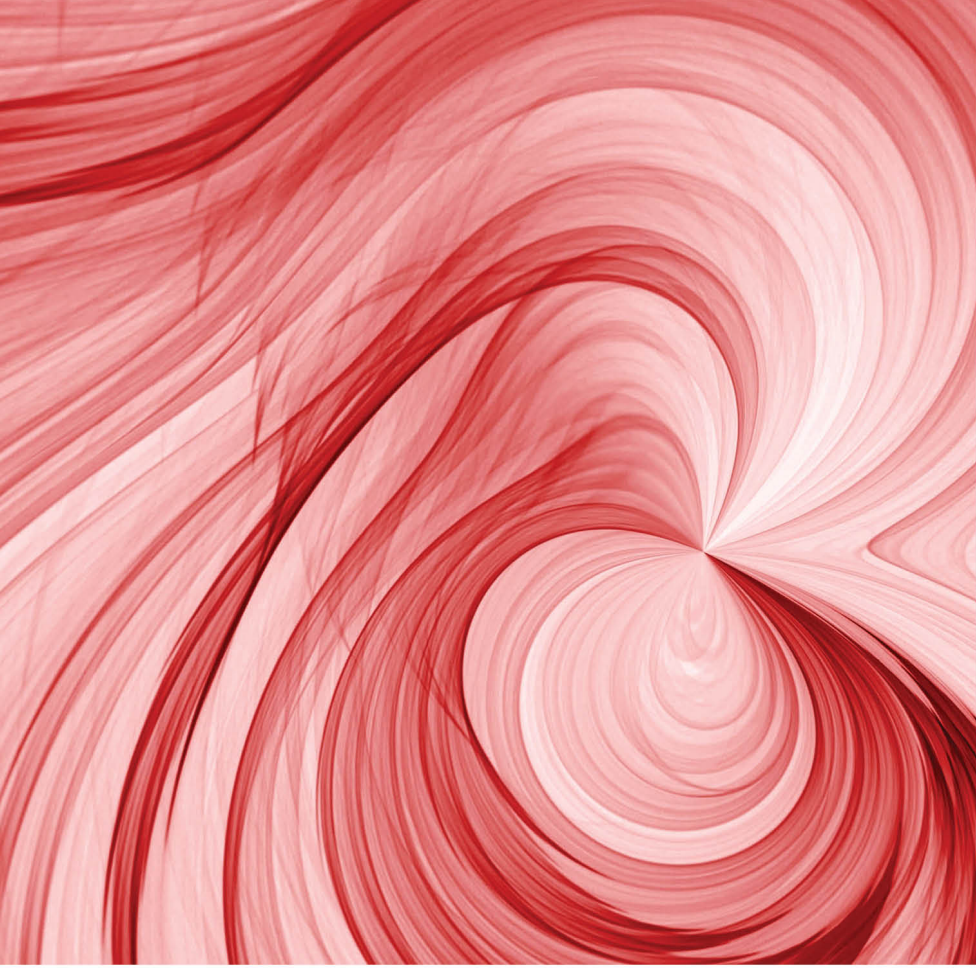

Jane Austen

Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sanditon

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NORTHANGER ABBEY, LADY SUSAN, THE WATSONS, SANDITON

JANE AUSTEN was born in 1775 in the village of Steventon, Hampshire, the daughter of an Anglican clergyman. The Austens were cultured but not at all rich, though one of Austen's brothers was adopted by a wealthy relative. Other brothers followed professional careers in the church, the navy, and banking. With the exception of two brief periods away at school, Austen and her elder sister Cassandra, her closest friend and confidante, were educated at home. Austen's earliest surviving work, written at Steventon whilst still in her teens, is dedicated to her family and close female friends. Between 1801 and 1809, her least productive period, Austen lived in Bath, where her father died in 1805, and in Southampton. In 1809, she moved with her mother, Cassandra, and their great friend Martha Lloyd to Chawton, Hampshire, her home until her death at Winchester in 1817. During this time, Austen published four of her major novels: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811); *Pride and Prejudice* (1813); *Mansfield Park* (1814); and *Emma* (1816), visiting London regularly to oversee their publication. *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were published posthumously in 1818.

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JANE AUSTEN

Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sanditon

Edited by
JAMES KINSLEY *and* JOHN DAVIE

With an Introduction and Notes by
CLAUDIA L. JOHNSON

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INTRODUCTION

Although virtually everyone considers Austen a very great writer, few think she particularly tried to be. In his 'Biographical Notice' about her, Henry Austen is at pains to praise his sister for being an 'unpretending' artist, one who achieved eminence without aspiring to it, and Henry James censures the same quality, calling Austen a 'homely songbird' who produced wonderful novels naturally and who was incurious about their properties.[1] Such misconceptions about Austen's stature and achievement as a novelist are still commonplace, and *Northanger Abbey*, her most youthful and in many ways her most brilliant novel, flies merrily in their face, at times inviting and at times daring us to pay close attention to the artistic positions and processes her other novels tend to relegate to the background. In the fifth chapter of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's narrator, having consigned her heroine to a morning of novel reading, intrudes upon the action and launches into a lively defence: 'Yes: novels,' she reiterates, with high-spirited defiance. Keenly aware that novels were thought to lack artistic merit and to be dangerous in their frivolity, she pointedly refuses to kowtow to such depreciation by inventing a heroine who demurs ' "I am no novel reader—I seldom look into novels" . . . "And what are you reading, Miss—?" "Oh! it is only a novel!" ' (pp. 23–4).

Only a novel? Such self-deprecation is 'common cant' and Austen has no part of it: 'I will not,' she states, '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.' Instead, Austen's narrator, with astonishing and unprecedented self-assurance, ridicules the literary establishment of reviewers and arbiters of taste who by complaining again and again about the 'trash with which the press now

[1] Henry Austen, 'Biographical Notice of the Author', *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion* (1818; rpt. in J. E. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen and Other Family Recollections*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)), 140; Henry James, 'The Lesson of Balzac' (1905), rpt. in B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage, 1870–1940*, ii (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 229–30.

groans'—a phrase as hackneyed then as it is now—show themselves duller than the novels they decry. As Austen sees it, *they*—and not novelists—are the ones who are deformed by 'pride, ignorance, or fashion'; they are the ones who are so clichéd and so meretricious that they 'eulogize' with 'a thousand pens' the 'nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England'; and their same thousand pens rhapsodize over anthologies that keep reprinting the same dozen lines from 'Milton, Pope, and Prior' and the same 'paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne', while disparaging with 'common cant' the original labours of novelists which (by marked contrast) have 'only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them' (pp. 23–4).

Only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them? Our entire understanding of *Northanger Abbey*—as well as Austen's other works—depends on the kind of attention we pay to the word 'only' seeded here and elsewhere. One of the most accepted but least examined tenets of Austenian criticism for the past century and a half has been that Austen—as an 'unpretending' novelist—is artistically and temperamentally committed to understatement, and that rather than cultivate stylistic and thematic boldness she opts to circumscribe her purview to include no more than (in her own words) '3 or 4 Families in a Country Village', to practise the miniaturist's craft on her 'little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour'.[2] Austen is thus in some legitimate and resonant sense an artist of 'only'—one who attempts to contain, delimit, modulate, and subtilize, and whose success makes the more expansive novels of her contemporaries seem excessive, vulgar, overstrained, and silly by (invidious) comparison.

Despite everything there is to recommend such a view—including Austen's own self-descriptions, facetious or not—*Northanger Abbey* requires us to relinquish it, for the novel is obviously bragging rather than demurring. It uses understatement (the heroine is reading *only* a novel) as a form of overstatement and aggrandizement (novels have *only* genius, wit, and taste to recommend them). The stakes involved in determining the uses to which Austen puts restraint and diminishment are enormous. *Northanger Abbey* is a novel about reading

[2] Letter of 9 Sept. 1814 (to her niece Anna); letter of 16 Dec. 1816 (to her nephew James Edward Austen).

novels in general and gothic novels in particular, and this mode of fiction, intensely popular during Austen's time, seems alien to Austen's methods and to her vision. In gothic novels, excess and overstatement are indulged in their darkest and most egregious forms: lustful, tyrannical, and rapacious fathers, corrupt monks, and other diabolical villains work their evil upon forlorn heroines far away from the reach of reason, restraint, or effectual aid, in secluded castles full of trap doors, hidden panels, dank dungeons, where storied spectres disclose in fragmentary pieces truths that can be neither fully spoken nor fully suppressed. Does Austen's celebrated understatement sabotage the highfalutin work of gothic novelists such as Horace Walpole, Monk Lewis, and most importantly Ann Radcliffe, or does it carry out that work of heightening and intensification, albeit in a roundabout way? When she extols novelists of manners, such as Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth, is she differentiating them from Ann Radcliffe? Or, is she grouping their novels (rife with gothic elements) alongside Radcliffe's, since it is Radcliffe, after all, who occasions this defence of novels—all novels, evidently, but especially recent ones by women? Is Austen possibly a gothic novelist herself? These questions are the more urgent because *Northanger Abbey*, under the title of *Susan* and later *Catherine*, was the first novel by Austen to be accepted for publication even though it was the last to be published. An answer can thus help illuminate how Austen—a highly self-conscious and 'pretending' novelist, despite what her brother said—might have understood the inauguration of her career.[3]

Gothic or Anti-Gothic?

For the most part, posterity has argued that *Northanger Abbey* makes a place for itself by debunking gothic novels and their all-too-recognizable formulas, and has aligned the novel with the numerous satirical essays of the late 1790s that commonly derided gothic novels by calling attention to their predictableness: 'Great attention must be paid to the tapestry hangings . . . principal incidents must be carried on in *subterraneous* passages,' exhorts one essay

[3] For a definitive refutation of the myth of Austen's 'unconsciousness' as an artist, see Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

with mock seriousness, while another complains 'if a curtain is withdrawn, there is a bleeding body behind it; if a chest is opened, it contains a skeleton; if a noise is heard, somebody is receiving a deadly blow'.[4] By this account, *Northanger Abbey* is a running gag driven by the disparity between the 'real' world with its ordinary mishaps and disappointments and the 'unreal' miasma of sensational adversities and terrors the naïve heroine, Catherine Morland, derives from gothic fiction, between what the narrator calls the 'anxieties of common life' and the 'alarms of romance' (p. 148). Inspired by her reading of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*, and incited by her hero Henry Tilney—who pulls her leg by encouraging her gothic expectations about his provocatively named home—Catherine anticipates that Northanger Abbey will be 'just like what one reads about' (p. 114): she will be assigned to a gloomy bedchamber in an isolated part of the abbey, hung with a mouldering tapestry concealing a door to a subterraneous passage replete with instruments of torture, bloody daggers, and the memoirs of a suffering maiden, Matilda. No wonder Catherine feels let down when she arrives without 'obstacle, alarm or solemnity' (p. 117) and discovers that, far from being a crumbling pile, it is a fashionably redesigned estate smacking (the cues are clear to us, if not to Catherine's 'unpractised eye' (p. 121)) of the nouveau riche: its windowpanes though 'pointed' are 'so large, so clear, so light!' (p. 118); its furniture is 'in all the profusion and elegance of modern taste,' fitted out 'in a style of luxury and expense' (p. 121), displaying the latest consumer goods such as hothouse pineapples, Rumford stoves, and an 'old' set of Staffordshire china manufactured two years earlier. Still eager for adventure despite these inauspiciously prosaic signs, Catherine's imagination is alternately inflamed and doused: she discovers a 'strange' chest in her bedchamber, but it is inlaid not with the mandatory mysterious cipher but with the predictable letter 'T', and instead of opening to reveal a horrid crime (as it had, say, in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*) it discloses a neatly folded bedspread; she

[4] See 'The Terrorist System of Novel-Writing', originally printed as 'Letter to the Editor', *Monthly Magazine*, 4: 21 (Aug. 1797), 102–14, rpt. in Rictor Norton, *Gothic Readings: The First Wave, 1764–1840* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2000), 299–303; 'Terrorist Novel Writing', *Spirit of the Public Journals for 1797*, 1 (London, 1798), 223–5, rpt. in *Gothic Documents*, ed. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 183–5.

encounters a 'strange' ebony cabinet that is mysteriously hard to open, but not, as it turns out, because someone shut it up with malevolent secrecy, but because Catherine had herself locked it by mistake; she discovers the sheaf of paper, but it is not a 'precious manuscript' detailing the woe of its author but an inventory of laundry and a farrier's bill. In short, Catherine expects the extreme and menacing and finds *only* the ordinary and the innocuous.

Catherine Morland is Austen's sweetest and most ingenuous heroine, so inexperienced that everything common and uncommon strikes her as 'strange'; she endures all the hilarious and humiliating reversals the novel continually sets her up for with such good nature that she is undeterred by them. While a house guest at Northanger Abbey, she continues to sense shady business. She can sustain her suspicions in part because as she turns from the *paraphernalia* of gothic to the *characters* of gothic, she encounters material congenial to the imagination. Catherine journeys to the abbey expecting to find 'some traditional legends, some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun' because as an avid reader of gothic novels—Radcliffe's *Sicilian Romance* or Lewis's *The Monk*, for example—she knows that such edifices routinely immure the dead or dying bodies of women whose diabolical husbands or fathers want them out of the way in the interests of wealth and status. Despite its tidy appearance, Northanger Abbey fits this bill, for it is animated on the one hand by the domineering General Tilney—whose cold, capricious, and overbearing manner squelches his children's spirits and silences their speech—and on the other hand by the spirit of the long and silently suffering Mrs Tilney, whose sudden death years earlier still haunts her daughter Eleanor with a melancholy Catherine promptly discerns.

Regarding virtually everything in the Tilney household as a clue to the domestic violence encrypted there, Catherine becomes convinced that General Tilney murdered his wife, and divulges this shocking opinion to the General's son Henry. He is not amused. In a passage central to any understanding of *Northanger Abbey* as a critique of gothic, Henry turns upon Catherine with a rebuke:

> 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 every thing open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting? (p. 145)

No budding young revolutionary in the mould of Mary Wollstonecraft, Catherine takes this lesson without resisting, running off 'in tears of shame' to her room. Crushed by Henry's disapproval, she renounces Radcliffe's novels for having aroused a 'craving to be frightened' that distorted her judgement. Now, it appears, the 'visions of romance were over'. Henry's admonitory appeal to national community ('Remember that we are English'), to religious affiliation ('we are Christians'), to modern ideological apparatuses ('our laws', to 'education', and to 'social and literary intercourse'), and to the repressive force of socialized forms of surveillance ('newspapers', 'roads', and a 'neighbourhood of voluntary spies') convinces Catherine that she had erred in mistaking gothic novels as models for English life. She scolds herself for the 'extravagance' of her 'fancies' and undergoes a process of enlightenment whereby improbability has normative force and is dismissed as a moral and political impossibility. Unspeakable crimes cannot happen here, and to suspect that they can is itself unspeakably criminal, for even the ever articulate Henry is at a loss for words: 'I have hardly words to—.' Catherine's turn away from the gothic is, then, a political act. She renounces the grandiose in favour of the diminutive, and she turns from the intense but improbable 'alarms of romance' to the smaller but actual 'anxieties of common life' because she is persuaded that modern English fathers are not murderous but *only* disagreeable.

Such an account is not entirely plausible, however. It is driven by a spotty reading of gothic and thus misapprehends the depth and extent of Austen's parody of it throughout *Northanger Abbey*. To begin with, urbane self-parody is itself already a significant part of the mainstream gothic tradition: both *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Monk* make fun out the excessiveness of their violence, and even Radcliffe's protracted dreaminess has a deadpan quality that is

hard not to read at times as camp. And in subjecting her heroine to a moralizing, mortifying—and, as we shall shortly see—not fully persuasive comedown, Austen is actually replicating rather than undermining a prominent formula of gothic fiction, whereby overimaginative heroines are punished for the transgressiveness of suspicions that are harrowing precisely because they cannot be unequivocally confirmed or denied. In that grandmother of all gothic novels—*The Mysteries of Udolpho*—the arch-villain is always browbeating the heroine Emily for letting her imagination run away with her. And that novel was infamous precisely for deflating Emily's paranoia when it finally informed us that the recumbent figure she glimpsed behind a veil was not the long-dead body of Signora Laurentini, slain in barbarous greed (as Catherine and the heroine of *Udolpho* assume) but (*only*) a waxen effigy of a dead body crafted in other-worldly piety!

This process of loving chastisement ('Dearest Miss Morland . . .') has been illuminated by a scandalously brilliant essay of Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick touching upon the gothic elements of Jane Austen criticism. Sedgwick demonstrates how most essays about Austen's novels are, without owning up to it, exercises in 'punitive/pedagogical reading' fixated on the 'unresting exaction of the spectacle of a Girl Being Taught a Lesson', a model of novel-reading that keeps producing the spectacle of wayward or uppity heroines who must get disciplined, punished for their errors, and disabused of their illusions for their own moral and ultimately erotic good, so that the plots of the novels, and of course the critics' own essays about them, can seem to work out intelligibly.[5] This spectacle, Sedgwick suggests, is satisfyingly conducive to readers and literary critics who, in the case at hand, nod approvingly when Catherine reproaches herself as a 'criminal' for the 'liberty' she has 'dared to take with the character' of the General. For readers who believe that one central purpose of *Northanger Abbey* is to teach the heroine a lesson for thinking the worst of the General and for letting her imagination run wild, the novel is basically over once Catherine takes her instruction from Henry rather than Ann Radcliffe, when she accepts his reproof, his forgiveness, and his love.

[5] Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, 'Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl', in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 113–26.

Of course, the erotic charge of pedagogical relationships in novels such as *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma* has been illuminated by several scholars.[6] Sedgwick is addressing neither gothic fiction as a genre nor *Northanger Abbey* itself at length, but her observations are valuable because they show the costs of vicariously participating in some of the ambiguous and volatile affects of the pedagogical scene rather than thinking critically about them. The readers she takes to task consider chastisement so natural, normal, and appropriate that they do not appear to notice its gothic dimensions, a crucial oversight for *Northanger Abbey*. Catherine's progress towards enlightenment and love is marked by a good deal of shame—more than once she feels 'humbled to the dust' (p. 126)—and such abjection begs to be considered as part of the gothic tradition. As gothic writers from de Sade to Angela Carter so vividly demonstrate, gothic foregrounds and intensifies interrelated experiences such as edification, punishment, and love, experiences that are no less unsettling for being common, voluntary, or (scariest of all, perhaps) normal. By this account, even a good guy like Henry can appear menacing—Catherine calls him 'formidable', which is almost as bad—and while some readers regard this possibility as extreme, extremeness is what the genre is all about.[7] Henry is never more gothic than when he upbraids the girl he loves for her gothic notions—notions which, as we will later see, turn out to have been largely right.

Clearly, though she pokes a lot of fun, Austen is not simply disavowing gothic. To be sure, all parody denaturalizes the conventions of what it is parodying, and so in its very nature is demystifying: after reading *Northanger Abbey*, cabinets, tapestries, and crumbling manuscripts will never cast quite the same spell. But at the same time, parody reaffirms and reconstitutes what it is parodying. Much as Pope's mock-epic *The Rape of the Lock* compares a lovers' quarrel

[6] See for example, David Devlin, *Jane Austen and Education* (London: Macmillan, 1975); Juliet McMaster, *Jane Austen on Love* (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria Press, 1978); Laura G. Mooneyham, *Romance, Language, and Education in Jane Austen's Novels* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel* (London: Macmillan; 1983); Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).

[7] See, for example, Harry Shaw, *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 147–61; Marilyn Butler, 'Introduction' to *Northanger Abbey* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), pp. xl–xli.

in modern-day London to epic warfare from *The Iliad* in ways that mutually illuminate these distinct-seeming worlds, so does Austen's mock-gothic juxtapose the 'alarms of romance' to the 'anxieties of common life' in order to enable us to see their interdependence. Rather than merely asserting the reality of one and dismissing the non-reality of the other, as Henry (and Catherine herself, briefly) would have it, we see them each anew, and we are struck first by their apparent distinctness and next by their apparent indistinguishability.

The fusion of edification, chastisement, and love we see when Henry scolds Catherine's paranoia provides us with a gothic backdrop against which to consider how education unfolds in (apparently) non-gothic sections of the novel. Always wiser than she knows, Catherine intuits the dark and troubling aspects of education when, referring to the irksomeness of history lessons, she airily describes schoolmasters as labouring for the 'torment of little boys and girls' (p. 79). A common schoolroom is a far cry from the inquisitorial torture chambers represented, say, in Radcliffe's *The Italian*, but Austen is a careful writer, and the language of 'torment', which runs steadily through this novel, makes it impossible for us to dismiss the intimation of violence as still another instance of Catherine's or Radcliffe's silliness. A strict pedagogue, Henry permits no transgressions against tidy definition: most famously, when Catherine assumes that 'something very shocking' (p. 81) in London is a new gothic novel while Eleanor assumes that it is a riot, Henry mocks the careless thinking of each girl, without pausing to consider how the misunderstanding might also be an insight, as both riots and gothic novels evoke the terror of moral anarchy. But Henry concedes no legitimacy to such conjunctions, regarding them as funny but also genially scolding Catherine for being wrong. Just as he is certain that Radcliffe's novels have no connection to modern-day England—with its roads, newspapers, and spying neighbours—so it appears that the boundaries between words like 'to torment' and 'to instruct' are secure, that no secret passageways communicate between them.

Jane Austen, Irony, and Gothic Style

As a prose stylist Austen brought an unparalleled degree of minute formal perfection to the English novel and she had an infallibly acute ear for jargon. For this reason it is easy to assume that she might take

Henry's side in his debate with Catherine concerning the proper uses of words like *torment* and *instruct*. In fact, this novel stages many discussions about the proper use of words, and in a sense the controversy about the merits of gothic fiction which this novel engages is itself a debate about words and the proper adjudication of their boundaries: the sensible but irrelevant and remote Mr Allen considers gothic representation hyperbolic and excessive ('unnatural and overdrawn' is his precise phrase), while the narrator turns the table by associating 'the best chosen language' with the novelists Catherine enjoys and 'coarseness of language' with approved classics such as Milton, Pope, Prior, and Addison and Steele. Given this overarching preoccupation with authoritative language, it is important that we track Catherine's and Henry's dispute for, as it happens, the ensuing passage shows how Catherine's association of *instruction* with *torment* has considerable merit. Finding herself unable to understand the Tilneys' conversation about the picturesque, Catherine feels 'heartily ashamed of her ignorance', but the narrator considers her abjection in another light:

> A misplaced shame. Where people wish to attach, they should always be ignorant. To come with a well-informed mind, is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing any thing, should conceal it as well as she can.
>
> The advantages of natural folly in a beautiful girl have been already set forth by the capital pen of a sister author [Frances Burney];—and to her treatment of the subject I will only add in justice to men, that 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 any thing more in woman than ignorance. But 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. (p. 81)

In thinking about the treatment of education and love in Austen's novels, most readers have tended to focus on the gratitude-inducing benefits education confers upon the tutee. This passage, by contrast, focuses on how the tutor's passion is engaged by instruction. Catherine has an 'advantage' over Henry of which she is, virtually by definition, unaware. Not only is she in need of instruction—her

'mind about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is'—but she also possesses 'all the civility and deference' that a 'youthful female mind' feels towards the 'high authority' of a 'self-assured man'. Henry is gratified by the spectacle Sedgwick unflatteringly calls a 'Girl Being Taught a Lesson' and he praises her pliancy, pronouncing at one point 'teachableness of disposition in a young lady is a great blessing' (p. 127). What embarrasses Catherine—her own ignorance—engages him, though paradoxically his very superiority puts him in her debt and in a sense empowers her. It is finally his 'gratitude' (p. 180) for her trusting partiality that leads to his love. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth and Darcy converse as equals and thus emerge from the mortifications they inflict upon each other mutually enlightened and attached. But in *Northanger Abbey* the intellectual disparity between the hero and heroine ensures that one party is doing all the instructing. When Henry is not 'overpowering' Catherine with the lexical authorities of 'Johnson and Blair'—the hint of violence here is not accidental—he is teaching her a lesson by teasing her ('nothing in the world advances intimacy so much' (p. 17) he remarks, upon their first meeting). The link between *instruction* and *torment* here is still remote from de Sade, but there *is* (despite Henry's denial) a link, whether thrilling or disquieting or both. Catherine idolizes Henry too much to reproach him for enjoying himself by imposing on her credulity, but even she recognizes that he is the one who encouraged her mortifying misadventures with the furniture to begin with: 'How could she have so imposed on herself?—Heaven forbid that Henry Tilney should ever know her folly! And it was in a great measure his own doing' (p. 126).

The narrator's intrusive chat about the appeal of ignorance to vanity bears on more than Henry, for it also refers specifically to *women* who know things: 'A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can.' At present, this remark cannot refer to Catherine, for what little she knows she is incapable of concealing: she is so unguarded that Eleanor immediately discerns that she is enamoured of Henry, so clueless about propriety and dignity that she chases Henry down the street, into his house, and up the stairs to talk to him. The woman here who possesses 'the misfortune' of knowledge is the Austenian narrator, the source of everything we readers know. Accordingly, we

must proceed with care, for she has just alerted us to her determination to work by concealment. The sentences that follow show how this is done. Having explained that Catherine's ignorance, however shameful to herself, gives her an edge, the narrator pays a compliment to Frances Burney and then pivots into a stunning sentence that conceals quite a barb which we may not have felt first time around:

> The advantages of natural folly in a beautiful girl have been already set forth by the capital pen of a sister author;—and to her treatment of the subject I will only add in justice to men, that 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 any thing more in woman than ignorance. (p. 81)

This sentence turns unexpectedly on and against the very persons we thought it would defend. Believing, like Henry Tilney perhaps, that there is a secure partition between bad 'trifling' men (who prefer imbecilic women) and good 'reasonable and well-informed' men (who will, we assume, surely prefer clever women), we are obliged to do a double take by the end of the sentence when we discover with chagrin that the good guys aren't so good after all, for they prefer ignorant women. In this instance, as in so many throughout *Northanger Abbey*, the butt of Austen's joke turns out to be the opposite from what we assumed.

Most readers will correctly recognize Austen's celebrated irony here. Historically, Austenian irony has been assessed in markedly different ways. To Lord David Cecil, for example, Austen's satire (irony per se is not an issue) is bracingly uncomplicated, serving the interests of moral realism, and robust good sense in a sane and secure world into which she is comfortably integrated. Insisting by marked contrast that Austen had 'none of the underlying didactic intention ordinarily attributed to the satirist', D. W. Harding regarded irony as the means through which Austen famously 'regulated' her 'hatred' of everything shallow, worldly, and corrupt about conventional society, from which she is fundamentally alienated. Taking a dimmer view of social criticism from women, Marvin Mudrick regarded Austen's irony as a pathological 'defense' against the risks of intimacy and loss of control. Most recently, irony has reappeared as 'attitude' for D. A. Miller, where it is the means through which

Austen's prose arouses anxious attentiveness in readers lest they fail to 'get' the jokes and put-downs booby-trapped throughout her pages and thus show themselves to be as dim-witted as infamously stupid characters, such as Mr Collins or Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*.[8]

The sheer paranoia of Miller's view of Austen's 'attitude' may seem outrageous, but in some ways it is also peculiarly just. Austenian irony is powerfully mobile and it destabilizes the basis on which we make distinctions and discern meanings. In the process, it transforms us into exceptionally alert and edgy close readers by taking apparently opposite things—trifling men and reasonable men, gothic novels and novels of manners—and bringing them subtly and without fanfare into mind-bending coextensiveness. What bears emphasizing is that Austen's irony functions gothically: it resituates the scene of mystery and sublimity from the dizzying Alps to the dizzying page that haunts us with implications we cannot take in at once but return to again and again, and it relocates painfully instructive adventure from the ruined abbey to the sentence itself, where artfully deployed twists, like concealed passageways, bring us unexpectedly to new and not very comfortable places. Much has been made of the epigrammatic crispness and tonic clarity of Austen's style. But it is equally true that Austen's style is mysterious, uncanny, and *un*clear. Baffled by Henry's tactful indirection on the subject of his rakish brother, Catherine remarks 'I cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible' (p. 96), a remark Henry regards as an inadvertent satire on modern jargon. But read in the context of Austen's style, Catherine's observation is marvellously apt, for Austen *does* at times write well enough to be unintelligible. Indeed, the very sentence that seems to blame gothic novels for Catherine's errors, when reread closely, says no such thing: 'it seemed as if the whole might be traced to the influence of that sort of reading which she had there [in Bath] indulged' (p. 146). Austenian irony thus makes us smart (in the sense of inflicting a little sting) even as it also makes us smart (in the sense of making us more alert, attentive, and

[8] Lord David Cecil, *A Portrait of Jane Austen* (London: Constable, 1978); D. W. Harding, 'Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen', *Scrutiny*, 8 (1940), 346–62; Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1968); D. A. Miller, 'Austen's Attitude', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 8 (1995), 1–6.

knowing than we were before). Catherine was again correct in opining that 'to *torment* and to *instruct* might sometimes be used as synonimous words' (p. 80): the very novel she occupies, like its more conventional gothic counterparts, instructs and informs us by torment.

At the hands of Austen's irony, readers become suspicious, willing to think (as Henry is not) that meanings may not be clear nor things as secure as they appear. Once we are in effect gothicized by Austen's irony, Henry seems to be the naïve one, and Catherine not nearly suspicious enough! With his characteristic insistence on a linguistic orderliness, Henry takes issue with the tautology in Catherine's phrase 'promised so faithfully'. But if we, smarting from Austen's irony, look further, his scolding seems overconfident, and Austen's irony is always hardest on the overconfident. The status of promises, the degree to which they should be binding into futurity, the flagrance with which some people break promises while others are bound inflexibly to them, were issues prominently debated during the 1790s, amidst the social upheaval felt throughout England in response to the French Revolution. *Northanger Abbey* and Austen's other early works were drafted during this turbulent period, and the social criticism aired during this time makes an unmistakable mark upon them. In her early fiction, promises, alas, are often not faithful. *Sense and Sensibility* opens with the heroines' brother talking himself out of the promise he had solemnly made to their dying father. And in *Northanger Abbey* many characters break or are made to break their words, and even Henry (the soul of honour in so many respects) breaks a promise to his sister when he is so swept up in a gothic novel that he finishes it by himself instead of waiting to read it aloud with her. With this in mind, Henry's too-ready dismissal of the tautology seems undiscerning.

Conversely, once Austen's irony makes us suspiciously attentive, Catherine seems too restrained in her application of Radcliffe's novels to her present life. In Chapter XIII, when James Morland along with John and Isabella Thorpe force Catherine into breaking her promise to the Tilneys, their efforts are described in patently gothic terms: Catherine's agreement was *demanded*; she is 'attacked with supplications or reproaches' and physically assailed ('Isabella . . . caught hold of one hand: Thorpe of the other'). Like good gothic heroines, Catherine stoutly resists this violence ('I cannot submit to

this,' she cries). But she never sees her ordinary experiences at Bath as a variant of episodes where gothic heroines are compelled by villains and treacherous friends to marry or sign over their property. Although Catherine muses on 'broken promises and broken arches, phaetons and false hangings, Tilneys and trap-doors' (p. 61), these elements remain discrete, occupying her only 'by turns', and as a result she is only half as paranoid as she ought to be. She does not perceive the selfishness, calculation, and duplicity not-so-cleverly concealed beneath the surface of Isabella Thorpe's professions of amity and warmth. And she is never more vulnerable than when she imagines General Tilney—who is courting her with almost glaring indelicacy on his son's behalf solely because he imagines her rich—to be her friend and protector: 'he could not propose any thing improper for her' (p. 113).

As these instances show, it is finally the readers of Austen's novel and not the characters within it who are the most important objects of Austen's irony. From the first chapter forward, the narrator sends up *our* expectations of what heroines should be like: unlovely, unorphaned, unprecocious, and unremarkable, Catherine unwittingly challenges our assumption that significant narratives require extraordinary characters, for she will turn out to be a heroine even though she is (*only*) ordinary. Catherine herself, after all, has no idea that her entrance into the Upper Rooms at Bath with Mrs Allen is like the entrance into the Capuchin Church of Segnora Leonella and her niece Antonia in Lewis's *The Monk*, nor does she realize that this allusion is amusing in part because Mrs Allen—whose meandering inanity of speech Austen patently enjoys—is so different from the wicked women in gothic novels who are the agents of 'general distress' (p. 10). Our constant access to such metafictional material—to the many times the narrator interrupts the story to chat about novels, the literary market-place, standards of heroinehood, the handling of plot and characterization—obliges us to be aware of the claims and conventions of fiction as fiction in ways that the characters are not, and this makes *Northanger Abbey* categorically different from other gothic parodies. Unlike heroines in novels written in part to mock the extravagances of fiction and its danger to female readers—such as Lady Arabella in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) and Cherubina in Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine* (1813)—Catherine is too modest to

think her own mishaps rise to the heroic level. It is we who recognize that the neglect she experiences with the Allens is a benign but unsettling version of the isolation endured by gothic heroines who never have responsible adults to turn to for help; it is we who perceive that John Thorpe's determination to force her on a carriage ride is a variant on countless gothic abduction scenes; and it is we who note that she is beset by mysteries, that she feels 'astonishment'—which along with awe and terror are mandatory gothic sentiments—at Thorpe's bluster; that she is 'distressed, but not subdued' by the heartlessness of family and friends who use her for their own designs. The network of gothic analogues that fall into our purview—as distinct from Catherine's—leads us to conclude that the unassuming Catherine is indeed a gothic heroine even though no one would have 'supposed' so when she was a little girl. The *alarms of romance* and the *anxieties of common life* are thus, like so many other apparent opposites in the novel, virtually one and the same. John Thorpe is still intolerably oppressive though he is a nasty and commonplace boor rather than an exotic villain; and Catherine's cries of distress are still momentous though they re-echo through the streets of Bath rather than the rugged mountains of Italy.

The intensifying properties of Austenian understatement return us to the villain of the novel, General Tilney. As we have seen, Catherine submits to Henry's lesson that Radcliffe's work is amusing but meaningless entertainment (*only* a novel) whose extravagant hyperbole can only deform rather than inform the mind, and whose sensational crimes and characters have no bearing on, or connection to, modern English fathers, 'the country and the age in which we live' (p. 145). Catherine struggles to talk herself into the sort of security Henry would have her feel, but her success is endearingly shaky:

> Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they [Radcliffe's novels] might give a faithful delineation; and Italy, Switzerland, and the South of France, might be as fruitful in horrors as they were there represented. Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country, and even of that, if hard pressed, would have yielded the northern and western extremities. But in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age. Murder was not tolerated, servants were

not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping potions to be procured, like rhubarb, from every druggist. (p. 147)

As this passage indicates, the protection conferred by national boundaries and national culture is at best provisional, for Alps and vices start to close in on Catherine even as she is trying to establish a safety zone coextensive with England's national boundaries. Before too long she cedes the northern and western extremities of the island, feeling safe only in the central part of England. Soon even that area is not secure. The climactic scene of *Northanger Abbey* is not when Henry scolds Catherine for her gothicizing suspicions, but when General Tilney throws her out of his house in disgrace because he finds out that she is not an heiress, as he had lavishly imagined (harmful imaginative excess is finally the domain of avaricious and competitive men, like the General and John Thorpe). Angrily expelling poor Catherine lacks the mythic grandeur of murder, but to underestimate its seriousness is to imply that respectable gentlemen are not to be judged by their treatment of persons who are 'only' girls.

General Tilney's behaviour explodes Henry's faith in the benevolizing effects of modern English manners. It is uncivil in the deepest sense, exhibiting insolence towards dependants, indifference to the good opinion of neighbours, and a contempt for the rules of decency and hospitality. Catherine's experience thus vindicates the capacity not of Henry's authorities (Johnson and Blair) but of gothic fiction to inform the mind, particularly through the cultivation of necessary suspicion. By the novel's end, Catherine finds that General Tilney is not less a villain for being *only* a greedy and insolent bully—*that*, after all, is finally what gothic villains are as well. Returning to her earlier intuition that the General is like Radcliffe's arch-villain Montoni, a figurehead of authority as well as an agent of lawlessness, Catherine reaffirms the gothic, concluding 'that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty' (p. 183). Catherine's crucial modifier 'scarcely' shows us that she has reached a new level of literary sophistication, revaluing gothic fiction as figural rather than literal representation that illuminates and dignifies the ambiguous distresses, dangers, and betrayals of ordinary life.

Henry has believed that our words and lives are safe and intelligible, and that both are guaranteed by the social order of 'the country and the age in which we live', a belief gothic fiction categorically undermines. It is not surprising, then, that he has never taken seriously the doubts, confusions, doublenesses, and contradictions that gothic fiction both reflects and promotes. At the end, Catherine makes no attempt to change his mind. When the couple meet again, they evidently do not revisit the subject of Catherine's previous suspicion. Catherine's experience has imparted to her the 'misfortune' of 'knowing' something, and she becomes just a bit like Austen herself. No longer artlessly transparent, she conceals what she knows and is mindful of her dignity. Now when she must thank Eleanor Tilney, she is attentive to the stylistic challenges of tact and reticence as she delicately attempts to 'compose a letter which might at once do justice to her sentiments and her situation, convey gratitude without servile regret, be guarded without coldness, and honest without resentment' (p. 174). Taking on an opacity she never needed before, she has become the heroine Austen designed her to be from the outset.

From the very first chapter, Henry Tilney was destined to serve as Catherine's 'hero', and at the conclusion he plays this part without missing a beat. Like all gothic heroes, Henry is not around when the going gets bad for the heroine, but he keeps faith with Catherine, eschewing his high satirical antics and journeying to Fullerton to propose marriage in manly defiance of his father, who has forbidden the match. In her final *homage* to the gothic, Austen brings the novel out of this crisis by mimicking the implausible felicity of gothic conclusions hastily tacked on to volumes of unspeakable misery. Reminding us that the 'tell-tale compression of pages' before us means 'that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity', she appeases the General's lust for money and status by inventing a fabulously wealthy Viscount and marrying him off to Eleanor. ('My own joy on the occasion is very sincere' (p. 185) the narrator adds, garrulously.) Aware that introducing a new character in the final chapter violates the 'rules of composition' she assures us that the Viscount was none other than the owner of those fateful washing bills Catherine earlier mistook for a woeful memoir. More fabulously, she enlarges the hitherto modest income of the Morlands enough to satisfy the General's greedy expectations of Catherine's dowry, and

she caps off this happiness by averring that the General's 'unjust interference' may have helped rather than hindered the union of Catherine and Henry. These mettlesome and conspicuously stylized gestures of closure—where all the strings are tied up, where all the problems are solved, where villains turn out to be not so bad as we imagined at the height of our paranoia, and where all the characters retire in married bliss ('the bells rang and everyone smiled' (p. 186))—remind us that we are in the never-never-land of comedy rather than the 'midland counties of England' (p. 147), and that if we can believe this is real, then anything we read in gothic novels can hardly seem less so.

Northanger Abbey *in Relation to* Lady Susan, The Watsons, *and* Sanditon

Northanger Abbey is a sophisticated and densely literary novel, mimicking a great variety of print forms common in Austen's day—conduct books, miscellanies, sermons, literary reviews, and, of course, novels. Its ambition is fitting, because it was to have marked Austen's entrance into the ranks of print culture. After Austen's earlier attempt to publish a version of *Pride and Prejudice* failed, *Northanger Abbey* (then called *Susan*) seemed to have succeeded, for it sold for a grand total of £10 to Crosby & Company in 1803. We have seen that Austen's entrance into the printed world, unlike Catherine's entrée into the wide world outside Fullerton, was energetically confident: when the narrator declares that novels 'have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them' (p. 23), she is clearly referring to her own novel too. This seems an audacious claim when we consider that Austen had yet to publish a novel, and a painful one when we consider that the novel, though bought, paid for, and even advertised, never actually appeared. In 1809, after Austen moved to Chawton and resumed her writing, she wrote to Crosby & Company under the name of Mrs Ashton Dennis and was informed that she could not publish the novel elsewhere unless she bought it back. Although Austen evidently had a copy of the manuscript (now called *Catherine*, due to the publication of another novel entitled *Susan*), we hear no more about it until 1816, when Austen's brother Henry recovered it for £10 (which was an immensely good deal, for now that Austen was successful it was surely worth more, and had Crosby

& Company realized who wrote it, they would have made a tidy profit by keeping their property and printing it themselves as another novel by the author of *Pride and Prejudice*). Austen's 1816 prefatory 'Advertisement to the Reader' suggests that she intended to publish the novel right away, but a letter to her niece announces that 'Miss Catherine is put upon the Shelve for the present, and I do not know that she will ever come out'.[9] *Northanger Abbey* was not published until early 1818, less than a year after Austen died, and it is not known whether Austen or her brother Henry was responsible for the title.

The rocky publication history of *Northanger Abbey* surely frustrated Austen but it also offers unique insight into Austen's career, for by accident it is a player at every stage of it. Written in 1798–9, though probably begun as early as 1794, *Northanger Abbey* has its roots deep in what the 1816 Advertisement describes as the 'period, places, manners, books, and opinions' of the 1790s. In 1803 an allusion to *Belinda* (1801) would seem up to date, and those to novels like *The Italian* (1797) or *Camilla* (1796) still recent, as would other historically specific details of politics and social life—such as General Tilney's hothouses, London riots, and Henry's reference to the Treasonable Practices Act of 1794 which permitted a 'neighborhood of voluntary spies' to report anyone for suspiciously seditious speech.[10] Austen was clearly presenting herself as an observer of contemporary manners and morals, and this gives us some sense of why, when she began to revise her earlier work in 1802 with an eye towards publication, she turned to *Northanger Abbey* rather than *Lady Susan*, whose fictional models are rooted in the earlier fiction of the eighteenth century.[11]

[9] Letter to Fanny Knight, 13 Mar. 1817.

[10] For discussions of Austen's roots in the controversies of the 1790s that have special bearing on *Northanger Abbey*, see B. C. Southam, 'General Tilney's Hot-Houses', *Ariel*, 2 (1971), 52–62; Robert Hopkins, 'General Tilney and Affairs of State: The Political Gothic of *Northanger Abbey*', *Philological Quarterly*, 57 (1978), 213–24); Warren Roberts, *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1979); Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975; rpt. Oxford: Oxford Universiy Press, 1987); Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[11] 'Lady Susan' is the title given to this work by J. E. Austen-Leigh in his second edition of *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1871), which printed it for the first time despite a squeamishness about the titular character. R. W. Chapman, in his edition of 1933, judged that *Lady Susan* was written and neatly transcribed in 1805 because the

Probably written in 1794 (and recopied by Austen in 1805), *Lady Susan* is an energetic and highly finished exuberant epistolary sketch about a lovely, calculating, and utterly amoral widow, whose 'happy command of Language' (p. 198) and 'attractive Powers' help her insinuate herself into the households and hearts of clueless men, in brazen defiance of the savvier women who look on helplessly. By the 1790s, novels told in letters were classics and, as such, a little passé. In this playful apprentice-piece, the young Austen tests herself as well as the limits of the epistolary novel by transforming its most famous anti-hero Lovelace, the libertine arch-machinator of Richardson's mid-century masterpiece *Clarissa*, into a woman seeking dominion over men and a fortune for herself. Using letters to describe the action makes possible the fullest representation of Lady Susan's conscious duplicity—as she professes tenderest maternal solicitude for her daughter in letters to correspondents she is duping, for example, while in letters to her confidante she drops the veil and calls her daughter the 'greatest simpleton on Earth' (p. 192), 'a stupid girl, and has nothing to recommend her' (p. 199). The fun of this tale lies both in the resourcefulness Lady Susan shows in wrapping people around her finger, even making those who lucidly disapprove of her succumb to her charms, and in the transgressive forthrightness with which she indulges her love for dominion, her enjoyment of her superiority, her pleasure in scheming the punishment of the uncompliant, and her contempt for those whose opinions are not material ('I have never yet found that the advice of a Sister could prevent a young Man's being in love if he chose it' (p. 203)). Although the plot duly punishes Susan with failure as her increasingly unwieldy machinations collapse all around her ('Facts are such horrid things!' her confidante observes, irritably), it unfolds in a cartoonish world where the consequences of violence and sociopathic depravity are never seriously felt, and it is animated by a relish in Lady Susan's egregious badness ('I am again myself', Lady Susan remarks echoing Shakespeare's Richard III, 'gay and triumphant' (p. 231)).

manuscript—an undated fair copy, with few corrections or revisions—bears a 1805 watermark. But the 1871 *Memoir* reports that *Lady Susan* was 'an early production'. On the basis of its similarities to Austen's juvenilia and the associated manuscripts, B. C. Southam has argued persuasively that *Lady Susan* was probably written in 1793–4, and most scholars endorse this view.

In part despite and in part because of the exuberance of its amorality, *Lady Susan* is an artistic cul-de-sac for Austen. The novel's forte is blatancy, not nuance. In the late 1790s, Austen's gifts were evolving towards the unprecedented mastery of a form of third-person narration able to represent subjective as well as objective experience by moving seamlessly from characters' consciousnesses to detached and authoritative commentary on them. That achievement—the perfection of free indirect discourse—eclipsed the epistolary mode. Austen, significantly, throws aside the machinery of letter-writing and finishes *Lady Susan* by appending a 'Conclusion' (possibly composed later) written in the third person, announcing facetiously that 'to the great detriment of the Post office Revenue', the correspondences among Lady Susan and her victims had to be discontinued. But the sketch still commands an immense amount of interest. Most striking is the fact that Lady Susan and the Austenian narrator sometimes seem of the same party. Lady Susan's quip that Mr Johnson is 'too old to be agreable, and too young to die' (p. 237) and the narrator's remark that Reginald De Courcy (the supposed good guy) marries Frederica Vernon only after he is 'talked, flattered and finessed into an affection for her' (p. 249) share a pleasure in linguistic mastery and a witty detachment from conventional pieties. Marvin Mudrick went so far as to suggest that Austen was much like Lady Susan, cold, unfeminine, uncommitted, dominating. After his sister's death, Henry Austen, worried that the acerbic strain in Austen's fiction might give rise to such speculations about her private character, went out of his way to reassure readers that while his sister noticed 'the frailties, foibles, and follies of others', she never herself uttered 'either a hasty, a silly, or severe expression'.[12] Whatever one's sense of Jane Austen as a person, as an author she perched the irreverence typical of Lady Susan far more productively within depersonalized ironic narration rather than within characters coolly and consciously determined to capitalize on others' stupidity: though *Sense and Sensibility*'s Lucy Steele has something of Lady Susan's gift for self-advancement through flattery, she lacks her self-conscious virtuosity, and only in *Mansfield Park*'s Mary Crawford, a troubling character, will we again encounter an audacious, attractive,

[12] 'Biographical Notice' in *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion*, rpt. in Austen-Leigh, *Memoir*, 139. J. E. Austen-Leigh's *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (London, 1870 and 1871) is even more hagiographical in its praise of Austen's sweetness of temper.

and calculating woman who divides the world into dupers and duped and who is determined to come out ahead.

The Watsons and *Sanditon* are short fragmentary sketches which, in part because they are so raw, seem to bring us closer to Austen than do her more refined and finished works. *The Watsons* is the title given by Austen's nephew, J. E. Austen-Leigh, to this untitled and unfinished work, and for this title he relied on family tradition. The fragment consists only of some forty pages probably written on paper watermarked 1803, though scholars believe that it was actually begun in 1804. For those of us accustomed to reading Austen's major works in their published forms (they do not exist in manuscript), it is likely to appear something of a mess, and fascinating on this very account, for it gives us a rare glimpse of Austen working. The manuscript contains many erasures and revisions—'gout', for example, is replaced by 'asthma'; 'awkward predicament' by 'scrape'—and there are several inconsistencies, particularly with place names.[13] Moreover, there are no chapters, few paragraph breaks, a considerable amount of telegraphing, and nothing much more than the kernel of a very promising idea, elaborated more carefully here and there. It is unquestionably Austen's bleakest work, taking on such painful subjects as the care of ageing parents, the shame and desolation of downward social mobility, and the mortifications of familial alienation. Raised in conditions of wealth and refinement under the patronage of a loving aunt, Emma Watson must return home when her aunt's remarriage makes her no longer welcome. To be ousted from her adoptive home is bad enough, of course, but to feel estranged beneath her paternal roof is even worse: Emma's family is so impoverished that it borders on the ungenteel; her invalid father is querulous; her sisters are unrefined husband-hunters; and her brother, who sees sisters as costs, is high-handed and indelicate about her reappearance.[14] Emma earns our sympathy as a judicious heroine who endures by succumbing neither to the demoralization

[13] For a complete account of the alterations to this manuscript, see *The Watsons*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), and B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts: A Study of the Novelist's Development through the Surviving Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

[14] On this score, see Juliet McMaster's fine ' "God Gave Us our Relations": The Watson Family', *Persuasions*, 8 (1986), 60–72.

of indignity nor to the false or compromising glare of riches as she arouses the interest of Lord Osborne.

We have reason to believe that Austen maintained some interest in this fragment, for she evidently told her sister Cassandra 'Mr. Watson was soon to die; and Emma to become dependent for a home on her narrow-minded sister-in-law and brother. She was to decline an offer of marriage from Lord Osborne, and much of the interest of the tale was to arise from Lady Osborne's love for Mr. Howard, and his counter affection for Emma, whom he was finally to marry.'[15] Several sections of this sketch are brilliantly imagined—the ball-scene, where Emma rescues a young boy from the humiliation of being jilted by dancing with him herself, is unparalleled in Austen's work. Even less dramatic passages evince a grittiness new in Austen's work, as in the following description of Emma's cart-ride to the Edwards's residence: 'The old Mare trotted heavily on, wanting no direction of the reins to take the right Turning, and making only one Blunder, in proposing to stop at the Milleners, before she drew up towards Mr. Edward's door' (p. 258). Despite its promise, the evidence is that Austen abandoned this project, and we will never know why for sure. Austen's nephew guessed that Austen 'became aware of the evil of having placed her heroine too low, in such a position of poverty and obscurity as, though not necessarily connected with vulgarity, has a sad tendency to degenerate into it'.[16] This explanation may say more about Austen-Leigh's social attitudes than Austen's, however. In his determination to idealize Austen and her family, Austen-Leigh does not draw attention to the ways *The Watsons* might have cut close to the bone of Austen's own experiences at the time. By 1804, the continuing non-appearance of *Northanger Abbey* must have hurt. To make matters worse, in that year her mother was ill and her friend Anne Lefroy died in a riding accident. And in 1805 her father died, leaving the Austen women in reduced circumstances and dependent largely on the support of Austen's brothers. For whatever reason Austen stopped working, she does not seem to have resumed until she settled at Chawton in 1809, at which time she passed over *The Watsons* and returned instead to the early

[15] J. E. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (London, 1871), 364. This (second) edition of the *Memoir* includes *Lady Susan*, *The Watsons*, and extracts from *Sanditon*, along with prefatory notes about them.

[16] Ibid. 296

versions of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, which still retain the élan of her early work. *The Watsons* thus stands as an unfinished bridge between the animation of Austen's youthful work and the greater sobriety of her later phase. We can detect its influence on Fanny Price's social embarrassment upon returning to her squalid home at Portsmouth in *Mansfield Park*, and on Jane Fairfax's dislocation in *Emma*.

'Sanditon' is the title given by Austen's family to her uncompleted sketch, though according to family tradition, Austen intended to entitle this work 'The Brothers'. Selections from *Sanditon* were published for the first time by J. E. Austen-Leigh in his second edition of *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1871), which calls it 'The Last Work'. The manuscript is clearly a first draft, extensively corrected and revised. The dates on the manuscript tell us that Austen began writing on 27 January 1817 and stopped on 18 March, when she was too ill to continue. Austen died three months later, on 18 June 1817.[17]

While people who do not like Jane Austen generally complain that she wrote the same novel six times, people who do admire her recognize that each novel, though maintaining allegiance to the comic marriage plot, strikes out on to new territory. That said, Austen's last work, the unfinished *Sanditon*, is still perhaps Austen's most original work. All of Austen's other novels are organized around the mystique of the country estate—Northanger Abbey, Norland, Pemberley, Mansfield Park, Donwell Abbey—whether that mystique is honoured or interrogated. *Persuasion*—which Austen (largely) finished shortly before beginning *Sanditon*—evokes Kellynch Hall, the heroine's ancestral home, even as she decisively leaves it behind to the undeserving worldlings who possess it, and takes up an unrooted, risky, but satisfying life as a naval officer's wife. *Sanditon* steps out further. Landed wealth and the myths of repose, nature, timelessness, and stability it encodes have no allure for most characters in *Sanditon*, which instead sketches a restless world of speculation and real estate development as the ebullient Mr Parker, his mind a busy whirl of hopeful schemes and capital investment, turns his back on the cosy comforts of the 'old' Sanditon and devotes

[17] For a complete account of the alterations to this manuscript, see *Sanditon*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), and Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts*.

himself to the new—specifically to the growth and transformation of his quiet coastal village into a bustling resort for wealthy invalids and their fashionable, free-spending companions. Against this backdrop of commercial promotion, Charlotte Heywood visits Sanditon, encounters many of its mostly ludicrous principals—commanding ladies, hypochondriacal families, mulatto heiresses—and makes the acquaintance of a very different kind of jargon-spouting promoter, the silly would-be seducer Sir Edward, before the fragment breaks off.

Sanditon is striking in its treatment of hypochondria. Generally an aberrant, temporary disorder in Austen's early works, illness and vulnerability of all sorts predominate in the late *Persuasion* where bodies get paralysed, arms broken, skulls fractured, where crows' feet gather around the eyes, and complexions lose their bloom. *Persuasion* is marked by a spirit of complaint, and while the pain of some (such as the whining of Mary Musgrove) is ridiculed as silly and weak, that of others (such as Wentworth) is honoured. In *Sanditon* invalidism is not so much a complaint as a boast, for it enjoys cultural capital in this spa town where bodily disorder is the order of the day. *Sanditon* is an extremely vigorous sketch which shows no signs of the declining 'autumnal' spirit some have fancied in *Persuasion*. But in early 1817, when it was begun, Austen was suffering from the illness that would soon kill her. With this in mind, we can appreciate how she might have rallied by sending up the jargon of medical nostrums—the touted 'anti-spasmodic, anti-pulmonary, anti-sceptic, anti-bilious and anti-rheumatic' properties of sea air and water, for example—with boisterous humour. Elsewhere, however, humour is a more profoundly defensive gesture, as when she seems to revenge her own sickness upon the character of Arthur Parker, a 'Broad made and Lusty' young man (p. 335), nevertheless engrossed in his health and excessively fond of cocoa and generously buttered toast—as if all complaints were imaginary complaints, all solicitude for the body and its comforts ridiculously self-indulgent.[18]

But equally new and striking in *Sanditon* is Austen's interest in explicitly thematizing the restless spirit of commodity culture as a feature of Regency society. Even though some locals worry that

[18] See D. A. Miller, 'The Late Jane Austen', *Raritan*, 10 (1990), 55–79, and John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

prices will be driven up by West Indian Britons who have made their fortunes on colonial sugar plantations and who are coming home to buy their way into fashion, for sojourners in Sanditon with leisure and resources, purchasing things—any things—is understood to be 'for the further good of Every body' (p. 316). Even the heroine feels the itch to buy, though for her the site of 'pretty Temptations' is not, as we might expect, the milliner's shop, but the circulating library, which 'afforded . . . all the useless things in the World that could not be done without'. Here novels as formidable as Burney's *Camilla*—which Austen compliments in *Northanger Abbey*—share space with 'Drawers of rings and Broches'. In the early *Sense and Sensibility* the consumption of cultural objects is fairly sanitized: the Dashwood sisters procure the latest and best music, poetry, and prints from London without having to encounter the bumptiousness of the market-place. But in *Sanditon*, we behold *Camilla* partaking of the same tawdriness as trinkets and other 'useless things' in the market-place. Just as the predominance of illness requires us to find ways of distinguishing the 'spiritualized' suffering of the Parker sisters (or the mortal suffering of Austen?) from the carnal self-pampering of their brother, so does the proliferation of unglamorous sundries bring novels themselves distressingly into commodity culture.

Yes, novels. Austen may well have put *Northanger Abbey* on the 'Shelve' by the time she began *Sanditon*, but its central preoccupation with the value of novels is still uppermost in her mind. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen ridiculed diffident heroines who demurred 'it is only a novel'; here she ridicules the silly Lovelacean wannabe, Sir Edward, who pompously declares 'I am no indiscriminate Novel-Reader. The mere Trash of the common Circulating Library, I hold in the highest contempt . . .' (p. 326). Sir Edward attempts to recommend the fire and genius of his tastes by disavowing the 'Trash' Austen both admires and produces, and she appears bent on trumping his rage for invidious distinction by exposing the clichéd and nonsensical quality of his high-flown tastes ('You will never hear me advocating those puerile Emanations which detail nothing but discordant Principles incapable of Amalgamation', he effuses (p. 326)). Because, somewhat peculiarly, Sir Edward models himself not on Austen's best-selling contemporary, Lord Byron, but on Richardsonian novels of seduction and rhapsodic sentiment, Austen was evidently intending to use the discerning and undiscerning

reading of fiction once again as a central subject of her work. It is hard to see the fragment of *Sanditon* break off without marvelling at the wealth, readiness, and rapidity of Austen's invention, and without wishing with a pang that she had lived on and developed yet more ways to make good on *Northanger Abbey*'s conviction that novels are works 'in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed . . . in the best chosen language'.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

Northanger Abbey was published with *Persuasion* by John Murray in December 1817 (title-page 1818) in a four-volume edition of 2,500 copies. The first American editions (1,250 copies each) were published by Carey and Lea of Philadelphia in 1832–3. A French translation, *L'Abbaye de Northanger*, appeared in 1824. The texts of *Lady Susan*, *The Watsons*, and *Sanditon* have been edited in one volume by Margaret Drabble (1974), and a facsimile of the manuscript of *Sanditon* is published in B. C. Southam (ed.), *Sanditon: An Unfinished Novel by Jane Austen* (Oxford and London, 1975).

All six novels were included in Bentley's cheap Standard Novels series (6*s*. a volume) in 1833 (repr. 1866, 1869, 1878–9, 1882). Since the first Everyman's Library edition introduced by R. Brimley Johnson (London, 1892; rev. edn. Mary Lascelles, London and New York, 1962–4), the six major novels have been reissued in cheap collected editions in (for example) Oxford World's Classics, Everyman, Penguin, Virago. The standard edition of the novels is that of R. W. Chapman (illustrated; 6 vols.; Oxford, 1923–54; rev. Mary Lascelles, 1965–7), with commentaries and appendices. The Oxford English Novels series issued the six major novels in 1970–1, based on the standard edition, in which Chapman's textual apparatus was revised and his emendations reconsidered by James Kinsley (see Textual Notes, p. 356).

The text of *Northanger Abbey* presents few problems for the editor. Jane Austen's manuscript does not survive, and the sole authority is the first edition, which was posthumously published. Although the proofs were not corrected by Jane Austen herself, the edition contains few detectable errors. The present edition reproduces the Oxford English Novels text.

It is less simple to determine the best procedure in editing the 'Minor Works' which are here included. Whereas for *Northanger Abbey* there is an authoritative early edition but no manuscript, for *Lady Susan*, *The Watsons*, and *Sanditon* there are manuscripts but no early printed texts. An ideal version of all three works would of course consist of the text which Jane Austen would have sanctioned if she had seen them into print, and the problems for the editor arise

out of the impossibility of constructing such an ideal version. The manuscript of *Lady Susan* was a fair copy and therefore reasonably near to what might have been expected in print, but *The Watsons* and *Sanditon* exist in first drafts which bear many signs of work still at a provisional stage.

Four editorial approaches are possible in such a situation. One is to publish a facsimile, as in B. C. Southam's 1975 edition of *Sanditon*: this is valuable for scholars and critics, but is hardly the form in which the general reader wants a text. A second method is to attempt a printed version which represents as faithfully as possible what appear to be the latest readings of the manuscript—this again, if skilfully done, yields a text which is reliable for the scholar, and it is the procedure which was followed in the Oxford Illustrated Jane Austen, volume VI of which includes these and other 'Minor Works'. But, as will be seen presently, there are idiosyncrasies in Jane Austen's manuscripts which mean that this editorial method cannot guarantee the smooth and fluent experience of ordinary reading. A third method seeks by contrast to provide this by normalizing the text along lines which the editor presumes would have been followed in publication: this clearly aims at the kind of ideal version envisaged above, but in practice to normalize the 'Minor Works' to this extent involves guesswork and runs the risk of departing from Jane Austen's intentions in some points of substance.

The fourth approach, which has been followed in this edition, is a fairly conservative compromise which confines its modernization of Jane Austen's manuscript to changes of a kind which, on the evidence of the other novels, would certainly have been made in publication and which can be consistently applied to all parallel examples in the text. These are:

1. the expansion of a few obvious and standard abbreviations except for abbreviated signatures in *Lady Susan*, e.g. 'Lord' from 'L^{d}', 'could' from 'c^{d}', 'morning' from 'morn^{g}';
2. the replacement of '&' by 'and';
3. the replacement of figures by words, not involving times of day;
4. the use of single speech marks (' ') throughout, and the insertion of these in a few instances where the manuscript omits to close or re-open them.

Some further changes which would have been made in publication have been refrained from here, because they could not be applied to all instances without the risk of losing, in at least a minority of instances, effects which Jane Austen would have retained in print. The most important examples of this kind are:

1. the abbreviations (not involving superior contractions) of names, such as 'Mr. P.' for 'Mr. Parker' (readers of *Emma* will recall that Mrs. Elton affectedly refers to her husband as 'Mr. E.');
2. the use of capitals where they would not be expected by rule, e.g. 'a match for every Disorder, of the Stomach, the Lungs or the Blood';
3. misspellings (it is sometimes hard to distinguish between a mistake and a possible period spelling).

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