed it:

> The general, perceiving how her eye was employed, began to talk of the smallness of the room and simplicity of the furniture, where everything, being for daily use, pretended only to comfort, &c.; flattering himself, however, that there were some apartments in the Abbey not unworthy her notice [...].[98]

Here he is explaining to Catherine the choices he has made on decorating the rooms, which actually display his knowledge of modern taste and the necessity of having things adapted to his lifestyle. If Catherine is amazed of the "modern taste" and elegance of the room, she is also disappointed because the Abby is not as Gothic as she imagined. The building is the representation of the progress of society and of the modern life that the General lives and is not afraid to display:

> "Let me see; Monday will be a busy day with you, we will not come on Monday; and Tuesday will be a busy one with me. I expect my surveyor from Brockham with his report in the morning; and afterwards I cannot in decency fail attending the club. I really could not face my acquaintance if I stayed away now; for, as I am known to be in the country, it would be taken exceedingly amiss; and it is a rule with me, Miss Morland, never to give offence to any of my neighbours, if a small sacrifice of time and attention can prevent it. They are a set of very worthy men. They have half a buck from Northanger twice a year; and I dine with them whenever I can. Tuesday, therefore, we may say is out of the question. But on Wednesday, I think, Henry, you may expect us; and we shall be with you early, that we may have time to look about us".[99]

[97] *Northanger Abbey* vol. II, ch. VI, p. 157.
[98] Ivi, ch. V, p. 153.
[99] Ivi, vol. II, ch. XI, p. 197.

Here the General is planning a visit to Woodson, where his son Henry lives and works, and Cornish notices his "essential vulgarity" in making plans.[100] Not only he arranges a visit of pleasure as if it was a business meeting, but he also highlights how important he is in the territory and how he makes it last in time, giving attention to his acquaintances. Although speeches like this, where he demonstrates his power and importance, in other occasions he displays a fake modesty that only convinces Catherine, not his children:

> "Did Henry's income depend solely on this living, he would not be ill provided for. Perhaps it may seem odd, that with only two younger children, I should think any profession necessary for him; and certainly there are moments when we could all wish him disengaged from every tie of business. But though I may not exactly make converts of you young ladies, I am sure your father, Miss Morland, would agree with me in thinking it expedient to give every young man some employment. The money is nothing, it is not an object, but employment is the thing. Even Frederick, my eldest son, you see, who will perhaps inherit as considerable a landed property as any private man in the county, has his profession".[101]

Catherine is positively surprised by these words as she ingenuously thinks the man will agree on a marriage with Henry, even though she is not as rich as he is. But what Catherine does not read between the lines, is that the importance he gives to money is essential, he basically states that his sons (especially Frederick) will be rich one day, thanks to his inheritance. So, money is actually everything, even if he affirms it is "nothing", and even if an employment is equally important. He is not a rich landowner whose only duty is to wait for their lands to make a profit, but he is a busy working man too. As Babb states, "whatever he says discloses how self-indulgent he is, whether in half-covertly calling attention to himself and his possessions or in bending everyone else to his wishes".[102] Catherine though, does not understand this and is excited at the "generous and disinterested sentiments on the subject of money" displayed by the General.[103] She thinks she has a possibility with Henry and cannot understand how someone could say something, meaning the opposite:

[100] F. W. Cornish, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
[101] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. VII, pp. 166-167.
[102] H. S. Babb, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
[103] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. XI, p. 195.

> Why he should say one thing so positively, and mean another all the while, was most unaccountable! How were people, at that rate, to be understood? Who but Henry could have been aware of what his father was at?[104]

Here, Henry has just told Catherine that he has to go back to Woodson, and the girl cannot understand why, because his father told him not to worry about that. Henry, though, says that he has to, even though his father said the opposite and this worries the poor girl. In the subsequent visit to Woodson, the General is somehow ashamed of the parsonage and asks Catherine not to confront it with the Abbey, thinking she is used to more luxury than that place can offer.[105] What she does notice, though, is that "the abundance of the dinner did not seem to create the smallest astonishment in the General", but despite this, he seems happy to dine out of his table.[106]

Despite all the work the General has done to impress Catherine at the Abbey in order to make her think of a marriage with Henry, it is nullified when he discovers Catherine is not the kind of girl he thought her to be. Actually, what the General comes to know about the girl is as wrong as believing she was rich. John Thorpe, his source of knowledge, somehow wanted revenge against Catherine, who has refused him, and whose brother has refused Isabella, so he worsens the information about her family to the General. John says the Morland were not respectable people who tried to climb the social ladder though connections with wealthy people.[107] These words makes the General furious and he decides to get rid of Catherine right away, forcing her daughter to do that. When Henry comes to know how his father has treated Catherine, he gets angry and confronts his father:

> Henry, [...] was sustained in his purpose by a conviction of its justice [and] felt himself bound as much in honour as in affection to Miss Morland. [He] steadily declared his intention of offering her his hand. The General was furious in his anger, and they parted in dreadful disagreement.[108]

---

[104] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. XI, p. 198.
[105] Ivi, p. 199.
[106] Ivi, p. 201.
[107] Ivi, ch. XV, p. 230.
[108] Ivi, p. 231.

At this point, some reflections can be made, first of all, the General, who is a proud man, who dictates law in his family because he thinks to know what is best, is deceived by John Thorpe's words. According to Wallace, this is a puzzle, because nothing of his representation of an "arrogant patriarch" makes the reader think he was foolish enough to believe John Thorpe's lies, even Catherine did not believe the man's integrity. Even if John and the General are similar from the point of view of embellishing their speeches with lies and false modesty, Wallace's explanation is that "Austen has created an [...] atmosphere at odds with her ostensibly parodic motif",[109] and I agree with Wallace, as *Northanger Abbey* is the author's first complete work, and such a mistake could have happened. But apart from this, it is interesting that the General does not reflect on his own knowledge of the girl: he has lived with her and has done everything to impress her, so he has had the opportunity to judge her form her direct actions and words. In fact, Henry, to the same explanation given by his father about the "necessitous" Catherine, does not believe. This makes me think of the self-centred point of view already described regarding John Thorpe. The General is so interested in his own interests that he does not even try to think from another point of view: if Catherine seems not as wealthy as he thought, he has no problem in finding another partner for Henry. He does not need to search for confirmation or to ask his son's opinion. And that is why "he ejects poor Catherine [...] without ceremony, or explanation, or pocket money", he does not even consider the fact he might put her in "some degree of danger".[110] He is "insensitive, inhospitable, and selfish, obsessed with marrying his children for money" that he does not doubt people's words if they are not what he wants to hear, he does not stop to think about his children's happiness. From this point of view, he is a villain.[111]

[109] T. G. Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
[110] R. M. Brownstein, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
[111] Ivi, p. 40.

The Morlands are happy about the proposal of marriage made by Henry, while the General does not give his permission for the ceremony, so the couple has to wait until he changes his mind, which seems difficult until Eleanor pleads for her brother. She marries a "man of fortune" and her marriage removes "from all the evils of such a home as Northanger".[112] "Never had the general loved his daughter so well in all her hours of companionship, utility, and patient endurance as when he first hailed her 'Your Ladyship!'", moreover, he finally understands the real condition of the Morland family, which were good enough to let Henry go back to the Abbey and marry Catherine.[113] Despite being interpreted as a villain, the General is not only effective, but also crucial to the story, as Mudrick explains. He allows the suspense and the climax of the novel, taking the role of the villain, thanks to whom the heroine can demonstrate to be such and can survives the ordeals of her adventures. In a parodic way, this is what happens to Catherine, but I would say the General is not the only villain, although he is the most recognizable one. Isabella pretends to be Catherine's friend but is only interested in herself and finding a rich partner, John is cruel to the protagonist and forces her to do what he wants, not giving her the possibility to choose. Although they are minor villains, and indirectly allow Catherine to enter in Northanger Abbey, they also indirectly help her to understand that people may not be what they seem. According to Mansell, Austen created two opposing pairs of brother and sister, the Thorpes and the Tilneys,[114] but the couple of "good" siblings are paradoxically the children of the villain and Eleanor has to perform the worst duty in the novel in the name of her father, sending her friend away from the Abbey. As Tanner notices, even though there is a happy ending, there is always a possibility for anger as the General has not changed.[115] So ultimately, there is an opposition between "good" and "bad" characters, but the "bad" Thorpes have a function which is overall favourable for Catherine's

[112] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. XVI, p. 233.
[113] Ivi, p. 234.
[114] Cf. D. Mansell, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
[115] Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

growth, whereas the “good” Tilneys are the children of the villain who makes Catherine suffer. To sum up, Austen created interesting shades of behaviour which allow the novel to develop as complexly as it does.

Chapter 3: Reading the novel

The aim of this final chapter is to analyse in detail the protagonist from two main perspectives. The first is literary and it will look at the primary source *Northanger Abbey* to understand the development of the character in the story. The second perspective describes psychologically what happens in Catherine's mind when she reads novels, following the study *5 Readers Reading*, by Norman Holland, an eminent scholar of psychoanalytic criticism applied to literary study. Finally, a more general overview of Jane Austen's authorial work will be given, by focussing on her defence of the novels inside her own work, but also by referring to her biography and social background.

3.1. Catherine's intellectual growth

The main description of the protagonist is provided in Volume I, Chapter I of the novel, which looks back at her family, her infancy, her abilities and character. As I have already mentioned in the previous chapters, Catherine is described as a simple girl, sometimes not so smart in understanding things quickly, not particularly beautiful and with no exceptional characteristics, if the fact of loving Gothic novels excessively is not taken into account. But what makes her the suitable person to be the protagonist of the story is that

> From fifteen to seventeen she was in training for a heroine; she read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives.[1]

From the beginning, Catherine is associated not only with passion for literature, but also with the destiny of being a heroine herself. This is what the reader expects from her, even though the narrator makes sure that she is not a traditional heroine. Some commentators, indeed, argue

[1] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. I, p. 17.

that Catherine is not a heroine at all, while for others she is the heroine of her own story in her own way. I think Catherine has both the good qualities of a heroine and the unusual characteristics which makes her so peculiar. For example, there are many episodes in *Northanger Abbey* in which she shows her good nature, either underlined by the narrator or by other characters. In Volume I, Chapter VIII, when Isabella choses to spend time with James instead of Catherine, the narrator makes it clear that she has "too much good-nature to make any opposition".[2] The protagonist is an honest girl, as Henry often recognizes, and this is displayed when she refuses "to tell a falsehood even to please Isabella",[3] but also when she expresses the idea that "to marry for money [is] the wickedest thing in existence".[4] This demonstrates the fact that she does not love Henry because he is richer or of a higher social status, but because she appreciates him simply for who he is. What makes the reader appreciate Catherine even more is the fact that she is also humble: when she is invited to the Abbey, she is extremely happy about it, but at the same time she feels she is not worthy of the invitation. When the General insists on making her feel comfortable, the effect is the opposite, he makes "it impossible for her to forget for a moment that she was a visitor. She felt utterly unworthy of such respect, and knew not how to reply to it".[5] These are a few examples of the fact that from the moral point of view, Catherine deserves to be a heroine because she has all the required good qualities. And this is why, according to Hardy, *Northanger Abbey* is a fresh novel, because its heroine is not selfish or sophisticated, but is rather simple.[6] Moreover, Butler asserts that Catherine is a good heroine in her own manner because she is able to involve the reader in her adventures provoking sympathy towards her.[7]

[2] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VIII, p. 51.
[3] Ivi, ch. IX, p. 65.
[4] Ivi, ch. XV, p. 118.
[5] Ivi, vol, II, ch. V, 146.
[6] Cf. J. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
[7] Cf. M. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

But the good qualities are not the only requirements for a heroine, indeed what makes Catherine such an uncommon heroine is the fact that she has probably as many flaws as good aspects. Some of her flaws are justifiable because she is young, "her mind about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is",[8] and also because her parents did not provide her with the proper education. Her mother, Mrs. Morland, was as ignorant as her daughter of the dangers of the high middle and aristocratic classes, so she could not give her the proper instruments to face the new social environment in Bath. Catherine's female guide, Mrs. Allen, is a woman who can only talk about clothes and has no idea of how to raise an adolescent. When the girl asks her if she can go to Claverton Down with John Thorpe, a man whom she does not know so well, Mrs. Allen only answers "do just as you please, my dear".[9] The answer can be explained in two ways: either Mrs. Allen has no idea that it is not appropriate for a girl to go out with a young man who is not her relative, even though they were actually in Isabella's company, or Mrs. Allen simply does not care about what Catherine does as long as she does it with people she likes, Mrs. Thorpe is Mrs. Allen's old friend. In any case, Catherine's chaperon is not good at her role and when Mr. Allen explains to Catherine that she should not walk out so easily with boys, it will be too late for her. She has already been deceived by the Thorpes, following them to Blaze Castle. In fact, when Catherine goes to apologise for missing the appointment with the Tilneys, she is not even sure of the gravity of her unfortunate behaviour:

> She knew not how such an offence as hers might be classed by the laws of worldly politeness, to what a degree of unforgivingness it might with propriety lead, nor to what rigours of rudeness in return it might justly make her amenable.[10]

However, she displays her strength in apologising, instead of hiding behind an excuse or justifying herself. And this is not the only time Catherine proves to be brave. At the Abbey,

[8] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. II, p. 19.
[9] Ivi, ch. IX, p. 60.
[10] Ivi, ch. XII, p. 88.

both the episodes of the cabinet and of the visit to Mrs. Tilney's room display a Catherine willing to take risks to follow her fantasies and to prove her theories. She goes to Henry's mother's room alone, even if she suspects that the General did something terrible to her. This is exactly what a heroine would do, as Henry underlined when he described a possible scenario of a frightening storm, which nevertheless does not prevent the girl from checking her room in the dim light. Even the journey back home "had no terrors for her", even if she was alone and it was long.[11] Which means, that even if she is not perfect, at least she is not a coward.

But the list of her flaws is not complete yet, as there is also proof of the fact that she does not understand things even when they are explained, as in the case of an allusion made by the General which everyone but Catherine grasped. He hopes that he will soon buy a tea set "not for himself",[12] in other words, it would be a perfect present for a new married couple, Catherine and his son. But "Catherine was probably the only one of the party who did not understand him".[13] The young protagonist is also naive in the sense that she believes almost everything she listens to, even if it is clear that the real meaning was the opposite, as in the case of the General's discourse about money which has been already discussed. Catherine is the only one who is happy about it, she believes his "generous and disinterested sentiments on the subject of money",[14] would allow her to marry his son. She is definitely blind on this subject as she was blind before, when Isabella was flirting with her brother James. "Catherine's understanding began to awake: an idea of the truth suddenly darted into her mind".[15] Basically only when Isabella tells her that James is amazing and she wishes to deserve him, the protagonist realizes Isabella is interested in him. Catherine is happy for them because she loves them both, but she would not have thought about a possible union if Isabella had not been that

[11] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. II, ch. XIV, p. 215.
[12] Ivi, ch. VII, p. 166.
[13] *Ibidem*.
[14] Ivi, vol. II, ch. XI, p. 195.
[15] Ivi, vol. I, ch. XV, p. 112.

clear. It is paradoxical indeed that the protagonist is so blind in front of some evidence, while she sees things bigger than they are when thinking about Gothic matters, as in the three episodes discussed in the first chapter.

Actually things are not this simple, because it would be wrong to say that Catherine is completely blind until the moment of her awakening in the second Volume. In the second chapter of this work, I explained Catherine's inability to comprehend Isabella's character but to a more detailed reading this is not what happens. Like any other really good novel, in *Northanger Abbey* the characters have many facets, so it may seem that the protagonist does not understand Isabella, but there are signs that she did. Catherine's ability to grasp some particular aspects of others is displayed also with for what concerns other characters. Fergus suggests that in the first meeting between Catherine and Henry, she is able to understand him immediately, even better than all the other Austen heroines do in their stories,[16] "Catherine feared [...] that he indulged himself a little too much with the foibles of others".[17] This is a perfect description of Henry's pleasure in correcting what other people say or believe according to his own knowledge. Something which he will do often with Catherine. So in just one encounter, she is able to understand him correctly and I would say that it is not by chance that this happens with Henry, her future husband. Indeed, another person she is able to understand from the beginning is Eleanor Tilney, the only one who does not hide any selfish interest or evil scope. There is another character, though, who Catherine cannot stand because she saw his real nature, John Thorpe. With him she is not so good as with other people ("when he spoke to her [she] pretended not to hear him")[18] because she dislikes him but has to deal with him (for the reasons I have mentioned in the previous chapter). No one can say that Catherine was blind to his rude and dishonest character, even though she could not imagine in what measure he was

[16] Cf. J. Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, cit., p. 17.
[17] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. III, p. 29.
[18] Ivi, ch. X, p. 72.

selfish, if considering that it was because of his lies that she was both invited and cast out from the Abbey. Actually, the protagonist is not completely blind also for what concerns Isabella. When she reproaches Catherine because she seems to prefer to stay with the Tilneys instead of the Thorpes, the protagonist considers her words were "strange and unkind" and that "Isabella appeared to her ungenerous and selfish, regardless of everything but her own gratification".[19] Even though Catherine had this feeling about Isabella, she says nothing and prefers to maintain the friendship instead of facing the reality that Isabella is not what she wants to appear. Isabella and John are not the only Thorpes who are unable to deceive Catherine completely. In Volume I, Chapter XIV, when she meets Anne Thorpe, the only sister who has not been invited to go to Clifton, she pretends she does not care about it because "it must be the dullest thing in the world" and she "was determined from the first not to go", while Catherine has the suspects that she is just saying this for pride, because she has been left alone in Bath, which is probably the truth.[20]

These are the main reasons why certain commentators believe there is no growth in Catherine during the novel, because she could see people for what they were from the beginning, she just chose to ignore the signs apparently. Fergus is quite strong on this point because he affirms *Northanger Abbey* lacks in development, especially because of the narrator's treatment of the protagonist.[21] As I have noticed in the first chapter, the narrator does not take Catherine's feelings and behaviour seriously, even if there are important doubts and anxieties for her:

> Austen shows no interest in placing Catherine within a complex world of moral perceptions and judgements, she neglects to provide for her the elaborate, fully imagined and realized social world of the other heroines.[22]

[19] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XIII, p. 94.
[20] Ivi, ch. XIV, p. 110.
[21] Cf. J. Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, cit., pp. 16-17.
[22] *Ibidem*.

Moreover, Fergus insists on the fact that the author is not interested in her protagonist's psychological development or in her personality, as Austen continuously refers to Catherine's inability to detect artifice.[23] Even though sometimes the protagonist is able to discriminate signs, she often choses to ignore them. Fergus is not the only one who thinks Catherine is not a good heroine and *Northanger Abbey* is not a special novel. Also Mudrick explains that she is neither a good parody of a literary heroine, nor an "interesting and complex" protagonist of a realistic novel.[24] Basically she is too much a product of Austen's imagination created to fulfil a function to be a credible character. According to Mudrick, Austen wanted to reject the genre of the romance so much that none of her characters have a psychological depth, but they are all flat, and Catherine is always severely treated.[25] Sadly, I had the same sensations while reading the novel for the first time. It seemed to me that the narrator was sometimes unnecessarily cruel with the protagonist, even if some of the comments were comical. From this point of view, I agree with Mudrick when he notices that Austen "cannot help intruding to assert her own detachment [...] from the events and the people that she herself has created".[26] I perceived the urge of the narrator to express detachment and superiority from the narration by using derogatory description and comments, but also by carefully choosing Henry's words. The passion he expresses in correcting Catherine's occasional stupidity cannot be separated from the authorial voice also because he is in a "position of relative immunity in an atmosphere contagious with irony".[27] Henry is a character who can be taken seriously by the reader, he is almost never wrong and has such a reliable role that it is easy to trust him, as it is easy for the protagonist herself. However, once the readers understand the narrator's critical attitude towards the protagonist will never change, they start loving her notwithstanding this. I do not

[23] Cf. J. Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, cit., p. 18.
[24] M. Mudrick, *op.cit.*, p. 88.
[25] Cf. Ivi, p. 89.
[26] Ivi, p. 87.
[27] Ivi, p. 86.

think that Catherine is not as good a heroine as Fergus does, as I do not believe that the narrator's comments prevent the reader from appreciating her, as Mudrick affirms. On the contrary, I think Catherine is to be loved by the readers because of her position as the simple girl who is destined to become a heroine despite the cruel treatment she receives by others, including the narrator. For example, Williams argues that she is a good heroine precisely because she is an ordinary girl, even if she has not got any extraordinary knowledge or abilities.[28] I would agree with him especially because this allows the female readers to easily identify with the protagonist, because she could represent any anonymous girl, not having particular powers.

The main interest here, though, is not to discuss whether Catherine deserves to be a heroine or not, because actually she is. She is the protagonist of *Northanger Abbey*. She has her strengths and her weaknesses, but in the end she is an Austen heroine as Elizabeth, Emma or Elinor are. The main interest is to understand if there is an improvement in Catherine's reasoning or behaviour, and in what it consists. I cannot say that Catherine improves at the end of the novel because she sees people for what they really are, because as I have just argued, this is not the case. Catherine notices John's bad behaviour, Isabella's selfishness, Anna's lies, Henry's flaws since the beginning of her journey. It may seem a contradiction to affirm that Catherine saw real important aspects from the start, but it is not, because what changes is the imaginative dimension in which she collocates her judgements. In the main body of the novel, Catherine believes she is living in a literary dimension, where she could be the heroine and her reading of the world is not guided by experience or wise advice, because she has received none. It is her first time in Bath and her parents did not warn her of anything. Her knowledge of the world is based on novels, mainly Gothic, and on "suggestions from people of her own age", as

[28] M. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

McKillop writes.[29] In fact, Catherine accepts Isabella's friendship even if she had some doubts on her honesty.[30] In the same manner she accepts John's friendship or Henry's explanations, because she can collocate them in a literary context, Henry is her lover and guide, Isabella is her best friend, John is a sort of villain, before meeting the General. What changes, then is not her intuitive process, but her imaginative dimension: she needs to enter a process of disillusionment. According to Tanner, she will undertake a process of "disillusion and enlightenment", common in Austen's novels.[31] In this way she will learn to collocate reality and fiction in two separate spheres of experience. Tanner then suggests that this evolvement is not necessarily good, because real life is not better than fiction, actually it can be even more incomprehensible, as it happens when the General sends her away.[32] According to Mansell, the process of disillusion is constituted by three steps which take place in the second Volume of the book.[33] These three steps destroy her illusions differently from the three Gothic episodes. Those Gothic episodes could be explained by Catherine's human mistake of judgement but they did not eliminate her expectation of something similar to happen again. In other words, there might have been another chest or another cabinet to open, the General himself might have hidden his wife in another place, according to Catherine's illusion. The three steps to which Mansell refers are different because there is no way back from them as they regard individuals. The first step regards the recognition of Isabella's real character behind her "mask of sensibility".[34] After both James's and Isabella's letters, Catherine cannot accept Isabella anymore, she has gone too far with her lies. The second step is the recognition both of the Abbey as a normal house and of the General not as a villain,[35] basically she has to lift the

[29] A. D. McKillop, *Critical Realism in Northanger Abbey*, in I. Watt, ed., *Jane Austen. A Collection of Critical Essays*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall International, 1986, pp. 52-61, p. 58.
[30] Cf. A. D. McKillop, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
[31] T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
[32] Cf. Ivi, p. 50.
[33] Cf. D. Mansell, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
[34] *Ibidem*.
[35] Cf. *Ibidem*.

Gothic veil from her mind. The last step regards Henry, and is defined as the recognition "behind all those masks that define the general habit which is Jane Austen's real subject".[36] I interpret this passage by referring to the fact that Henry represents the author and he corrects the habit she dislikes: the readers who confuse reality and fiction. And actually Henry's role in the novel is double: he "encourages Catherine's illusions at Bath", but then exposes to her "the common workings of common life".[37] From the moment of their confrontation after her visit to Mrs. Tilney's room, Catherine should stop interpreting reality according to literary conventions and start interpreting it according to real everyday life experience, now that she has lived outside her little town for a while. In fact, the main parody of the novel is not directed against Catherine herself, but against "silly novelists and novel-readers".[38] Catherine is not criticized by the narrator because she is not smart or beautiful or talented enough, but because she reads Gothic novels which influence negatively her interpretation of reality. And as long as Catherine will take her experience derived from novels for real experience, she will be wrong. The main surprise at the end of the story, is in fact that Catherine was not wrong at all about the General, she just mistook her interpretations and associations. She felt discomfort when she was with him, and felt the discomfort of his children too, but did not know how to interpret it.[39] She could not imagine that a father could be so harsh and manipulative with his children, because her father (or Mr. Allen) was not like that. She could not understand that for certain people money and social position were more important than friendship, love or affection because her family was full of love and she was honest and pure. So the only way she has to give a meaning to her sensations is to draw significance from her only source of knowledge: Gothic novels. The "heroine's instincts were good guides to truth",[40] she was actually good in

[36] D. Mansell, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
[37] Ivi, p. 37.
[38] A. D. McKillop, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
[39] Cf. M. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
[40] R. M. Brownstein, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

interpreting people's character, but was unable to deal correctly with the truth. The real growth in Catherine's educative process is to identify the "border between fiction and life",[41] and to open her eyes to the pragmatic reasons which guide people's action in life, such as money and power. In conclusion, in *Northanger Abbey* there is a process of growth, that maybe did not coincide with the readers' expectations, but that is important for Catherine, who "proves [the General] to be a villain after all".[42] Butler then argues that the General's children were aware of their father's temperament and that his decision to send Catherine home with no servants or money was unrealistic for a gentleman at that time.[43] I think that the General's behaviour should not be realistic to be useful for the scope of the novel. And more important, this is a parodic novel, not a realistic one. And even if Henry, Eleanor and Frederick knew their father was not sweet or sensitive, it did not appear to me that they would expect such sudden and cruel treatment to a young girl. Eleanor's anxiety and uneasiness when she has to tell the news to Catherine or Henry's decision to marry her against his father's demonstrate this.

3.2. A psychological insight: Catherine's process of reading

While I was reading the novel, I was interested in understanding what happens in the mind of the readers while reading a novel, of any genre. This thought was suggested by the fact that Catherine is herself a reader of novels inside *Northanger Abbey*, so it could be interesting to take her as an example to analyse the application of some psychological theories. During my research, I encountered Norman Holland's study, *5 Readers Readings*, where he experiments his psychoanalytic theories about readers' response to literature with five of his students. Holland starts form the assumption that the universal response of readers as a sort of catharsis

[41] M. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
[42] M. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
[43] Cf. Ivi, p. 179.

described by Aristoteles is obsolete. Readers respond to literature according to their own "lifestyle", which is personal and prevents the prediction of how readers will respond to a text.[44] It is important to say that the creative process starts in the writer's mind but that readers' response will differ from the author's intent. In addition, the readers' responses will be different from one person to another, and also the same reader will respond differently to the same text if read more than once.[45] What is important is that the readers need to "make sense" of a text by satisfying their need for sense and logic and defending themselves from any source of anxiety. This is similar to what happens in dreams, where raw material is transformed to create something significant in the dream, thanks to the help of censorship. The agents of the transformation are the need for theme, meaning and form and the readers process the inanimate literary work to interpret it according to these agents in their minds. This psychological work in the literary text is not different from the elaboration of everyday new experiences. In other words, the readers start a psychological work in their minds from the reading of a literary work in the same way as if they were living a real adventure. As a consequence, the readers absorb the book, not the other way around. This means that when a book easily satisfies the needs for theme, meaning and form and our defences, the readers feel as in the state of "most primitive gratified desire" experienced when their mother was nurturing them. In this period of life, there is a loss of self-consciousness and identity because the babies have no defences against the mother, who takes care of them. According to Holland, this is the reason why the readers can say they lose themselves in the book, and the main point in this process in that the minds of the readers elaborate and interpret the literary work, not the opposite.[46] Another fundamental passage regards the fact that people aim to achieve pleasure in the easiest possible way, in order also to reduce suffering. And people do this according to some strategies, and once they find

[44] Cf. N. Holland, *5 Readers Reading*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1975, pp. 5-12.
[45] Cf. Ivi, p. 13.
[46] Cf. Ivi, pp. 16-19.

effective strategies they adhere to them and establish their own personality theme. The individuals can grow and change, but always within their style of identity and the interpretation of behaviour based on this principle explains how people remain the same during a life time, yet change after each new experience.[47] This theory made me think directly of Catherine Morland, as she is the emblem of this psychological growth within the same personality. As discussed earlier, her capacities to understand personalities and her good nature remain the same during the novel, but yet she changes as she learns to interpret what she sees according to the social costume of her time and not according to the teachings of Gothic novels. I would interpret this change in her behaviour by saying that because of her ignorance of the rules of society, the easier way for her to satisfy her need to understand what was going on around her, was to rely on the source of knowledge which gave her the most pleasure with the least effort: Gothic novels. Indeed, her defences would have been too active and her pain too strong if she had to abruptly abandon her imagination and face reality once arrived in Bath. She needed to live new experiences, events and episodes in order to make her intellect adapt step by step to the new conception of the world dissociated from her book-fed imagination.

Holland then defines four psychological principles of literary experience which I would like to compare to Catherine's experience as a reader. These principles allow for the understanding, from a psychoanalytic point of view, of what happens in the readers' minds while reading, especially in the process of appreciation of a text. They are: "style seeks itself", "defenses must be matched", "fantasy projects fantasies" and "character transform characteristically". The first principle, "style seeks itself", states that people approach new experiences with hopes, desires, fears and needs, and the approach to new literary works is the same. If the elements of a text satisfy and gratify the readers' expectations, it means that the readers will respond positively to the literary work because it acts out their own lifestyle. If the

[47] Cf. N. Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-61.

work pleases the readers, they will merge with it and the events narrated will be as real as any other real-life event.[48] Taking into consideration Catherine's situation, I would say that the Gothic novel definitely satisfies her needs as she has been absorbed in reading *The Mysteries of Udolpho* since the beginning. Probably, that kind of novel where the protagonist is a young lady, with no parental guidance, who had to face unknown people and new situations, made Catherine feel empathy with the protagonist as she herself is a young girl in a new place with new people and with no help from her chaperon Mrs. Allen. Indeed, to merge with such adventures could have been a way for Catherine to work on her own fears, and the fact she enjoyed so much reading *Udolpho* is clear:

> "Oh! I am delighted with the book! I should like to spend my whole life in reading it. I assure you, if it had not been to meet you, I would not have come away from it for all the world".[49]

To speak about the second principle "defenses must be matched", it is necessary to explain the mechanisms of adaptation and defence. The mechanism of adaptation allows people to cope with the external reality in harmony with their inner self, whereas the mechanism of defence activates automatically at any signal of danger to protect people from suffering. These processes work together as part of people's lifestyle and if they are well managed they allow pleasure. For this reason, for readers to enjoy a work of art it is necessary to cope with these two mechanisms through the satisfaction of the ego at a high intellectual level.[50] In other works, the literary work has to be interesting enough to satisfy the readers' needs, but it has also to allow the mechanisms of adaptation and defence to adapt it to the readers' lifestyles: the literary work should not be seen as menace. I consider the principle "defenses must be matched" satisfied in *Northanger Abbey* because although Gothic novels can be considered frightening, Catherine enjoys them precisely because they are frightening and horrid. I think the

[48] Cf. N. Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.
[49] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VI, p. 39.
[50] Cf. N. Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-116.

characteristic of Gothic novels of being terrifying could have been the one which more easily would have prevented a common reader from choosing such type of readings, because not everyone likes to be terrified by a book. But this is not the case of Catherine and her question "are they all horrid, are you sure they are all horrid?",[51] and the episodes in the Abbey demonstrate she searches for danger and enjoys it, maybe to prove that she is strong enough to face it and to be considered a heroine, just like the ones she has read of. For sure, Catherine was influenced by the historical time in which she was living, where the readers' taste had evolved from the appreciation of simple beauty to the need for sublime. The sublime described by Burke scares the spectator but it also provides a deep sense of satisfaction, as the extremely popular genre of Gothic novels did at the time in which Austen was writing.

The third principle is "fantasy projects fantasies" and it is based on the fact that when readers read a literary work, they create a fantasy in their mind to represent it. This fantasy mixes the content of the reading, which matters to the readers, with their personality and their unconscious concerns.[52] To do this, the readers' minds take into account form and content of the work, and once they are unified into the psyche, readers elaborate the story according to their preferences and defend it from the possible attacks of external reality in order to preserve the pleasure of reading.[53] I would say that this principle has many connections with *Northanger Abbey* not only because Catherine creates the fantasy of Gothic novels in her mind while reading, but also because she is not the only one who openly does it in the novel. Henry is the one who creates fantasy out of literary fantasy during their journey to the Abbey in Volume II, Chapter V, and he does it out loud, to make fun of Catherine. Of course, this is not what the principle explained by Holland refers to, but I would link this episode with it because what Henry does, by putting Catherine inside of a Gothic adventure, is possible only if he has already

[51] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. VI, p. 39.
[52] Cf. N. Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-119.
[53] Cf. Ivi, p. 121.

created in his own mind the elaboration of the novels he has read. And for Catherine to understand such reference is possible because she has elaborated her readings in her own mind too. Moreover, she uses the fantasy created also to interpret real life adventures, such as that of the cabinet mentioned by Henry, the one of the chest and all the misunderstandings with the General. Fantasy plays big part in Catherine's personality and is probably influenced by this principle described by Holland.

The last principle, "character transform characteristically", consists of the ability of the readers to use their ego functions such as the interpretative skills, the literary experience, the lifelong experience and sensibility to "make sense" of the text. Readers will transform the fantasy created in their mind to tolerate social, moral and political ideas and transform them into a pleasing intellectual content. In this process, the personal style of each reader is fundamental, as the act of reading cannot be separated from the creative personality of the reader.[54] I believe this fourth principle can be related to the aim of the whole novel of *Northanger Abbey*: to acquire the ability to separate reality from fantasy. Catherine needs to distinguish between the two and she needs to learn how to use her intelligence and her high ego functions, to interpret reality and literature in the correct way, not mixing them up but associating the right meaning and weight to both of them. In the end, thanks to Henry's words in Volume II, Chapter IX, she has to face reality and learn how to deal with it, also by elaborating and interpreting literature in its context, separated from real life.

The main point of this study comparing *Northanger Abbey* to the principles elaborated by Holland is to understand that when readers approach to a text, the mechanisms at work are the same as those which operate when people have experiences in real life. People desire pleasure and judge if situations will provide it with little effort and no suffering. Then they elaborate what happens in their mind in order to give it meaning and to classify it according to

[54] Cf. N. Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-122.

socio-cultural and political values. The role of the personality and lifestyle of a person deeply influences this process and makes it unique for each individual. The same happens with reading: what is narrated is elaborated with the same process, with the only difference that the experience comes from words written on a page. For many people, then, it is normal to classify knowledge derived from real-life experience and knowledge derived from literature, but for Catherine (and the lady readers Austen wants to criticize) it is not that simple. She misses the education which would have allowed her to distinguish the difference between art and life and for this reason she misinterprets events and people. Catherine's situation can be compared to the one of Miss Emily Atkins, a character of *The Man of Felling* (1771) by Henry Mackenzie. Emily is a young prostitute whose story has been deeply affected by her readings: she was accustomed to read sentimental novels which formed her ideals of the perfect lover and one day she met a man who –she thought– answered to all her expectations.[55] To meet the man of your dreams could seem something good, but this was not her case. Unfortunately, "the course of reading to which I had been accustomed, did not lead me to conclude, that his expressions could be too warm to be sincere" is what she affirms.[56] To summarize what happens next, the man she fell in love with abandons her before the marriage and she runs away to London and finds herself on the path of prostitution. This may be a bit extreme and unrealistic, but it is interesting that Emily trusted a man because he fitted the imagination she had created thanks to her readings, but those same readings did not help her to distinguish between real people and real feelings and imaginations or desires. The power of reading is sometimes stronger than expected. Whilst Emily had to face betrayal and shame, Catherine had the opportunity to recognize the separation between fiction and reality after new experiences and thanks to Henry's words. She grows maintaining her personality and becoming a better person, ready to

[55] Cf. H. Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* [1771], ed. B. Vickers, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, ch. XXVIII, p. 43.
[56] Ivi, p. 44.

get married but respectful enough of the traditions to wait for the General's approval of the marriage. However, the fact that in people's mind the separation between literature and life is not so different for what concerns the workings of the mind, because the text acts in the same way of the external reality, is highly revealing.[57] This is why literature is so important and Austen knew this while she was writing *Northanger Abbey*.

3.3. Austen's defence of the novel and the value of reading

In order to understand what Austen's relationship with reading was, it may be interesting to understand what her relationship was also with literature itself, and the way in which she constructed her knowledge. In her home, she had access to her father's library, which contained more than 500 books –more than people used to have even at school– but during her study she did not follow a traditional literary canon, similar to that proposed at the university, for example.[58] "She was dependent on titles which happened to come her way", so it might have happened that she ignored her predecessors in English fiction but knew old history better.[59] For example, Austen knew the Bible, which helped her with the plot and the language,[60] and she also knew Shakespeare very well, whom she used for some quotations in her novels. For example in *Emma* the protagonist quotes *Romeo and Juliet*, showing that she took from the play what she could relate to her life, displaying an "independent thinking".[61] Austen also appreciated Augustan writers and "Catherine Morland is educated [...] within the Augustan tradition",[62] and preferred Richardson to Fielding but had also a special approach to

[57] Cf. N. Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
[58] Cf. I. Grundy, *Jane Austen and Literary Traditions* in Copeland, E., and McMaster, J., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 189- 210, p. 189.
[59] *Ibidem*.
[60] Cf. Ivi, p. 196.
[61] Ivi, p. 197.
[62] Ivi, p. 204.

Johnson, whom she trusted for playful intertextuality and hidden meanings.[63] For example, Johnson's dictionary and ideas are to be found in the words Henry uses to overpower Eleanor and Catherine in the debate about history in Volume I, Chapter XIV. Besides, Austen read pedagogical works, travel books, historical, political and medical pamphlets and also other female writers' books such as those of Maria Edgeworth, Francis Burney or Anne Radcliffe.[64] What is important, though, is that she did not recognize any kind of authority, as the Great Tradition, in her readings and followed her own taste to guide her in the choice of readings. Books were a vital part of her life and she always looked to them as sources for her own writings, where she displayed her knowledge through the characters.[65] Austen's idea was that literature should combine pleasure and instruction, so she felt authorized to make a parody of any volume which caught her interest despite they might belong to some traditional canon of literature.[66] However, she never copied other authors and was able to create her own characters thanks to the dialogue engaged with texts of other authors:

> Austen learned from the writers who made up her tradition: [...] she developed her mastery of balance from Pope, wisdom and playfulness from Johnson, gendered power-struggle and immediacy from Richardson, relation of books to life from Lennox, [...] grotesquery from Burney.[67]

For what concerns the publication of books, instead, the eighteenth century saw the rise of the novel, and for the first time the women were leading in this genre. This happened because, differently from the romances, the novels depicted everyday life and required no classical education for their production. In particular, the female dominance was predominant in the last decades of the century, which saw the publication of novels focussed on a female protagonist in contrast with a male dominating world. Francis Burney is an example of writer of this type of novel with her *Evelina* (1778), *Cecilia* (1782) and *Camilla* (1796).[68] These

[63] Cf. I. Grundy, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-199.
[64] Cf. Ivi, p. 200.
[65] Cf. Ivi, p. 190.
[66] Cf. Ivi, p. 194.
[67] Cf. Ivi, p. 203.
[68] Cf. R. P. Irvine, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

novels are also referred to as "domestic" fiction, because they aim to be didactic in teaching some values to the readers, who identify with the heroine. Another example is *Belinda* (1801) by Maria Edgeworth which is regarded not only as "domestic fiction" but, together with the works of Burney and Austen, as "realistic" fiction, because it is contraposed to the unrealistic Gothic fiction. Gothic literature, together with the French romances of the early century –and sentimental literature– caused anxieties about female modesty and subordination to the needs of fathers and husbands. The adventures of the heroines evoked a deep identification in the readers, so they were encouraged to indulge in their emotions and in their unrealistic expectations about marriage.[69] All these types of readings could influence women so much that they could waste their life imagining a future that would not happen instead of focussing on being good wives and mothers. Basically, according to many scholars, literature could corrupt virtue,[70] and some of them were worried for the younger female readers. Male thinkers thought that the access to certain genres of literature that focussed too much on feelings could create "physical consequences as autoerotic cravings" which could provoke "nervous maladies" or diseases.[71]

The fact that the writers and readers of novels (of different genres) were mainly female, caused them to be considered in "a very low status in the literary hierarchy",[72] so the need of male control was perceived and satisfied with all the critical journals or essays. Some examples are the "Gentleman's Magazine", the "Monthly Review" and the "Rambler", by Johnson. He proclaimed he had the moral task to improve his readers but actually all these publications aimed to control the literary canon by classifying low and high value works from a male perspective.[73] Despite this male attempt to control the market, the readers were many and of

[69] Cf. R. P. Irvine, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[70] Cf. Ivi, p. 18.
[71] Ivi, p. 286.
[72] Ivi, p. 17.
[73] Cf. Ivi, p. 19.

different types. In Britain, the access to reading became the new parameter according to which the society was divided, there were the illiterates and the literates who could participate in cultural circles or clubs. "Patrician and plebeian, or rich and poor" were not as important distinctions as literacy.[74] Moreover, the access to a wide range of material through the circulating libraries, made the access to literature cheaper and easier also for the women, who constituted a large part of the audience and of the writers.[75]

The fact that there were many young female readers and that many novels spoke about female heroines directly interests *Northanger Abbey* and the exemplary defence Austen makes of novels and female readers and heroines:

> Yes, novels;— for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding— joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. [...] Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure [...]. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. [...] "And what are you reading, Miss—?" "Oh! It is only a novel!" replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame.— "It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda;" or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language. Now, had the same young lady been engaged with a volume of the Spectator, instead of such a work, how proudly would she have produced the book, and told its name [...].[76]

I think this defence of novels is perfect and it was also brave for a woman to write it, when the harshest critics and writers were male. The first part of the defence I quoted highlights the author's consciousness and integrity as she recognizes she is contributing to a genre which is not considered important but actually sells well and is loved by readers. The first part missing from the quote has already been mentioned in the first chapter of my work, as it regards the importance of heroines to support and protect each other in a sort of solidarity among women in a male dominating world. Afterwards, Austen mentions the reviewers, as they were for the

[74] R. Porter, *Enlightenment. Britain and the Creation of the Modern World*, London, Penguin Books, 2000, p. 76.
[75] Cf. Ivi, p. 77.
[76] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. V, pp. 36-37.

majority male and criticized many of the female famous novels, so appreciated by readers. Selling well was not enough for novels to be considered good literature and actually the general negative consideration of novels remained until a male writer, Walter Scott, published a successful novel, *Waverley* (1814). Later, Austen mentions the "Spectator" but certainly she also read the "Rambler", which influenced her writing of the novel. The following lines regards the fact that novel is the genre which provokes more pleasure in the readers. This is something undeniable, as essays, biographies and even poetry sometimes, do not engage the readers in the same deep way as the novels do. I think this happens because the readers can easily feel empathy for stories of other human beings as they explore feelings and sensations which are universal, such as love or pain. Novels also narrate adventures people would like to have, but are afraid to or cannot try, and reading them makes readers feel like they had lived them. Even if this is true, for a long period novels were not considered at the same level as poetry or epic, for example, and people were ashamed to admit they loved them. This is the impression Catherine shows when speaking with Henry,[77] and Austen demonstrates this in her defence, imagining the hypothetical reader of Burney's novels. Finally (in the quote but not in the actual writing), there are the words which are more frequently mentioned when speaking about this defence, those which describe what novels are for Austen. Novels are capable of representing human nature in all its qualities with wit and humour, in an appropriate language. This is a rather simple description but it is meaningful because novels are nothing more than written words which are able to describe the endless possibilities of human nature to behave, feel and evolve, and this is what makes novels so special.

If novels have remained so successful for centuries there must be a reason. The simplest explanation is pleasure, as Baym states, because there is no other way book-lovers would be

[77] *Northanger Abbey*, vol. I, ch. XIV, pp. 102-103.

so passionate if they did not experience pleasure while reading.[78] Different stories make people live different lives, experience many feelings and live many adventures, not just their own. In addition to this, as Holland explains, literature is not only a pleasure but it is also useful, as it helps us to elaborate our feelings, our desires and our fears, without being exposed too harshly to the anxieties of reality. This is also the reason why literature is so important also at school for children, for example: from early childhood parents read stories to their children to help their psychological growth or facilitate sleep, and at school the process continues and becomes even more important, especially in the primary school, when children start to live in a community and they need to elaborate daily emotions. Keen argues that some critics tried to find connections between reading and the impact on students' behaviour in order to become "good citizens". The experiment only highlighted that good readers had better academic results but did not change their behaviour. In fact, as Holland clarifies the readers' temperament influences the way they perceive fiction instead of the contrary. And young readers may interpret literature differently from what an adult would expect.[79] In fact, reading can influence the most impressionable readers, and this was feared in British society, especially for what concerns young female readers. This is why Austen makes her attempt to instruct young female readers in *Northanger Abbey*. The narrator is severe in judging Catherine for the length of the novel because she wants to make sure that the readers can learn the same lesson of Catherine. Moreover, when Austen brought back the manuscript of the novel from the publisher who accepted but did not published it, she worked on it again before its eventual publication, and Gooneratne suggested that this caused the harsh treatment of Catherine: Austen was a more mature writer and made a revision of the work according to her new standards.[80] When she

[78] Baym, N., *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers. Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1984, p. 60.
[79] S. Keen, *Readers' Temperaments and Fictional Character*, "New Literary History", vol. 42, no. 2, 2011, pp. 295–314, p. 301.
[80] Y. Gooneratne, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

wrote of Catherine the first time they were closer in age than when she re-worked on it, and this allowed her to judge the work from a different perspective. This is also what she wrote in the "Advertisement" for the readers which introduces the novel. In a way, she justifies her work by saying that thirteen years have passed and "places, manners, books and opinions have undergone considerable changes",[81] because she knows that this kind of parodic novel would have been understood better when also the Gothic novels were still popular, but at the moment of the publication the fashion of that genre was coming to an end. However, she did not lose the desire to publish her first work and to make it useful anyway, because she knew literature is always a good thing to share.

The fact that the novels had to be defended, made the readers suppose that there had been a more precise attack on them than the simple critic made in journals and magazines. Indeed, there had been a direct attack against readers of novels made by Samuel Johnson in the "Rambler":

> These books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life. They are the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles, and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account.[82]

Catherine corresponds to this description, and Austen takes her heroine's side in two ways: in her defence of the novels she elevates the status of the genre by pointing at all its qualities; in her creation of *Northanger Abbey* the heroine is able to learn to distinguish fancy from reality and act accordingly to this new situation. What Johnson says then might have been true at the beginning of the novel, but as the story develops it is not anymore because Austen demonstrates that female readers can evolve further than this superficial description. This is not the only attack which Austen decides to face in her novel. As I discussed in the first chapter, in the

[81] *Northanger Abbey*, p. 13.
[82] Quoted in M. Butler, *Introduction* to *Northanger Abbey*, p. xiv. She quotes from "Rambler", no. 4, 31 March 1750.

"Rambler" (no. 97) Richardson wrote about the fact that women had to be passive and wait for the men to demonstrate their love, but Catherine does not. Austen again challenges what the male reviewers expected to read in the novels by creating characters which left their mark in literature.

It was not so easy to go against the most prominent minds of the time, especially for a woman, but Austen did it. Not by chance she is mentioned, together with Shakespeare, as a writer who created characters which went beyond the gender stereotypes and conventions found –in her case– in many of the nineteenth century novels.[83] According to Brown, Austen was aware of the problems of female education of her time, and she showed it in the way she presented Catherine's own education, precisely in *Northanger Abbey*. Whereas, in *Pride and Prejudice* the concern is displayed regarding the relationship between education and marriage, for example.[84] Brown connects this consideration of Austen's ideas about women's condition to Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas. Wollstonecraft was the writer of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) where she protested against the way in which females were educated to remain ignorant and docile.[85] The Western world before the Enlightenment saw a patriarchal society where women were subordinate to man and in marriage their own legal existence was suspended.[86] Only the progress of the Enlightenment slowly allowed them to have more freedom, thanks to the development of print culture, for example, many women became famous writers. In general, English women were the ones who had more freedom and were admired by the other European countries.[87] Although in her letters Austen never mentions Wollstonecraft, Brown believes the ideas of these two women are similar, for example regarding marriage,

[83] Cf. J. P. Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels. Social Change and Literary Form*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 169.
[84] Cf. L. W. Brown, *Jane Austen and the Feminist Tradition*, "Nineteenth-Century Fiction", vol. 28, no. 3, 1973, pp. 321–338, p. 328.
[85] Cf. R. Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 335.
[86] Cf. Ivi, pp. 320-321.
[87] Cf. Ivi, pp. 326-327.

seen in Wollstonecraft as "restrictive [...] of the women's identity".[88] In Austen, marriage does not deal with religious or juridical ideas which usually gave power to husbands and fathers, but is seen as a moment of maturation, where the couple celebrates the compatibility of their personalities, overcoming the individual mistakes to find unity in this institution.[89] According to Brown, this new conception of marriage links Austen to the eighteenth century feminist tradition, where women had the same importance of men in the couple. On the contrary, Winnifrith argues that feminists wanted to see Austen as one of them but "it is difficult to be certain how Austen reacted to Wollstonecraft's ideas".[90] For example, Winnifrith stated that Austen condemns adultery harsher when it is committed by a woman, bringing the example of Isabella, who is punished for her flirtation with Frederick while she was engaged with James.[91] The author then assumes that Austen "seems to accept [...] the patriarchal idea that women's role was to marry and that women should enter marriage as virgin",[92] so according to him there is no trace of feminism in Austen. Conversely again, Julia Prewitt Brown says that Austen was the voice of the feminine consciousness which represents the set of values and beliefs that female generations have preserved through centuries. This feminine consciousness is shaken at the end of the eighteenth century because of all the changes in society caused by the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution.[93] Austen finds herself in the middle of this transformation and is able to represent all the "connections between generation, the mistakes of the past and the hopes for the future".[94] Also here marriage is seen as an institution which unites two people out of love, cooperation and respect, as opposed to Winnifrith's theory.[95]

[88] L. W. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 336.
[89] Cf. Ivi, pp. 336-338.
[90] T. Winnifrith, *Fallen Women in the Nineteenth-century Novel*, Basingstoke, MacMillan St. Martin's, 1994, p. 15.
[91] Cf. Ivi, p. 23.
[92] Ivi, p. 28.
[93] Cf. J. P. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157.
[94] Ivi, p. 158.
[95] Cf. *Ibidem*.

I used the example of marriage to discuss the fact that the same theme is interpreted in completely different ways by scholars, according to their needs to see Austen as belonging to a feminist tradition or not. Although the interpretations of her works can lead down an opposite path, I believe there are some points of which the readers can be sure. All of Austen's heroines are female, and for sure she knew many of the opposite sex quite well, starting with her own brothers, but she chose to write about the most controversial sex. Catherine is young, but breaks the convention of waiting for the male's consent to fall in love and in the end she marries the man of her choice. Furthermore, Catherine is also a reader, a figure that highlights a progressive view of print culture, to which also young women had access to. I do not think Austen can be identified as a feminist, although she wrote things close to that movement, because there is no to access to her direct thoughts regarding it, but only to her fictions (and of course some private letters that have remained). However, some aspects of Austen as a woman writer are important to mention. Even if it is true that she wrote "when opportunities for women to publish have never been greater", there were still many obstacles for a woman to do so.[96] Authorship regarding the publication of novels especially, could be a problem or an infamy for women. Women had to be "modest, retiring, essentially domestic and private".[97] For this reason some women decided to remain anonymous until their works became successful. Moreover, male writers or essayists discouraged women from writing, by saying they had not the adequate preparation, even if they only wanted to help maintain their family. Often the women apologised for their own works in the prefaces. It was even more a problem when they were married, because they had no legal existence and could not sign contracts.[98] When they were not married, instead, they were under the father's (or brother's) authority and they might not have allowed them to have an artistic career, but fortunately this was not the case of Austen,

[96] J. Fergus, *The Professional Woman Writer*, in Copeland, E., and McMaster, J., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 12-31, p. 13.
[97] Ivi, p. 13.
[98] Cf. Ivi, p. 14.

whose father (and siblings) encouraged and helped her in the publication of her works. For this reason, and because Austen knew many published female authors from her family's circle of friends, she was sure of her being able to publish, but this does not make her success less remarkable.[99] She decided to publish mainly on commission, a method which required an initial capital but that could have been more remunerative for the author.[100] However, the story of the publication of *Northanger Abbey* is not that simple, because she sold the manuscript (called *Susan*) in 1803 to B. Crosby and Company but they never published it, Austen could never understand why.[101] Her brother was able to buy the manuscript back in 1816, when she was also writing *Persuasion* (1817) but because of the difficult financial situation of her family she was not able to publish either of them. Her professionality led her to start writing another novel but, because of her precarious health, she was only able to write twelve chapters before dying, in 1817. At the end of that year, her sister Cassandra realized her sister's last dream and published her novels, which sold better than her previous novels, but less than Austen's female contemporaries.[102] But today we do not read other female writers of her time as often and as passionately as we read Jane Austen, because she was able to portray, with a unique style, the English society of her time, together with the universal human feelings and behaviour.

[99] Cf. J. Fergus, *The Professional Woman Writer*, cit., p. 15.
[100] Cf. Ivi, p. 17.
[101] Cf. Ivi, p. 19.
[102] Cf. Ivi, pp. 27-28.

Bibliography

Primary sources

J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* [1818], ed. M. Butler, London, Penguin, 2003.

W. Scott, *Waverley* [1814], ed. C. Lamont, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

C. Smith, *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* [1788], ed. Z. Fairbairns, London, Pandora, Pandora Press, 1987.

H. Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* [1771], ed. B. Vickers, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

H. Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* [1764], ed. N. Groom, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014.

S. Richardson, *Clarissa or, the History of a Young Lady* [1747-8], ed. A. Ross, London, London, Penguin, 1985.

M. Cervantes, *Don Quijote de la Mancha* [1605], ed. M. de Riquer, Barcelona, Editorial Juventud, 2005.

Secondary sources

Books

H. S. Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels. The Fabric of Dialogue*, S.l., Archon, 1967.

C. N. L. Brooke, *Jane Austen. Illusion and Reality*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1999.

J. P. Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels. Social Change and Literary Form*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979.

M. Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1975.

E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. With an Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste; and Several other Additions*, London, 1798.

F. W. Cornish, *Jane Austen*, London, Macmillan, 1913.

J. Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel. 'Northanger Abbey', 'Sense and Sensibility' and 'Pride and Prejudice'*, London, Macmillan, 1985.

Y. Gooneratne, *Jane Austen*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970.

J. Hardy, *Jane Austen's Heroines. Intimacy in Human Relationships*, London, Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1984.

R. P. Irvine, *Jane Austen*, London, Routledge, 2005.

C. L. Johnson, *Jane Austen. Women, Politics and the Novel*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1988.

M. Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, Brighton, Harvester, 1986.

D. Mansell, *The Novels of Jane Austen. An Interpretation*, London, Macmillan, 1974.

F. Moretti, *Il romanzo di formazione*, Torino, Einaudi, 1999.

B. C. Southam ed., *Jane Austen. 'Northanger Abbey', and 'Persuasion'. A Casebook*, Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1976.

T. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1986.

C. Tomalin, *Jane Austen. A life*, London, Penguin, 2000.

M. Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

T. G. Wallace, *Jane Austen and Narrative Authority*, Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1995.

M. Williams, *Jane Austen. Six Novels and Their Methods*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1986.

T. Winnifrith, *Fallen Women in the Nineteenth-century Novel*, Basingstoke, MacMillan St. Martin's, 1994.

Essays

L. Braudy, *The Form of the Sentimental Novel*, "Novel: A Forum on Fiction", vol. 7, no. 1, 1973, pp. 5–13.

L.W. Brown, *Jane Austen and the Feminist Tradition*, "Nineteenth-Century Fiction", vol. 28, no. 3, 1973, pp. 321–338.

R. M. Brownstein, '*Northanger Abbey', 'Sense and Sensibility', 'Pride and Prejudice*' in Copeland, E., and McMaster, J., eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 32-58.

A. H. Ehrenpreis, *Northanger Abbey: Jane Austen and Charlotte Smith*, "Nineteenth-Century Fiction", vol. 25, no. 3, 1970, pp. 343–348.

G. E. Haggerty, *Fact and Fancy in the Gothic Novel*, "Nineteenth-Century Fiction", vol. 39, no. 4, 1985, pp. 379–391.

I. Grundy, *Jane Austen and Literary Traditions* in Copeland, E., and McMaster, J., eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 189- 210.

G. Levine, *Translating the Monstrous: 'Northanger Abbey'*, "Nineteenth-Century Fiction", vol. 30, no. 3, 1975, pp. 335–350.

A. D. McKillop, *Critical Realism in Northanger Abbey*, in Watt, I., ed, *Jane Austen. A Collection of Critical Essays*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall International, 1986, pp. 52-61.

N. Shaw, *Free Indirect Speech and Jane Austen's 1816 Revision of Northanger Abbey*, "Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900", vol. 30, no. 4, 1990, pp. 591–601.

Background studies

Books

N. Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers. Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1984.

R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress. Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade*, London, Macmillan, 1974.

N. Holland, *5 Readers Reading*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1975.

N. Holland *Poems in Person. An Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Literature*, New York, Norton, 1975.

R. Porter, *Enlightenment. Britain and the Creation of the Modern World*, London, Penguin Books, 2000.

D. Punter, *The Literature of Terror. A History of Gothic Fiction from 1765 to the Present Day*, Harlow, Longman, 1996.

Essays

M. Hannoosh, *The Reflexive Function of Parody*, "Comparative Literature", vol. 41, no. 2, 1989, pp. 113–127.

S. Keen, *Readers' Temperaments and Fictional Character*, "New Literary History", vol. 42, no. 2, 2011, pp. 295–314.