



Jane Austen's *Northanger*
Abbey

A Mock-Gothic Romp through Regency England

Jane Austen, 1775-1817



Thwarted Love



Early Literary Efforts

- *Elinor and Mariann*, commenced 1796
- *Susan*, commenced 1798
- *First Impressions*, commenced 1799

Publication History of *Northanger Abbey*

- Third full-length novel completed (1803)
- First novel sold (for ten pounds to an apparently inept publisher in 1803)
- Returned to Austen (for the same sum) in 1816
- Revised prior to her death in 1817
- Last novel published in a single volume with *Persuasion* (1817)

The Novel in Regency England

- Perceived as an inferior form of writing
- Largely consumed by women
- Considered “dangerous” or “scandalous”

The Gothic Novel

- Generally considered to have originated with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)
- The genre reached wild popularity with Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolfo* (1794)
- And there was the rather off-color hit, *The Monk*, by Matthew Gregory Lewis (1796)
- *The Monk* inspired Radcliffe's final novel, *The Italian* (1797)

Characteristics of the Genre of the Gothic Novel

- In Austen's time, Ann Radcliffe was the most popular Gothic novelist among the English reading public
- Key elements of her books:
 - "Supernatural" events explained by natural causes
 - Innocent, helpless heroine (annoyingly virtuous)
 - Brooding villain
 - Terror and mystery
 - Crumbling castles, locked rooms, unexplained events
 - Ultimate salvation of heroine by dashing hero

The Gothic Novel and English Society

- Although bestsellers, Radcliffe's novels were considered "light" or "sensational" fiction and derided by the more educated classes in England
- At best, Gothic novels were a "distraction." At worst, they were considered "dangerous," particularly for young women
- Austen's well-educated family read and critiqued the melodramatic nature of these novels

Satire and the Gothic Novel

- Austen's comic genius found a wealth of material in the popularity of the Gothic novel
- Her propensity to mock both young women and young men of the day was fueled by the way that many young people perceived themselves as characters in these novels
- The satiric novel provided her the opportunity to sharpen her social commentary skills

Overview of *Northanger Abbey*

- Catherine Morland (Quixote-like, periodically pretty heroine)
- James Morland (Catherine's brother)
- Mr. and Mrs. Allen (Catherine's hosts in Bath)
- Isabella Thorpe (Frivolous and dangerously wanton young lady, engaged to Catherine's brother)
- John Thorpe (Isabella's irritating brother, has a penchant for Catherine)
- Henry Tilney (Catherine's love interest, inhabitant of Northanger Abbey)
- Frederick Tilney (Henry's older brother and a consummate flirt)
- General Tilney (Henry's father, assumed to be the Gothic villain)

“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.”

Character Pairings

- Catherine and General Tilney
- John Thorpe and Mrs. Allen
- Isabella Thorpe and Frederick Tilney
- Eleanor and Henry Tilney