

NORTHANGER ABBEY: All Equally Against Her

Northanger Abbey is a radical's attack on the extremely popular Gothic mysteries of the time, particularly *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Mrs. Radcliffe. The popularity of Mrs. Radcliffe must have been a threat to a serious artist like Jane Austen and she felt it strongly. In *Northanger Abbey* there are brief excursions into literary comment, that appear to indicate a natural desire of Jane Austen to make her way as a writer. It does not please Jane Austen that a young lady might be ashamed to be seen reading a novel but would proudly show herself with a copy of *Spectator*. An engaging story of human beings in pursuit of love, money and pleasure, *Northanger Abbey* begins with Catherine Morland, the heroine's visit to Bath. Bath represents the very opening of independent life for Catherine. We are at once struck by the immediate intensity of Catherine's wish to become engaged to Henry Tilney, the hero of the piece. Elements of radicalism in Austen are explicit in her dealing with the actions and interactions among different characters in the novel. More breathlessly reckless is the engagement of Isabella Thorpe and Catherine's brother, James Morland. Jane Austen, unmarried herself knew the inglorious fervour of these girls in

pursuit of a husband. There is a suggestive edge of degradation in the miserable impatience. Isabella Thorpe is a characterization of considerable interest. She has an ongoing vigour and sustaining ambition and a pure purposefulness that daze Catherine. Isabella's heartless self-interest does not really make a villain of her. In fact, she is hardened by her lack of money and the necessity to find a husband to make up for the lack. General Tilney invites Catherine to visit Northanger Abbey. This invitation, however, is the useful vehicle in which the action of the novel moves forward. But one thing that Jane Austen makes us understand is Catherine's middling charms and prospects that make her an unlikely candidate for the General's dreams for his son. This also results in the discovery of cold-heartedness, snobbery and down right meanness. Revelations of human perfidy are particularly startling in *Northanger Abbey*.

Jane Austen hinges her novel upon love of money or in a different way, greed. Truly, she knew, as we know now, money precedes even the reverence for social position. It is the very essence of love in many instances and plays its part in the most natural and pure affections. Isabella Thorpe's engagement to Catherine's brother provides a vivid

instance of the power of money to create or destroy love. When the financial arrangements and expectations are announced by the young man's father, the disappointment of Isabella and her mother is immediately clear. The mother and the daughter make the usual empty protestations of gratitude but the very words reveal them as ungrateful, greedy and completely contemptible in their lack of appreciation for the kindness of the father. 'Every body has a right to do what they like with their own money', says Isabella implying that the Reverend Moorland might have endowed more generously if he had wished. It is not long after, of course, that further proof of Isabella's lack of feeling is provided by the news that she has taken up an excited flirtation with Captain Tilney, the brother of Henry. She sees this, we guess, as a social and financial improvement but she does not realize that Captain Tilney is also unable to love, or at least to marry, without money and would never take seriously a penniless girl like herself.

Any way, the rejection of the standard notions of femininity is evident in the early chapters of **Northanger Abbey** where the author in mock despair laments that Catherine Morland, who preferred rough boy's games to elegant

occupations such as watering a rose-bush or feeding a canary, was quite unsuited to the role of heroine, 'She was moreover noisy and wild, hated confinement and cleanliness, and nothing so well in the world as rolling down the green slope at the back of the house' (2). As if this was not enough, when the man she thinks she is in love with fails to show up at a ball, the disappointed Catherine returns home not to weep or to toss sleeplessly in bed, but instead to 'appease' her 'extraordinary hunger' and then to fall asleep for nine solid hours. Her physical energy and spontaneity provide a contrast with Isabella Thorpe, the arch and affected husband-hunter, who perfectly fitted the conventional role-model of a feminine woman as well as the fictional stereotype of a woman of sensibility.

John Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*, a callow braggart, declares with indignation, 'I never read novels; I have something else to do' (31) and ridicules Fanny Burney without having read her. On the other hand, most of Jane Austen's heroines and other positive characters seem to be avid readers. Catherine Morland, initially apologetic about her taste for novels, is pleasantly surprised that an educated man such as Henry Tilney showed share her enthusiasm. Jane Austen's double-edged defence of the novel

in chapter 5 of **Northanger Abbey** is provoked by attitudes such as these. In this rare authorial intrusion she demands a better deal for the novel as a genre and attacks hypocritical people who secretly read what they publicly condemn. But in the same novel (**Northanger Abbey**) she is also able to establish a parodic or ironic relationship with a literary tradition she professes to admire and this is perfectly illustrated in **Northanger Abbey** where a skillful balance is maintained between enthusiastic support for the new genre and an awareness of its sentimental excesses. Jane Austen praises the novel's delineation of the varieties of human nature, its humour, the concreteness of its language and its realism. The novelist herself was an ardent but critical reader of the novels.

Perhaps it was fortunate for Jane Austen that she preferred to conform to the outer framework of the convention and regard the post--nuptial life of a woman as strictly outside her purview. Her radical vision of life would have found it difficult to reconcile a description of the heroine's married life with the demands of fiction. Her playful subversion of some of the conventions of the popular novel in **Northanger Abbey** resulted in the non-publication of the manuscript in her lifetime, even though

a publisher had paid for it. Whatever might have been her fictional stand on marriage as a happy ending, one gleans from her letters her misgivings on the subject in real life. She wrote to her favourite niece, Fanny in 1817: 'Oh what a loss it will be when you are married. You are too agreeable in your single state, too agreeable as a niece: I shall hate you, when you delicious play of mind is all settled down into conjugal and maternal affection' (L 18).

Although not explicitly stated, and perhaps not consciously intended either, in **Northanger Abbey** the same loss can be perceived in the transformation of the high spirited Catherine Morland of the early chapters into the subdued and chastened heroine of the concluding pages. The boisterous young girl, who 'hated confinement and cleanliness' is changed into a creature inhabiting enclosed space, who reads not romances but moral essays 'appropriate to her silence and sadness' and the wildness of whose imagination has been suitably controlled. Even if we grant that such change is in any case inevitable because adulthood for woman is a fall from freedom, marriage nevertheless intensifies the setting of boundaries and imposition of socially determined roles.

However, the process of self-definition for a heroine often includes at least one refusal for a marriage proposal, a plot-strategy that persisted. This can be read as a symbolic assertion of a woman's will in a society where the ideology of capitalism sanctioned individual (male) enterprise in the wider world, but efforts were still being made to retain the old power structure within the orbit of the home. Some women writers covertly challenged the dual values and tried to make the voice of the female individual heard. But as women their heroines were still bereft of political or economic power; the only sphere in which they could exercise a semblance of choice was in the arena of marriage. Even then as in a country-dance which Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* calls an emblem of marriage, only the male could really choose his partner: 'You will allow that in both (a country dance and matrimony) man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal' (57).

In the novel under discussion Jane Austen is essentially radical in her approach to the heroine for investing the countries outside England with romance and exaggerated charm on the one hand and sinister horror of untold vices on the other. Henry Tilney's voice 'Remember that we are

English, that we are Christians' (159) reminds that Jane Austen's fictional world is firmly located in south of England. Just as 'Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country, and even of that, if hard pressed, would have yielded the northern and western extremists' (161), Jane Austen dared not expand her actual fictional space beyond a dozen countries in the southern England of which she had first hand experience, even though her knowledge and interest extended to areas far outside this empirical boundary. The England she really knew and valued was largely agrarian, governed in a paternalistic fashion by the land owning gentry and aristocracy. In her novels she seldom ventures beyond the pastoral south of England to the industrializing north. If her advice to her niece Anna against taking her fiction characters out of England is any indication, Jane Austen believed that a writer ought to stay within the territory she fully knew. The territory Jane Austen knew consisted of self-sufficient rural units with their own church, shops and apothecary, and presiding over these communities, a few land owning families with large and comfortable family seats, symbolic of traditional English society. In **Northanger Abbey** the great mansion Northanger Abbey is not at the centre of the narrative but

the heroine finds her way to it at the end of the narrative.

It is well known that Jane Austen herself was an eager and unashamed reader of novels. Her letters mention scores of books not only by well-known writers but also by many lesser writers. In **Northanger Abbey** books by different authors provided the staple diet of young girls like Isabella Thorpe and Catherine Morland. That Jane Austen was capable of laughing at the novels she herself read with relish, is seen in the very novel under our present discussion where the defence of the novel in the famous 5th chapter is undercut in the succeeding chapter by an exchange between two giddy girls about their favourite reading; 'But my dearest Catherine what have you been doing with yourself all this morning? Have you gone with Udolpho? 'Yes I have been reading it ever since I woke ... I should like to spend my whole life in reading it' (23).

The tongue-in-check relationship between the defence of the 'genius, wit and taste' of the maligned company of novelists in chapter 5 and the gushing sensationalism of the conversation in chapter 6 is typical of the double-edged mirth of **Northanger Abbey**. Not all the novels written or

read in Jane Austen's time can have displayed 'the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour' (24), but, as some one involved in the enterprise of writing and reading novels, Jane Austen had no patience with those who affected to despise them.

The nature of the books consumed of course, determines the personality of Austen's heroines. In *Northanger Abbey* Catherine Morland is shown to be 'in training for a heroine'. Her reading includes: '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' (3). The list includes Shakespeare, Pope, Gray and Thompson among others. The heroine for whose role Catherine is training herself belongs to the genre of popular romance but, as the novel progresses 'the anxieties of common life began;...to a proceed to the alarm of romance' (183). Teaching her that life has the tendency to overflow fictional boundaries, Catherine's education is best described in Tony Tanner's words: 'One of the things she has to learn is to break out of quotations as it were, and discover the complex.

Differences (as well as the complex connections) between reading a book and reading the world' (1986,189).

Northanger Abbey is in many ways a novel about novels, because books and life are here intertwined in a double relationship. The novel traces Catherine's progress from the illusions created by fiction to the clear vision of reality. As a true radical, Jane Austen deliberately wanted to establish her view that when women folk was discouraged in reading novels, the heroines in her novels are shown prone to reading the 'forbidden' things. Again, the marks of shift or transition are further prominent in Jane Austen as **Northanger Abbey** upholds the changing relationship between life and art. Tilney and Catherine have read the same books but unlike Tilney who has the ability to see through the artifice of what he enjoys, Catherine confuses the world she inhabits. She has to play a double role in the novel—the innocent reader of Gothic novels who inflates life with the extravagance of fiction, and the heroine of a mock-romantic novel that parodies fictional conventions of love, separation and marriage as in the following reflection by Catherine:

Charming, as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland countries of England, was to be looked for. Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine forests and vices, they might give a faithful delineation (160).

Though Catherine is seen here as gradually discovering the gap between books and life, the author deliberately subverts the process by showing her as naively identifying England with normalcy—obviously under the tutelage of Henry Tilney, who has held forth on this subject a page earlier—'Remember that we are English, that we are Christians' (159). In the present novel the business of puncturing the emotional rhetoric of the romantic novel is carried out at various novels. When the hero and heroine finally unite at the end, this is not the triumph of ecstatic mutual passions or of the man's undying love for the woman, but something so prosaic as to reverse all romantic expectations: 'It is a new circumstance in romance I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of a heroine's dignity' (198). The shift from romance to realism suits Jane Austen's inverted radical mode. From the spirited

defence of the novel in the early part till the happy ending, **Northanger Abbey** contains numerous direct, oblique, and concealed arguments about the complex relationship between life and art, making it the most self-reflexive of Jane Austen's novels. Considered from Jane Austen's traits of radicalism **Northanger Abbey** delights us by its irreverence towards conventions and authority. Once again, the rejection of the standard notions of femininity is clearly seen in the early chapter of this novel **Northanger Abbey**, where Jane Austen in mock despair refers to the fact that Catherine Morland, who preferred 'rough boy's games' to elegant occupations such as watering a rose-bush or feeding a canary was quite unsuited to the role of a heroine. Jane Austen's rejection of the excessive emotionalism was undoubtedly a reactionary stand. Her novels exemplify the author's refusal to eroticize female inanimation and promote the cult--vulnerability. She insisted on strength, rationality and autonomy in woman. In her bid to do this she, no doubt, came out a radical. Moreover, when most of her contemporary writers stressed on the need for female debility, it was Jane Austen who moved apart with her marks of transitionalism by way of her attaching importance to the need for manly qualities in her heroines.

In *Northanger Abbey*, a radical as Jane Austen is, she handles the conventional subject matter in a consistently critical manner. Ideologically, it is a very clear statement of the anti-Jacobin position and the novel is distinctive for the virtuosity with which it handles familiar clichés of the type. Very pleasing, for example, is the cleverly oblique presentation of the subject under attack. Most anti-Jacobin novels include characters who profess the new ideology, and are never tired of canvassing it in conversation. In *Northanger Abbey* there is no overtly partisan talk at all--'By an easy transition Henry found himself arrived at politics; and from politics, it was an easy step to silence' (111). Jane Austen develops, perhaps from the prototypes the Stanleys in *Catherine*, her version of the revolutionary character, the man or woman who by acting on a system of selfishness, threatens friends of more orthodox principles. Again, ultimately, through cold-blooded cynicism in relation to the key social institution of marriage, human happiness is threatened at a very fundamental level. Isabella Thorpe, worldly, opportunist, bent on self-gratification, is one of a series of dangerous women created by Jane Austen. Lucy Steele, Lady Susan, Mary Crawford, all like Isabella pursue the modern creed of

self, and as much are Jane Austen's reinterpretation of a standard figure of the period, the desirable, amoral woman whose activities threaten manners and morals. Moreover, in *Northanger Abbey*, the opportunities find allies where they should properly be most vigorously opposed—among those who uphold only the forms and not the essence, of orthodoxy. The pompous but mercenary General is as much implicated as John Thorpe in the pursuit of Catherine's mythical fortune. In the same vein, Henry and Mary Crawford meet no resistance, but encouragement when they threaten to introduce anarchy into Mr. Rushworth's ancestral estate. Inheriting a set of radical traits and creating in her fictions the revolutionary villain, Jane Austen produces more natural equivalent as well. Her villains are not only better art than her rivals. They are also better propaganda. The tendency among the routine anti-Jacobins was to create Satanic demon-villains who were dangerously close in the temper of the times to being heroes as has been observed by Dr. Marilyn Butler in her celebrated book *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*. Jane Austen's selfish fictional characters are consistently smaller and meaner than their orthodox opponents, the heroines. They are restricted within the bounds of their own being and their hearts and minds are impoverished.

Northanger Abbey is very much a novel and succeeds in creating and maintaining an autonomous fictional world. The story employs the common novelist's fantasy of the poor girl who meets, after a series of vicissitudes and marries the rich young man. Catherine, the heroine invites and keeps our sympathy and she makes us feel that what happens to her matters to us. No wonder, that in the famous passage in chapter 5 in the novel Jane Austen radically refuses to condemn the novel; for **Northanger Abbey** is quite as much a novel as *Udolpho* is. It is perhaps because Catherine is so pleasing, even when she blunders that some recent critics have felt that Jane Austen ends **Northanger Abbey** by reversing its whole moral tendency; that she turns her look on the good sense advocated by Henry Tilney and at least in part vindicates Catherine's intuition. The central piece of evidence cited is that the General turns Catherine out of *Northanger abbey*, and thus proves to be a villain after all. This action of the General is the result of the ill-tempered pique of a snobbish man who has just discovered that Catherine is a person of no social account. There is plenty of evidence through out the novel that Henry and Eleanor are aware of their father's bad temper, as well as of his snobbery and formality. Eleanor's instant obedience

on all occasions, for example, suggests that she has learnt to fear the General's anger. Again, after Catherine returns home, her romantic feelings are opposed to Mrs. Morland's worthy moralizing and here at least Jane Austen appears to be on Catherine's side: 'There was a great deal of good sense in all these; but there are some situations of the human mind in which good sense has very little power: and Catherine's feelings contradicted almost every position her mother advanced' (241).

Northanger Abbey subjects the conventional matter of the mere subjective genre to constantly critical handling. Ideologically, it is a very clear statement of the anti-Jacobin position though, compared with other anti-Jacobin novels, it is distinctive for the virtuosity with which it handles familiar clichés of the type. Very pleasing for example, is the cleverly oblique presentation of the subject under attack. Austen's stern criticism of the society in which she lived is included in the present novel. In this novel Henry Tilney has been made to show his superiority by responding to Radcliffe's powers of invention and imagination without supposing that **The Mysteries of Udolpho** is an imitation of life. Catherine also shows her responsiveness but is required to make a

childish confusion of life and art. Jane Austen then through her radical viewpoint shows that there is a further truth which neither the hero nor the heroine has quite realized.

A close examination of the novel reveals to us the fact in the manners set forth as follows: First, Catherine, the heroine, though young and full of simplicity, has been made the subject of absurd delusion, consequent upon her reading of romantic novels when she has much common sense. Her errors are not likely to be long lasting, for her own abilities, with a little experience are bound to correct them. Secondly, the hero, Henry Tilney, although a clergyman is not shown as always superior in his judgments. He has the sense to value novels, saying in reply to Catherine's suggestion that 'Gentlemen read better books. The person, be it gentleman or lady, who had not pleasure in a good novel must be intolerably stupid' (21). He knows how to admire and how to read Anne Radcliffe 'I have read all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and most of them with great pleasure. The Mysteries of Udolpho. When I had once begun it, I could not lay down again---I remember finishing it in two days, my hair standing on end the whole time' (106).

Thirdly, although the heroine's delusions about General Tilney and the 'forbidden gallery' at Northanger are exposed as absurd, they lead the reader to something more substantial. Austen handles this episode in such a manner as to make us see that the heroine learns that her romantic notions are all mistaken and the world of the every day is better ordered than that of imagination. Catherine accepts the truth of things as Henry Tilney puts them to her and is bitterly ashamed of herself for having indulged in wild fantasies about the General's conduct to his late wife. Henry Tilney's account of his mother's life and death makes it clear that she did suffer greatly during her years as the General's wife. His abstract arguments in support of the idea that English wives in the Midland countries of England are protected by better laws and more humane customs than those to be found in Mrs. Radcliffe's Alps and Pyrennes raise doubts in the intelligent reader's mind. The arguments of course, satisfy Catherine. Dismissing her dreadful suspicions, Henry says,

What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we English that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, 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 where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open? (159).

This is a powerful rejection of the Gothic fantasy of the wicked husband who secretly murders his wife, or locks her up for years on and in a turret, and Catherine on reflection, accepts it. There is, however, something really evil about the General and his wife had, in a sense, been imprisoned by her marriage to him. General Tilney is allowed by the laws of England and the manners of the age to exert near absolute power over his wife and daughter, and he does so as an irrational tyrant. The 'laws of the land and the manners of the age' do little to protect the wife as an equal citizen. Jane Austen with the help of her radical views on woman life and society stands apart as a writer of the time. In 1798, when Jane Austen began composing her **Northanger Abbey**, **The Mysteries of Udolpho** was probably the most widely read novel in Europe. By her daring effort to parody the most famous female

novelist of the age, Austen performed the role of a radical in the real sense. In her novel Jane Austen repeatedly sets up a superficial resemblance between her own fiction and Radcliffe's only to revoke it with a simple yet devastating shift in context. *Udolpho's* romantic situations are reconstituted in the comically unromantic perspective of 'the midland countries of England'. By this method of ironic dislocation, Austen both acknowledges her powerful precursor and signaled her separation from her. Examples of this recall-and-displace technique occur throughout *Northanger Abbey*. Whereas *Udolpho* opens with Emily, St. Aubert accompanying her mysteriously ailing father, *Northanger Abbey* in immediate and deflating contrast opens with Catherine Morland accompanying the neighbours Mr. And Mrs. Allen to the mundane environs of Bath, where Mr. Allen has been ordered for the benefit of his 'gouty constitution'. Again, most blatantly and ridiculously in each of the instances incorporated into the novel Austen makes clear the sort of novelist she is not going to be. The events of ordinary life, with their special admixture of joy and fiasco, are to be the subject of her fiction not the sensational doings of romance. The true climax of *Northanger Abbey* comes about not when Catherine realises that she has mistaken about General Tilney but it is when

she realises that he is still a man capable of 'behaving neither honourably nor feelingly'. She comes to such an estimate when she has been rudely expelled from Northanger Abbey. At this juncture, Catherine finally grasps painfully what she has in fact half known all along: 'That in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character or magnified his cruelty' (201).

Austen repeatedly connects Catherine Morland's failure to think with the fact that she has never been taught to think. The problem is not individual incapacity but lack of education. Catherine has been made stupid by a society, which fails to honour the intelligence of its female members. 'In justice to man', the narrator observes, 'though to the larger and more trifling part of the sex, imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms, there is a portion of them too reasonable and too well informed themselves to desire anything more in woman than ignorance' (86).

For Wollstonecraft, the condition 'imbecility' of women was self-perpetuating since solely their mothers or other women educated most girls; the pattern of female folly reproduced

itself over generations. Few women had the ability to train their daughters in the ways of logical reasoning. Catherine's situation has been as such under the condition just mentioned. Her mother, to whom we learn her education has been solely entrusted, is no intellectual model; indeed, like Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Morland is one of the more oblivious parents to be found in Austen's fictions. Preoccupied with the physical burdens of motherhood, she is herself too distracted to instill in her daughter any sense of the value of hard won knowledge. Thus Catherine's failure to learn to play the spinet at an early age, Mrs. Morland, we are told, 'insist on her daughters being accomplished in spite of incapacity or distaste' (2).

For Catherine, however, enlightenment comes about in part through the tactful ministrations of Henry Tilney. His comments are almost always interestingly double-edged. He is an admirer of female understanding, what he regrets is that women do not take their own intelligence seriously enough--'nature has given them so much, that they never find it necessary to use more than half' (89). In the scene of Catherine's lonely home coming after the expulsion from Northanger Abbey, Austen allegorizes the coming of a woman into a sense of her own cognitive and ethical powers.

Neither parent, nor lover nor friend can guide her now. She has to decide for herself the meaning of the General's behaviour. Yet she meets the challenge triumphantly. Catherine Morland is, however, a new kind of heroine in English literature: a thinking woman's heroine. With Henry's encouragement she makes her way out of mental slavishness towards a kind of liberation. The marriage of Henry and Catherine at the end of the novel delights us because both parties have shown themselves to advantage. Henry, by choosing Catherine, dissociates himself from the self-serving patriarchy so repellently embodied by his father. Catherine, by choosing Henry, retains her newly discovered intellectual freedom. By loving the person who refuses to condescend to her, she demonstrates joyfully that condescension is no longer necessary.

The idea just hinted at, implies that a certain strengthening awareness can be passed from woman to woman—through the genre of the novel itself. A novelist of Jane Austen's rank with the ability to express her own 'powers of mind' acts as a beacon to her female readers in particular and all her readers in general. This again, is an inspiring reminder that women as well as men can achieve and bear witness to the 'most through knowledge of human

nature'. With her traits of a radical, Jane Austen invites us to exert our power of mind and thereby affirms her faith in us to be the appreciators of her literary art composed at a period when an old century was passing into the new one.

Within her extremely limited world, Jane Austen succeeds admirably in exposing the social order of her time. As a radical she felt that she had a place in society. She might introduce unpleasant people into her stories but she confidently exposed them to a public opinion that condemned them. Instead of reproducing the Gothic types of character and situation in **Northanger Abbey** she presents their anti-types in the actual world and organizes the types into a domestic narrative. The aim herein is to write simultaneously a Gothic novel and a realistic one, and to gain and keep to reader's acceptance of the latter while providing that the former is false and absurd. **Northanger Abbey** is a specimen of Austen's shifting of grounds. The transition is in respect of atmosphere rather than of character or motive. Austen in this novel most essentially sets up her own domestic anti-type. In the Radcliffean novel the heroine's consciousness or sensibility is the centre of action but in **Northanger Abbey** the heroine's

function is doubled with the doubling of the action. There is irony even in its internal point of view in the fact that its two worlds must originate, converge and be finally discriminated in the limited consciousness of that most ingenuous and domestic heroine, Catherine Morland. At the outset, nobody but the author knows that Catherine is a Gothic heroine: 'No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be a heroine. ... had a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour, dark, lank hair and strong features' (13).

As she grows up and becomes 'almost pretty' she begins to occupy, without yet being aware of it, her role. Catherine's luck changes when Mr. And Mrs. Allen, a childless couple in the village, invite her to accompany them to Bath. Jane Austen never lets us doubt her dual intention in the narrative. She places before us both what a character should be if he were to conform to the Gothic mode and what he really is. Catherine, uninstructed by her mother Isabella Morland is shown as incapable of making her own illusory world but the author comes forward to help her. Mrs. Allen appears on the scene. She is neither wicked nor vigilant. She is content to let Catherine walk and visit where she pleases. In due course, Catherine meets

Henry Tilney, a clergyman 'of a very respectable family in Gloucestershire' (30). It soon becomes apparent that Henry fancies himself as an anti-hero and provides a non-committal running ironic commentary on the hypocrisy of social conventions in tune with Jane Austen's traits of radicalism. Henry prides himself on his worldliness and his lack of sentimentality. He is firmly articulate about the wearing qualities of women's clothes and of their letters, about imprecision of language, about dancing and marriage, about the beauties of landscape. He is always informed and confident. His role in Catherine's unsentimental education is clear. To become her chief mentor, all he needs beyond his personality is to be attracted by her. Jane Austen herself, having made Catherine impeccably ignorant, guarantees that much, '... in justice to men...imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their of their personal charms' (111).

It is typical of the explicitly radical ground of Jane Austen's view in **Northanger Abbey** that Catherine seems, not a hallucinated puppet but a credibly impressionable and ingenuous young girl with enough common sense. Catherine finds her villains, not simply because she is looking for them but because the author finds villains in actual life

as there are 'voluntary spies' to be found 'every where'. At Bath Jane Austen finds very satisfactory counterparts of malice, hypocrisy, and treachery and general wickedness. She just diminishes the scale to demonstrate what villainy is like when transferred to the every day middle class social world. We can never believe that Catherine ever loses vigilant sight of her creator. She is the specific point of Austen's attack on romantic love. Catherine, having fallen in love, perversely fails to lose either appetite or sleep; on the contrary, her reaction takes the form of an 'Extraordinary hunger and when that was appeased, changed into an earnest longing to be in bed... there she immediately fell into a sound sleep which lasted nine hours' (60). Anyway, she is the centre of action. She is credible enough and functions amusingly in her role. But she, in due course, turns herself up as a symbol of the author's rejection of the romantic realm, to assert the claim of personal feeling. Jane Austen's rejection of romance develops into a rejection of personality—whatever value or autonomous feeling the action even begins to suggest for Catherine, is immediately brought to the author's radical outlook. Jane Austen's radicalism can be traced in her liking for a sort of detachment. This detachment lies not in the behaviour of her characters but

in her own explicit intrusions into the theme of the novel as it is in her treatment of Catherine. Her attack is directed against the strength of the object--the flimsy and false-fronted Gothic world. She over reaches into her own realistic world and shakes that also, dangerously. In *Norhanger Abbey* we can see how she disposes of Catherine in love and in the disappointments of love as well. In her friendship with Isabella, Catherine is just as severely treated: the two girls supply, 'the place of many ideas by a squeeze of the hand or a smile of affection' (52).

As a radical, Jane Austen took an exception to social cruelty. It is a very common theme in her novels. Selfishness is one of the common human feelings and Austen treats this aspect vehemently because selfishness inflicts pain upon helpless persons. She remains alive to the suffering, to the wounds of indifference and cruelty. Greed and family pride were more readily displayed in Jane Austen's day than in our own. Her fictional characters are interesting and lifelike and through them she projects her view of life and society at large. In *Northanger Abbey*, Henry Tilney is a very successful creation. He is in some sense a preview of Mr. Knightley in *Emma*. Henry is spared the acquisitive meanness of his father. But he is

sufficiently wordly to hold his own in the society around him. In Jane Austen we hardly expect the characters to escape their social destiny. Again, there is John Thorp, Isabella's brother, who is a liar and thoroughly disturbing young man. Thus, in furnishing different types of characters in the novels, Jane Austen comes to establish herself not simply as a placid spinster writer but as one who has an insight into the variegated tastes and temperament of the people in society. Thereby she comes to be looked upon as a radical artist upholding the peculiarities of the people and the society of her time. We, the modern readers get a scope as well to examine the relevance of the aspects of the then people and society to our modern times. Besides this, in her novels there is also wit and balance and proportion and there is something else in the lines that speak of moral rebellion against the ways of the world testifying to her radicalism.

Change in the approach of and attitude to Jane Austen's handling the theme and structure in the novels speaks for her traits of transitionalism. This particular aspect is explicitly clear in **Northanger Abbey**. Although **Northanger Abbey** is often remembered for its sequence at the Abbey, when Catherine is led by her reading of (presumably) Mrs.

Radcliffe's novel into fantastic imaginings, the central impulse of *Northanger Abbey* and its serious achievement has nothing to do with burlesque. There is clearly a difference in Jane Austen's use of dialogue in the first volume and in the second. In the first, it is the reader alone, who is enlightened, by comparable dialogues between Catherine and the Thorpes, and Catherine and the Tilneys. During the same period the heroine neither learns to discriminate between her two groups of friends nor to be discriminating about them. Catherine returns from her walk with Henry Tilney and Eleanor nearly is enlightened as saying: 'It was no effort to Catherine to believe that Henry Tilney could never be wrong' (114). In the second volume the impact on Catherine of Henry's remarks and negatively of Isabella's letters, is far greater. Catherine is brought sharply to a sense of reality: 'The visions of romance were over and Catherine was completely awakened' (199). When she becomes more tranquil, Catherine continues soberly to recognize that 'it had been all a voluntary, self-created delusion' (199). This then, is the typical moment towards which all the Austen actions tend, the moment when a key character abandons her error and humbly submits to objective reality. We are shown in the present novel that Catherine has learnt a significant general rule that human nature is worse than

she first thought. Apart from her aberration over the General; she has successively overrated the Thorpes, Frederick Tilney and perhaps even Henry, with all the sentimentalist's optimism about human nature. Really speaking, *Northanger Abbey* succeeds in creating and maintaining an autonomous fictional world essentially fashioned after the viewpoint of an artist born in an age of transition. Again, insertion of the passage of 'a neighbourhood of voluntary spies' into Henry's speech is an attack on the meddling ways of Austen's contemporaries. The passage referred to also alludes to the spectre of violence. D. H. Harding's analysis of the passage is also worth mentioning. He argues that the reference to 'spies' with 'touch of paranoia' reveals some underlying tensions between Austen and the society in which she lived. While the novelist 'seems to be on perfectly good terms with the public she is addressing', she was, in fact, at odds with and critical towards that public. 'Those close to her' Harding contends 'did probe and pry into the affairs of others', and in that sense they spied. Austen's perception of her world is explicitly stated through different passages in *Northanger Abbey*. She comments on both fear and repression of her world in her characteristic way. Just as the French Revolution had a profound effect on English

social and political life, so did it permanently alter Austen's outlook. This again, is a testimony of her transitionalism that the present novel upholds.

Austen's radicalism also consists in her criticism of the importance given to clothes by the women. Her treatment of this theme is essentially related to that of female education; the false volumes that accompanied the female accomplishment encouraged girls—indeed, taught them to stress appearances. Allen in **Northanger Abbey** is an example of middle-aged woman who is empty headed and overtly concerned with appearances. She has 'the air of a gentle woman, a great deal of quiet, inactive good temper, and a trifling turn of mind***Dress was her passion' (20).

Another and wiser middle-aged woman in the same novel is Catherine's aunt, who tells her 'Dress is at all times a frivolous distinction, an excessive solitude about it often destroys its own aim' (73). Catherine is unable to follow this advice, lying awake at night thinking about a new gown. As if to drive home her point about clothes, such as that of Catherine's brother, would have been more successful, 'for man only can be aware of the insensibility of man towards a new gown' (74). What this sentence reveals is Austen's view that females' main reason for concerning

themselves so much with clothes is to please men and that they are mistaken in doing so. Men scarcely notice or care, women would be mortified if they knew, 'how little the heart of man is affected by what is costly or new in their attire' (74). Jane Austen clearly felt that gentle females cared too much about appearances and clothes, making them their own worst enemies, and she objected to the countless influences and pressures placed on girls to make attracting men their main goal in life. From beginning to end her novels are filled with flirtatious females, all of whom are flawed for that reason. Typically, they are vain, shallow, selfish and calculating. Accomplished young ladies whose main goal is to please men with skills and catch their attention with clothes do not develop their minds. Superficial and without mental resources, they are fated, once they achieve their objective of marriage, to a life of emptiness.

Jane Austen does not merely reflect the manners of the time in describing female life as she does both before marriage and in marriage but addresses herself to problems related to the position of women. She finds faults with certain female practices because of their effects on girls, the sad and pathetic results of which she illustrates through one

character after another in her novels. Trivial, cloth-conscious females are clearly viewed critically. Austen obviously considers the female penchant for fashions misdirected. A novelist, who presents female life in this way and at times comment on it, does not just reflect contemporary life and manners. She also thoughtfully and critically examines a social pattern that as a woman she finds unsatisfactory. To examine **Northanger Abbey** in respect of Jane Austen's radical outlook, her handling of Catherine Morland from a feminist viewpoint also needs a close observation. Catherine is looked upon as anti-Evelina type, although in a different sense. She is a burlesque of the innocent girl who enters the world, not just unaware of society's ways as Burney's heroine was but also 'her mind (was) about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is'-- (18). In creating such an anti-heroine, Austen makes her the intellectual inferior of the hero, Henry Tilney. Throughout **Northanger Abbey**, Henry is the voice of reason. Intelligent and well informed as Henry is, and superior in understanding to Catherine, he can be as mistaken as she. In correcting Catherine's errors and those of his sister Henry commits his own. Further, he does so condescendingly, as a male who looks down upon mentally deficient females.

Really speaking, *Northanger Abbey* is not a romance as much as anti-romance. Austen describes a hero and a heroine who fell in love but also deflates the conventions of falling in love. In concluding the novel she explains that Henry's affection for Catherine, having originated in gratitude, is a 'new circumstance I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity' (243). In another authorial intrusion that pokes fun at the lovers, Austen says, 'I fear to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity' (250).

Language is inflated for the same purpose, to amuse the reader, who is reminded of stock-passages in romantic fiction--'Catherine, wrapt in the contemplation of her own unutterable happiness scarcely opened her lips' (243). Austen burlesques the hero and the heroine in the novel and they are shown to overcome various obstacles while courting before their marriage. Austen parodies both situations by creating machinery that she sets before the hero and heroine and then, at the appropriate moment removes it. Her interest is not in tracing the development of a relationship that would lead to marriage, as much as

parodying the conventions of courting. To the extent that she describes the relationship between the hero and heroine, it hardly appears as an ideal preparation for marriage, at least from the female point of view. The hero's affection results from a pride that he feels over the heroine's partiality, his way of treating her reflects the superiority that he clearly assumes, and he marries her from a sense of honour as well as for love. The way that Austen continues to represent the female life in her novel, she simply strikes off in a new direction. Her stories move toward their marital conclusion more positively without the former ambivalence and uneasiness. Austen comes under the influence of the larger forces that were at work in English society--those stressing order, stability, continuity and individual duty and responsibility. Out of these changes came a different view of woman's life that the novelist hints at. Related to the changed view of the author a new type of heroine, more reserved, modest and gently as Catherine came into being in **Northanger Abbey**. Thus, the study of the novel in the perspective of Jane Austen's transitionalism and radicalism comes to the phase of its conclusion.