

ANN RADCLIFFE AND JANE AUSTEN: ROMANCE TO REALISM

by

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To my family

ANN RADCLIFFE AND JANE AUSTEN: ROMANCE TO REALISM

by

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This dissertation explores the literary relationship between Ann Radcliffe's late eighteenth-century heroine-centered novels and Jane Austen's early nineteenth-century Gothic parodies, *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma*. Within this framework, it argues that, contrary to scholarly consensus, significant and extensive continuities exist between Radcliffe's romance and Jane Austen's realism. This study demonstrates these affinities through close reading, analyzing each author's treatment of narrative elements and formal techniques, and discussing ways in which each author responded to important aesthetic and philosophic concepts that emerged during the eighteenth century. More broadly, it examines how cultural discourses influenced the development of the novel as they generated debate over the purpose and value of literature linked to its efficacy in relaying knowledge. In more specific terms, it looks at how novelists participated in this debate as they contributed to shaping or contested literary and epistemological norms. Many contemporary fiction writers characterized literary realism as superior to romance based on the widely held assumption that the objective knowledge of reality was a feasible human goal. This dissertation argues that Austen in *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma* challenges these beliefs through her adaptation of Radcliffe's work. Rather than opposition,

Austen establishes a correspondence between realism and romance as she enlists and reworks her predecessor's fiction to foreground the provisional nature of knowledge. Austen has been long admired for the accuracy that she brings to depicting her period's cultural practices and customs, and, as a hallmark of her style, this quality has been credited with giving her realism a decidedly modern flavor. This project considers how the interplay between Austen's and Radcliffe's work enhances the modern dimension of Austen's realism in finding that, because her Gothic parodies serve as a means to question rigid distinctions between subgenres of fiction and assertions of unitary truth, they express perspectives more in keeping with postenlightenment thought than with ideas that prevailed in Austen's day.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LITERARY AESTHETICS

The first Gothic novel appeared on December 24, 1764, with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Walpole's contemporaries, however, did not often employ the term "novel" to refer to prose fiction. As John Richetti observes, in regard to the "classification for the many prose narratives produced in Britain over the course of the eighteenth century, 'novel' is a convenient label rather than a historically accurate term," one which was not widely used until the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹ Among the various names used at the time to refer to prose fiction, "romance" and "history" were two of the most common. These terms, however, were not synonymous. Writers often labeled their works "histories" in order to distinguish them from romances. Karen O'Brien points out that titles such as *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749) and *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1747-48) signaled their authors' intentions of departing from the improbabilities of romance by presenting their readers with stories that fulfilled "many of the same mimetic and instructive functions" associated with accounts based on historical events.² Contemporary critical consensus distinguished between

¹ John Richetti, introduction in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

² Karen O'Brien, "History and Literature, 1660-1780," in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 377.

true-to-life representations and those of romance in that it privileged the former over the latter, maintaining that verisimilitude granted a superior moral stature to fiction.³

From classical times to well into the eighteenth century, Western aesthetic theory conceived of art as an imitation of nature. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the neoclassical concept of mimesis encompassed a variety of meanings, including art as the depiction of ideal types, as the representation of general rather than individualistic traits, and as the expression of long-recognized standards of taste, all of which fostered the imitation of illustrious classical models.⁴ By contrast, it could also define art as a faithful imitation of empirical reality, one which was tied to the effects it achieved.⁵ The latter principle would come to serve as the basis for literary theory as it developed in England during the greater part of the eighteenth century. As for most of the century, the majority of English critics found that verisimilitude was a prerequisite for achieving art's desired effects, and they looked to classical texts, especially Horace's *Ars Poetica*, to define art's purpose as twofold—to please and to instruct. Mimetic theories played an important part in the development of contemporary aesthetics, but their proponents generally linked the value of artistic mimesis to its capacity to entertain and to educate its audience.⁶

³ Deborah Ross, *The Excellence of Falsehood: Romance, Realism, and Women's Contribution to the Novel* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1991), 94, 97.

⁴ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1948), 73-74, 76.

⁵ Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas*, 76.

⁶ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 15-17.

Believing verisimilar depictions were necessary to fulfill a useful didactic purpose led many eighteenth-century critics to disparage the romance. As E.J. Clery notes, while they attacked the medieval romance's use of the marvelous, the focus of their disapproval was primarily directed against the seventeenth-century French heroic romance with which most of them were more familiar.⁷ These stories did not usually depict supernatural events but were critiqued instead for such features as extravagant idealism, implausible characters, and highly contrived plots.⁸ This attitude was shaped by seventeenth-century French neoclassical criticism, which, in decreeing that the romance lacked authenticity, designated it a debased form of literature. Clery points out that neoclassicists derived authority for their critique from a variety of classical sources, including Horace, "whose dictum 'incredulous odi' (what I cannot believe disgusts me)" gained such wide acceptance that it became "a cliché of neoclassical criticism."⁹ They also looked to literature itself, especially Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), which they perceived as a denunciation of romance, for, in their eyes, it portrayed the way in which the genre perverted "the educative function, unfitting the reader for life in the real world."¹⁰

This critical climate drove English writers to assume "defensive" positions "to gain respect for their art."¹¹ Composing prefaces for their books gave authors the opportunity to

⁷ E. J. Clery, "The Genesis of 'Gothic' Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 22.

⁸ Clery, "Genesis of 'Gothic' Fiction," 22.

⁹ Clery, "Genesis of 'Gothic' Fiction," 22.

¹⁰ Clery, "Genesis of 'Gothic' Fiction," 22.

¹¹ Ross, *The Excellence of Falsehood*, 2.

defend their fiction, and those who wrote prefaces claiming to introduce works of moral significance also often insisted upon the truthful nature of their narratives. In order to underscore the authenticity of their stories, numerous writers, particularly those of epistolary and memoir fiction, assumed the guise of “editor” or “translator” in their prefatory remarks. Daniel Defoe was among the many authors who embraced this convention. According to O’Brien, he was also among those who “went so far as to foster public belief in the genuine historicity of their fictional works.”¹² For example, in his preface to *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) he presents himself as “editor,” claiming the story offers “a just history of fact” without “any appearance of fiction in it.” By asserting the story is autobiographical as well as entertaining, he justifies its publication: although a “private man’s adventures,” they are well “worth making publick,” for “the wonders of this man’s life exceed all that . . . is to be found extant; the life of one man being scarce capable of greater variety.”¹³ Defoe’s claims about the wondrous nature of Crusoe’s adventures suggest elements of romance, and he probably intended to ward off or to diminish negative criticism by declaring the story constitutes both a “diversion” and an “instruction” for “the reader,” echoing accepted notions of aesthetic criteria.¹⁴

As Defoe’s preface implies, eighteenth-century English fiction did not conform to critical expectations that sharply distinguished between romance and realism. From its very beginnings in ancient Greece, certain features had come to define the romance genre. Corinne Saunders

¹² O’Brien, “History and Literature,” 377.

¹³ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. John Richetti (London: Penguin, 2001), 3.

¹⁴ Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 3.

identifies them as “exile and return, love, quest and adventure, family, name and identity,”¹⁵ and these motifs also served to shape many eighteenth-century narratives that strove for verisimilitude. Richetti’s description of a plot common to eighteenth-century fiction serves to suggest how authors adapted such prominent romance elements: It “tend[s] to be about leaving home, making a break with the familiar world of childhood, finding your way, and often enough a mate, seeking your fortune, acquiring an identity by making your mark in the world.”¹⁶ As Northrop Frye points out, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Pamela*, *Tom Jones* “use much the same general structure as romance, but adapt that structure to a demand for greater conformity to ordinary experience.”¹⁷ In discussing eighteenth-century literary norms, Ross notes that “no fiction writer completely escaped romance.”¹⁸

Novels identified with the development of literary realism clearly exhibit the appropriation of romance motifs. Despite the critical censure of the romance, writers relied on its conventions, in part, to engage a reading public familiar with the genre.¹⁹ Translated versions of seventeenth-century French romances had enjoyed a great popularity in England, where their improbable tales of love and adventure fulfilled its readers’ “imaginative needs,” and a host of

¹⁵ Corinne Saunders, introduction in *A Companion to Romance: From Classical to Contemporary*, ed. Corinne Saunders (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 2.

¹⁶ Richetti, introduction, 7.

¹⁷ Northrop Frye, *Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 38-39.

¹⁸ Ross, *Excellence of Falsehood*, 4.

¹⁹ Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 38; Saunders, introduction, 6.

eighteenth-century English writers fashioned plots that capitalized on the romance's appeal.²⁰ For example, Henry Fielding in *Tom Jones* looked to some of its most enduring features to shape his story. According to Helen Cooper, Fielding counted on "readers' continuing familiarity" with prominent elements of romance: these included the picaresque plot, a structure based on the convention of the journey as the vehicle for adventure, and the "fair unknown," the heroic youth of obscure birth who ultimately succeeds in wedding the high-born heroine once his noble identity is revealed.²¹ In *Pamela* (1740-41), Samuel Richardson also employs a variation of the "fair unknown" as he presents the recognition of his low-born heroine's nobility of virtue as the primary factor in her marriage to a member of the gentry. For Patricia Meyers Spacks, one of the most common affinities that exists between the romance and those fictions often identified as foundational texts of literary realism, such as *Tom Jones*, *Pamela*, and Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778), resides in their use of "unrealistic" plots: in a variety of ways, these portray a protagonist who undergoes a succession of ordeals before finally earning the just reward of a marriage based on love, one that achieves a happy-ever-after resolution.²² Given the prevailing aesthetic criteria, writers' appropriation of romance served to complicate their prescribed purpose. As Clery comments, both writers and critics recognized that "moral messages would be

²⁰ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 2, 28.

²¹ Helen Cooper, "Mallory and the Early Prose Romances," in *A Companion to Romance: From Classical to Contemporary*, ed. Corinne Saunders (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 105.

²² Spacks, *Novel Beginnings*, 71, 162-63.

useless if not joined to compelling narratives that stirred the emotions of the reader.”²³ However, the writer’s duty to please *and* to instruct often seemed to represent competing claims.

Additionally, the conflict between these demands was often intensified because the notion of verisimilitude meant different things to different people. As Roy Porter observes, the notion of “Nature” constituted the “key” cultural concept at the time, but it was one that possessed a “deeply enigmatic” meaning.²⁴ A. O. Lovejoy points out that “nature” in the eighteenth century denoted a multiplicity of meanings, and, in terms of literary aesthetics, critics did not always agree on how to define “natural” representation.²⁵ Most did agree that, in terms of human conduct, feeling, and experience, “empirical reality” constituted a worthy object of imitation.²⁶ In regard to conduct and feeling, the sense of nature was conveyed by the “possible” or the “usual.”²⁷ In regard to experience, it was primarily represented by well-established links between cause and effect.²⁸ However, such notions of “empirical reality” were open to interpretation. For example, while orthodox neoclassicists maintained that the three unities of classical drama promoted realism and verisimilitude, those who disagreed insisted such a rule violated the concept of natural imitation.

²³ Clery, “Genesis of ‘Gothic’ Fiction,” 23.

²⁴ Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: Norton, 2000), 295.

²⁵ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 69-70.

²⁶ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 70.

²⁷ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 70.

²⁸ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 70-71.

In England, the contemporary critical response to Richardson's *Pamela* (1740-41) illustrates how literary works could evoke sharply different assessments. Its enormous popular success fueled critical debate about the impact of current fiction on its readership and served as a focus for airing competing claims that differed in defining how fiction should go about fulfilling its aesthetic role. Numerous critics praised the work for conveying a useful didactic purpose through its mimetic depictions, but it came under attack at the same time for failing to satisfy the criteria for both realism and effective moral purpose. Among the charges leveled against Richardson was the complaint that he had engaged in writing a romance. Thomas Keymer notes that, although highly innovative, *Pamela* reveals how Richardson employed "the selective appropriation and conversion" of romance: in attempting to avoid the sensational dramatizations of "passion and intrigue" associated with the seventeenth-century French form, he revised the genre to create a kind of "moralized romance."²⁹ Richardson, however, defended the integrity and originality of *Pamela* by characterizing it as a sharp departure from the romance. In a letter to his friend Aaron Hill written in 1741, he defines the story as a new approach to fiction by contrasting it with what he clearly implies are not only the outmoded but also the inferior aims and forms of romance: "I thought the story, if written in an easy and natural manner . . . might possibly introduce a new species of writing, that might possibly turn young people into a course of reading different from the pomp and parade of romance writing, and dismissing the improbable and marvelous, with which novels generally abound, might tend to promote the

²⁹ Thomas Keymer, introduction to *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, by Samuel Richardson, ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xx-xxii.

cause of religion and virtue.”³⁰ Defining acceptable fiction by contrasting it with romance was a wide-spread practice that was followed by writers and critics alike, including Samuel Johnson, who employed the distinction to specify the standards for fiction. Johnson’s views represented, in many respects, the perspective of contemporary English literary criticism.³¹ Like Richardson and numerous other commentators, he asserted the importance of mimetic depictions but subordinated it to the primacy of effect.

In his essay published in *The Rambler* (1750), Johnson laid out his aesthetic criteria for fiction: privileging true-to-life depictions over tales of romance, he argued that verisimilar representations, while not the “most important concern,” are necessary to support literature’s proper purpose as they are essential to the pleasure and instruction that art should provide. In maintaining the superiority of more realistic fiction, Johnson claims it excites a greater degree of interest among readers because, unlike the romance, it is relevant to their lives. In comparison to a story based on imagined “incredibilities,” fiction informed by “accurate observation” possesses greater appeal and so creates a more effective mode of instruction. According to Johnson, fiction must “exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world,” for “what we cannot credit we shall never imitate.” However, he qualifies this prescription by advising writers to use care in how they choose to depict nature, counseling them “not to invent” but to endow their characters with those qualities most likely to promote virtue and good

³⁰ Samuel Richardson, “Samuel Richardson,” in *Eighteenth-Century British Novelists on the Novel*, ed. George L. Barnett (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968), 72.

³¹ Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 18-19.

judgment. Their villains should possess only detestable human qualities while their heroes should embody only “the highest and purest that humanity can reach.” Because readers of fiction are primarily “the young, the ignorant, and the idle,” fictional stories should “serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life.”³² Although Johnson’s essay codified widely accepted standards, his formulation of criteria relied on blending elements of romance and realism rather than sharply distinguishing between them. On the one hand, he asserted the importance of verisimilitude in achieving art’s proper effects, but, on the other, he maintained the need for employing a primary romance convention—idealized characters—to promote those effects. While Johnson looked to the concept of “la belle nature”—the neoclassical concept of mimesis as the depiction of ideal types, this principle promoted the creation of improbable characters, an unrealistic feature for which the romance was criticized.

Johnson’s essay reveals how the criteria for fiction rested on contradictory principles. J. M. S. Tompkins observes that critical consensus demanded that narratives “should above all be probable, for probability distinguishes a novel from a romance, and its appeal to the reader’s sympathies, and the consequent efficacy of its moral lesson, depend on probability.”³³ In practice, however, the difficulty in balancing these demands posed dilemmas not only for writers in composing fictional narratives but also for critics in formulating coherent theories. The prevailing problem for the critic, as for the writer, derived from what often turned out to be a

³² Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, no. 4 (March 31, 1750), in *Novel and Romance, 1700-1800: A Documentary Record*, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 106-09.

³³ J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1976), 19.

conflict between art's prescribed purposes, and, although the nature of the conflict tended to differ according to the practitioner's aims, both writer and critic often attempted to resolve it in similar ways. While many authors no doubt hoped to deliver a moral message, they usually wanted to fashion entertaining stories that would appeal to a broad audience and so ensure their success. Yet, because the genre's popularity granted it the power to influence a wide and growing readership, theorists stressed the necessity of its fulfilling a useful didactic role. To achieve their aims, both groups resorted to romance, enlisting its support by defining their aims in opposition to its conventions. Because the flexible quality of the term "nature" offered them a sense of scope in defining verisimilitude, it supported their efforts to adapt elements of romance to their characterizations of realism. In both relying on and disparaging the romance, however, such characterizations possessed inherent inconsistencies as the *Pamela* controversy demonstrates. At the time Richardson published the story, the aesthetic principles later codified by Johnson enjoyed broad support, but the reaction to *Pamela* shows that the practice of interpreting such principles could elicit contradictory responses, which, in the case of Richardson, ranged from praising his story for its realism to denouncing it for its romance.

Eighteenth-century commentaries that judged the era's fiction based on defining realism in opposition to romance have their modern counterparts in much twentieth-century scholarship. In his influential *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt, for example, primarily discusses the works of Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson to argue their innovations were tied to the creation of a new realism, which he sharply contrasts with the "romance" of later eighteenth-century Gothic

fiction, finding the latter quality possesses “little intrinsic merit.”³⁴ While Watt’s perspective has not gone unchallenged, it has both accorded with and reinforced the ways in which modern assessments of eighteenth-century literature have often marginalized the role of romance in the development of the eighteenth-century novel. Moreover, modern studies of the eighteenth-century novel have often identified its qualities of realism in terms that echo in many respects those used by eighteenth-century commentators to characterize verisimilitude. J. Paul Hunter catalogues certain traits that Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* and numerous other modern literary scholars have relied on to define the genre: As a narrative of contemporary life, it offers a “subjective, individualistic, realistic” account of “ordinary characters in everyday situations using the informal language of everyday life to describe, for ordinary readers, the directions and values that inform a series of particular, connected actions and events.”³⁵ He argues, however, that this definition tends to exclude features important to understanding the genre. According to Hunter’s definition, the eighteenth-century novel’s depiction of events remains faithful to the physical laws of reality, but, from its beginnings, its narratives quite often depend upon events as unlikely as the “marvelous” happenings of romance.³⁶ For Hunter, such improbabilities call into question conceptions of the novel’s “new realism.” He maintains that the genre’s popularity was in no small part due to its representations of “the unusual, the uncertain, and the unexplainable,”

³⁴ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*. 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 290.

³⁵ J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: Norton, 1990), 30.

³⁶ Hunter, *Before Novels*, 30-31.

which appealed to a widespread “curiosity” about the “strange and surprising” in an era when the rational and the scientific were increasingly employed to explain the world.³⁷

More recently, Spacks has also argued that much modern scholarship has overdetermined the part played by realism in shaping the development of the novel. As Hunter does, Spacks finds that this perspective has resulted in the tendency to oversimplify definitions of the genre.

According to her, “to think of eighteenth-century fiction as dominated by realism makes it more difficult to see its complexity and range and to experience its variety of riches.”³⁸ While she finds its delineations of society and explorations of human psychology greatly contributed to literature’s realism, she points out that these features alone do not define the novel.³⁹ In Spacks’s view, the novel established itself as a genre in England by the 1760s, and she attributes its emergence over the preceding six decades to a climate of “narrative experimentation,” fostered by both literary innovations and the practice of appropriating and adapting previous conventions, including to an important extent those of romance.⁴⁰ Hunter and Spacks, among others, have enlarged the definition of the novel to encompass a broader meaning, one which takes into account a variety of subgenres including the category of Gothic romance, a form that served to challenge neoclassical assumptions and significantly furthered the novel’s development in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

³⁷ Hunter, *Before Novels*, 31, 33, 34-35.

³⁸ Spacks, *Novel Beginnings*, 3.

³⁹ Spacks, *Novel Beginnings*, 2-3.

⁴⁰ Spacks, *Novel Beginnings*, 16, 17-18, 276.

In 1764, when the novel as a genre was taking on a recognizable shape, Walpole's *Otranto* appeared, defying the standards for literary verisimilitude by relying on the marvelous associated with medieval romance. In the story, supernatural phenomena act as agents of a divine Providence intent on exacting retribution and righting past wrongs. In carrying out their role, these phenomena take on outlandish shapes: in the form of a statue that bleeds, a skeleton that speaks, a portrait that descends from its frame, and a lethal helmet that is huge in size and of enormous weight, they serve to signify the long-concealed crimes of murder and usurpation on which the narrative turns. Given his extensive use of the supernatural to propel the plot, Walpole clearly violated prevailing aesthetics.

To defend *Otranto* against censure, Walpole employs in his preface to the first edition (1764) and in his preface to the second (1765) the same critical approach that neoclassical commentators relied on to judge fiction, considering the story's mimetic function in relation to its purpose. However, the ways in which he describes *Otranto*'s fulfillment of these criteria in his first preface differs markedly from his description in the second, and these differences express the tension between the prevailing literary principles and a new aesthetic that fostered a revisionary notion of "nature," one that would eventually succeed by the late eighteenth century in challenging major tenets of neoclassicism. Thus, the two prefaces represent competing voices in the eighteenth-century debate over the definition of literature, one predominant and the other emergent.

On the face of it, Walpole's first preface seeks critical acceptance for his story by presenting it as an ancient historical document. As Clery points out, "objections to the representation of the marvelous" did not extend to "a work of the past" that offered a genuine

account of superstitions belonging to a bygone era because such a work imparted a sense of history.⁴¹ Thus, Walpole engages in a rather elaborate ruse to ward off disapproval. First of all, he adheres to the convention of publishing his novel anonymously. Masquerading as the translator of a recently discovered medieval document originally written in Italian, he assumes the name of William Marshall, presenting himself as a gentleman learned in the history and literature of Italy's Middle Ages. In this guise, he makes claims for the historical authenticity of *Otranto*. As Defoe and others did before him, Walpole sets his story in the remote past and in a distant location, relying on a device that, according to Ross, numerous authors employed to "make their romances unverifiable and hence possibly true."⁴² He further bolsters his claims for authenticity by fabricating a provenance for his story. O'Brien notes that many authors "derived strategies of factual authentication from historians' footnotes and discussions of manuscript provenance, often in order to distance themselves from the more fanciful world of romance."⁴³ For this reason, Walpole goes into some detail to establish *Otranto*'s derivation, concocting dates and locations for its discovery and initial publication, attributing its authorship to "an artful priest," and pointing to "evidence" within the text itself to create a basis for professing it must have originated sometime in the era of the Crusades, "or not long afterwards."⁴⁴

⁴¹ E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 54-55.

⁴² Ross, *Excellence of Falsehood*, 2.

⁴³ O' Brien, "History and Literature," 377.

⁴⁴ Horace Walpole, preface to the 1st ed. of *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. W.S. Lewis, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5.

Walpole then turns to justifying the story's publication by specifying how it further conforms to prevailing criteria. He first asserts its depiction of the supernatural is realistic. Although Walpole expresses regret for the author's probable intention in writing the story, speculating it was "to confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstitions," he emphasizes how the narration of "preternatural events" renders the document "faithful to the *manners* of the time" when belief in the "*miraculous*" was widespread.⁴⁵ He further maintains *Otranto* achieves verisimilitude by observing the three unities of classical drama, a statement that aligns him with orthodox neoclassicists.⁴⁶ In regard to literary purpose, he declares the narrative promotes the effects of classical tragedy and thus captivates the reader: "Terror, the author's principal engine, prevents the story from ever languishing; and it is so often contrasted by pity, that the mind is kept up in a constant vicissitude of interesting passions."⁴⁷ Moreover, while he acknowledges it lacks a strong moral, he nevertheless insists *Otranto* fulfills a useful didactic role because it not only conveys an understanding of the past "founded on truth" but also displays "lessons of virtue" and a "purity of the sentiments," qualities which should excuse it from the "censure" so often directed against "romances."⁴⁸ In ending his first preface, Walpole firmly establishes himself as a supporter of predominant literary principles, emphasizing the validity of his fiction by contrasting it with the romance.

⁴⁵ Walpole, preface to the 1st ed. of *Otranto*, 5-6.

⁴⁶ Walpole, preface to the 1st ed. of *Otranto*, 6.

⁴⁷ Walpole, preface to the 1st ed. of *Otranto*, 6.

⁴⁸ Walpole, preface to the 1st ed. of *Otranto* 7, 8.

In the months following *Otranto*'s first appearance, the novel's success with the reading public prompted Walpole to admit his authorship in the preface to the second edition. Emboldened by an appreciative audience, he revealed his ruse, and, in contrast to his preface to the first edition, his preface to the second openly challenged prevailing critical assumptions. As Tompkins remarks, his claims constituted "a manifesto"⁴⁹ Defending the "novelty" of his "invention," he describes his "new species of romance" as a narrative form superior to both the "ancient" and the "modern" by which he means medieval romance and the contemporary novel respectively.⁵⁰ In depicting "mere men and women . . . in extraordinary positions," he intends to bring to the realm of fiction the marvelous of romance in order to enhance its representations of the probable.⁵¹ Thus, he asserts *Otranto* provides an example for achieving a greater degree of emotional effect than literary standards allow and for expressing a greater degree of imaginative freedom than they authorize. However, while he defies the reigning criteria, he also depends to an important extent upon literary convention by claiming Shakespeare as his "model."⁵² The principles that he now supports differ to a significant extent from those he relied on previously. Walpole's second preface looks not only to the towering reputation of Shakespeare but also to the aesthetics of the sublime, the growing interest in England's medieval past, the notion of original genius, and the novel's development as a genre.

⁴⁹ Tompkins, *Popular Novel*, 226.

⁵⁰ Walpole, preface to the 2nd ed. of *Otranto*, 9, 14.

⁵¹ Walpole, preface to the 2nd ed. of *Otranto*, 9-10.

⁵² Walpole, preface to the 2nd ed. of *Otranto*, 10-11.

In retrospect, Walpole's first preface seemed to be lampooning contemporary critical theory while appearing to support it, an ironic stance that was sure to anger many critics. In swift response to Walpole's revelation, the author of a review published in the prestigious *Monthly Review* expressed outrage at the hoax. Invoking neoclassical standards, specifically the Horatian principle *incredulous odi*, to support the denunciation, the author declared the portrayal of "preposterous phenomena" in a contemporary work to be insupportable: "It is, indeed, more than strange, that an Author, of a refined and polished genius, should be an advocate for re-establishing the barbarous superstitions of Gothic devilism!"⁵³

In 1765, the identification of the Gothic with the "barbarous" was commonplace. The eighteenth-century use of "Gothic" as a disparaging term has its origins in the Renaissance, when Italian humanists characterized the Goths as destroyers of classical culture and the subsequent medieval period as an era of barbarism. More specifically, they represented medieval architecture as the embodiment of medieval culture. By the seventeenth century, neoclassicists applied the term "Gothic" to not only the architecture of the Middle Ages but also contemporary art forms to signify the antithesis of the classical style. Lovejoy explains that this distinction then gained wide acceptance in England by the early eighteenth century when classical architecture represented a superior form of mimetic art for critics who perceived its "rational simplicity" as the exemplification of "naturalness."⁵⁴ Critics applied classical principles to censure what they

⁵³ John Langhorne, review of *The Castle of Otranto*, in *Horace Walpole, the Critical Heritage*, ed. Peter Sabor (London: Routledge, 1987), 71-72.

⁵⁴ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 142.

saw as the Gothic style's lack of regularity, which, in their estimation, failed to follow mathematical rules of proportion and to disapprove of what they identified as its lack of symmetry. In their eyes, the notion of symmetry demanded unity of effect, and, for them, Gothic buildings created a "multiplicity of impressions" that distracted from rather than contributed to a unified design and so were "inconsistent with beauty."⁵⁵ From their perspective, Gothic architects operated according to "rule of thumb or spontaneous inspiration."⁵⁶ Thus, the label "Gothic" became broadly associated with asymmetry and irregularity as well as with ignorance of proper standards and therefore the lack of an educated taste. The neoclassical corollary between the classical and the "natural" also provided the rationale for extending the standards for unity and symmetry to other arts.⁵⁷ For example, the rules for drama reflected a similar insistence by requiring authors to observe the unities of action, time, and place and to maintain distinctions among literary genres.⁵⁸ However, around the mid-eighteenth century, an aesthetic that called into question this critical perspective emerged, and Walpole's second preface both reflected and contributed to its development. As it developed, it served to elevate the status of the Gothic style and culminated in successfully challenging major neoclassical tenets in the late eighteenth century.

⁵⁵ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 145-46.

⁵⁶ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 147.

⁵⁷ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 143-44.

⁵⁸ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 146.

A number of critics have traced the source of the Gothic's appeal in England to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Although they have not always agreed about its origins, they generally find similar elements fostered its development, which, as Lovejoy points out, depended upon its supporters' success in reformulating the neoclassical notion of nature.⁵⁹ Before the publication of *Otranto*, various factors contributed to this reformulation. Kenneth Clark traces the origins of the Gothic's appeal to the early eighteenth century, arguing it initially manifested itself in a "literary impulse" when a fashion for the works of Milton and Spenser exhibited a receptive mood for "Gothicism" in literature, a trend that continued to grow over the next few decades as the great popularity of graveyard poetry demonstrated.⁶⁰ Flourishing from 1740-1752, this school of verse looked back to Thomas Parnell's "A Night Piece on Death" (1721). Set amidst a moonlit graveyard, Parnell's poem evokes, at times, an atmosphere of reflective melancholy in contemplating human mortality and, at others, a sense of death's mystery and terror through envisioning the supernatural.⁶¹ To varying degrees, the graveyard poets appropriated these motifs to express similar sensibilities and purpose. As they developed the genre, they created an "emotional poetry" by depicting the terror of death amidst images of medieval ruins, wandering ghosts, and the destructive forces of nature.⁶² As Clark observes, the

⁵⁹ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 165.

⁶⁰ Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 29-30, 66.

⁶¹ Thomas Parnell, "A Night Piece on Death," in *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820*, ed. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 19-21.

⁶² John W. Draper, *The Funeral Elegy and the Rise of English Romanticism* (New York: Octagon, 1967), 11, 220, 226, 232.

vogue for their poetry embodied “the Gothic mood” that would be reflected again and to a greater extent in the immense popularity of the late eighteenth-century gothic novel.⁶³

In contrast to Clark, Lovejoy argues that the impetus for a positive re-evaluation of the Gothic style in England sprang from a rebellion against neoclassical aesthetics that first occurred in late seventeenth-century notions of landscape gardening, then in architectural taste, and only afterwards in literature. Lovejoy primarily attributes this development to “the transfer of the aesthetic *principle of irregularity*” from English landscape gardening to conceptions of architecture.⁶⁴ He finds that, about the middle of the eighteenth century, this correspondence served to establish an association between Gothic architecture and naturalness, and, in turn, influenced literary aesthetics.⁶⁵ Both Lovejoy and Clark make compelling claims about the origins of Gothic taste, suggesting that changing attitudes toward nature and art acted in tandem to promote Gothic style. Certainly, the relationship among these attitudes became apparent later in the eighteenth century. According to Lovejoy, “as the revolt against the classical models grew,” associating “natural irregularity” with “aesthetic excellence” became common as “the three changes in taste which were developing at the same time gave one another mutual support.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Clark, *Gothic Revival*, 28, 44.

⁶⁴ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 153-54, 155.

⁶⁵ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 159.

⁶⁶ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 159.

For Clark, the taste for the Gothic in literature is closely allied with the subsequent appreciation for medieval architecture that emerged about the middle of the eighteenth century. In his view, this appreciation gained considerable momentum from the work of Thomas Gray and Thomas Warton, poets of the Graveyard School whose interests in medieval antiquities stemmed from the “literary impulse” exhibited in their poems. As Clark points out, Warton made important contributions to analyzing the origins and development of Gothic architecture, while Gray’s knowledge of and empirical approach to the subject substantially influenced the work of other scholars: at the time of *Otranto*’s publication, they had not only advanced the study of Gothic architecture but also established a basis for the elevation of its status by insisting it be judged according to its own merits rather than the principles of classical design.⁶⁷

Before he published *Otranto*, Walpole himself also had an important role in promoting an appreciation for medieval buildings. Clark designates Walpole “a central figure . . . in eighteenth-century medievalism,” primarily for the part he played in fostering admiration for Gothic architecture.⁶⁸ According to him, although Walpole did not possess the learning of Gray or Warton, his thoughts on the subject produced entertaining and, at times, insightful criticism that had a great influence on shaping public opinion. He singles out as one of Walpole’s most valuable contributions his *Anecdotes of Painting* (1762) in which Walpole mounted an impressive defense of Gothic’s architectural style.⁶⁹ Walpole’s own admiration for the style

⁶⁷ Clark, *Gothic Revival*, 33, 37-41.

⁶⁸ Clark, *Gothic Revival*, 41, 42.

⁶⁹ Clark, *Gothic Revival*, 37, 41-43.

prompted him to redesign his house Strawberry Hill. In 1753, it underwent a neo-Gothic transformation, a make-over that spurred the development of a fashion for similar renovations in the latter half of the eighteenth century. As Clark comments, Walpole's status as a member of the aristocracy and the son of a prime minister as well as his reputation as a man of cultivated taste then fostered a vogue for Gothic design among the upper classes: "he did not so much popularise as aristocratised Gothic" and, in the process, "gave Gothic social standing."⁷⁰

In his second preface, Walpole contributed to an emerging critical discourse that challenged the predominance of neoclassicism by characterizing its aesthetic standards as limitations that diminished the power of literary expression and effect. Walpole's views resonated with a number of contemporary critical commentaries that argued, to varying degrees, for the need to expand the range of literature. Although these views expressed a still marginal critical perspective, they would prove over time to be influential in subverting neoclassicism. In the 1750s and 1760s, a growing emphasis on the importance of the imagination and feeling in art emerged. As Monk observes, this emphasis was due in great part to changing conceptions of the aesthetic sublime.⁷¹

The theory of the sublime derived from *On the Sublime*, a classical Greek text probably written in the first century A.D. and attributed to Longinus. According to the treatise, the power of the author to achieve sublimity, or a sense of transport, relied not only on a command of language and knowledge of rhetorical principles but also on innate imaginative abilities and the

⁷⁰ Clark, *Gothic Revival*, 61-62.

⁷¹ Samuel Holt Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 25.

capacity to express passionate emotion. The neoclassicists championed the treatise after the highly influential French critic Boileau translated it in 1674, and their appreciation served to privilege the former elements over the latter. Amanda Cockburn notes, however, that “the experience of the sublime” as well as “its causes, ends, and effects” became a topic of intense debate in the eighteenth century given there were “many distinct conceptions of the sublime.”⁷² As Monk observes, the “latently un-neoclassical elements” of Longinus’s treatise provided a basis on which to mount an attack against neoclassicism, and commentators “habitually turned to [*On the Sublime*] for authority when [their] tastes were heterodox.”⁷³ In mid eighteenth-century England, theorists who intended to challenge the prevailing artistic criteria looked to Longinus’s work to foster a counter-aesthetic that celebrated the imaginative and the passionate in poetry and drama.

Although numerous eighteenth-century authors wrote on the sublime, Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) proved to be the most popular and influential discourse. Offering an “empiricist account of aesthetics,” his *Inquiry* greatly contributed to the emerging trend that opposed neoclassical standards.⁷⁴ Contrary to the neoclassicists, Burke valued obscurity in art because he believed that it stimulated the

⁷² Amanda Cockburn, “Awful Pomp and Endless Diversity: The Sublime Sir John Falstaff,” in *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Sabor and Paul Yachnin (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 143.

⁷³ Monk, *The Sublime*, 106, 188.

⁷⁴ Frances Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 39-40.

imagination, and thus he asserted that “a clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea.”⁷⁵ In addressing the psychological and physiological aspects of the sublime, he rejected the rational simplicity promoted by neoclassicism for the irrational and mysterious. As Monk points out, in formulating his conception of the sublime, Burke was highly influenced by the Gothic sensibility of the graveyard poets.⁷⁶ His *Inquiry* placed a new emphasis on terror, making it “the ruling principle of the sublime”: “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.”⁷⁷ Burke associates the force of such qualities as “privation,” “vastness,” “magnificence,” and “infinity” with the sublime, but he generally finds that obscurity is essential “to make anything very terrible.”⁷⁸ For example, “notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas,” create the sort of fear based on “the terrible uncertainty” that he associates with sublimity.⁷⁹ In his view, the sublime constituted the highest quality of art because it manifested art’s transcendent power by evoking emotions that expanded the faculties of the imagination.⁸⁰ As were the neoclassicists, Burke was

⁷⁵ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 56.

⁷⁶ Monk, *The Sublime*, 34.

⁷⁷ Burke, *Inquiry*, 36, 54.

⁷⁸ Burke, *Inquiry*, 54, 65, 66, 67, 71.

⁷⁹ Burke, *Inquiry*, 54, 58.

⁸⁰ Burke, *Inquiry*, 55-58.

concerned with aesthetic effect, but, by emphasizing the importance of subjective perception over the objective qualities of art, he stressed the limits of reason, the value of feeling, and the vital force of the imagination to profoundly challenge the predominant criteria for art and influence the development of Gothic aesthetics.

Burke's *Inquiry* had significant implications for the development of the novel. Although graveyard poetry had imported elements of the marvelous to achieve a sense of sublimity that conveyed a didactic purpose, this practice did not change the demand for probability in the novel. Although Monk finds that, despite this demand, some fiction writers had begun to incorporate a mood and imagery derived from graveyard poetry into occasional scenes or episodes prior to the publication of Burke's treatise, he identifies Burke as the author who most advanced "the appreciation of terror" in the arts.⁸¹ Walpole was among the first novelists to appropriate Burkean notions of the sublime to a significant extent. In considering Walpole's depictions of supernatural events, Spacks notes that he relies "on the established vocabulary of sublimity," to such an extent that, at times, he "might be writing with Burke open on his lap."⁸² As he declared in his preface to the first edition of *Otranto*, "terror" constituted "the author's principal engine."⁸³ Here, he had referred to the Aristotelian rules for tragedy. In the preface to the second edition, however, he dropped this reference to classical conventions and implicitly

⁸¹ Monk, *Sublime*, 90-91.

⁸² Spacks, *Novel Beginnings*, 197.

⁸³ Walpole, preface to the 1st ed. of *Otranto*, 6.

associated his dramatization of terror with the “sublime.”⁸⁴ As David Morris points out, Walpole’s appropriation of Burke was innovative and served to establish what would become a primary device of Gothic fiction: “in pursuing Burke’s alliance between terror and sublimity,” Walpole was instrumental in initiating “a new mixing of the separate conventions associated with verse and with prose.”⁸⁵ By blending these genres, Walpole brought to the novel “the same emotional intensities and narrative freedoms which belonged to poetry and to the poetic province of romance.”⁸⁶ In his second preface, Walpole defined *Otranto* as “a new species of romance” that brought together “ancient” and “modern” conventions, and he defended his creation of this hybrid form as an effort to overcome the limits prescribed by neoclassicism and so enhance the scope of contemporary fiction.⁸⁷

Almost a decade before the publication of *Otranto*, Joseph Warton in volume one of his *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (1756) had taken aim at the proponents of the prevailing aesthetics by denouncing what he had characterized as their restrictions on literary creativity. In declaring “the Sublime and the Pathetic are the two chief nerves of all genuine poesy,”⁸⁸ he had championed qualities celebrated by Longinus and by those of his contemporaries who wished to reform literary aesthetics. He further asserted these qualities

⁸⁴ Walpole, preface to the 2nd ed. of *Otranto*, 10.

⁸⁵ David Morris, “Gothic Sublimity,” *New Literary History* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1985): 301.

⁸⁶ Morris, “Gothic Sublimity,” 301.

⁸⁷ Walpole, preface to the 2nd edition of *Otranto*, 9.

⁸⁸ Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (London, 1756), iv-v, x.

sprang from the exercise of the imagination and not the observance of common circumstances: “the most solid observations on human life” do not “make a poet.” On the contrary, “it is a creative and glowing imagination, ‘*acer spiritus ac vis*,’ and that alone, that can stamp a writer with this exalted and very uncommon character, which so few possess, and of which so few can properly judge.”⁸⁹ Walpole echoed this point of view in his second preface when he claimed the standards for verisimilitude that were required of the “modern romance” had “cramped [the] imagination” by insisting it reflect “a strict adherence to common life.”⁹⁰ As Joseph Warton had done, Walpole valorized the imagination to argue for allowing the writer a greater freedom of expression.

Walpole’s claims for creative liberty were related to his defense of *Otranto*’s novelty, and he looked to then current notions of original genius to support his innovative approach to fiction. Among the contemporary critics who argued for the importance of originality in literature, none went so far as Edward Young. In 1759, he had boldly challenged the imposition of neoclassical rules in his *Conjectures on Original Composition* by objecting to the literary standard that equated the imitation of nature with the imitation of classical authors. In part, he had drawn from Longinus’s treatise to maintain that promoting this practice had served to stifle the “sublime flights” of the poetic genius and had thus undermined literary achievement: “Originals are, and ought to be, great Favourites, for they are great Benefactors; they extend the Republic of Letters,

⁸⁹ Warton, *Essay*, iv-v, x.

⁹⁰ Walpole, preface to the 2nd edition of *Otranto*, 9.

and add a new province to its dominion.”⁹¹ Although Young was more unorthodox than most of his contemporaries, his characterization of a widely recognized standard for literary mimesis as a constraint upon the author’s imaginative abilities resonated with similar objections, including Walpole’s. Unlike Young, Walpole took issue with the rules for verisimilitude in fiction, but he similarly asserted that the principle of imitation had diminished literature’s potential, and thus he defended his “new species of romance” on the grounds that it “[le]ft the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention.”⁹² In part, the ideas of Joseph Warton, Burke, and Young provided Walpole with the rationale for introducing supernatural events into his story, for they gave him an aesthetic basis for claiming that his depiction of the marvelous was an attempt to overcome the restrictions placed upon fiction and bring to the novel what he characterized as the imaginative and emotional power of “ancient” romance.

By giving the second edition of *Otranto* the subtitle “A Gothic Story,” Walpole emphasized a correspondence between his novel and the romance form associated with England’s medieval past. As Anne Williams remarks, however, the emerging celebration of medieval romance was based more on “fantasies” than on any real knowledge of the subject. Much of its influence actually derived from Shakespearean and Jacobean drama, Spencer’s poetry, and the work of Milton, reflecting a tradition that encompassed the English “poetic” of

⁹¹ Edward Young, excerpt from *Conjectures on Original Composition*, in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 330, 333.

⁹² Walpole, preface to the 2nd ed. of *Otranto*, 9.

the preceding two centuries.⁹³ Throughout most of the eighteenth century, the term “Gothic” was generally used to denote any historical period between the medieval era and the mid-seventeenth century.⁹⁴ Prior to the publication of *Otranto*, a number of commentators challenged the prevailing literary criteria by championing what they called Gothic romance, and, in describing his story as “Gothic,” Walpole implicitly assumed an anti-neoclassical stance.

In 1762, Thomas Warton in his *Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser* and Richard Hurd in his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* aligned their objections to neoclassical aesthetics with their appreciation for Gothic romance, and they chose Spenser’s epic romance *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596) as the primary example on which to base their claims. They both maintained that the literature of romance should be judged on its own merits, taking into account the times in which its authors wrote. However, they also called into question the prevailing standards for literary mimesis and purpose by unfavorably comparing neoclassical poetry with the tradition of Gothic romance.

In volume two of his work, Thomas Warton claimed Gothic romances not only offered historical accounts of the past but more importantly represented a significant contribution to England’s literary heritage, and he argued that their aesthetic value was testified to by the powerful appeal that they continued to exert, an appeal rendered in part by their sublime depictions of the marvelous: “Above all, such are their terrible graces of magic and enchantment,

⁹³ Anne Williams, *The Art of Darkness: A Poetics of the Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 13.

⁹⁴ David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (London: Longman, 1996) 1:5.

so magnificently marvelous are their fictions and fablings, that they contribute, in a wonderful degree, to rouse and invigorate all powers of imagination: to store the fancy with those sublime and alarming images, which true poetry best delights to display.”⁹⁵ In particular, he defended Spenser’s epic romance against those detractors who criticized it for failing to exhibit the required standards of unity: as Spenser lived prior to the imposition of neoclassical rules, he was free to fashion “infinite beauties” from “romantic materials.”⁹⁶ Thomas Warton maintained that such rules had served over time to diminish poetry’s power, for, under their sway, “imagination gave way to correctness, sublimity of description to delicacy of sentiment, and majestic imagery to conceit and epigram,” discouraging poetic creativity by disallowing “the daring strokes of great conception” that had belonged to the Gothic age.⁹⁷

Hurd went even further than Thomas Warton, making claims for Gothic art that, as Abrams points out, were “revolutionary.”⁹⁸ Hurd took issue with contemporary standards that celebrated classical literature over the romance, finding the latter “more poetical for being Gothic,” in part because of its supernatural depictions: the romance’s “machinery” of the “marvelous and extraordinary” had allowed poets a greater imaginative scope and had also enhanced literary effect to a greater degree as its “magical and wonder-working Natures” were

⁹⁵ Thomas Warton, *Observations on The Fairie Queene of Spenser*, 2nd ed. (London, 1762), 1:267-68.

⁹⁶ Thomas Warton, *Observations*, 111, 267-68.

⁹⁷ Thomas Warton, *Observations*, 111, 267-68.

⁹⁸ Abrams, *Mirror and the Lamp*, 69.

“more awakening to the imagination” given “the fancies of our modern bards are . . . more sublime, more terrible, more alarming, than those of the classic fablers.”⁹⁹ Similarly to Thomas Warton, Hurd objected to the restrictions imposed by neoclassical criteria: in harnessing “fancy” to “strict truth,” they had served to sacrifice “a world of fine fabling” to mere “good sense.”¹⁰⁰ In describing how Gothic romance surpassed contemporary literature, both Thomas Warton and Hurd made claims that rested to an important extent on finding the supernatural depictions of the former achieved sublime effects. Thus, their commentaries voiced a point of view that gave further support to Walpole’s defense of importing the marvelous of romance into contemporary fiction. In a more general sense, their admiration for Gothic romance contributed to a growing critical consensus that expressed impatience with the rules for literary mimesis and purpose and sought to redefine them by looking to a literary heritage bequeathed by earlier, so-called primitive cultures.

In the mid-eighteenth century, a number of critics became caught up in exploring the source and development of the literary arts, formulating theories that distinguished between cultivated and primitive poetry. According to Abrams, there emerged at this time a widespread acceptance for the notion that primitive poetry expressed “an entirely instinctive outburst of feeling.”¹⁰¹ Although “primitive poetry” was an ambiguous term and often referred to a large and various body of work, there was some agreement among critics in characterizing its qualities. It

⁹⁹ Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (Dublin, 1762), 29, 32, 51, 63.

¹⁰⁰ Hurd, *Letters*, 29, 32, 51, 63.

¹⁰¹ Abrams, *Mirror and the Lamp*, 82.

was widely believed that, in their early stages, different cultures displayed similar traits, creating “the uniform attributes of the primitive mind.”¹⁰² This notion of uniformity was often based on readings from early cultures, including Homer’s epics.¹⁰³ As Lovejoy points out, the neoclassicists’ valorization of the epic and their designation of Homer’s work as the genre’s exemplars manifested “a primitivistic strain” that was also implied by their demand for universal values in art: given art demonstrated its universality by appealing to what was “immutable in human nature,” it seemed logical to conclude that “primitive man must . . . have manifested most clearly, simply, and uncorruptedly those elements in human nature which are universal and fundamental.”¹⁰⁴ The primitivism implied in these standards was contradicted by the contemporary demand for “elegance” and “correctness,” and, in time, this contradiction significantly contributed to undermining neoclassical notions of nature.¹⁰⁵ Thus, aesthetic primitivism contributed to the formulation of a critical perspective that perceived a fundamental conflict between “nature” and neoclassical art.

Hugh Blair’s *A Critical Dissertation on Ossian, Son of Fingal* (1763) was among the earliest studies to privilege primitive poetry over contemporary verse. In his *Dissertation*, Blair set out to provide an analysis of *Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem, in Six Books* that had appeared the year before in 1762. Purportedly written by an ancient Gaelic bard, Ossian, it was actually

¹⁰² Abrams, *Mirror and the Lamp*, 82.

¹⁰³ Abrams, *Mirror and the Lamp*, 82.

¹⁰⁴ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 77.

¹⁰⁵ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 77.

the work of James Macpherson, one of Blair's contemporaries. In forging it, Macpherson drew from old ballads and Celtic poetry, and, as Walpole would do, he posed as the translator of his own fabrication. *Fingal*'s enormous popularity, fueled by the widespread belief in its ancient Scottish origins, reflected the increasing regard for non-classical literary traditions and bolstered the growing interest in the romance literature of England's "Gothic" past. Furthermore, as David Punter remarks, its success served to support the views of critics who found "Gothic qualities" constituted a vital literary force that embodied "a fire, a vigor, a sense of grandeur" missing from contemporary art.¹⁰⁶ The qualities that Blair chose to admire in *Fingal* and the praise that he expressed for its author suggest ways in which concepts of aesthetic primitivism relate to some of the same ideas that Walpole relied on in his second preface: theories of the sublime, perceptions of Gothic romance, and notions of original genius.

As Joseph and Thomas Warton, Hurd, Young, and Burke did, Blair voices dissatisfaction with neoclassical literary standards: "accuracy and correctness; artfully connected narration; exact method and proportion of parts" are among poetry's "lesser graces."¹⁰⁷ In unfavorably comparing poetry that fulfills the prevailing rules to the less cultivated art of *Fingal*, he extols the superiority of the latter's art. Enumerating its achievements, Blair recalls Joseph Warton's aesthetic criteria by equating *Fingal*'s "high degree of poetical merit" with its "sublime and pathetic" qualities, and he echoes Burke by defining sublimity as literature's "highest effect,"

¹⁰⁶ Punter, *Literature of Terror*, 5-6.

¹⁰⁷ Hugh Blair, *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal* (London, 1763), 68.

referring to its transcendent power to “raise [the mind] to an uncommon degree of elevation.”¹⁰⁸ In claiming the epic’s “ghosts and spirits of the night” convey “the true poetical sublime,”¹⁰⁹ he reflects the views of Thomas Warton and Hurd whose praise for the Gothic romance also expressed admiration for an earlier, so called primitive literary tradition, in part by maintaining its use of the marvelous achieved powerful emotional and imaginative effects. Ultimately, Blair valorizes *Fingal* by claiming its author possessed “a genius” derived not from “art” but from “nature.”¹¹⁰ Similarly, Young in his *Conjectures* attributed to Shakespeare a “genius” drawn from “nature,” maintaining his “innate” talents were empowered rather than diminished by his lack of cultivated “learning.”¹¹¹ When they privileged nature over art, Blair and Young expressed unorthodox views. However, numerous orthodox English critics had extolled, as Young did, various aspects of Shakespeare’s plays for their closeness to “nature,” and, in bestowing such praise upon works that failed to fulfill neoclassical notions of art, they tended to undermine their own criteria.

As modern critics have noted, the eighteenth-century elevation of Shakespeare to England’s national poet served to elevate the status of the Gothic style. Both Lovejoy and Clark, for example, find the cult of Shakespeare was profoundly instrumental in fostering the vogue for

¹⁰⁸ Blair, *A Critical Dissertation*, 68.

¹⁰⁹ Blair, *A Critical Dissertation*, 68.

¹¹⁰ Blair, *A Critical Dissertation*, 68.

¹¹¹ Young, *Conjectures*, 332-33.

the Gothic.¹¹² More specifically, Jonathon Bate finds that “the originality of Shakespeare’s supernatural characters, the way in which they seemed to embody the creative power of the imagination, was perhaps the largest single factor in the English rejection of neoclassical theory.”¹¹³ Walpole’s second preface explicitly promoted an association between Shakespearean drama and his “Gothic Story.” Although he openly defied the reigning criteria, he also sought acceptance for his defiance by declaring he had chosen to follow the lead of Shakespeare, “that great master of Nature.”¹¹⁴ As Clery notes, “Walpole was by no means unique in submitting his plea for imaginative liberty under shelter of the Immortal Bard.”¹¹⁵ Among others, Joseph Warton, Burke, Young, and Blair had all looked to Shakespeare’s work to provide to varying degrees literary justification for their aesthetics.

At the time *Otranto*’s second edition appeared, Shakespeare’s dramas had long been admired by English critics. Despite their failure to fulfill neoclassical criteria, they had achieved monumental status by 1765. Although in the first half of the eighteenth century, his plays were not without their detractors, objections to them were eventually undermined, assisted by two of England’s most preeminent neoclassicists, Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson. Published forty years apart, their commentaries on his dramas were highly influential in elevating Shakespeare’s

¹¹² Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 159; Clark, *Gothic Revival*, 32.

¹¹³ Jonathon Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 170.

¹¹⁴ Walpole, preface to the 2nd ed. of *Otranto*, 9-10.

¹¹⁵ E. J. Clery, introduction to *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole, ed. W.S. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xiv.

critical reputation even though they found that his work exhibited significant faults. In 1725, Pope's *Preface to Shakespeare* asserted that the source of Shakespeare's superiority to other writers resided in an originality derived directly "from the fountains of Nature."¹¹⁶ Moreover, Pope implicitly identified the "natural" in art with the Gothic style by likening Shakespeare's plays to a Gothic building, in terms of both their illustrious and defective qualities: Like the "odd and uncouth passages" found in Gothic architecture, his work exhibited "irregularity," but the sense of majesty that such architecture conveyed was analogous to the impression of nobility that Shakespeare's plays expressed.¹¹⁷ In praising Shakespeare, Pope voiced an opinion that was significantly at odds with the neoclassical principle of rational simplicity.

In the same year that the second edition of *Otranto* appeared, Johnson published his edition of Shakespeare's plays. Although in many respects his *Preface* to the edition represented the critical perspective that prevailed in England, his praise for Shakespeare's dramas further elevated Shakespeare's reputation, for it possessed "all the verbal and cultural authority of the [country's] most respected conservative critic."¹¹⁸ In contrast to Pope, who considered the lack of regularity in Shakespeare's work to be its primary defect, Johnson identifies this "defect" as a positive attribute, one which contributes to Shakespeare's natural depictions. He defends Shakespeare against those who complain the mixture of comedy and tragedy debases his plays,

¹¹⁶ Alexander Pope, *The Works of Alexander Pope* (London, 1766), 6:332.

¹¹⁷ Pope, *Works*, 6:349.

¹¹⁸ Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 135.

finding his blend of genres only adds “to the appearance of life.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, he disagrees with those who maintain his dramas suffer from their failure to reflect the unities, declaring the unities of time and place are far from “essential” to the drama.¹²⁰ In contrast to contemporary French theorists, this perspective was not an unusual one among English critics. According to Abrams, many of them “repudiated such formal French requisites as the unity of time and place, and the purity of comedy and tragedy.”¹²¹ For Johnson, Shakespeare’s chief “defect” rests in his apparent willingness to disregard the importance of conveying a moral message: “He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct.”¹²² However, Johnson extols Shakespeare for the pleasure that his plays afford, particularly praising his development of characters with whom his audience can identify: “As his personages act upon principles arising from genuine passion, very little modified by particular forms, their pleasures and vexations are communicable to all times and to all places; they are natural, and therefore durable.”¹²³ In this respect, Johnson’s assessment links two key concepts of neoclassicism, the principle of mimesis that validated the representation of general rather than individualistic traits and the standard that defined aesthetic value according to the duration of an artwork’s appeal. Yet, in declaring that

¹¹⁹ Samuel Johnson, *Mr. Johnson's Preface to His Edition of Shakespear's Plays* (London, 1765), xiv.

¹²⁰ Johnson, *Preface*, xxix-xxx.

¹²¹ Abrams, *Mirror and the Lamp*, 17-18.

¹²² Johnson, *Preface*, xix.

¹²³ Johnson, *Preface*, xvii.

“Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature,”¹²⁴

Johnson expressed a point of view similar not only to that of Pope and many English neoclassicists but also to that of critics who opposed neoclassicism. Despite Johnson’s embrace of neoclassicism, he finds that, while its principles foster the creation of admirable drama, the playwrights who have adhered to them have not produced work that equals Shakespeare’s.¹²⁵ In comparing contemporary dramatists to Shakespeare, he employs a garden metaphor to convey the superior power of his genius:

The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades, and scented with flowers; the composition of Shakespeare is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and to roses; filling the eye with awful pomp, and gratifying the mind with endless diversity.¹²⁶

Like many other English critics, both orthodox and unorthodox, Johnson lauded Shakespeare for his achievement of sublime effects. Furthermore, Johnson’s praise of Shakespeare for his lack of regularity as well as for his “endless diversity” celebrated those qualities to which English neoclassicists had once widely objected and to which their French counterparts continued to object. As Lovejoy points out, Johnson’s preface suggests ways in which English neoclassicism served to undermine its own notion of nature.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Johnson, *Preface*, viii.

¹²⁵ Johnson, *Preface*, xxxv.

¹²⁶ Johnson, *Preface*, xxxv-xxxvi.

¹²⁷ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 159-60.

Those who challenged neoclassicism often valorized Shakespeare by looking in particular to Longinus's *On the Sublime*. Gary Taylor points out that, by the mid-eighteenth century, two English translations of Longinus's work had established "an association between Shakespeare and Longinus for innumerable eighteenth-century readers," and, from this point onward, the classical authority of Longinus offered a means to vindicate Shakespeare's violation of "critical categories," giving his admirers a basis for "claiming Shakespeare had seen beyond categories."¹²⁸ They also garnered support from contemporary celebrations of medieval romance. As Fred Botting notes, it became common to associate the "emotional power and visionary images" of Shakespearean drama with its tradition.¹²⁹ In tandem with these developments, theories of aesthetic primitivism provided further support for elevating Shakespeare's reputation. According to Nicholas Hudson, as a "new perception of what was 'natural' in Shakespeare's drama" developed, "the author's supposedly low birth and lack of education became a positive advantage": Unhampered by the rules "of a classical and 'realist' tradition," he had been free to dramatize the world that confronted him.¹³⁰ Both neoclassicists and those who opposed their criteria contributed to establishing the cult of Shakespeare, which, as Williams remarks,

¹²⁸ Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare*, 135.

¹²⁹ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), 35.

¹³⁰ Nicholas Hudson, "The 'Vexed Question': Shakespeare and the Nature of Middle-Class Appropriation," in *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Sabor and Paul Yachnin (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 45.

ultimately served to validate “nature” over “art” in opposition to neoclassical criteria.¹³¹ Thus both groups played a significant role in shaping the emergence of Gothic aesthetics.

England’s celebration of Shakespeare as its national poet initially stemmed from a reaction against French neoclassicists’ “patronizing and disparaging attitude towards his works.”¹³² Taylor points out that “the opposition between Shakespeare’s practice and French aesthetic theory” prepared the way for designating him “the exemplar of literary liberty.”¹³³ As England’s paragon of artistic freedom, Shakespeare served as the “champion” of those who sought to defend medieval romance against its detractors.¹³⁴ In his second preface, Walpole took the opportunity to defend his own violation of convention by objecting to Voltaire’s deprecating remarks about Shakespeare’s failure to fulfill neoclassical standards. Ostensibly, Walpole sought to justify Shakespeare’s practice of mixing comedy and tragedy and thus provide an aesthetic rationale for blending elements of these genres in *Otranto*.¹³⁵ For Angela Wright, his defense of Shakespeare also served broader goals: in associating himself with Shakespeare, he acted to allay “his readership’s anxieties regarding the boldness of his own experimentation,” a move that then served to provide cover for his “use of the supernatural.”¹³⁶ As Bate points out, for many readers

¹³¹ Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 32.

¹³² Bate, *Genius of Shakespeare*, 169.

¹³³ Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare*, 123.

¹³⁴ Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare*, 123.

¹³⁵ Walpole, preface to the 2nd ed. of *Otranto*, 10-12.

¹³⁶ Angela Wright, “In Search of Arden: Ann Radcliffe’s William Shakespeare,” in *Gothic Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis and Dale Townsend (New York: Routledge, 2008), 112.

and critics, Shakespeare's "poetic creativity," was bound up with his conception of "supernatural characters," and, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, "the first act of *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*" came to represent "his most characteristic achievements."¹³⁷ However, Walpole's second preface sought to do more than take issue with French objections to Shakespeare and so support his use of the marvelous. According to Clery, it served another purpose: in mounting an out-and-out "assault" to defend English art against French cultural intrusions, it signified a "national enterprise" (1998, xiv-xv). However, while Walpole's defense of Shakespeare appeared to establish him wholeheartedly on the side of many English neoclassicists in opposition to their French counterparts, he implicitly extended his attack against Voltaire and his French colleagues to critics at home, drawing an analogy between the constraints that the French imposed upon drama and those that the English placed upon fiction.

Towards the end of his preface, Walpole moves from criticizing Voltaire specifically to denouncing French neoclassicists in general for what he describes as their rigid orthodoxy, characterizing their rules as "shackles" and "fetters" that "have cramped their poetry."¹³⁸ Here, Walpole's language recalls the opening of this preface where he assumes a milder tone to claim that the standards for verisimilitude in fiction—prevailing in England and elsewhere—have "cramped" the novel's development and so have led him to introduce the marvelous of romance into the genre (1998, 9). Although his attack on Voltaire took direct aim at the French, it also

¹³⁷ Bate, *Genius of Shakespeare*, 170, 179.

¹³⁸ Walpole, preface to the 2nd ed. of *Otranto*, 13.

indirectly targeted English neoclassicists who, like Johnson, hailed Shakespeare as “the poet of nature” despite his use of the supernatural, but who expected writers of contemporary fiction to conform to strict standards for literary realism.

By taking Shakespeare as his model, Walpole underscored his argument for bringing to the novel a more expansive notion of nature, one which he and numerous others identified with Shakespearean drama in particular and Gothic romance in general. As Clery remarks, Walpole’s primary innovation resides in introducing the Gothic mode into the idiom of the eighteenth-century novel.¹³⁹ While *Otranto*’s narrative exhibits many of the same enduring features of the romance form—“exile and return, love, quest and adventure, family, name and identity”¹⁴⁰—that had shaped the contemporary novel, Walpole’s use of Gothic motifs contributed to developing the genre’s sense of realism. By dramatizing what Karl Kroeber describes as “the reality of events and experiences outside the range of conventionalized normality,” he extended its explorations of human psychology.¹⁴¹ In fashioning his “new species of romance,” he infused what he called the “modern” romance with “Gothic” qualities derived from poetry, drama, and notions of the emerging Gothic aesthetic to overcome the traditional restrictions placed upon fiction and thus enlarge the scope of the novel.

¹³⁹ Clery, introduction, xv.

¹⁴⁰ Saunders, introduction, 2.

¹⁴¹ Karl Kroeber, *Styles in Fictional Structure: The Art of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971), 116.

CHAPTER 2

TOWARDS GOTHIC AESTHETICS

During the second half of the eighteenth century, critical discourse shifted away from advocating neoclassical principles toward assuming standards that focused on art's psychological effects. This development stemmed from "the formation of an aesthetic based mainly on the mind that perceives, and not on the objective qualities of art."¹⁴² Rather than looking to a long-established consensus for judging literature, critics moved toward recognizing the importance of the reader's subjective experience, a recognition that Brewer notes significantly diminished prior distinctions between the genres of history and fiction: the question became not so much whether a narrative was factual or fictional but whether it conveyed scenes of affective power.¹⁴³ This shift in aesthetics was linked to broader cultural change which not only decreased the authority of neoclassical criteria but also created a more receptive climate for the production of contemporary romance. To a substantial extent, new patterns in taste resulted from the growing tendency to view the nation's "Gothic" heritage in positive rather than negative terms, a trend bolstered by a desire for greater freedom from classical traditions. Although the British had long celebrated ancient Greece and Rome as exemplary civilizations, they increasingly turned to their own cultural heritage to discover alternative models for defining excellence.

In part, the change in attitude was fostered by the spirit of nationalism that had colored

¹⁴² Monk, *The Sublime*, 118.

¹⁴³ John Brewer, "Sentiment and Sensibility," in *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 33-34.

the defense of Shakespeare against the French Academy and that subsequently spread across Britain. Samuel Kliger notes that the impetus for this reconsideration actually surfaced not in “aesthetic but in political discussion” during the seventeenth century.¹⁴⁴ Throughout much of the eighteenth century, the discussion was marked by intense debate, the scope of which encompassed diametrically opposing points of view: on the one hand, there were those who associated the term “Gothic” with a “dark age of feudal tyranny,” while, on the other, there were those for whom the term meant “a golden age of innocent liberty.”¹⁴⁵ In 1783, James Beattie was far from alone when he valorized the Goths for their “invincible spirit of liberty,” which he identified with the foundation of Britain’s legal institutions: “To them there is reason to believe that we are indebted for those two great establishments, which form the basis of British freedom, a parliament for making laws, and juries for trying criminals, and deciding differences.”¹⁴⁶ To a significant degree, revisionary histories such as Beattie’s exerted their appeal by inspiring a sense of national pride. According to Fred Botting, in establishing a relationship of organic “continuity” between an “idealized” notion of the past and contemporary political norms, they exalted the nation’s institutions, especially when they presented them in marked opposition to

¹⁴⁴ Samuel Kliger, “The ‘Goths’ in England: An Introduction to the Gothic Vogue in Eighteenth Century Aesthetic Discussion,” *Modern Philology* 43, no. 2 (November 1945): 107.

¹⁴⁵ Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London: Routledge, 1995), 14.

¹⁴⁶ James Beattie, excerpt from *On Fable and Romance*, in *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820*, ed. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 89.

those “artificial and imported tyrannies of absolutist monarchy.”¹⁴⁷ In this context, tyranny was often associated with ancient Rome’s occupation of Britain and the Norman Conquest.¹⁴⁸ During the eighteenth century, opinion came to characterize the Gothic in terms denoting either liberty or oppression in discussions that extended beyond politics.

The ongoing debate also influenced the values assigned to medieval ruins. As relics of Britain’s heritage, they took on more than aesthetic connotations. As Brewer points out, they stood as ancient remnants that evoked either a political and religious tyranny long since overcome or the enlightened ancestry of a King Arthur.¹⁴⁹ These opposing perspectives on Britain’s political and architectural history were analogous to those reflected in disagreements over the nation’s native literary tradition given that commentators tended either to celebrate its marvelous incidents as an expression of poetic freedom or to denounce them as oppressive superstition. As Mark Madoff remarks, “a conjunction of aesthetic preferences, political sentiments, and antiquarian fancies produced two conflicting descriptions of gothic ancestors. It did not matter whether they had ever held a place in British history; they still led a vigorous existence in the popular imagination.”¹⁵⁰ Increasingly, however, public discourse was inclined to

¹⁴⁷ Fred Botting, “In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture,” in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter, rev. ed. (Chichester, UK.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 16.

¹⁴⁸ Kilgour, *Gothic Novel*, 13-14.

¹⁴⁹ John Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Farrar, 1997), 584.

¹⁵⁰ Mark Madoff, “The Useful Myth of Gothic Ancestry,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 8 (1979): 341.

cast this mythic past in a more sympathetic light, endowing the Gothic with an authority that provided a basis for defining important cultural norms. This development was nowhere more apparent than in the growing admiration for the literature identified with Britain's heritage. The enduring popularity of Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and Thomas Warton's *The History of English Poetry* (1774-81) testified to the sustained interest in and enthusiasm for a native literary tradition. For the British, the significance of these works initially stemmed from the historical insight that they seemed to offer into the cultural past, but appreciation for them eventually came to focus on aesthetic properties.¹⁵¹ Both Percy's *Reliques* and Warton's *History* celebrated the art of romance, as did the commentaries of many other literary antiquarians, suggesting, as Patricia Parker notes, "that the fortunes of romance were virtually synonymous with the fortunes of poetry."¹⁵² However, like most literary antiquarians, Percy and Thomas Warton believed the romance belonged to an irretrievable past. As Parker remarks, their "effort at revival was accompanied . . . by a sense that no real return was possible" in "an enlightened age."¹⁵³ Nevertheless, their admiration encouraged the desire to recapture the spirit of romance in the present. Brewer notes that the popularity of Percy's *Reliques* and Warton's *History* reflected the wish to find in Britain's past a literary legacy uninfluenced by

¹⁵¹ Susan Manning, "Antiquarianism, Balladry, and the Rehabilitation of Romance," in *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 52.

¹⁵² Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 162.

¹⁵³ Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 161.

classical and neoclassical writers.¹⁵⁴ Along with previous or concurrent commentaries by the Warton brothers, Blair, and Hurd, their works represented what Robert Folkenflick refers to as a “version of cultural nationalism”¹⁵⁵ that promoted a positive perception of the Gothic romance to which the vogue for graveyard poetry, the Ossian poems, and especially the plays of Shakespeare also contributed.

Along with literary antiquarians, commentators on Shakespeare’s plays exercised a growing influence on aesthetic theory, in part by assuming an instrumental role in extending the notion of probability. In their efforts to valorize Shakespeare as “the poet of nature,” critics sought to reconcile his marvelous incidents with mimetic standards by promoting a more elastic definition of the probable. Douglas Lane Patey notes that, influenced by theories of the sublime, they enlarged the concept of probability to include not only external or “ordinary” probability characterized by “the mundane details of everyday social life” but also internal or “poetical” probability associated with “deeper psychological truths, permanent truths of the heart and its emotions.”¹⁵⁶ Contemporary critical discourse provided a rationale for this development because it tended to emphasize the psychological effects evoked by the sublime much more than the actual properties of the object which produced it. At the same time, the works of literary

¹⁵⁴ Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 582, 584.

¹⁵⁵ Robert Folkenflick, “Folklore, Antiquarianism, Scholarship and High Literacy Culture,” in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 613.

¹⁵⁶ Douglas Lane Patey, *Probability and Literary Form: Philosophic Theory and Literary Practice in the Augustan Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 144-45.

antiquarians played an important part in revising the notion of probability. Patey finds, for example, that critics were more and more disposed to uphold Joseph Warton's designation of "passion" as "the source and concern of all true poetry."¹⁵⁷ However, while critics were increasingly willing to assign internal probability to the province of poetry, they continued to expect the novel to concern itself solely with considerations of external probability throughout most of the eighteenth century. Given one of the primary functions of fiction was to educate its young readers to become productive members of society, critics insisted on the need for characters who modeled the process of interpreting the concrete actualities of everyday life to demonstrate the methods of practical reasoning. Ideally, for critics, this instruction not only illustrated proper methods of analysis but also led to "reading" the moral implications of the novel.

At mid-century, Charlotte Lennox in her novel *The Female Quixote* (1752) dramatizes just such a process. Looking to the prevailing critical interpretation of *Don Quixote*, she depicts how the heroine, whose distorted vision of reality has been shaped by romance reading, comes to develop a common-sense view of the world through learning to make judgments based on empirical evidence. In the penultimate chapter, a learned clergyman succeeds in divesting her of her illusions by instructing her in the methods of drawing probable inferences and forming reasonable expectations from "accurate Observation," a phrase that echoes Samuel Johnson in his essay on fiction in *Rambler*, no. 4.¹⁵⁸ As John Bender notes, this scene supports the critical

¹⁵⁷ Patey, *Probability and Literary Form*, 144.

¹⁵⁸ Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote or the Adventures of Arabella*, ed. Margaret Dalziel, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 380; Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, no. 4, 107.

establishment's approval of what "we now call 'realist' novels," for strengthening "the power of readers to form probabilistic judgments with which they must make their way in the world" and its disapproval of the romance for lessening "these powers or, at worst, foster[ing] delusion."¹⁵⁹ Challenging this consensus, Walpole implicitly claimed the use of internal probability for the novel when he explained in his second preface to *Otranto* that "he wished . . . to make [his characters] think, speak, and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions."¹⁶⁰ Patey finds that, although Walpole did not defend his use of the marvelous "by invoking a notion of internal probability," he anticipated later novelists and poets who would "argue that marvels reveal passionate truth."¹⁶¹ However, Walpole strongly suggests this notion when he voices his desire to emulate "all inspired writings" in which "witnesses to the most stupendous phenomena" retain "their human character."¹⁶² Here, he most likely refers to Shakespeare, his avowed "model,"¹⁶³ whose use of the supernatural was validated by the concept of internal probability. According to Kroeber, Walpole's attempt to "represent realities"

A number of modern critics have claimed that Johnson wrote this chapter. In her explanatory notes to this edition of Lennox's novel, Margaret Anne Doody finds that, while the claim has decided merit, no conclusive evidence exists to prove it.

¹⁵⁹ John Bender, "Novel Knowledge: Judgment, Experience, Experiment," in *Fictions of Knowledge: Facts, Evidence, Doubt*, ed. Yota Batsaki (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 147.

¹⁶⁰ Walpole, preface to the 2nd ed. of *Otranto*, 9-10.

¹⁶¹ Patey, *Probability and Literary Form*, 160.

¹⁶² Walpole, preface to the 2nd ed. of *Otranto*, 10.

¹⁶³ Walpole, preface to the 2nd ed. of *Otranto*, 10.

that were “excluded from the novel . . . [laid] the groundwork for the modern romance’s special claim to ‘truth,’ ” providing a basis for later Gothic writers to develop greater “psychological complexity” in the novel.¹⁶⁴ Walpole’s efforts to bring to the novel an enlarged concept of probability participated in the movement toward an aesthetics that elevated the importance of the reader’s subjective response. By modifying “the objective world as represented in the works of contemporary novelists” to present a “less empirical” version of “reality,” Walpole largely focused on the “affective concerns” that increasingly came to preoccupy aestheticians in the latter half of the century.¹⁶⁵ As his second preface and *Otranto* itself demonstrate, Walpole was among the forerunners of those who promoted an expressivist aesthetics that manifested what Northrop Frye has called “the age of sensibility.”¹⁶⁶

Numerous scholars have identified the rise of sensibility with momentous social and cultural developments that occurred across Europe in the latter half of the eighteenth century. According to Charles Taylor, the embrace of sentiment constituted a “profound” change.¹⁶⁷ For Janet Todd, “sensibility” represented a “key” if not the “key term of the period.”¹⁶⁸ In considering the far-reaching effects of what she calls “the cult of sensibility,” Todd relates its

¹⁶⁴ Kroeber, *Styles in Fictional Structure*, 115, 117.

¹⁶⁵ George E. Haggerty, “Fact and Fancy in the Gothic Novel,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 39, no. 4 (March 1985): 380.

¹⁶⁶ Northrop Frye, “Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility,” *ELH* 23, no. 2 (June 1956): 144.

¹⁶⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 302.

¹⁶⁸ Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), 7.

significance to fundamental aspects of British life: the concept of the family, notions of class and gender, the development of London as an urban center, and trends in scientific, religious, aesthetic, and philosophical thought.¹⁶⁹ From mid-century when the word gained currency, “sensibility” took on a multiplicity of connotations. G. J. Barker-Benfield notes that “the flexibility of a term synonymous with consciousness . . . permitted a continuous struggle over its meanings and values.”¹⁷⁰ In Britain, as elsewhere in Europe, understanding of the term encompassed widely diverse views and shifting implications. Over time, it “signified revolution, promised freedom, threatened subversion, and became convention.” More specifically, however, the term referred to “the receptivity of the senses,”¹⁷¹ a phenomenon that John Locke described in formulating the basis for his empirical psychology in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690).

Lockean psychology exerted a powerful influence on shaping eighteenth-century inquiries into the workings of the mind. As Roy Porter remarks, in an era preoccupied with the “study of human faculties, motives, and behavior,” Locke’s empirical approach to explaining consciousness appealed to philosophers who sought to establish an “objective” basis for investigating how humans apprehended the world.¹⁷² Locke’s theory of the mind as a blank slate

¹⁶⁹ Todd, *Sensibility*, 10.

¹⁷⁰ G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), xvii.

¹⁷¹ Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, xvii.

¹⁷² Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment*. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 162-63.

contested the Cartesian notion of innate ideas by maintaining that consciousness was shaped by experience while understanding and morality stemmed from the proper employment of human faculties. Taylor finds that, among these faculties, “the exercise of disengaged reason” assumed paramount importance for Locke.¹⁷³ However, Locke’s theory of associationism, which he articulated in the fourth edition of his *Essay* (1700), served to undercut the privileged role that he gave to reason by claiming that thought processes originated in sense experience and operated by means of association and rational reflection to form complex ideas. Inger Brodey points out that, although reason played the “supreme” role for Locke in forming ideas, he supported “to an unprecedented degree” the significance of feeling in human perception and understanding.¹⁷⁴ Associationism proved to have an enduring influence on contemporary thought. In the latter half of the century, it provided an empirical basis for establishing the “interrelated” connection “between thought and feeling” and thus elevated feeling as a source of “aesthetic and moral insight.”¹⁷⁵ More immediately, followers of Locke found that “the understanding of selfhood in general and of the individual self in particular meant prioritizing interiority.”¹⁷⁶ This new emphasis on the inner life led philosophy and soon afterwards aesthetics toward exploring and then often endorsing concepts of sensibility.

¹⁷³ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 265.

¹⁷⁴ Inger Sigrun Brodey, *Ruined by Design: Shaping Novels and Gardens in the Culture of Sensibility* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 208n24.

¹⁷⁵ Walter Jackson Bate, *From Classic to Romantic* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 130, 132.

¹⁷⁶ Porter, *Creation of the Modern World*, 163.

Although Locke is recognized as the major philosopher in the development of eighteenth-century sensibility, his pupil, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, is usually identified as the author of the moral-sense philosophy that brought a new emphasis to the role of feeling in ethics and the arts. In his *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), he insisted on a close connection between virtue and taste, claiming moral and aesthetic judgments owed more to the emotions and intuition than they did to reason. While Shaftesbury appropriated Locke's sensationalist psychology to an important extent, he objected to what he saw as the moral relativism implied by Locke's blank-slate theory.¹⁷⁷ By contrast, he asserted in *Characteristics* that human beings possessed an innate moral sense, granting them the ability to judge "actions" as well as "affections and passions" by making distinctions between, on the one hand, "the fair and shapely, the amiable and admirable and, on the other, "the deformed, the foul, the odious or despicable."¹⁷⁸ For Shaftesbury, perceiving what was virtuous was analogous to perceiving what was aesthetically pleasing given both these qualities manifested the beauty of nature's providential design. However, he insisted that true virtue and taste required "labor," "pains," and "time to cultivate."¹⁷⁹ Although Shaftesbury defined "moral sense" as an inborn quality, he found exercising its powers belonged to the privileged classes, because, in his view, they alone possessed the necessary resources for developing it. Yet many of those who embraced

¹⁷⁷ Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 106-07.

¹⁷⁸ Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (London, 1733), 2:401.

¹⁷⁹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 2:129.

his ideas misconstrued this aspect of his thought. According to Stephen Cox, Shaftesbury left his claims open to misinterpretation because he focused on describing how virtuous people resembled each other, while he all but ignored how they potentially differed.¹⁸⁰ As Barker-Benfield points out, by envisioning “a generic human nature,” he invited his audience to consider “his idea of ‘moral sense’ as generally applicable.”¹⁸¹ Shaftesbury’s philosophy achieved enormous influence, in large part through the development of his ideas in the works of Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith, which modified his notion of an inner sense and also appropriated aspects of Lockean psychology to privilege the role of sentiment over reason.

In the 1720s, Hutcheson considerably consolidated and enlarged on Shaftesbury’s position by bringing a systematic approach to discussing the connection between ethics and aesthetics. According to Porter, Hutcheson stressed the subjective nature of judgment by arguing that beauty “did not simply dwell in and radiate from the object but was inseparable from acts of perception.”¹⁸² For Hutcheson, recognizing beauty is bound up with experiencing a “pleasure” fostered by the “*moral sense*.”¹⁸³ In his view, humanity’s natural impulses ultimately served to promote happiness through the pleasure derived from observing benevolence. Taylor notes that, although Hutcheson valued reason as the means for rectifying distorted perception, he

¹⁸⁰ Stephen Cox, “*The Stranger Within Thee*”: *Concepts of the Self in Late Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), 19.

¹⁸¹ Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 108.

¹⁸² Porter, *Creation of the Modern World*, 164.

¹⁸³ Francis Hutcheson, preface to *Inquiry into the Originals of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, 2nd ed. (London, 1726), xiii-xiv.

emphasized the role that sentiment played in stimulating moral actions and feeling.¹⁸⁴ While Shaftesbury's idea of goodness had relied to an important degree on benevolence, Hutcheson's belief in humanity's natural propensity for sympathy constituted the basis for his concept of virtue.

In the following generation, David Hume and Adam Smith formulated theories which further explored and established the relation between sentiment and ethics. Although Hume drew on the ideas of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, he went further than they in identifying "morality with subjective feeling."¹⁸⁵ In his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), he famously declared, "morality . . . is more properly felt than judg'd of." Because "the passions" motivate human behavior, the proper role of reason is "to serve and obey" them.¹⁸⁶ Following Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, he elevated sentiment's role in motivating ethical conduct. He, too, disavowed "the ethics of rationalism," but he went beyond their conclusions by disclaiming the power of reason to act as a form of moral control.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, Hume rejected the notion of an innate moral sense. Instead, he argued that the attributes crucial to human harmony spring from natural

¹⁸⁴ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 261-62, 284.

¹⁸⁵ Thomas Keymer, "Sentimental Fiction: Ethics, Social Critique and Philanthropy," in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 578.

¹⁸⁶ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. P. H. Nidditch. rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 416, 470.

¹⁸⁷ Todd, *Sensibility*, 26.

inclinations nurtured by social traditions.¹⁸⁸ While Hume did not valorize sympathy to the degree that Hutcheson had, he found it to be a critical factor in establishing the public good.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Smith also analyzed the part that sentiment took in shaping moral judgment and promoting social welfare. As Hutcheson had, Smith held that sympathy constituted the motivating principle for exercising virtue, but as his colleague Hume did, he denied the existence of an innate moral sense. In his view, the natural desire for self-approbation and social approval fostered the development of moral sentiments. The pleasure derived from mutual sympathy curbed people's natural tendency toward selfishness by encouraging them to imagine themselves in the circumstances of others. However, in envisioning the act of sympathy as an imaginative undertaking, Smith also expressed doubts about its effectiveness as a moral force: "When we condole with our friends in their afflictions, . . . we may inwardly reproach ourselves with our want of sensibility, and perhaps, on that account, work ourselves up into an artificial sympathy, which, however, when it is raised, is always the slightest and most transitory imaginable."¹⁸⁹ While both Smith and Hume are associated with elevating sensibility "to an exalted status previously held exclusively by reason,"¹⁹⁰ Smith viewed the power of sentiment in less hopeful terms. Todd notes that sympathy was "not an

¹⁸⁸ Porter, *Creation of the Modern World*, 178-79.

¹⁸⁹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 47.

¹⁹⁰ Brodey, *Ruined by Design*, 11.

original spontaneous feeling” for Smith as it was for Hume “but more of a moral duty.”¹⁹¹

According to Smith’s *Theory*, society’s expectations play an important role in shaping the proper sense of duty: sympathy prompts the individual “to view his situation” through the “eyes” of others and to take into account “the light” by which they perceive it. Although this process is encouraged by “beneficence,” it is assisted by a “sense of propriety,” which serves to moderate behavior by animating “the virtues of self-command.”¹⁹² Such a notion raised unsettling questions about what was natural and what was contrived in people’s dealings with others. As Cockburn remarks, it suggested “that people were not cultivating a *true* sense of duty and morality but were presenting only an artificial show . . . to gain approval.”¹⁹³ The ambiguities inherent in Smith’s *Theory* demonstrated the eighteenth century’s difficulty in defining a coherent concept of sensibility in general and of sympathy in particular. Cox comments that contemporary philosophy conceived of sympathy as “a form of sensibility that connect[ed] the inner with the outer world,” but “distinctions between the self conditioned by society and the self defined by the inner principle became difficult to maintain.”¹⁹⁴ Across Britain, the tension between propriety and sentiment expressed in Smith’s work emerged at mid-century in the conflict between the ideal of politeness and the culture of sensibility, a conflict which rested on competing claims about the source of taste and morality.

¹⁹¹ Todd, *Sensibility*, 27.

¹⁹² Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 22, 262-64.

¹⁹³ Cockburn, “Awful Pomp,” 140.

¹⁹⁴ Cox, *Concepts of the Self*, 9.

The polite ideal represented a significant aspect of cultural life in eighteenth-century Britain. According to Brewer, belief in its positive value stemmed from contemporary notions of human psychology: the strength of human passions required regulation, while their refinement added to the enjoyment of life.¹⁹⁵ In judging behavior, people looked to its influence on others.¹⁹⁶ Given a polite identity was a shared identity, “morality became embedded in the world of appearances,” generating a “tension between interior self and public persona” and creating “a profound anxiety about identity.”¹⁹⁷ Those critical of the polite ideal often associated the concept with the dissimulation of the urban world, particularly the world of London society, which they presented in marked contrast to provincial life where they found that those “outside the culture of display” were “less corrupt.”¹⁹⁸ As champions of sentiment, they tended to locate the basis for virtue in the “human affections” and to consider the more emotionally sensitive to be “potentially more refined and virtuous.”¹⁹⁹ Before the rise of sensibility, the emotions had played an important role in shaping ethical and aesthetic concepts, but afterwards they acquired a much more positive significance, one that, for many, seemed to manifest a democratic impulse. To a significant degree, this sense of egalitarianism relied on eighteenth-century developments of Locke’s empirical psychology. Influenced by Thomas Willis’s nerve physiology and Isaac

¹⁹⁵ Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 112.

¹⁹⁶ Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 106-07.

¹⁹⁷ Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 106, 112.

¹⁹⁸ Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 113.

¹⁹⁹ Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 113, 114.

Newton's theory of perception, Locke had established a mind-body connection as the basis for human understanding by finding that sensations were conveyed to the mind through the nerves. Later physiologists and physicians also participated in formulating ideas that linked the operations of the nerves to those of the mind, raising the possibility that everyone was equally capable of exercising the same degree of virtue and taste. As Brewer notes, "theories of nervous sensibility" provided "material accounts of the universal human condition."²⁰⁰ Yet such theories were open to debate. Brewer also points out that they served as "the basis on which a system of human distinction was made."²⁰¹ Although Locke had argued that humans were endowed with similar powers of perception, his ideas could be and often were taken to mean that understanding "reality" relied on "the nature of the individual observe."²⁰² If, as Locke's blank-slate theory claimed, "experience" shaped "humanity," then an individual's upbringing and situation in life would seem to inform the development of "selfhood."²⁰³ In the latter half of the eighteenth century, many agreed that, owing to circumstance and ability, some people were more likely than others to possess the degree of sensibility required for exercising true discernment in matters of morality and taste. According to Todd, sensibility often implied "a meritocracy of feeling," but

²⁰⁰ Brewer, "Sentiment and Sensibility," 25.

²⁰¹ Brewer, "Sentiment and Sensibility," 25.

²⁰² Ira Konigsberg, *Narrative Technique in the English Novel: Defoe to Austen* (New York: Archon, 1985), 8.

²⁰³ Elaine McGirr, "Interiorities," in *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 89.

one “not necessarily coinciding with the hierarchy of birth.”²⁰⁴ Although the notion of sensibility encompassed conflicting claims, its very contradictions made it an adaptable concept, contributing to its widespread appeal. Through various cultural avenues, including popularized moral philosophy, the visual arts, drama, poetry, and especially fiction, sensibility’s ethical and aesthetic concepts were widely disseminated across Britain.

From approximately the 1740s to the 1770s, much British fiction focused on sentiment. By directly appropriating the “vocabulary and propositions” of moral-sense philosophy,²⁰⁵ novelists provided a highly popular venue for circulating its ideas. However, Cox notes that much sentimental literature granted sympathy a kind of “mystical force,” describing its powers in more extravagant terms than contemporary philosophy would have accepted.²⁰⁶ As Brodey remarks, it often depicted the finer sentiments as the sole basis for creating meaningful bonds “among kindred, sensitive souls.”²⁰⁷ Sarah Fielding’s *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744) and Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740-41), *Clarissa* (1748-49), and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754) in large part established the basis for the sentimental novel, portraying a new kind of hero or heroine. Often presented as victims of a heartless world, its protagonists stood as paragons of virtue whose sensibilities served to place them in conflict with polite society’s customs and practices.

²⁰⁴ Todd, *Sensibility*, 13.

²⁰⁵ Keymer, “Sentimental Fiction,” 581.

²⁰⁶ Cox, *Concepts of the Self*, 44.

²⁰⁷ Brodey, *Ruined by Design*, 12.

Sentimental fiction's moral purpose was closely allied with the sensibility of the protagonist, whose displays of high-minded sensitivity were meant to promote reader identification through dramatizing feelings. To a great extent, the genre's didactic aims became centered on its attempt to elicit the reader's sympathetic response: "to read novels for the 'sentiment' was to discover the capacity for fine feeling as its own justification."²⁰⁸ Although seventeenth-century French romances had relied on evoking sympathy to achieve emotional effects, Keymer points out that "what was new after Richardson was the primacy of feeling."²⁰⁹ In writing the preface to Sarah Fielding's *David Simple* (1744), Henry Fielding suggests this shift in focus when he praises his sister's novel for achieving "a vast penetration into human nature, a deep and profound discernment of all the mazes, windings, and labyrinths which perplex the heart."²¹⁰ Sentimental fiction found a receptive audience not only in Britain but across Europe. While Sarah Fielding's novel had a moderate success, Richardson's works enjoyed enormous critical and popular acclaim. *Pamela* and *Clarissa* in particular played a large role in fostering the vogue for sentimentalism at home and abroad.

In many respects, Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) represents the quintessential sentimental novel. Like other sentimental writers before him, Mackenzie emphasized scenes of heightened sensibility against the backdrop of a callous and self-serving

²⁰⁸ John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 146.

²⁰⁹ Keymer, "Sentimental Fiction," 576.

²¹⁰ Henry Fielding, "Preface to *David Simple*," in *Eighteenth-Century British Novelists on the Novel*, ed. George L. Barnett (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968), 53.

world. The novel clearly dramatizes what Mullan identifies as a common theme in contemporary literature and philosophy: the tension between “social instincts” and “resources of sensitivity.”²¹¹ Above all, it reflects contemporary trends in fiction by focusing on the protagonist’s capacity for sympathetic understanding. As Deidre Lynch remarks, “sentimental fiction exemplifie[d] and enact[ed] the virtues of connection.”²¹² Yet, as *The Man of Feeling* demonstrates, it often did so to emphasize the singularity of the sympathetic heart. Mackenzie’s benevolent hero, Harley, encounters few like-minded souls, leaving him to retreat in “disappointment” from society’s “bustle,” “dissimulation,” and “restraint.”²¹³ Ultimately, he concludes that “there are some feelings which perhaps are too tender to be suffered by the world. The world is in general selfish, interested, and unthinking, and throws the imputation of romance or melancholy on every temper more susceptible than its own.”²¹⁴ Harley’s “romantic” nature appealed to a large audience eager for novels in which the protagonists’ displays of sensibility served to measure and inform its own sympathies and tastes. According to Taylor, such fiction “contributed immensely” to “the moral consecration of sentiment” that occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century.²¹⁵ In terms of the novel’s development, it linked its aesthetic and moral effects in new ways. Rather than

²¹¹ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 15.

²¹² Deidre Lynch, “Transformation of the Novel – I,” in *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 456.

²¹³ Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* (1771), ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 94-95.

²¹⁴ Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, 95.

²¹⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 294.

model meaningful action, it illustrated the virtues of its protagonists' affective response to the world through its focus on character, a technique that created a sense of emotional affinity between the text and its readership.

While concepts of sensibility promoted belief in the power of feeling to establish a kindred relationship among individuals as well as between the novel and its audience, they also provided a similar basis for establishing a sense of unity between the individual and nature. According to Taylor, "the moral importance of sentiment" was tied to the development of "the feeling for nature," a feeling that expressed a new attitude as it was more concerned with "the sentiments that nature awakens in us" than with "the virtues of simplicity or rusticity" that had been celebrated since classical times.²¹⁶ Across Britain, various developments contributed to this transformation as economic, social, and cultural changes served to modify the population's vision of nature to a profound degree: urbanization, advances in the sciences, developments in natural philosophy, innovations in agriculture, and the proliferation of large estates created changes that significantly altered how the British defined their relation to nature. During the eighteenth century, the growth of urban centers, the decline in the number of small landowners, and more modern methods in agriculture meant that the daily lives of more and more people no longer relied on a direct connection to the land.²¹⁷ Developments in analyzing natural phenomena also contributed to this sense of separation. As natural philosophy and scientific discoveries

²¹⁶ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 296-97.

²¹⁷ Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 621.

divested nature of its symbolic associations, the natural world gradually became a domain for observation from which its workings could be understood, ordered, and categorized.²¹⁸ Brewer notes that these changes fostered the tendency to see nature as “something experienced from the outside,” rendering it “a surface on to which all sorts of values and views could be projected.”²¹⁹ Among these ideas, the notion that nature was “opposed to human artifice” eventually gained widespread acceptance.²²⁰ At the same time, trends in landscape appreciation charted the movement toward redefining concepts of the natural world as they increasingly reflected and supported the shift away from neoclassical principles in the realm of aesthetics.

The history of the eighteenth-century English garden illustrated the broader changes in taste that occurred across British culture, exemplifying the move toward validating the tenets of sensibility. In the early decades of the century, developments in garden design reflected a growing dislike for the neoclassical formality of the French Baroque and Dutch styles, which, in the eyes of their detractors, represented intrusive schemes that Burke would later associate with “the artificial lines and angles of architecture.”²²¹ As Malcom Andrews observes, however, the “crucial change” in landscape design happened during the latter part of the century in the movement away from a purpose that emphasized moral instruction toward one that emphasized

²¹⁸ Brewer, *Pleasure of the Imagination*, 622.

²¹⁹ Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 624.

²²⁰ Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 624.

²²¹ Burke, *Inquiry*, 92.

the affective response.²²² In the 1720s, the emblematic garden, in which monuments, inscriptions, and sculpture “elaborated various moral precepts,” had come into vogue, but its style was eventually displaced in the latter part of the century by “a landscape of variety,” one intended “to be *felt* as a medley of moods.”²²³ In 1770, Thomas Whately suggests such a trend in his *Observations on Modern Gardening* when he objects to the rationalism of the emblematic style: its “devices . . . make no immediate impression, for they must be examined, compared, perhaps explained, before the whole design of them is well understood.”²²⁴ Although both forms relied on principles of association to achieve their effects, the later style exhibited a broader appeal. As David Marshall points out, it seemed “more inclusive” in its approach because it demanded a less intellectual, more immediate response.²²⁵ According to John Dixon Hunt, as fashion shifted decisively away from the emblematic toward the “expressive,” the primary appeal of gardens came to reside in “their effect upon the sensibilities” evoked by the “landscape itself.”²²⁶

Capability Brown’s approach to garden design proved highly influential in fostering this change in taste during the 1760s and 1770s. The work that he carried out in the park at Stowe

²²² Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 52.

²²³ Andrews, *Search for the Picturesque*, 51.

²²⁴ Thomas Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening* (London, 1770), 151.

²²⁵ David Marshall, *The Frame of Art: Fictions of Aesthetic Experience, 1750-1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 38.

²²⁶ John Dixon Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening During the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 247.

indicates sensibility's influence on current aesthetic theory. Hunt notes that, compared to traditional schemes, his designs were "far less concerned to direct visitors' responses."²²⁷ His renovations gave them greater latitude to roam and offered them more secluded spots from which to enjoy the park's vistas in privacy, contributing to the park's "psychological effects."²²⁸ Furthermore, by deemphasizing emblematic references and often relying instead on the contours of the land to provide the focal points, Brown created spaces that seemed to speak to each viewer and elicit "a unique and individual response."²²⁹ For many, Brown's style conveyed a new and welcome sense of freedom. According to Brodey, the expressivist style derived its popularity in large part from the belief that it promoted "liberty of mind or feeling."²³⁰ The vogue for the English garden both drew from and inspired a new view of nature. By striving to create seemingly natural landscapes that would resonate with and nurture the viewer's sentiments, Brown and his followers were instrumental in fostering what Taylor calls a "new orientation to nature," one that looked to scenic vistas to "reflect and intensify" or even to "awaken . . . strong and noble feelings."²³¹ By the late eighteenth century, however, the fashion for Brown's style had declined as landscape enthusiasts came to regard the kind of large-scale "improvements" that it required as artificial or overly contrived. As Andrews remarks, they grew "impatient with

²²⁷ Hunt, *Figure in the Landscape*, 188.

²²⁸ Hunt, *Figure in the Landscape*, 188.

²²⁹ Hunt, *Figure in the Landscape*, 188.

²³⁰ Brodey, *Ruined by Design*, 68.

²³¹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 297-98.

gardens altogether.”²³² Once opinion associated the style with imitation, it could no longer wield the same affective power. To a significant extent this attitude was fostered by developments in theories of the picturesque.

The picturesque exercised an enormous influence on shaping late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tastes. Beginning in the early 1780s, the publication of William Gilpin’s work provided a theory of picturesque scenery, which Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight, among others, extended later in the century. From his travels around Britain, Gilpin produced a series of widely popular guidebooks that promoted a vogue for domestic tourism and, at the same time, established the basis for a new aesthetic category, one which privileged variety over uniformity, the irregular over the symmetrical, and the psychological effect over the didactic message. Although Brown and his followers had made an important contribution to the development of the picturesque, their vision came to represent a retreat from nature as fashion increasingly celebrated landscapes free from aesthetic cultivation.

The principles of the picturesque shared significant similarities with those of the sublime. Aligned with the culture of sensibility, both defined artistic merit in terms of a scene’s affective power. For example, Burke’s *Inquiry* identifies mountains with “the great and sublime in *nature*” because their forbidding “magnitude” conveys an overwhelming impression of power, exciting “astonishment,” or “that state” in which “the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it.”²³³ The

²³² Andrews, *Search for the Picturesque*, 52.

²³³ Burke, *Inquiry*, 53, 66.

Alps on the continent and the Scottish Highlands in Britain represented the kind of harsh and wild but majestic terrain associated with the sublime. Although Gilpin also celebrated scenery that inspired a spontaneous response, his vision of the picturesque referred to landscapes that overcame the observer with delight rather than with awe:

We are most delighted, when some grand scene, tho perhaps of incorrect composition, rising before the eye, strikes us beyond the power of thought . . . and every mental operation is suspended. In this pause of the intellect; this *deliquium* of the soul, an enthusiastic sensation of pleasure overspreads it, previous to any examination by the rules of art. The general idea of the scene makes an impression, before any appeal is made to the judgment. We rather *feel* than *survey* it.²³⁴

For Gilpin, the evocation of pleasure needed little to no moral justification. As Burke's *Inquiry* did, his work represented a critical factor in shaping an aesthetics that rejected neoclassicism's definition of art's educative purpose.

Gilpin and his immediate followers inspired an eagerness for touring the British countryside that made domestic travel the height of fashion, primarily among the upper-middle and upper classes given they could afford the expense that it entailed. These tourists sought out "wild, uncivilized scenes that had once been called 'romantic' and were cherished now as sublime or picturesque."²³⁵ Enthusiasts of the picturesque extolled scenes consisting of expansive views and rugged, overgrown terrain in which rustic cottages dotted valleys and hills and decaying ruins seemed to emerge organically from the land itself.

²³⁴ William Gilpin, *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape: To which is added a Poem, on Landscape Painting* (London, 1792), 49-50.

²³⁵ Lawrence Lipking, "Literary Criticism and the Rise of National Literary History," in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 49.

The ruin played a predominant role in Gilpin's theory, in large part because he saw it as a natural rather than manufactured artifact. His accounts of his travels were confined to Britain, particularly England where, as Clark points out, nearly "all the authentic ruins are medieval."²³⁶ By making the ruin central to his theory, Gilpin considerably elevated the aesthetic importance of Gothic architecture. For him, "the gothic arch, the remains of castles and abbeys" are capable of producing "high delight" because the ruin reflects nature's shaping influence: "Rooted for ages in the soil; assimilated to it; and become, as it were, a part of it; we consider it as a work of nature, rather than of art."²³⁷ Gilpin's preoccupation with the ruin's role in landscape appreciation is closely tied to contemporary cultural trends, an association that in part accounts for his influence. According to Andrews, in the last decades of the century, tourists' attitudes toward the ruin in large part corresponded with Gilpin's views: they were not so much concerned with its political and moral implications as with its aesthetic properties of "colour and composition" and with its evocation of "mood," which Gilpin described in terms of "vague sentimental associations" related to concepts of sensibility and the sublime as well as to the melancholy tone attributed to graveyard poetry.²³⁸ Furthermore, their half-decayed state increased the complexity of their emotional and imaginative appeal. Brodey remarks that the picturesque tourist was drawn to "recreating the ruins just as one sympathetically recreated . . .

²³⁶ Clark, *Gothic Revival*, 48.

²³⁷ Gilpin, *Three Essays*, 46, 50; Gilpin, *Observations, relative chiefly to picturesque beauty, made in the year 1772 on several parts of England; particularly the mountains, and lakes of Cumberland, and Westmoreland* (London, 1786), 2: 183.

²³⁸ Andrews, *Search for the Picturesque*, 50.

other's emotions."²³⁹ The response to the ruin's crumbling decay reflected broader trends in taste, which Barker-Benfield identifies with the "marked tendency to aggrandize a greater freedom of form and emotion."²⁴⁰ As Lovejoy notes, the growing appreciation for Gothic architecture expressed a reaction against what was perceived to be neoclassicism's constraints on aesthetic pleasure.²⁴¹ By the late eighteenth century, the "exactness," "proportion," and "symmetry" of which Burke had complained in commenting on the continental garden²⁴² no longer defined what was "natural" in either landscape or the arts, signifying the decisive shift away from neoclassical principles toward an aesthetics that was, above all, validated by the tenets of sensibility.

In fostering the belief that the perception of beauty derived not from cultivation but from sensation and sentiment, sensibility exerted an enormous influence on redefining standards of taste. Walter Jackson Bate points out that "the copious British writing of the eighteenth century on sentiment or feeling, and on the use which intuition makes of it," often expressed the "desire to find or reconstruct some general basis for knowledge, morality, and art."²⁴³ However, given philosophy had "disposed of the mind as a strictly rational instrument," it "was increasingly

²³⁹ Brodey, *Ruined by Design*, 68.

²⁴⁰ Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 206.

²⁴¹ Lovejoy, *History of Ideas*, 165.

²⁴² Burke, *Inquiry*, 91-92.

²⁴³ Bate, *Classic to Romantic*, 129.

forced to fall back on the immediate feeling of the individual.”²⁴⁴ In the middle years of the century, this trend in aesthetics troubled many arbiters of taste. According to Barker-Benfield, aestheticians had become worried by “the great variety of tastes they saw about them,” a circumstance which the growth of consumerism and competitive markets was making more and more apparent.²⁴⁵ Although they attempted to formulate principles based on “knowledge and practiced judgment,” they undercut their own efforts because “they continued to place very high value on sensibility.”²⁴⁶ Although they sought to deny or diminish sensibility’s implicit relativism, the legacy of Locke and Shaftesbury made it difficult for them to formulate coherent positions. For example, in discussing Hume’s “Of the Standard of Taste” (1757), Marshall points out that, although Hume recommended “universal agreement” as the foundation for aesthetic criteria, he undermined his proposal by rejecting belief in “the equality of tastes.”²⁴⁷ He further reinforced the apparently “paradoxical” nature of these assertions by “privileging” an artwork’s “effects” and “subjective responses” over “rules and formulas.”²⁴⁸ Hume’s support for universal consensus indicates the ways in which neoclassicism continued to exert authority during the latter half of the eighteenth century, even though critics often placed its criteria in uneasy alliance with concepts of sensibility.

²⁴⁴ Bate, *Classic to Romantic*, 129.

²⁴⁵ Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 205.

²⁴⁶ Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 205.

²⁴⁷ Marshall, *Frame of Art*, 190-91.

²⁴⁸ Marshall, *Frame of Art*, 190-91.

Late in the century, however, critical discourse more clearly demonstrated the ascendancy of sensibility's influence. By this time, for example, literary criticism routinely affirmed the value of poetry's psychological effects. Commentators on Shakespeare's plays made significant contributions to this development by employing techniques that further discounted neoclassical principles and questioned the need for a standard of taste. Drawing on Lockean psychology, especially associationism, they particularly focused on character analysis, a device which allowed them to deemphasize or even jettison discussions of the plot, the focus of traditional literary aesthetics. This practice suggests the influence of the novel, especially sentimental fiction, which had privileged character over action for decades.

Among the commentaries on Shakespeare's dramas, Maurice Morgann's *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (1777) provides an important example. Morgann claimed that the practice of evaluating a text should depend on the subjective impressions derived from subordinating logic to sensation and sentiment. Cockburn points out that, for Morgann, reading character "could not be further from systematic reasoning."²⁴⁹ As Marsden notes, his approach stressed "the purely subjective," and, in denying the merit of "rationalism and order," it disputed "any notion of critical consensus."²⁵⁰ Although some critics continued to voice the call for such a consensus, others dismissed the idea, making it impossible to establish a broad enough basis for formal agreement. According to Cox, "a really authoritative standard of

²⁴⁹ Cockburn, "Awful Pomp," 147-48.

²⁵⁰ Jean I. Marsden, *The Re-Imagined Text: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 139-40.

taste was never formulated,” but the widespread support for the tenets of “sensibility” served to afford “at least a general standard of taste.”²⁵¹

In 1790, the publication of Archibald Alison’s *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* reflected and further endorsed the embrace of sensibility in critical discourse. Appropriating the tenets of associationism to make his major claims, Alison argues that “the emotions of taste” originate in feelings of “simple” pleasure, but their realization then relies on the imagination’s power to evoke “a train of thought . . . analogous to the character or expression of the original object.”²⁵² For Alison, the exercise of taste is a subjective act given that an individual’s “state of mind”—influenced by present circumstances and personal experience—determines the degree to which “objects of taste” can appeal to the “sensibilities.”²⁵³ As Morgann had, he repudiates the practice of traditional critical analysis in forming aesthetic judgments: because it focuses the “attention” on “minute considerations,” it “fetter[s]” the “liberty” of “the mind” and thus prevents the free “flow of imagination” necessary to genuine appreciation.²⁵⁴ In finding the imagination, prompted by feeling, forged a meaningful link between external phenomena and the inner self, Alison looked to “the Science of the Mind,”²⁵⁵ drawing from eighteenth-century developments in Lockean empiricism that also informed

²⁵¹ Cox, *Concepts of the Self*, 55.

²⁵² Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (Dublin, 1790), x.

²⁵³ Alison, *Essays*, 6-7.

²⁵⁴ Alison, *Essays*, 7-8.

²⁵⁵ Alison, *Essays*, x.

Morgann's *Essay* as well as prevailing notions of the sublime and the picturesque. According to Kirwan, however, he extended previous theory by providing "a psychological explanation" that encompassed aesthetic experience.²⁵⁶ Alison's *Essays* was widely read, and its appeal clearly signaled both the decline of neoclassicism's authority and the great extent to which concepts of sensibility had come to shape critical attitudes. In concert with this development, the growth in literary consumption and its influence on the print industry also played a significant role in transforming contemporary taste.

Although for the late eighteenth-century, an educated taste still mattered, its meaning had shifted. The classical learning associated with men of the privileged classes no longer served as a necessary requirement for discernment. Changes in readership wielded substantial influence in fostering this alteration in taste. Increasingly, the middling classes made up a greater proportion of the reading public, especially once the growth of the circulating library in the latter half of the century provided a convenient, less expensive method for acquiring periodicals and books. According to Adrian Johns, "by 1800 there were perhaps 1,000 [circulating libraries] in the provinces and 100 in London alone. . . . The bigger ones issued printed catalogues listing thousands of titles" and "allowed many to read a far wider array of books than they could have afforded to buy."²⁵⁷ More specifically, its subscribers increased the demand for novels and fueled

²⁵⁶ James Kirwan, *Sublimity: The Non-Rational and the Irrational in the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 104, 106.

²⁵⁷ Adrian Johns, "Changes in the World of Publishing," in *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 396.

the print industry's efforts to meet it. Although epic and tragedy maintained their prestige, literary fashion embraced the novel, which, as Mullan points out, "came to dominate the market for books."²⁵⁸ By the 1770s, library patronage had served to commercialize the production of fiction to an unprecedented extent, and, over time, this turn of events further diminished the authority of neoclassicism, which increasingly appeared out-of-step with fashionable literary trends.

The kind of dissatisfaction with neoclassical standards that Walpole had voiced in his second preface to *Otranto* gained greater cultural currency in the last decades of the century. In 1773, John and Anna Laetitia Aikin's essay "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror" sought to provide a theoretical basis for terror in literature, including fiction, by invoking both neoclassical principles and Burke's concept of the sublime. The essay attempts to account for why images of terror in literature—"ghosts and goblins," "murders," "all the most terrible disasters attending human life"²⁵⁹—exert such a strong hold over their audience. Despite what the Aikins see as its lack of moral purpose, they endorse "the inspiration of terror" as a worthy goal of art by maintaining that it represents an aim shared by classical and Shakespearean tragedy, Milton's verse, the Oriental tale, Graveyard poetry, and Walpole's *Otranto*.²⁶⁰ By establishing a correspondence between the classical and the Gothic, the ancient and the

²⁵⁸ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 15.

²⁵⁹ John Aiken and Anna Laetitia Aikin, excerpt from "Three Essays from Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Verse" in *Novel and Romance, 1700-1800: A Documentary Record*, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 283.

²⁶⁰ Aikin and Aikin, "Three Essays," 283-84.

contemporary, and the Eastern and the Western, they implicitly defend the marvelous of romance by claiming it fulfills abiding tenets of neoclassical criteria: the terror that it conveys in the hands of an accomplished author not only reflects a primary aim of tragedy—"the most favorite work of fiction"²⁶¹—but has retained a universal appeal over centuries. However, in attempting to account for why "well-wrought scenes of artificial terror" evoke pleasure,²⁶² the Aikins rely on Burkean notions of the sublime to offer a psychological explanation:

A strange and unexpected event awakens the mind, and keeps it on the stretch; and where the agency of invisible beings is introduced, . . . our imagination, darting forth, explores with rapture the new world which is laid open to its view, and rejoices in the expansion of its powers. Passion and fancy co-operating elevate the soul to its highest pitch; and the pain of terror is lost in amazement.²⁶³

They conclude that, in contrast to the boredom induced by the "insipid" and "tedious" nature of many "modern novels," the salutary effects provided by tales of "wild, fanciful, and extraordinary" events stimulate the capacity to feel and to imagine and so enhance the operations of the mind.²⁶⁴ The Aikins' remarks about the humdrum quality of much contemporary fiction supported Walpole's critique of it as largely unimaginative, and their praise of *Otranto* as "a very spirited modern attempt" to unite "the terrible" and "the marvelous"²⁶⁵ validated his efforts to enliven the novel with a newly fashioned version of the supernatural sublime.

²⁶¹ Aikin and Aikin, "Three Essays," 283-84, 285.

²⁶² Aikin and Aikin, "Three Essays," 284.

²⁶³ Aikin and Aikin, "Three Essays," 284-85.

²⁶⁴ Aikin and Aikin, "Three Essays," 284-85.

²⁶⁵ Aikin and Aikin, "Three Essays," 285.

Thirteen years were to elapse before an author followed what Walpole had characterized in his second preface as “the new route” prepared by *Otranto*.²⁶⁶ In writing the *Champion of Virtue* (1777), Clara Reeve attempted to emulate Walpole, but only in part. When the second edition appeared the following year, retitled *The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story*, it contained a preface in which Reeve acknowledged her admiration for and debt to Walpole’s story as well as explained her reasons for departing to a significant extent from his example. Although Reeve praises *Otranto* for displaying “enough of the manners of real life, to give an air of probability to the work” and “enough of the pathetic, to engage the heart in its behalf,” she finds fault with it for violating the “limits of credibility.”²⁶⁷ While she agrees with Walpole when she declares that the “modern novel” needs “a sufficient degree of the marvelous to excite attention,” she complains that his depictions of the supernatural “excite laughter” instead and so destroy any sense of “enchantment.”²⁶⁸ Unlike Walpole, Reeve describes captivating the reader as an aim which should ideally serve what she finds to be a greater purpose—conveying a moral message.²⁶⁹ Much as Samuel Johnson had, she defines the goals of fiction as instruction and entertainment, but, by contrast, she maintains that, if properly handled, what Walpole called the “new species of romance” can fulfill both of these criteria.

²⁶⁶ Walpole, preface to the 2nd ed. of *Otranto*, 10.

²⁶⁷ Clara Reeve, preface to *The Old English Baron* in *The Old English Baron and The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole, ed. Laura L. Runge (Glen Allen, VA: College Publishing, 2002), 41.

²⁶⁸ Reeve, preface to *The Old English Baron*, 40-41.

²⁶⁹ Reeve, preface to *The Old English Baron*, 40-41.

Set in the “Gothic” past of fifteenth-century England, the plot of the *Baron* is similar to *Otranto*’s in that it concerns murder, usurpation, tyranny, and the ultimate recognition of the peasant-hero as the legitimate heir to a noble inheritance. By contrast, however, the supernatural plays a relatively minor role in Reeve’s novel. For the most part, she confines its appearance to eerie sounds and mysterious flashes of light to suggest rather than dramatically exhibit the workings of Providence. On the rare occasion when she does represent the supernatural in ghostly form, she characterizes its intentions as benevolent rather than threatening. Reeve’s approach to writing Gothic romance also markedly differs from Walpole’s in other ways. While both authors look to the conventions of the sentimental novel to create characters with whom their readers could sympathize, Reeve departs from Walpole’s model by consistently rewarding those who illustrate high-minded sensibility. According to Walpole’s Gothic vision, such virtue guarantees neither happiness nor immunity from harm. Although both plots rely on providential design to provide a sense of closure, Reeve’s ending depends on sentimental conventions, while Walpole’s more spectacular conclusion draws on notions of the sublime. In both stories, supernatural intervention restores the rightful heir to his inheritance, but, while restitution ultimately serves to reestablish harmony in the *Baron*, it is attended by death and destruction in *Otranto*. As Laura Runge points out, Walpole expresses his primary commitment to the imagination in his use of the “supernatural sublime,” whereas Reeve “avoids” its use to create “a more realistic fiction that engages and tutors the sensibility.”²⁷⁰ For the sake of didacticism, she

²⁷⁰ Laura L. Runge, introduction to *The Old English Baron*, by Clara Reeve, and *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole, ed. Laura L. Runge (Glen Allen, VA: College Publishing, 2002), 27.

chose not to venture much beyond the boundaries of the external probability assigned to the novel.

The rather prosaic nature of Reeve's story, however, did not prevent it from enjoying an immense popularity with the reading public and went a long way toward protecting it from critical censure. It was not only reprinted thirteen times between 1778 and 1786 but also favorably received by the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review*.²⁷¹ Glen Cavaliero suggests that, although tastes were changing, the "relatively conventional" nature of Reeve's story reassured reviewers and, as a result, contributed to raising the critical fortunes of contemporary romance.²⁷² Clery points out that, although Reeve's novel "signally failed to fulfill the criterion of sublimity, a validation of the supernatural which was growing in authority," its success "began to make romance-publishing and romance-writing look like a viable business."²⁷³ The following decade witnessed a continued interest in the romance tradition's origins and literary qualities, an interest that was accompanied by the adaptation of *Otranto* for production on the stage as *The Count of Norbonne* (1781) and an increase in the publication of contemporary romance.

In the 1780s, a number of novelists followed the examples of Walpole and Reeve, a development that reflected the growing desire to enliven prose fiction with the excitements of Gothic romance, though not necessarily by relying on its supernatural machinery. Their novels

²⁷¹ Laura L. Runge, ed., appendix to *The Old English Baron*, by Clara Reeve, and *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole (Glen Allen, VA: College Publishing, 2002), 263.

²⁷² Glen Cavaliero, *The Supernatural and English Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 24.

²⁷³ Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 86, 89.

exhibit what Robert Kiely identifies as the increasing tendency “to associate the [Gothic] with a salutary break from a discipline which had become too mechanical in its application.”²⁷⁴ Among these works, Sophia Lee’s *The Recess: A Tale of Other Times* (1783-85), William Beckford’s *Vathek, an Arabian Tale* (1786), and Charlotte Smith’s *Emmeline, Orphan of the Castle* (1788) represent not only notable examples but also the variety of approaches which authors employed. Set during the Elizabethan period, *The Recess* is an early example of the historical novel. Mixing fact and fiction, Lee drew on the association of Gothic romance with the nation’s past to write an emotionally charged narrative whose central features include a decaying monastery and whose plot not only hinges on a long-buried secret but also encompasses tyranny, persecution, kidnap, imprisonment, and murder. On the other hand, Beckford’s *Vathek* provides a vivid version of the then fashionable Oriental tale that combines supernatural events with exotic settings and extraordinary adventures. In contrast to Beckford’s and Lee’s novels, Smith’s *Emmeline* has more in common with the heroine-centered plots identified with Frances Burney’s fiction, given its story concerns a young woman of admirable sensibilities who eventually succeeds in overcoming the difficulties that prevent her from marrying for love. Although she sets her story in contemporary times, Smith incorporates some aspects of romance associated with Walpole’s *Otranto* and Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* by making her heroine’s home a medieval castle and by introducing, from time to time, an air of mystery into the sentimental novel of manners.

²⁷⁴ Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 28.

By the early 1790s, the reading public had embraced Gothic fiction, while critical attitudes toward it ranged from the disparaging to the admiring. As Tompkins points out, critics had come to accept romantic “invention” in contemporary poetry, finding it reinvigorated a genre in danger of depleting itself, but such a consensus was less robust in regard to prose fiction: “it was by no means clear to all that the novel required such a renewal.”²⁷⁵ There were critics who continued to object to romance in fiction on the grounds that its lack of probability made it impossible for a novel to fulfill a didactic purpose. Although neoclassicism had been seriously undermined by the emergence of new aesthetic standards, some critics remained its staunch disciples, at least when it came to judging the novel. As Clery notes, “some continued to uphold the Johnsonian ideal . . . and to describe the taste for horrors as a ‘second childishness,’ echoing the charges brought against *The Castle of Otranto* thirty years before.”²⁷⁶ An entry in the January 1794 issue of the *Analytical Review* provides a case in point. In considering Susannah Gunning’s *Memoirs of Mary* (1793), the review praises the novel for both educating and pleasing its audience and, in large part, maintains that it fulfills the novel’s traditional twofold purpose by respecting the limits defined by the concept of external probability: “Her design appears to have been, not to astonish by improbable incidents, or to harrow up the soul by scenes of distress which can barely be supposed to exist, but to interest and instruct, by representing persons,

²⁷⁵ Tompkins, *Popular Novel*, 215-16.

²⁷⁶ Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 148.

manners, and events, as they are exhibited in real life.”²⁷⁷ Such opinions, however, had little effect on public taste.

During the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, the popularity of modern romance was so great that it created what Robert Miles refers to as a “Gothic craze.”²⁷⁸ As his study shows, between 1788 and 1793, the demand for Gothic novels greatly increased, and, between 1794 and 1807, it grew to such an extent that Gothic fiction dominated the market for novels.²⁷⁹ Remarking on current literary fashion, a review in the September 1798 issue of *Gentleman’s Magazine* noted that “the wonderful and miraculous is the *forte* of our modern novel-writers, and a most singular revolution has taken place in this department of literature.”²⁸⁰ As the anonymous author of “Terrorist Novel Writing” put it, “*terror*” had become “*the order of the day*.”²⁸¹

The enormous popularity of the Gothic novel prompted some commentators to revise their standards. Clery finds that, for a number of them, the novel’s didactic function became less

²⁷⁷ “Two Reviews” from *The Analytical Review* 18 (January and April 1794), in *Novel and Romance, 1700-1800: A Documentary Record*, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 288.

²⁷⁸ Robert Miles, “The 1790s: The Effulgence of Gothic,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 42.

²⁷⁹ Miles, “Effulgence of Gothic” 42.

²⁸⁰ Review of *Santa Maria* from *Gentleman’s Magazine* 68 (September 1798), in *Novel and Romance, 1700-1800: A Documentary Record*, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 331.

²⁸¹ “Terrorist Novel Writing” (1798), in *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820*, ed. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 183.

important as they came to view fiction as “a pastime and nothing more” and to judge it according to how “well-written and entertaining” it was.²⁸² Tompkins points out that, at the same time, there emerged a new breed of critics who were more open to finding aesthetic merit in romance:

While they by no means accepted all the manifestations of popular romance, [they] were willing to consider it in relation to a more flexible scale of values than the men they replaced. Less deeply committed to the didactic standpoint, they had more extended notions as to whither the ‘paths of nature’ might lead the inquiring author and did not halloo him back at the first sign of the marvelous.²⁸³

Increasingly, critics came to view romance reading as innocuous or even beneficial, indicating a decisive shift away from the traditional emphasis on the novel’s instructive role. For Clery, the move away from the “didactic model of fiction” signified the critical establishment’s recognition that taste had become “privatized, singular,” and “[could not] be enforced as a code of law.”²⁸⁴ Despite this change in attitude, however, proponents of the Gothic often sought to bolster their position by relying on literary theory. As Tompkins remarks, they felt the need to assign contemporary romance “some useful purpose,” and, while they admitted it performed no substantial didactic function, they assumed what constituted a defensible position in the late eighteenth century by maintaining that the pleasure it evoked stemmed from its power to elevate the mind.²⁸⁵ These critics asserted claims similar to those that the Aikins had made in 1773 when they considered why “well-wrought scenes of artificial terror” (1970, 284) produce salutary

²⁸² Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 148.

²⁸³ Tompkins, *Popular Novel*, 215.

²⁸⁴ Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 149.

²⁸⁵ Tompkins, *Popular Novel*, 216-17.

effects. As the Aikins had done, they primarily looked to the discourse on the sublime to support their arguments.

Nathan Drake's *Literary Hours* (1798) provides a notable example. In making his claims, he draws from not only the works of Burke and the Aikens but also subsequent developments in aesthetics, including Alison's *Essays*, to celebrate both the past and the present Gothic romance for its powerful emotional and imaginative effects. Contending that the depiction of "supernatural agency" had the capacity "to surprise, elevate, and delight, with a willing admiration, every faculty of the human mind," he looks to Shakespeare "beyond any other poet" to support his assertions.²⁸⁶ Considering the same criteria he turns to evaluating eighteenth-century Gothic fiction, finding the legacy of Britain's national poet realized in the contemporary novels of Ann Radcliffe. In naming her "the Shakespeare of Romance Writers."²⁸⁷ Drake also identifies Radcliffe as unrivalled among her peers, an opinion that echoed the extraordinary public and critical acclaim that had greeted her work since the early 1790s.

Although the decisive shift away from neoclassical aesthetics helped prepare a very different reception for Radcliffe's work than Walpole's *Otranto* had received a generation earlier, her own innovations in writing fiction greatly contributed not only to raising the cultural status of contemporary romance but also to earning her recognition as Britain's preeminent novelist of the time. While Radcliffe looked to Walpole's model, she also drew from other forms

²⁸⁶ Nathan Drake, *Literary Hours or Sketches Critical and Narrative* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798), 90, 93.

²⁸⁷ Drake, *Literary Hours*, 249.

of literature, as well as current critical discourse, and developed new techniques to radically revise Gothic fiction. As Margaret Anne Doody observes, “in the development of the Gothic novel it is Ann Radcliffe who is the major innovator.”²⁸⁸ Given the pivotal role that she played, Richard Albright finds that “the term ‘Radcliffean Gothic’ is almost a tautology.”²⁸⁹ Improving upon what Walpole referred to in his second preface as “an attempt to blend . . . the ancient and the modern,” she fulfilled his hope for a successor “of brighter talents”²⁹⁰ by more fully realizing the synthesis of romance and realism in the novel.

²⁸⁸ Margaret Anne Doody, “Deserts, Ruins, and Troubled Waters: Female Dreams in Fiction and the Development of the Gothic Novel,” *Genre* 10 (1977): 563.

²⁸⁹ Richard S. Albright, “No Time Like the Present: *The Mysteries of Udolpho*,” *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2005): 49.

²⁹⁰ Walpole, preface to the 2nd ed. of *Otranto*, 9, 10.

CHAPTER 3

RADCLIFFE'S GOTHIC

Ann Radcliffe reenvisioned the Gothic romance in drawing from previous Gothic fiction and a host of other sources. Of the six novels that she wrote, five saw publication between 1789 and 1797, and the last appeared after her death in 1826. Among both the public and the critics, she was celebrated for her heroine-centered novels, *The Sicilian Romance* (1790) and the fiction that established and solidified her reputation, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Italian* (1797). In the last decade of the eighteenth century, “Radcliffe’s work came to epitomize the Gothic novel.”²⁹¹ For almost three decades, the popularity of her novels was testified to by their adaptation to numerous operas and plays, the publication of many imitations, and the extraordinary sums of money that she was paid for the rights to *Udolpho* and *The Italian*. Moreover, Radcliffe’s reputation extended beyond Britain as translations of her novels appeared in French, Italian, German, Spanish, and Russian.

Although contemporary evaluations of Radcliffe’s work were mixed, critics generally praised her talent, and many of them praised it lavishly. Included among her admirers were Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Hazlitt, Anna Barbauld, and Walter Scott. For Scott, she belonged “among the favoured few, who have been distinguished as the founders of a class or school.”²⁹² In an anonymous review of *The Italian*, widely attributed to Mary Wollstonecraft, the

²⁹¹ Deborah D. Rogers, introduction in *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*, ed. Deborah D. Rogers (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1994), xix.

²⁹² Rogers, introduction, xxi.

author spoke for many of Radcliffe's contemporaries when she said, "the spell, by which we are led, again and again, round the same magic circle, is the spell of genius."²⁹³ When she died in 1823, she was widely considered "as one of the first English novelists and as a peerless writer of romance."²⁹⁴ For numerous contemporaries and nineteenth-century British novelists, Radcliffe's Gothic represents an important literary legacy.²⁹⁵

In employing innovative techniques and in reconceptualizing literary modes and themes, Radcliffe adapted the form of classic romance to her development of the Gothic mystery plot. Her approach draws parallels between the romance motif of the journey and the quest for knowledge in her four heroine-centered novels in featuring protagonists who must contend with unfamiliar, often harrowing circumstances that challenge their perceptions and test the validity of their judgments. Radcliffe drew from eighteenth-century aesthetics, Shakespearean drama, and contemporary notions of epistemology to fashion complex mysteries in which she brings a sceptical perspective to bear on exploring the nature of knowledge. In doing so, she establishes a correspondence among the romance form, the Gothic novel, and later detective fiction by treating the journey as a process of knowing, a means by which her heroines, in seeking to resolve mysteries, play an important role in shaping their own stories.

²⁹³ Rogers, introduction, xl.

²⁹⁴ Rogers, introduction, xx.

²⁹⁵ Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), 250-56.

Radcliffe reworked the Gothic romance by appropriating the eighteenth-century courtship plot associated with literary realism. Numerous critics have identified this innovation as an important aspect of Radcliffe's work in locating similarities that it shares with the sentimental fiction represented by the Richardson-Burney tradition.²⁹⁶ For example, James Watt finds that "the newness of Radcliffean romance" derives, in part, from its adaptation of the Burneyan plotline.²⁹⁷ Radcliffe, too, focuses each of her heroine-centered novels on the plight of an inexperienced young woman who, in making her way in an unfamiliar world, must navigate or even surmount the various obstacles that threaten, throughout much of the story, to prevent her from marrying the hero. From *A Sicilian Romance* to *The Italian*, a wedding scene at the close of each story, signified by "felicity" and "joy,"²⁹⁸ claims the traditional courtship plot's happy ending for the Gothic by also affirming the contemporary notion of companionate marriage.

During the eighteenth century, society's growing support for companionate marriage marked a major cultural shift in challenging the patriarchal family's age-old practice of treating marriage as a means to solidify or increase its property and status. According to Taylor, "the rebellion" against arranged marriages derived in large part from the rise of sensibility, which justified placing "personal autonomy and voluntarily formed ties" above "the demands of

²⁹⁶ See for example, Coral Ann Howells, *Love, Mystery, and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* (London: Athlone Press, 1978), 49; Deborah Ross, *The Excellence of Falsehood*, 135-36; and Deidre Lynch, "Transformation of the Novel," 467.

²⁹⁷ James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre, and Cultural Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 105.

²⁹⁸ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, 359, 363.

ascriptive authority.”²⁹⁹ As Cox notes, much eighteenth-century thought conceived of sensibility in terms that granted new authority to the individual by providing a rationale for “an assertion of the self’s inherent power and value.”³⁰⁰ Proponents of companionate marriage also looked to the tenets of sensibility when they maintained that marital relationships based on mutual affection and respect nurtured the social sentiments and so served the public good by promoting such virtues as sympathy and benevolence beyond the domestic sphere.³⁰¹ Yet, while sensibility raised “the standards for marriage to love and compatibility,” fiction’s courtship plot showed how acting on those standards “in the real world of power” could be fraught with difficulties.³⁰² Frequently, these took the form of family objections or social disapproval involving matters of money and position.

Radcliffe heightened this situation to dramatize the opposition that emerges when the values associated with companionate marriage come into conflict with those sanctioned by dynastic ambitions. Her plots manifest a tension between two competing “ethical systems,” represented, on the one hand, by “the needs of the individual” and “fellow-feeling” and, on the other, by “the power structure” and “the class system.”³⁰³ By transporting her eighteenth-century

²⁹⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 290.

³⁰⁰ Cox, *Concepts of the Self*, 34.

³⁰¹ Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 216-17.

³⁰² Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 336.

³⁰³ Syndy M. Conger, “Sensibility Restored: Radcliffe’s Answer to Lewis’s *The Monk*,” in *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression*, ed. Kenneth W. Graham (New York: AMS, 1989), 142-43.

heroines from the contemporary drawing room to the past and distant regions of southern Europe, she pitted the vulnerable protagonist against tyrannical authority. For Radcliffe's villains, marriage serves to form alliances for the purpose of enhancing, maintaining, or shoring up their fortunes and power. Although treating marriage as a pragmatic transaction constitutes an accepted custom among those who hold social sway in Radcliffe's fictional world, her villains' ruthlessness in bending custom to their will sets them apart from her other characters. As Miles notes, their ambitions are drawn "on a grand scale."³⁰⁴ In the position of the heroine's parent or guardian, they treat her as an asset to be bartered or a liability to be disposed of in exchange for their self-advancement, dismissing the claims for personal feeling and autonomy as "folly," "impertinence," or even a figment of "romance."³⁰⁵ Within the context of the Gothic, Radcliffe also dramatizes the cultural tensions surrounding the redefinition of marriage that were central to domestic realism's courtship plot.

From *The Sicilian Romance* to *The Italian*, villains routinely discount the heroines' efforts to play a part in shaping their own destinies, often characterizing these attempts as a moral affront to their values. Thus Radcliffe dramatizes the relation between self and society in terms that Frances Ferguson identifies with Romantic-era Gothic fiction as a "conflict between the individual perspective on society (which stresses individual agency and experience) and the societal perspective on the individual (the formal claim that an external categorization of an

³⁰⁴ Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 19.

³⁰⁵ Radcliffe, *A Sicilian Romance*, 56; *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 128; and *The Romance of the Forest*, 136 respectively.

individual can be definitional regardless of the individual's actual experience and action).”³⁰⁶ (1992, 98). Though *The Italian* departs from her previous practice by locating the source of objection in the hero's family, it explicitly dramatizes this opposition in the scene in which Vivaldi's father opposes his son's desire to marry the heroine, Ellena. Finding it inconceivable that his son would choose as a wife someone as poor and socially insignificant as she, he is outraged by the notion that Vivaldi's “romantic” ideas could take precedence over the claims of his “house”: “Are you to learn, Signor, that you belong to your family, not your family to you; that you are only a guardian of its honour, and not at liberty to dispose of yourself?”³⁰⁷

In its general outline, the structure of Radcliffe's novels exhibits what Northrop Frye describes as the “cyclical movement” of traditional romance, a trajectory which encompasses a “descent” from “a world associated with happiness, security, and peace” into one of “threatening complications” and a subsequent “ascent” or journey back “to the idyllic world, or to some symbol of it like a marriage.”³⁰⁸ Thematically, this plot maps an analogous trajectory towards self-realization, signified by “freedom” from the “tyranny” of the “external circumstances” that, throughout most of the story, have impeded the plot's happy resolution.³⁰⁹ Drawing on Frye's analysis, Pamela Regis also identifies a similar romance pattern in the plots associated with the

³⁰⁶ Frances Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime*, 98.

³⁰⁷ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 30.

³⁰⁸ Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 53-54, 129, 131.

³⁰⁹ Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 54.

Richardson-Burney tradition.³¹⁰ Although Radcliffe drew on this tradition, her novels do not simply represent a variation on prior sentimental fiction. On the contrary, Radcliffe's journey from departure to return is shaped by what Peter Garrett refers to as her "drama of knowledge."³¹¹ In wedding the courtship plot to her development of Gothic mystery, she placed her heroines in situations that challenge the validity of their perceptions and judgment, focusing on the ways in which misperception, misinterpretation, and duplicity create major obstacles to their happy endings.

Additionally, Radcliffe developed in innovative ways the treatment of character, plot, setting, and formal techniques. From the Gothic novel's beginnings, vulnerability has been an abiding feature of its protagonists. Radcliffe follows this convention in creating heroines whose orphaned state, isolation, and frequent imprisonment is exacerbated by the threat of being disowned, consigned to nunneries, or delivered into forced marriages. While Radcliffe intensified the heroine's vulnerability, she also endowed her with a greater degree of agency, in part through her efforts to rehabilitate sensibility. During the last three decades of the eighteenth century, sentimental fiction came increasingly under attack in Britain for promoting a view of sensibility "untethered to 'productive action or effective judgment.'"³¹² Although Radcliffe's

³¹⁰ Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 29. Regis relies on Frye's description of Greek New Comedy in *Anatomy of Criticism*, whereas I reference his more detailed analysis of romance in *Secular Scripture*.

³¹¹ Peter K. Garrett, *Gothic Reflections: Narrative Force in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 6-7.

³¹² Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 120, 130.

novels condemn the excesses of sensibility as destructive, they ultimately affirm its power, privileging feeling and imagination, tempered by reason. According to Spacks, Radcliffe's later work marked a "fresh direction" for the novel by the way in which its heroines' "imaginative and emotional capacities" serve as "mode[s] of effectiveness."³¹³ Through her plot developments, Radcliffe was also instrumental in enhancing the heroine's role in fiction. According to Ellen Moers, she provided a model for later writers when she "shaped the Gothic novel as a structure for heroism," offering "a feminine substitute for the picaresque, where heroines could enjoy all the adventures and alarms that masculine heroes had long experienced, far from home, in fiction."³¹⁴ Radcliffe's novels cast her "idea of female selfhood" in terms of "the traveling woman: the woman who moves, who acts, who copes with vicissitude and adventure."³¹⁵ By sending her heroines traveling, Radcliffe dramatizes in spatial and temporal terms the journey as a means of discovery.

In discussing the romance form's transitional phase from descent to ascent, Frye points out that this movement is often achieved by "an explanation of a mystery . . . which usually takes

³¹³ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Desire and Truth: Functions of Plot in Eighteenth-Century English Novels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 155-156. Spacks attributes this new direction for the novel to Radcliffe's *The Italian* and especially to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*; also see Claudia L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s, Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, and Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 77-78. She finds that, in *Romance of the Forest*, the heroine's sensibility can also act as an empowering force.

³¹⁴ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1977), 192, 204.

³¹⁵ Moers, *Literary Women*, 191.

the form of a recognition scene.”³¹⁶ Ideally, such recognition is accompanied by “a reversal of movement.”³¹⁷ As in Aristotle’s model of tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, revelation in comic romance is linked to a reversal of fortune but one which engenders an “escape” from “tragic complications”: “A comic resolution, in fact, could almost be defined as an action that breaks out of the Oedipus ring.”³¹⁸ When Frye observes that the best romance relies on the structure of tragedy and turns upon the solution to a mystery, he points to continuities between its plot and that of the eighteenth-century Gothic novel. Both Walpole and Radcliffe looked to Shakespearean drama to construct plots that incorporated “the laws of the tragic genre,”³¹⁹ although her work more closely conforms to the structure of comic romance given that the protagonists ultimately escape from tragedy. However, her narratives also differ from the traditional romance form in which, according to Frye, the nature of the mystery represents a negligible feature—“a rather easy not to say transparent puzzle”—whose only significance resides in its role as a plot device that prepares

³¹⁶ Northrop Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 130.

³¹⁷ Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 130.

³¹⁸ Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 137; Also see, for example, B. P. Reardon, who notes that tragedy and romance share such plot elements as recognition and reversal, and that, in romance, “their nature is less grim” as “no ultimate fall from happiness occurs.” *The Form of Greek Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 103.

³¹⁹ Walter Göbel, “Stimulating and Stifling the Emotions: An Eighteenth-Century Dilemma and a Gothic Example,” *The Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 16 (2000): 143; also see Robert B. Hamm, Jr., “*Hamlet* and Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 49, no.3 (Summer 2009): 667-692. Hamm finds that *Hamlet* serves as Walpole’s primary model of tragedy; and Dale Townsend, “Gothic and the Ghost of *Hamlet*,” in *Gothic Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis and Dale Townsend (New York: Routledge, 2008), 80, 88. Townsend notes that *Hamlet* was often appropriated by authors of early Gothic fiction, including Radcliffe.

the way for a happy ending.³²⁰ By contrast, mystery lies at the heart of Gothic romance, and in *Otranto* and Radcliffe's novels, it assumes paramount importance in shaping their narratives.³²¹

Despite their similarities, Radcliffe's approach to dramatizing mysterious events represents a sharp departure from Walpole's, for in her work, what may at first appear to be the work of the supernatural is ultimately discovered to spring from natural causes. In this respect, Tzvetan Todorov's concept of the "the fantastic" provides useful denominations for distinguishing between what he calls Walpole's "supernatural accepted" and Radcliffe's supernatural explained."³²² Todorov characterizes the fantastic as a literary genre according to three principles: first, the story apparently takes place in a world governed by "only the laws of nature."³²³ Yet it presents the reader with a series of mystifying events that seem to stem from supernatural causes, and the effort to determine their origins brings the reader "to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation."³²⁴ Secondly, this sense of uncertainty is usually assigned to a protagonist who shares the reader's "ambiguous vision"³²⁵ Thirdly, the reader must disregard "allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations" because either of these

³²⁰ Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 130-31.

³²¹ Here, *Hamlet* is particularly relevant to the Gothic novel as it centers on the protagonist's efforts to uncover guilty family secrets.

³²² Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 41-42.

³²³ Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 25.

³²⁴ Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 33.

³²⁵ Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 32-33.

would dissolve the effect of the fantastic, which persists only as long as the reader remains suspended in uncertainty.³²⁶ Although Todorov's analysis offers insight into eighteenth-century Gothic literature, it has been widely criticized for relying on criteria too narrow for defining a genre.³²⁷ Among others, Jacqueline Howard finds its limited scope discourages a fuller understanding of the fantastic's role in literary history.³²⁸ In part, she objects to its classification as "a single genre" on the grounds that, as such, it necessarily excludes other generic categories long identified with the fantastic, such as the fairy tale, fantasy literature, and detective fiction.³²⁹ For Howard, considering Todorov's concept of the fantastic as an "aesthetic category" rather than as a genre provides a less restrictive and therefore a more appropriate designation.³³⁰ Treating the fantastic as an aesthetic category serves to underscore, on the one hand, crucial differences between Walpole's *Otranto* and Radcliffe's fiction and, on the other, close affinities between her fiction and the detective story. Such differences and similarities help explain the literary significance of Radcliffe's departure from Walpole's model.

³²⁶ Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 27, 32-33.

³²⁷ See for example Eric S. Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 117-18; Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 62; and Jack G. Voller, *The Supernatural Sublime: The Metaphysics of Terror in Anglo-American Romanticism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994), 21.

³²⁸ Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 37-38.

³²⁹ Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction*, 37-38.

³³⁰ Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction*, 37.

The supernatural explained is considered Radcliffe's "trademark device,"³³¹ one which was adopted by her many imitators and much adapted by later writers. From *The Sicilian Romance* to *The Italian*, Radcliffe made use of the technique, continually developing and refining it. Perhaps taking her cue from Reeve, she not only diminished the role of supernatural agency but jettisoned it altogether. As David Sander notes, both Reeve and Radcliffe considered "Walpole's work too obvious in its presentation of the fantastic."³³² Nevertheless, their methods for reworking his approach markedly differ. As a "disciple of Richardson," Reeve relied on lengthy, detailed descriptions to infuse her story with the "sense of real life and manners" that she identifies with the novel in distinguishing it from the romance.³³³ For Richardson, it was a "necessity to be very circumstantial and minute in order to preserve and maintain that air of probability which is necessary to be maintained in a Story designed to represent real life."³³⁴ His "formal realism" relied on presenting the fictional world "in all its concrete particularity," and

³³¹ E. J. Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 105.

³³² David Sandner, *Critical Discourses of the Fantastic, 1712-1831* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 117.

³³³ Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame, Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England: Its Origins, Efflorescence, Disintegration, and Residuary Influences* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), 79; Clara Reeve, excerpt from *The Progress of Romance*, in *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820*, ed. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 179-80. In addition to dedicating *The Old English Baron* to Martha Bridgen, Richardson's daughter, Reeve singles out Richardson in her preface as preeminent among novelists in achieving the twin objectives of entertaining and instructing the reader, 39, 40.

³³⁴ Samuel Richardson, postscript to *Clarissa. Or, the History of a Young Lady*, 3rd ed. (London, 1751), 8: 297.

Reeve drew on this strategy to give substance and texture to what she calls her “picture of Gothic times and manners.”³³⁵ Radcliffe, however, sharply diverged from this mimetic approach.

According to Radcliffe’s posthumously published essay on aesthetics, she drew on Shakespearean drama and Burkean concepts to inform her style, looking to the power of suggestion: “obscurity, or indistinctness, is only a negative, which leaves the imagination to act upon the few hints that truth reveals to it.”³³⁶

Looking back on the eighteenth-century Gothic novel, Walter Scott assessed its achievements in *Lives of the Novelists* (1821-24) by considering the fiction of Walpole, Reeve, and Radcliffe. His commentary largely evaluated the work of all three novelists from the perspective of an expressivist aesthetics that, above all, celebrated the sublime. According to Scott, Reeve’s emphasis on the probable and prosaic succeeded in endowing her story with a sense of “reality” but worked against establishing the aura of mystery that he associates with sublime effects.³³⁷ In this respect, he finds that Walpole employed a superior but also problematic approach: “the supernatural occurrences in *The Castle of Otranto* are brought forward into too strong daylight, and marked by an over degree of distinctness and accuracy of outline.”³³⁸ For Scott, Walpole’s explicit as well as “too frequent” depictions of the supernatural

³³⁵ Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 29-30; Reeve, preface to *The Old English Baron*, 40.

³³⁶ Ann Radcliffe, “On the Supernatural in Poetry,” *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 16, no. 1 (1826): 149, 150.

³³⁷ Walter Scott, *Lives of the Novelists* (London: Oxford University Press, 1906), 193-94, 200.

³³⁸ Scott, *Lives of the Novelists*, 193, 200-01.

tended to counteract rather than to create “mysterious obscurity.”³³⁹ On this score, Scott measures the *Old English Baron* and *Otranto* against the standard established by Radcliffe, who, in his view, surpasses “any other writer of romance” in her imaginative “use of obscurity and suspense.”³⁴⁰ Yet despite his admiration for Radcliffe’s work, Scott objects to the technique for which she was most famous, characterizing the supernatural explained as an unnecessary and ill-conceived rejection of the precedent which Walpole had established for the Gothic novel in “avowing the use of supernatural machinery.”³⁴¹ Although Scott was not alone in making this complaint, he was the most insistent as well as the most influential in voicing his dislike of Radcliffe’s signature technique.³⁴² According to him, it represents “an unsatisfactory solution of the mysteries” that must excite the reader’s “displeasure,” for, too often, “explanation falls short of expectation.”³⁴³

In respect to both plot and characterization, Scott misses the innovative nature of Radcliffe’s supernatural explained. While, for Scott, the device diminishes the outcomes of Radcliffe’s narratives, modern critics have noted how it brings a greater degree of realism to the Gothic romance by serving, as Garrett remarks, as a form of “naturalistic deflation.”³⁴⁴ In

³³⁹ Scott, *Lives of the Novelists*, 192-93.

³⁴⁰ Scott, *Lives of the Novelists*, 326.

³⁴¹ Scott, *Lives of the Novelists*, 192, 327.

³⁴² Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 109.

³⁴³ Scott, *Lives of the Novelists*, 329-30.

³⁴⁴ Garrett, *Gothic Reflections*, 52.

functioning as a critical factor in her dramatization of consciousness, it contributed to the atmosphere of “obscurity and suspense” for which he praises her work. According to Marilyn Butler, critics’ complaints about Radcliffe’s use of the technique are “nonsensical,” for they fail to appreciate how her technique was crucial to her success in drawing “a definitive portrait of the subjective heroine of her day.”³⁴⁵ In discussing *Romance of the Forest*, Butler finds that “her whole strategy requires an exploration of her heroine’s inner state of being. . . . An emanation that might claim external reality,” such as “the ghost of the murdered knight in *Otranto*,” would dispel “the exceptionally concentrated effect of half-conscious experience and discovery.”³⁴⁶ As Maria Tatar notes, Walpole’s supernatural accepted had placed his story’s focus primarily on external circumstances by making supernatural phenomena the “agents of revelation,” whereas the introduction of the supernatural explained shifted this role to the protagonist and thus gave greater emphasis to “psychic” rather than external reality.³⁴⁷

Despite their differences, *Otranto* and *The Old English Baron* assign the supernatural the key responsibility for uncovering past crimes whose disclosure shapes the fate of their protagonists. By contrast, in Radcliffe’s heroine-centered novels, the protagonists become the “agents of revelation,” and without recourse to the workings of Providence, they are left to rely on their own, merely subjective powers of understanding as they explore and attempt to resolve

³⁴⁵ Marilyn Butler, “The Woman at the Window: Ann Radcliffe in the Novels of Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen,” *Women and Literature* 1 (1980): 129, 131.

³⁴⁶ Butler, “Woman at the Window,” 131-32, 140.

³⁴⁷ Maria Tatar, “The Houses of Fiction: Toward a Definition of the Uncanny,” *Comparative Literature* 33, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 173.

mysteries significant to their futures. Radcliffe's heroines are confronted with not only mysteries that may derive from supernatural causes but also those that unquestionably originate from human design. In her work, however, the latter possess greater psychological resonance given their implications bear much more forcefully on her protagonists' present and future welfare. As Daniel Cottom remarks, Radcliffe's primary thematic focus concerns the "difficulty in knowing the truth of another"; as her plots unfold, the heroines' closest relations are likely to assume "a doubtful appearance."³⁴⁸

The contemporary critical reception of Radcliffe's work characterized her as "the great poet of the aesthetics of uncertainty."³⁴⁹ In large part, she earned this reputation through wedding the aesthetics of obscurity to her exploration of contemporary epistemological issues. Radcliffe's approach to dramatizing subjective experience had important implications for the novel's development. Both thematically and technically, her work largely contributed to and exemplified the concern with delineating the inner life that emerged in 1790s fiction. According to Emma McEvoy, "a new focus on interiority is integral to nearly all the developments of the period. Radcliffe's concern with the processes of perception and the way perception creates our sense of reality becomes its main mode of narration."³⁵⁰ As Katherine Ding notes, Radcliffe addressed

³⁴⁸ Daniel Cottom, *The Civilized Imagination: A Study of Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 58-59.

³⁴⁹ Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe*, 14.

³⁵⁰ Emma McEvoy, "Gothic and the Romantics," in *The Routledge Companion to the Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (London: Routledge, 2007): 23. According to Stuart Curran, Radcliffe's Gothic continues to warrant "serious appraisal for its capacity to render psychic interiorities." "Women Readers, Women Writers," in *The Cambridge Companion to*

“the questions of perception and knowledge at the heart of Enlightenment philosophy” from a perspective informed by Humean empiricism, infusing her romance with an aura of mystery by highlighting the limits of human awareness.³⁵¹ Her approach to the Gothic dramatized in new ways the empirical concerns that had previously emerged in both eighteenth-century philosophy and fiction.

Post-Lockean concepts of sensibility brought questions about the nature of knowledge to the cultural forefront. Locke’s empiricism had raised concerns about the extent to which experience could impart an understanding of reality, given his claim that knowledge rested on information derived from sensory perception. Subsequently, Hume radically addressed the epistemological issues posed by Locke’s *Essay*, building on his theory but sharply departing from it in claiming that perceptual experience provides no direct knowledge of the external world: For Hume, “the mind never has anything present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexions with objects.”³⁵² Although he also endorsed the value of experience and observation, he claimed that “as to those *impressions*, which arise from the *senses*, their ultimate cause is . . . perfectly inexplicable by human reason, and 'twill

British Romanticism, ed. Stuart Curran, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 178.

³⁵¹ Katherine Ding, “‘Searching After the Splendid Nothing’: Gothic Epistemology and the Rise of Fictionality,” *ELH* 80, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 543-44, 545. Also, see Margaret Russett, “Narrative as Enchantment in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*,” *ELH* 65, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 170-74; and William Bowman Piper, *Reconcilable Differences in Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 156-57.

³⁵² David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Charles W. Hendel (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), 162.

always be impossible to decide with certainty, whether they arise immediately from the object, or are produc'd by the creative power of the mind.”³⁵³ His philosophy gave unprecedented importance to the imagination, for, in his view, it “fills in the gaps between discrete ‘impressions’ and weaves phenomena into an intelligible text of experience.”³⁵⁴ While he found that people lacked the faculties to perceive reality, Hume did not advocate the adoption of a thoroughgoing skepticism, finding that it would “undermine . . . all action as well as speculation”; instead, given “the narrow capacity of human understanding,” the “just reasoner” cultivates “a degree of doubt and caution and modesty . . . in all kinds of scrutiny and decision,” including those pertaining to probability and cause and effect.³⁵⁵

Hume’s *Treatise* and *Inquiry* had a small readership, but the epistemological principles that they articulated were widely circulated, usually through published discussions that strove to refute them. Proponents of Thomas Reid’s mainstream “Common Sense” philosophy took a prominent part in opposing what they characterized as the dangerous relativism of Hume’s thought. Whereas Hume destabilized the relationship between perception and reality, Reid, as Ian Duncan notes, insisted on its stability in disputing Hume’s claim that the imagination shapes belief.³⁵⁶ According to Reid, belief stems from a reliable apprehension of the world given that

³⁵³ David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 84.

³⁵⁴ Ian Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2007), 120.

³⁵⁵ Hume, *Inquiry*, 55, 170.

³⁵⁶ Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 132.

“nature hath established a real connection between the signs and the things signified; and nature hath also taught us the interpretation of these signs.”³⁵⁷ For Reid and his followers, the perceptual process rested on an ability by which the self instinctively derives accurate knowledge of the world. Such theories “were particularly attractive to eighteenth-century thinkers, perhaps because [they] seemed to impart the greatest moral significance to individual experience.”³⁵⁸ Radcliffe’s fiction challenges Reid’s epistemology in aligning her attitude toward the nature of knowledge with Hume’s strand of eighteenth-century empiricism. Within the context of the Gothic romance, Radcliffe dramatizes her skeptical approach in portraying characters who, in seeking to resolve mysteries, blur the distinction between the real and the imagined.

Numerous critics have discussed how the novel identified with literary realism both drew on and contributed to the cultural momentum inspired by post-Lockean thought. According to Emily Anderson, realist fiction mostly “responded to the philosophical questions of the period with optimistic answers.”³⁵⁹ George Levine notes that, throughout the century, fiction’s approximations of everyday life aligned it with empiricism’s focus on “experience” as the source of knowledge.³⁶⁰ According to Watt, the novelist, in common with the philosopher, sought to

³⁵⁷ Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind, On the Principles of Common Sense*, ed. Derek R. Brooke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 190, quoted in Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 132.

³⁵⁸ Cox, *Concepts of the Self*, 22.

³⁵⁹ Emily R. Anderson, “‘I Will Unfold A Tale--!’: Narrative, Epistemology, and *Caleb Williams*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 101-02.

³⁶⁰ George Levine, “Literary Realism Reconsidered,” in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 13-14.

represent “an authentic account of the actual experience of individuals,” an objective which developed from “the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses.”³⁶¹ More specifically, these novelists aimed to bring “a new standard of fact-like plausibility” to fiction by endorsing the knowledge derived from such methods as “direct observation” and “inference from statistical regularities.”³⁶² Generally, realist fiction’s turn toward empirical philosophy has been considered an important factor in differentiating it from the Gothic romance. As Ruth Mack points out, “the Gothic genre’s relation to empiricist realism is usually cast as one of opposition.”³⁶³ Yet, as James Carson comments, Radcliffe’s Gothic shows “a continuing exploration of the epistemological questions that dominate[d] eighteenth-century British fiction.”³⁶⁴ Indeed, from its beginnings, the Gothic novel was also centrally concerned with issues related to contemporary empirical philosophy, given that, as a mystery story, it relied on enacting a process of knowing. From *Otranto* onwards, “the quest for knowledge” recurs as a key motif in its narratives.³⁶⁵

³⁶¹ Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 12, 27.

³⁶² Hawes, Clement. “Novelistic History,” in *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 63.

³⁶³ Ruth Mack, *Literary Historicity: Literature and Historical Experience in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 128.

³⁶⁴ James P. Carson, “Enlightenment, Popular Culture, and Gothic Fiction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 260.

³⁶⁵ Diego Saglia, “‘A portion of the Name’: Stage Adaptations of Radcliffe’s Fiction,” in *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic*, ed. Dale Townsend and Angela Wright (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 226, 228.

Radcliffe reinforces her focus on the provisional nature of knowledge through creating in her fiction a pervasive atmosphere of obscurity. Her use of spatial imagery establishes a correspondence between the labyrinth of conjecture in which her heroines often find themselves and the landscapes and architectural sites through which they travel. As Kim Michasiw observes, Radcliffe's settings emphasize the importance of sensory perception while highlighting its limits.³⁶⁶ To endow her settings with an aura of uncertainty, she drew on England's native literary tradition in the form of graveyard poetry and Shakespearean drama,³⁶⁷ and especially on the aesthetics of obscurity that informs both Burke's concept of the sublime and Gilpin's theory of the picturesque.³⁶⁸ According to numerous critics, Radcliffe's scenic descriptions owe a great deal to Gilpin.³⁶⁹ She frequently conveys the impossibility of overcoming the fallibility of perception by looking to Gilpin, whose notion of perceiving the natural world rested on the belief that "we can view only detached parts [and] we must not wonder, if we seldom, find in any of

³⁶⁶ Kim Ian Michasiw, "Ann Radcliffe and the Terrors of Power," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 6, no. 4 (July 1994): 331.

³⁶⁷ Jacqueline Howard, introduction to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by Ann Radcliffe, ed. Jacqueline Howard, (London: Penguin, 2001), xviii-xix.

³⁶⁸ Michasiw, "Ann Radcliffe," 330-31.

³⁶⁹ See, for example, Charles Kostelnick, "From Picturesque View to Picturesque Vision: William Gilpin and Ann Radcliffe," *Mosaic* 18 (1985): 33; Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho*, 76-79; and Francesca Orestano, "Picturesque, a Transformation: William Gilpin's Aesthetics and Ann Radcliffe's Visual Imagination," *Textus* 18, no. 1 (2005): 51-52.

them *our confined ideas* of the whole.”³⁷⁰ Radcliffe’s Gilpinesque atmosphere, her mist-shrouded and shadowy landscapes, are analogous to the dimly lit confusion of winding passages that characterizes her vast Gothic castles, convents, and abbeys. As Kristen Girtten remarks, Radcliffe’s “architectural labyrinths” hinder “the characters’ capacity for observation and navigation,” suggesting “the persistence of epistemological uncertainty” as they “signify the dizzying speculation that results from the unattainability of reliable knowledge.”³⁷¹ Much as the partial views and indistinct images of Radcliffe’s scenery lend themselves to a multiplicity of meanings, the gloomy, twisting corridors of her Gothic interiors render the concrete world ambiguous.

In Radcliffe’s hands, the quest for knowledge not only becomes vital to the narrative’s outcome but, more importantly, foregrounds the way in which the process of knowing is circumscribed by indeterminacy. As her heroines struggle to construct meaning from insufficient information and equivocal impressions, their predicament is underscored by the way in which such terms as “inquire,” “examine,” “suspect,” “surmise,” “conjecture,” “infer,” and “doubt” govern the action. In discussing *Udolpho*, William Piper finds that it “presents an enormous discrepancy between perceived and unperceived sensibilia, an explicit incongruency that dramatizes the central epistemological fact of the novel, that is, the recurrent presence of

³⁷⁰ William Gilpin, *Observations on Several Parts of the Counties of Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, Also Several Parts of North Wales; Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809), 175, quoted in Michasiw, “Ann Radcliffe,” 332.

³⁷¹ Kristen M. Girtten, “‘Sublime Luxuries’ of the Gothic Edifice: Immersive Aesthetics and Kantian Freedom in the Novels of Ann Radcliffe,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 28, no. 4 (Summer 2016): 718, 720.

gaps between Emily's perceptions and her understanding. . . . The primary purpose of her heroine is to reconcile the perceptions and bridge the gaps."³⁷² For Piper, Radcliffe's focus on epistemological concerns is almost exclusively confined to *Udolpho* and slightly prefigured in *Romance of the Forest*. It is true that, compared to her mature work, the *Sicilian Romance* places much more emphasis on physical action, especially in its series of climactic escapes and rescues. Yet, to use Radcliffe's metaphor, its protagonists must also contend at crucial points in the narrative with deciphering cryptic signs by "only a glimmering and uncertain light."³⁷³ In its literal and metaphorical configurations, her approach in this early work exhibits in rudimentary form a strategy which she would later develop, from *Romance of the Forest* onward, in a much more sustained and complex fashion to explore the ambiguous relationship between perception and reality. Comparing Radcliffe's work to earlier fiction, Spacks finds that "interpretation as action assumes new importance in Radcliffe's Gothic. Indeed, it becomes in a sense the center of the plot."³⁷⁴ Thus, Radcliffe makes her heroines figures of detection.³⁷⁵ In belonging to a world

³⁷² William Bowman Piper, *Reconcilable Differences*, 148.

³⁷³ Radcliffe, *A Sicilian Romance*, 21.

³⁷⁴ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Desire and Truth: Functions of Plot in Eighteenth-Century English Novels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 162.

³⁷⁵ On Radcliffe's heroines as detective protagonists, see for example, Cannon Schmitt, "Techniques of Terror, Technologies of Nationality: Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*," *ELH* 61, no. 4 (Winter, 1994): 863, 869-70; Maureen Reddy, "Women Detectives," in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Martin Priestman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 191; and Diane Hoeveler, "The Heroine, the Abbey, and Popular Romantic Textuality: *The Romance of the Forest*," in *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic*, ed. Dale Townsend and Angela Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 101, 102.

governed by, in Todorov's phrase, "only the laws of nature,"³⁷⁶ they provide nineteenth-century fiction with literary models for its detective protagonists.

The Gothic has been widely recognized as an important precursor to the detective story.³⁷⁷ On a thematic level, these two subgenres demonstrate their affinities in their focus on epistemological considerations. According to Brian McHale, the detective story is "the epistemological genre par excellence."³⁷⁸ In featuring figures of detection as its protagonists, it centers its narratives on "basic problems of knowledge and knowing."³⁷⁹ Radcliffe's work, in particular, holds a special relationship to detective fiction given her signature technique. According to Maria Tatar, by "locating the source of knowledge in human agents rather than in specters from the past," the explained supernatural laid the foundation for detective fiction.³⁸⁰ Although the detective story fully emerged only in the mid-nineteenth century with the appearance of Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin stories (1841-45) and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*

³⁷⁶ Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 25.

³⁷⁷ See for example Dennis Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 13; Albert D. Hutter, "Dreams, Transformations, and Literature: The Implications of Detective Fiction," in *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, ed. Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 234; and Peter K. Garrett, "Sensations: Gothic, Horror, Crime Fiction, Detective Fiction," in *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 469.

³⁷⁸ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987), 16.

³⁷⁹ Heta Pyrhönen, *Murder from an Academic Angle: An Introduction to the Study of the Detective Narrative* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994), 51.

³⁸⁰ Tatar, "Houses of Fiction," 173-74.

(1867), it largely derived its origins from Radcliffe's use of this device.³⁸¹ Indeed, critics have long associated Radcliffe's work with this literary form.³⁸² In 1920, Clara McIntyre pointed out that detective fiction owes a considerable debt to Radcliffe's work for not only her explained supernatural but also her development of narrative suspense. For McIntyre, Radcliffe's "deliberate use of suspense as an artistic principle" constitutes one of her most important contributions to the novel: "she gave a new emphasis to action—not action in and for itself, . . . but action as bringing about complications and resolving them."³⁸³ Radcliffe's methods for creating suspenseful stories indicated new directions for fiction that also demonstrate continuities between the romance tradition, the Gothic novel, and the detective story. Frye suggests these continuities when he notes that the detective story conforms to the romance structure in that the crucial stage in the plot—the transition from descent to ascent—is tied to a form of recognition, the investigator's identification of the criminal.³⁸⁴ However, as Geoffrey Hartman points out,

³⁸¹ David H. Richter, *The Progress of Romance: Literary Historiography and the Gothic Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), 149, 153-54.

³⁸² See for example A. E. Murch, *The Development of the Detective Novel* (London: Peter Owen, 1958), 27-29, 34-35; Richard Alewyn, "The Origin of the Detective Novel," in *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, ed. Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe, trans. Glenn W. Most (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 75; and Mark Madoff, "Inside, Outside, and the Gothic Locked-Room Mystery," in *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition and Transgression*, ed. Kenneth W. Graham (New York: AMS, 1989), 49-50.

³⁸³ Clara F. McIntyre, *Ann Radcliffe in Relation to Her Time*, (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1970), 88-89.

³⁸⁴ Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 136-37. Also see, for example, B. P. Reardon, *The Form of Greek Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 175. This analysis also notes affinities between the romance and detective plots.

writers of detective fiction generally depend on recognition and reversal to construct their plots.³⁸⁵ In both Radcliffe's work and the detective story, they constitute key factors in producing suspense.

For Radcliffe, recognition and reversal play definitive roles in generating curiosity, doubt, and expectation. Her development of this strategy is tied to the formulation of the basic Gothic plot already established in *Otranto*. In *The Poetics of Prose*, Todorov aptly characterizes the "duality" of this plot.³⁸⁶ and, although he refers to detective fiction, his description equally applies to the Gothic. The main action rests on the tension engendered by the twofold structure of its story, which narrates, on the one hand, the perpetration of a crime and, on the other, the discovery of its causes.³⁸⁷ In *Otranto*, *The Old English Baron*, and Radcliffe's romance, narrative closure occurs only when crimes buried in the past are uncovered to reveal hidden family relationships, usually resolving questions surrounding the protagonists' identities. In Radcliffe's hands, this dual plot unfolds through a series of recognitions and reversals that concurrently promise and postpone discovery. As Pierre Machery points out, "the mystery of the novel, as it is practiced by Mrs. Radcliffe, seems to be the product of two different movements: the one establishes the mystery while the other dispels it. The ambiguity of the narrative derives from the

³⁸⁵ Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Literature High and Low: The Case of the Mystery Story," in *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, ed. Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 211.

³⁸⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 44.

³⁸⁷ Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, 44.

fact that these two movements are not, properly speaking, successive . . . but are inextricably simultaneous.”³⁸⁸ Machery’s comments point to further affiliations between Radcliffe’s plot and the romance tradition, for, as Parker notes, the quest narrative of romance bequeathed to the novel a literary form in which “the play on deviation and deferral . . . simultaneously moves towards and delays a definitive resolution.”³⁸⁹

With the publication of Radcliffe’s novels, the tactic of deferral served as a means for generating and sustaining suspense and afterwards became an indispensable component of the classic detective story. According to Dennis Porter, detective fiction most clearly manifests its Gothic inheritance in its use of what Machery identifies as the “double movement” of the Radcliffean plot.³⁹⁰ In respect to the former, recognition and reversal also function to create complex patterns of action that both approach and withdraw from revelation. As Porter explains, they emerge as “two contradictory impulses” within the detective story.³⁹¹ While the recognition scene—“in the form of an unmasking”—represents the investigation’s ultimate objective, reversal acts as “a form of impediment” that delays its realization.³⁹² In Radcliffe’s work and later in the detective story, impediments frequently appear in the form of mistaken and concealed

³⁸⁸ Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 34.

³⁸⁹ Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 14.

³⁹⁰ Machery, *Theory of Literary Production*, 28, quoted in Dennis Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 30.

³⁹¹ Porter, *Pursuit of Crime*, 30-31.

³⁹² Porter, *Pursuit of Crime*, 32.

identities, misleading witnesses and counterfeit testimony, and equivocal and fabricated evidence, which envelop events in ambiguity and contribute to false solutions, apparently genuine recognitions that actually turn out to constitute reversals.

However, while the classic detective story deploys impediments to hinder or temporarily halt the process of discovery, Radcliffe manipulates them to call into question the certainty of knowledge. In this significant respect, Radcliffe departs from both eighteenth-century Gothic fiction and from the traditional detective story. According to Spacks, usually, “the workings of the [Gothic] plot ultimately reveal reasons and facts to elucidate motives and events alike.”³⁹³ Similarly, in classic detective fiction, closure coincides with the revelation of truth by which the pursuit of knowledge is fully realized. The detective’s account of the crime and its solution dispels any sense of “indeterminacy” by establishing that “only one true meaning” can explain what previously appeared to be strange and inexplicable events.³⁹⁴ Although revelations play an important part in Radcliffe’s plot resolutions, her narratives often resist full disclosure, especially in *Udolpho* and *The Italian*, dramatizing how her mysteries are “rarely unequivocally settled in favor of absolute transparency.”³⁹⁵ In *Udolpho*, crucial questions about the hero’s motives and

³⁹³ Spacks, *Novel Beginnings*, 221.

³⁹⁴ Peter Huhn, “The Detective as Reader: Narrativity and Reading Concepts in Detective Fiction,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 33, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 455-56.

³⁹⁵ Sue Chaplin, “Ann Radcliffe and Romantic-Era Fiction,” in *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic*, ed. Dale Townsend and Angela Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 216.

behavior remain open,³⁹⁶ while, in *The Italian*, doubts about the villain's confession and the heroine's identity are left unresolved.³⁹⁷ Particularly in Radcliffe's later work, uncertainties persist beyond the last chapter.

Radcliffe's agility in maintaining a tension between narrative disclosure and concealment depends not only on her method for structuring the action but also on her narrative techniques. Radcliffe's approach to rendering her characters' inner lives contributed to major developments in narrative style. To a significant extent, her sustained use of free indirect discourse, especially in *Udolpho*, represents an innovation in rendering point of view.³⁹⁸ In juxtaposing the narrator's and the heroine's perspectives, she built on previous authors' work to develop a technique by

³⁹⁶ Nina Auerbach, *Romantic Imprisonment: Women and Other Glorified Outcasts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 15-16; Claire Wrobel, "Valancourt the Wanderer: Space, Self, and Truth in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*," in *Space, Haunting, Discourse*, ed. Maria Holmgren Troy and Elizabeth Wenno (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 89; Jakub Lipski, "The Masquerade in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*," *Women's Writing* 22, no. 3 (August 2015): 340.

³⁹⁷ E. J. Clery, introduction to *The Italian*, by Ann Radcliffe, ed. E. J. Clery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxvi-xxvii; Peter DeGabriele, *Sovereign Power and the Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Literature and the Problem of the Political* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2015), 133, 135.

³⁹⁸ In regard to some potential eighteenth-century sources for Radcliffe's development of the technique, see, for example, Anne Neumann, "Free Indirect Discourse in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel: Speakable or Unspeakable? The Example of *Sir Charles Grandison*," in *Language, Text and Context: Essays in Stylistics*, ed. Michael Toolan (London: Routledge, 1992), 114. She speculates that Richardson's *Grandison* (1753) influenced the development of free indirect discourse; Margaret Anne Doody, "George Eliot and the Eighteenth-Century Novel," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35, no. 3 (December 1980): 286. Doody sees "hints" of the technique in Burney's third-person narration in *Cecilia* (1782); and Marshall Brown finds that Walpole's *Otranto* provides, in embryonic form, a "narrative of consciousness." *The Gothic Text* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 30-32.

which “the boundary between narrator and character becomes as fluid as that between mind and body.”³⁹⁹ As such, free indirect discourse is a particularly effective method for eliciting the reader’s involvement. According to Doody, “the author makes us see the world as the character sees it, and we must comprehend his view before rejecting or modifying it.”⁴⁰⁰ As George Levine notes, this strategy “encourages the reader to be an active participant in the narrative rather than a passive receiver of ‘facts’ and judgments.”⁴⁰¹ From *Romance of the Forest* to *The Italian*, events are often filtered through the heroines’ perceptions, prompting the reader to both question and depend on their subjective impressions and judgments. In discussing *Udolpho*, Barbara Benedict points out that Radcliffe’s use of free indirect discourse “employs narrative effects to mystify the reader, a mystification that heuristically parallels the heroine’s own experience.”⁴⁰² Radcliffe heightens her narratives’ aura of uncertainty by using limited perspective, which Donna Bennett, in discussing later detective fiction, identifies as a key device for obstructing or delaying the reader’s resolution of mysteries.⁴⁰³ Thus Radcliffe’s readers are likely to find

³⁹⁹ Brown, *Gothic Text*, 163.

⁴⁰⁰ Doody, “George Eliot,” 288.

⁴⁰¹ Levine, “Literary Realism Reconsidered,” 19.

⁴⁰² Barbara Benedict, “Editorial Fictions: Paratexts, Fragments, and the Novel,” in *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 226, 227.

⁴⁰³ Donna Bennett, “The Detective Story: Towards a Definition of Genre,” *PTL* 4 (1979): 250-51.

themselves caught up in an epistemological labyrinth that figuratively parallels the shrouded landscapes and maze-like structure of Radcliffe's Gothic architecture.

Interpretation as action characterizes the experience of not only Radcliffe's characters but also her readers. Reviewing *Udolpho*, Coleridge maintained that "the art of escaping the guesses of the reader . . . has been brought to perfection."⁴⁰⁴ For Miles, one of Radcliffe's primary innovations was to introduce "a new hermeneutics of reading. . . . In place of the customary agreement between author and reader, . . . much of the burden of construing the meaning of the text has been shifted onto the reader. . . . The foundations on which interpretation rests are riddled with lacunae the reader is both free—and obliged—to fill in."⁴⁰⁵ As Claire Wrobel remarks, "Radcliffe's novels put the readers in the positions of detectives."⁴⁰⁶ In *Romance of the Forest*, Radcliffe suggests the corresponding relationship between her heroines and readers in depicting how Adeline attempts to decipher the meaning of the mysterious, partly illegible manuscript by imaginatively filling in the gaps created by its semi-decayed state.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. T. M. Raysor (London: Constable, 1936), 356, quoted in Miles, *Ann Radcliffe*, 134.

⁴⁰⁵ Miles, *Ann Radcliffe*, 134.

⁴⁰⁶ Claire Wrobel, "Valancourt the Wanderer," 89.

⁴⁰⁷ Critics also see such parallels between heroine and reader in Radcliffe's later work. For Scott Mackenzie, *Udolpho*'s "Emily is a metonymy for the reader." "Ann Radcliffe's Gothic Narrative and the Reader at Home," *Studies in the Novel* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 420; Cannon Schmitt finds that, in *The Italian*, "the reader's position with regard to [clues] replicates, in a *mise en abyme*, that of the heroine herself." "Techniques of Terror," 870.

An inset tale, the manuscript highlights Adeline's role as both literal and figurative reader. Radcliffe emphasizes this point when she juxtaposes Adeline's initial efforts to decode the manuscript with a scene in which she eavesdrops on a secret, partly inaudible conversation and attempts to construe its meaning from what is only fragmentary evidence. As "her imagination [fills] up the void in the sentences,"⁴⁰⁸ Adeline blurs the real and the imagined. These two episodes highlight what Ding describes as a major distinction between Radcliffe's romance and fiction associated with the eighteenth-century realist tradition. "Rather than striving for representational accuracy," Radcliffe's work is centrally concerned with calling into question the notion of "a stable correspondence between experience and the object of perception."⁴⁰⁹ Ding aligns this approach with Humean scepticism,⁴¹⁰ an approach that Radcliffe makes evident throughout her heroine-centered novels as her protagonists as well as other characters seek to construct coherent narratives from partial and ambiguous information. When it turns out that almost all of these stories must be revised and some even prove incapable of resolving significant mysteries, they dramatize Hume's notion of how the effort to impose order on experience inevitably blends fiction and truth.

In focusing on the gap between perception and reality, Radcliffe conveys the provisional nature of knowledge. Through her literary innovations and development of Gothic conventions and motifs, she dramatizes the limits of observation and experience in showing how appearances

⁴⁰⁸ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, 121.

⁴⁰⁹ Ding, "Searching After the Splendid Nothing," 546.

⁴¹⁰ Ding, "Searching After the Splendid Nothing," 544-45.

provoke shifting perceptions and conflicting interpretations. As she presents her heroines' process of knowing as a continuous, ongoing mode of action, she prompts her readers to question and revise their own inferences and assumptions. For Robert Miles, Radcliffe aligns her fiction with the modern realistic novel through her "hermeneutic art," which in his view fulfills the notion of modern literary realism as defined by Steven Behrendt, "The emerging 'modern' novel whose roots we see in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is 'realistic' precisely to the extent that it moves toward a world-view characterized by unresolved inconsistencies, contradictions, ambivalences, and 'dead ends' of all sorts."⁴¹¹ In numerous ways, nineteenth-century novelists adapted this aspect of Radcliffe's legacy. Among them, Jane Austen looked to her predecessor to explore serious epistemological considerations, enhancing her realism as she made comedy out of her heroine's pursuit of truth in her parodies of the Gothic, *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma*.

⁴¹¹ Steven Behrendt, "Response Essay: Cultural Transitions, Literary Judgments, and the Romantic-Era British Novel," in *Enlightening Romanticism, Romancing the Enlightenment: British Novels from 1750-1832*, ed. Miriam L. Wallace (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 201, quoted in Robert Miles, "The Surprising Mrs. Radcliffe: *Udolpho*'s Artful Mysteries," *Women's Writing* 22, no. 3 (2015): 314.

CHAPTER 4

NORTHANGER ABBEY: AUSTEN'S GOTHIC PARODY

In *Northanger Abbey* (1818), Jane Austen explores notions of romance and realism that had long preoccupied British critics and novelists. In demonstrating the relationship between these two subgenres, Austen contributes to the rich tradition of literary parody as she probes major contemporary aesthetic and philosophic issues. The modern critical reception of *Northanger Abbey* has often characterized the novel as an unqualified endorsement of realism in considering its Gothic parody to be the antithesis of Radcliffe's romance. However, while Austen frequently affirms her realism by ironically juxtaposing the Gothic and the prosaic, she simultaneously reworks significant aspects of Radcliffe's fiction in more probable terms to dramatize epistemological concerns from a perspective similar to her predecessor's. Throughout *Northanger Abbey*, Austen adapts Gothic conventions and motifs to her focus on how perceiving the world is subject to difficulties and limitations. By also taking as her theme the disparity between appearance and reality, she aligns herself with Radcliffe to foreground the provisional nature of knowledge. Although Austen's droll allusions to Radcliffe's larger-than-life characters and extravagant events are a significant feature of her domestic comedy, her parody expresses a tribute to the author who was largely responsible for the development of the eighteenth-century Gothic novel by drawing on Radcliffe's romance to challenge widely accepted distinctions between the real and the imagined.

Traditionally, modern criticism has claimed that *Northanger Abbey*'s parody of the Gothic endorses fictional realism by disparaging Radcliffe's romance. According to Marvin Mudrick's influential, mid-twentieth century analysis, Austen contrasts the "Gothic" with the

“realistic” for the purpose of validating the latter “while proving that the former is false and absurd.”⁴¹² In a similar vein, Stuart Tave argues that Austen devalues romance to celebrate the novel of “common life” as the “superior art.”⁴¹³ Walter Anderson agrees but in addition suggests that Austen’s attitude toward Radcliffe’s work exhibits an anxiety of influence. For Anderson, Austen presents a conflict between “fatuous imaginings” and “commonsensible pleasures in reading” as the means “to compete with and ultimately outstrip Gothic romances.”⁴¹⁴ These perspectives tend to support the conventional view of the novel as a genre whose progress in development was temporarily suspended by the late eighteenth-century ascendancy of Gothic fiction and of Austen as a novelist who participated in reasserting the value of literary realism by overturning the conventions of Gothic romance. As Lynch points out, “for critics committed to chronicling the rise of the novel, Gothic fiction . . . stands for all that went awry with fiction in the century’s closing decades,” while Austen’s realism constitutes a welcome factor in returning the novel from its “regrettable hiatus” to the realm of “everyday life.”⁴¹⁵

Other critics, however, have challenged this consensus, contending to varying degrees that, whereas Austen depreciates Radcliffe’s romance in *Northanger Abbey*, she also harnesses

⁴¹² Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 39.

⁴¹³ Stuart M. Tave, *Some Words of Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 37.

⁴¹⁴ Walter E. Anderson, “From Northanger to Woodston: Catherine’s Education to Common Life,” *Philological Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (Fall 1984): 494, 498.

⁴¹⁵ Deidre Lynch, “Transformation of the Novel,” 469.

her parody to serious purposes. For A. Walton Litz, Austen both “react[s] against Gothic conventions” and gives them an important role in her “complex drama of illusion and reality.”⁴¹⁶ In also considering the novel’s thematic focus, Alistair Duckworth finds that Austen “subverts the falsities of such works as *The Mysteries of Udolpho*,” yet “retains enough of the extrarational probing of the Gothic novel to put into question any easy acceptance of a rationally grounded existence.”⁴¹⁷ Jan Fergus, on the other hand, centers her analysis on the novel’s readership to conclude that, while Austen derides Radcliffe’s conventions, she also “exploits” them for their emotional and imaginative appeal.⁴¹⁸

The modern critical reception of *Northanger Abbey* points to its frequent misconception of parody. In Everett Zimmerman’s view, it has often suffered from the “assumption . . . that all parody, like burlesque, must ridicule its object.”⁴¹⁹ Given that parody crucially relies on establishing affinities with its targeted text, such an attitude would ultimately undermine its aesthetic purpose. As Linda Hutcheon explains, parody is “often confused” with other genres such as burlesque, and, whereas burlesque “necessarily” relies on ridicule, “parody does not.”⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁶ A. Walton Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study of her Artistic Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 61-62.

⁴¹⁷ Alistair Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen’s Novels* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 84-85.

⁴¹⁸ Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel: Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1983), 27.

⁴¹⁹ Everett Zimmerman, “The Function of Parody in *Northanger Abbey*,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 30 (1969): 54, 58.

⁴²⁰ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 40.

In considering its modern permutations, Hutcheon defines parody as “a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion”: it “both deviates from an aesthetic norm and includes that norm within itself as backgrounded material; consequently, “any real attack would be self-destructive.”⁴²¹ Regarding *Northanger Abbey* as a prime example, she notes that “Austen parodies gothic conventions while still relying on them for her novel’s shape” and so endows Radcliffe’s work with “authority.”⁴²² Claudia Johnson also maintains that, although she “pokes a lot of fun, Austen is not simply disavowing the Gothic” as “parody reaffirms and reconstitutes what it is parodying.”⁴²³ More recently, Eleanor Courtemanche has identified *Northanger Abbey*’s parody as “only partially deflationary,” for, while Austen initially presents realism as the antithesis of romance, she afterwards permits them “to infiltrate each other.”⁴²⁴ Indeed, Austen not only ironically inverts but also appropriates Radcliffe’s legacy in more direct terms, creating meaningful tensions within her narrative between “the alarms of romance” and “the anxieties of common life.”⁴²⁵ Throughout the novel, Austen’s parody of Radcliffe’s work encompasses the use of structure, theme, plot, characterization, and even, in some respects,

⁴²¹ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 6, 44.

⁴²² Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 79.

⁴²³ Claudia L. Johnson, introduction to *Northanger Abbey*, by Jane Austen, ed. James Kinsley and John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), xiv.

⁴²⁴ Eleanor Courtmanche, *The “Invisible Hand” and British Fiction, 1818-1860: Adam Smith, Political Economy, and the Genre of Realism* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 89.

⁴²⁵ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. James Kingsley and John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 148.

setting and formal techniques, bringing together romance and realism in a narrative mode which illuminates and develops the relationship between two subgenres of the novel.

This relationship is suggested by Austen's explicit mention of other novels, which include an array of works traditionally identified with the legacy of either Richardson and Burney or Radcliffe. As Butler points out, Austen's references invoke "the family similarity" common to these two forms of the novel.⁴²⁶ Frequently, critics have identified Austen's references to the former primarily with volume one and to the latter primarily with volume two.⁴²⁷ However, allusions to Radcliffe's fiction recur throughout *Northanger Abbey*, signifying the new ways in which Austen's novel manifests what Johnson refers to as the "interdependence" of romance and realism.⁴²⁸ Austen draws on Radcliffe's romance conventions far more extensively than is generally recognized, perhaps because her obvious appropriation of Radcliffe's work in volume two tends to obscure her less explicit parallels in volume one. According to Keymer, the novel's "intertextual range" is "dominated by the Gothic" as Austen's use of *Udolpho* as a constant "point of reference" demonstrates and as the title, *Northanger Abbey*, suggests.⁴²⁹ For Eric Rothstein, the abbey serves as "the central symbol of the novel" in

⁴²⁶ Marilyn Butler, "Introduction to *Northanger Abbey*," in *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: A Critical Reader*, ed. Stephen Regan (London: Routledge, 2001), 152.

⁴²⁷ See, for example, Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, 20; Butler, "Introduction to *Northanger Abbey*," 151; and Christopher Miller, "Jane Austen's Aesthetics and Ethics of Surprise," *Narrative* 13, no. 3 (2005): 240.

⁴²⁸ Johnson, introduction, xv.

⁴²⁹ Thomas Keymer, "*Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 24, 26. According to Peter Garside, a contemporary title of

representing an amalgamation of the “medieval” and the “modern.”⁴³⁰ As such, it denotes the hybrid nature of a narrative which further develops from Radcliffe’s innovation in drawing from the Richardson-Burney tradition.

In volume two of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen heightens and extends her parody of Radcliffe’s romance by incorporating into her novel key elements drawn from the tradition of the quixote narrative. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, numerous writers employed the quixote trope to participate in debates over how the effects of fiction were related to its purpose and value. Frequently, through their depiction of romance- and novel-reading female characters, they pursued considerations that had long been a subject of literary aesthetics. While Samuel Johnson had focused his attention on “the young, the ignorant and the idle” reader, the reading habits of young women increasingly became a matter of anxiety for literary critics as well as novelists who voiced their concerns in turning to the legacy of anti-romance established by Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* and adapted by Lennox in *The Female Quixote*. According to Jodi Wyett, within the realm of contemporary fiction, “the figure of the female

fiction that incorporated the term “Abbey” would have associated the work with the Radcliffean Gothic. “The English Novel in the Romantic Era: Consolidation and Dispersal,” in *The English Novel, 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, ed. Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling, vol. 2, 1800-1829, ed. Peter Garside and Rainer Schöwerling (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 52.

⁴³⁰ Eric Rothstein, “The Lessons of *Northanger Abbey*,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 44 (1974): 19.

quixote seems almost exclusively associated with uncritical, overly absorptive novel reading,”⁴³¹ At the time, young women were thought to be “easily swayed by tales of romance,” more likely than others to be “misled into error” and even “wickedness.”⁴³² Their vulnerability was often attributed to their education, which was considered a poor defense against the ability of romance in particular and of fiction in general to raise false expectations that would ill prepare them for life’s realities.⁴³³

Like *The Female Quixote*, *Northanger Abbey* and a number of other contemporary novels feature quixotes as major or minor female characters whose stories occur within the generic framework of the courtship novel associated with domestic realism. Among these are some of the best known works produced in the genre, including Frances Burney’s *Camilla* (1796), Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801) and *Angelina* (1801), Mary Brunton’s *Self-Control* (1811), and Eaton Stannard Barrett’s *The Heroine* (1813). In contrast to Austen, however, these novelists frequently disparage fiction within their own work, engaging in a practice that, by the early nineteenth century, had become commonplace.⁴³⁴ In volume one of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen takes exception to this practice in

⁴³¹ Jodi L. Wyett, “Female Quixoticism Refashioned: *Northanger Abbey*, the Engaged Reader, and the Woman Writer,” *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 56, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 261.

⁴³² Brewer, “Sentiment and Sensibility,” 42.

⁴³³ Katherine Sobba Green, *The Courtship Novel, 1740-1820: A Feminized Genre* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 110-11.

⁴³⁴ Green, *The Courtship Novel*, 111.

her Defense of the Novel, interrupting her narrative to protest against “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.”⁴³⁵ Although Austen’s Defense expresses admiration for Burney’s *Camilla* and Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, it also suggests a critique of their authors for refusing to apply the term “novel” to their own fiction, a signal which devalued much contemporary fiction by implicitly declaring the superiority of their own.⁴³⁶ Within the context of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen’s Defense further suggests differences between her parody and works such as *Camilla*, *Belinda*, and the others mentioned above given that they use the quixote trope to discredit the romance as well as most novels. Rather than employing the quixote figure to show the negative influences of reading fiction, Austen dramatizes in volume two how the appeal of romance benefits her heroine.

Both Austen’s novel and the quixote story in general are centrally concerned with epistemological issues. Both link questions about the effects of literary representations to those about the nature of knowledge in dramatizing the extent to which their characters can accurately perceive the world around them and fiction constitutes a viable mode for understanding that world. *Northanger Abbey*, however, sharply differs from the majority of these in its attitude toward the nature of knowledge. Austen’s positions her novel in opposition to what Scott Paul

⁴³⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 23.

⁴³⁶ Vivien Jones, “Jane Austen’s Domestic Realism,” in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, ed. Patrick Parrinder, vol. 2, *English and British Fiction, 1750-1820*, ed. Peter Garside and Karen O’Brien (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015), 276-77. Austen added the term “A Novel” to the title of each her works published during her lifetime.

Gordon calls the “orthodox” version of the quixote narrative and associates it with what he refers to as the “unorthodox” version.⁴³⁷ Gordon’s *The Practice of Quixoticism* (2006) provides insights into how eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century orthodox and unorthodox models elucidate competing views of epistemological issues, identifying the former with Enlightenment thought and the latter with postenlightenment perspectives that challenge its assertions.⁴³⁸

According to Gordon, orthodox tales “insist on the absolute difference between accurate and proper perception of the real” and its “misconstruals” to “demonstrate the danger of changing ‘reality’ into appearance, of introducing ‘relativities’ into things as they are in themselves” and “of infecting real things with subjectivity.”⁴³⁹ By contrast, he finds that unorthodox tales challenge the traditional version by showing “an awareness of the relativity and contingency” of perception. “In allowing quixote figures to expose competing construals of reality, these tales embrace or, at the very least, tolerate . . . a model of perception that acknowledges the subject’s *activity* in making the very world he or she seems to find.”⁴⁴⁰ Moreover, in discussing their effects on readers, Gordon notes marked differences between the two versions. Whereas the orthodox model “offer[s] readers a vantage point from which they can

⁴³⁷ Scott Paul Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism: Postmodernist Theory and Eighteenth-Century Women’s Writing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 3, 6. Gordon’s study does not consider any of Austen’s novels in his analysis, although he does mention *Northanger Abbey* briefly.

⁴³⁸ Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism*, 3, 8.

⁴³⁹ Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism*, 22.

⁴⁴⁰ Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism*, 6-7.

confidently know the ‘real,’” the unorthodox “den[ies] readers any reliable ground from which to gain clear sight” by “blurring the boundaries between the real and the illusory” (6). Thus the latter can bring readers to realize that they themselves are quixotes too.⁴⁴¹

While Gordon aligns the orthodox model with Enlightenment epistemology, it would be more accurate to associate it with contemporary mainstream philosophy given that the eighteenth century fostered conflicting concepts of the nature of knowledge. Contemporary debates that centered on the opposition between Reid’s Common Sense theory and Hume’s empiricism are particularly relevant to characterizing the competing attitudes toward epistemological issues that distinguish the orthodox from the unorthodox quixote narrative.⁴⁴² In unsettling the notion of a stable relationship between perception and reality, Hume’s scepticism supports what Gordon describes as the non-traditional variation’s depiction of the provisional nature of knowledge. On the other hand, Reid’s theory conforms to what Lynch refers to as the Enlightenment notion that “an unmediated encounter between the eye and its object” could yield objective knowledge.⁴⁴³ Although, according to Reid, truth is derived from perception, he finds that “fiction” in various guises can distort the clarity of the relationship between objects and their meaning.⁴⁴⁴ For Gordon, the orthodox quixote narrative serves as a primary mode for advancing such a view,

⁴⁴¹ Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism*, 7.

⁴⁴² In early nineteenth-century Britain, Reid’s theory continued to be widely accepted, although Hume’s skepticism persisted in contesting its principles. Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 133.

⁴⁴³ Deidre Lynch, “Gothic Fiction,” 47.

⁴⁴⁴ Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 132.

based as it is on the assumption that eliminating the negative influences of literary fictions would allow individuals to accurately perceive the world.⁴⁴⁵ Ultimately, in volume two of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen more clearly reveals her disagreement with this perspective but undercuts its assumptions throughout her narrative as she enlists and reworks Radcliffe's romance to convey her skepticism toward the problem of knowledge.

A number of critics have found that Austen's novels are preoccupied with exploring epistemological issues.⁴⁴⁶ For Susan Morgan, "the problem of perception" represents the key concern in Austen's fiction.⁴⁴⁷ According to Richard Patteson, "the matter of perception and knowledge underlies all else," and, "although there is, admittedly, a tendency within Austen's texts to impart solidity to the world, that world proves to be unexpectedly fluid and essentially unknowable."⁴⁴⁸ Patteson's study suggests that Austen explores the nature of knowledge from a position of skepticism. Other critics have explicitly associated Austen's treatment of

⁴⁴⁵ Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism*, 3, 4.

⁴⁴⁶ See for example, Mark Blackwell, "'The setting always casts a different shade on it': Allusion and Interpretation in *Sense and Sensibility*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 17, no. 1 (2004):110-25; Martha Satz, "An Epistemological Understanding of *Pride and Prejudice*: Humility and Objectivity," *Women and Literature* 3 (1983), 171-86; David Marshall, "True Acting and the Language of Real Feeling: *Mansfield Park*," in *The Frame of Art: Fictions of Aesthetic Experience, 1750-1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 72-90; Joseph Litvak, "Reading Characters: Self, Society, and Text in *Emma*," *PMLA* 100, no. 5 (October 1985), 763-73; Keith G. Thomas. "Jane Austen and the Romantic Lyric: *Persuasion* and Coleridge's Conversation Poems." *ELH*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Winter, 1987), 893-924.

⁴⁴⁷ Susan Morgan, *In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Fiction* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), 3.

⁴⁴⁸ Richard F. Patteson, "Truth, Certitude, Stability in Jane Austen's Fiction," *Philological Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (Fall 1981), 455.

epistemological issues with the skeptical strand of eighteenth-century, post-Lockean empiricism,⁴⁴⁹ and, more specifically, Sarah Tindal Kareem locates in *Northanger Abbey* a “skeptical drive” informed by Hume’s philosophy.⁴⁵⁰ Piper’s study draws similar conclusions, but his claim differs in finding that the ways in which Austen treats “the challenge of perceptual experience” owes a significant debt to Radcliffe’s approach to exploring the implications of Humean epistemology in *Udolpho*.⁴⁵¹ As *Northanger Abbey* shows, however, all of Radcliffe’s heroine-centered novels provide Austen with a fertile source for exploring the problem of knowledge in her Gothic parody.

As Radcliffe does from *A Sicilian Romance* to *The Italian*, Austen both focuses on the importance of sensory perception and foregrounds its limits as she centers her narrative on the disparity between appearance and reality. In dramatizing the ways in which deception, misinterpretation, and misunderstanding create mystery, Austen, too, both propels and delays the narrative’s movement toward its traditional resolution. As Garrett notes, in employing “mysteries and their possible explanations as plotting devices,” *Northanger Abbey* represents a variation on the “drama of knowledge” enacted in Radcliffe’s romance.⁴⁵² In *Northanger Abbey* and Radcliffe’s fiction, the heroines’ investigations into mysteries involve them in efforts to

⁴⁴⁹ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 108-10; Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, 5; Vivien Jones, “Jane Austen’s Domestic Realism,” 279.

⁴⁵⁰ Sarah Tindal Kareem, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 190.

⁴⁵¹ Piper, *Reconcilable Differences*, 182, 188, 214.

⁴⁵² Garrett, *Gothic Reflections*, 6-7.

construct coherent narratives from ambiguous information as they attempt to make sense of their experience. As Natalie Neill comments, *Northanger Abbey* and Radcliffe's fiction are "centrally concerned with questions of perception, and specifically, with the female protagonist's 'reading' of the world around her."⁴⁵³

Northanger Abbey's structure exhibits the cyclical pattern of the romance form that shapes the Radcliffean Gothic and the courtship novels associated with Richardson and Burney.⁴⁵⁴ Early in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen suggests this generic resemblance when the novel's narrator facetiously notes that the "adventures" attending Catherine Morland's "entrée into life" will certainly involve "difficulties and dangers."⁴⁵⁵ Austen, too, chooses as her heroine a naïve and vulnerable young woman whose introduction into society confronts her with hazards and risks that she must negotiate before her story can end happily. Austen's narrative also dramatizes the developing relationship between the heroine and hero, and, true to the form, it ultimately comes to a close in the removal of those obstacles that stand in the way of their marriage. Yet, as Austen employs the romance form of departure and return, her novel demonstrates a closer affiliation with Radcliffe's work. In a fashion similar to Emily's journey in

⁴⁵³ Natalie Neill, "'the trash with which the press now groans': *Northanger Abbey* and the Gothic Best Sellers of the 1790s," *Eighteenth-Century Novel* 4 (2004): 168.

⁴⁵⁴ For discussions of how the structure of Austen's novels relies on the pattern of romance described by Northrop Frye, see, for example, Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, 28-30, 75; and Audrey Tauchert, *Romancing Jane Austen: Narrative, Realism, and the Possibility of a Happy Ending* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2005), 15-16, 17, 31-32.

⁴⁵⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 8, 10.

Udolpho, Catherine's begins and ends at her home and comprises two extended periods of stay along the way when she visits first Bath and then later Northanger Abbey.⁴⁵⁶ According to Tompkins, Radcliffe's work, from *A Sicilian Romance* to *The Italian*, plays an essential part in shaping the story: "the whole structure of the book is modeled on those of Mrs. Radcliffe": "Like Emily St. Aubert, Catherine leaves domestic quiet for a center of dissipation, where she meets a scheming soldier, and presently departs with his party to his Gothic mansion."⁴⁵⁷ Once there, "Catherine understudies most of Mrs. Radcliffe's heroines."⁴⁵⁸ Initially, Catherine appears to have little in common with Radcliffe's heroines when, at the age of seventeen, she is invited by her wealthy neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Allen, to visit Bath. She possesses neither their great beauty nor their impressive accomplishments, having no talent for sketching, writing sonnets, or composing music. Although Catherine fails to measure up to the standard of "the true heroic height" in these respects,⁴⁵⁹ she does attain the stature of a heroine when she is no longer willing to accept appearances for reality.

The narrative also relies on an amalgamation of Radcliffe's plot elements, especially *Udolpho*'s. As Emily's journey does, Catherine's separates her from a safe and familiar

⁴⁵⁶ As Eric Rothstein points out, "Catherine's journey home is almost a physical repetition of her journey to the Tilney's" given that Austen places the Abbey "on so direct a line with Fullerton and Bath." "Lessons of *Northanger Abbey*," 23.

⁴⁵⁷ J. M. S. Tompkins, *Ann Radcliffe and Her Influence on Later Writers* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 146.

⁴⁵⁸ Tompkins, *Ann Radcliffe*, 146.

⁴⁵⁹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 7-8.

environment and delivers her into an exciting but threatening world, where she receives little in the way of useful guidance. Catherine, too, is thrown back on her own resources and must primarily depend on herself for counsel. Her ability to judge for herself is severely tested by Isabella Thorpe and, later, by General Tilney, both of whom pretend an affection for Catherine to conceal their intentions of taking advantage of her naivete and good nature. Though they hail from the midland counties of England, Isabella and the General represent contemporary versions of Gothic villainy in that they have no scruples about ruthlessly using others for the sake of their self-interest. When it comes to perceiving their motives, Catherine is at a decided disadvantage, having been brought up in the Fullerton parsonage, where “the common feelings of common life” prevail.⁴⁶⁰ Despite her more prosaic circumstances, she finds herself caught up, as the Radcliffe heroine does, in situations where the need to distinguish between the genuine and the false has a material bearing on her well-being. As Mary Waldron remarks, she is “in danger . . . from other people’s construction of everyday life.”⁴⁶¹ While Catherine rather quickly sees through the obviously absurd pretensions of John Thorpe, her sheltered upbringing initially leaves her largely unequal to deciphering the characters of Isabella and the General.

Austen explores the problem of knowledge by situating it within the context of a Radcliffean mystery story that also features a detective heroine. As Susan Zlotnick point out,

⁴⁶⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 9.

⁴⁶¹ Mary Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 28.

prompted by reading Radcliffe, Catherine becomes one of literature's "earliest girl detectives."⁴⁶² Although the results are frequently amusing, Catherine reveals her resemblance to her Gothic counterpart as well as subsequent detective figures when she sets out to investigate Isabella and the General. She, too, gathers and interprets evidence in the effort to determine others' motives and, like the Radcliffe heroine, is confronted with mysteries in which she is personally involved, giving her a crucial stake in discovering their causes. Once Catherine's investigations get underway, the narrative's double plot clearly emerges as it highlights how concealment in the novel is tied to the Gothic motif of secrecy. As in Radcliffe's work and later detective fiction, closure in *Northanger Abbey* occurs when the revelation of secrets uncovers the story of the crime. Although crime in Austen's novel is social rather than legal in nature, it is, as Tanner remarks, "lethal nonetheless" given that it stems from "putting money (and social advancement) first with complete disregard for the feelings of others"⁴⁶³ As Catherine's life comes to share with Emily's the dilemma of bridging the gap between appearance and reality, Radcliffe's fiction enhances her education as a heroine-in-training by giving her a means to explore difficult truths.

Austen emphasizes her epistemological concerns in the novel's transitional scene, which looks both backward and forward to the narrative's action. On Catherine's journey from Bath to Northanger, Henry entertains her with an improvised pastiche of Radcliffe's romance.

⁴⁶² Susan Zlotnick, "From Involuntary Object to Voluntary Spy: Female Agency, Novels, and the Marketplace in *Northanger Abbey*," *Studies in the Novel* 41, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 288-89; also see Maureen T. Reddy, "Women Detectives," 191.

⁴⁶³ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 46. Tanner's remarks refer only to the General but apply equally well to Isabella, who attempts to achieve similar aims by similar means.

Transposing the setting from southern Europe and the distant past to his family's abbey, he teasingly casts Catherine in the part of the heroine who encounters mysteries that test to the utmost her interpretive skills. In weaving together key scenes from *Romance of the Forest* and *Udolpho*, Henry invokes Radcliffe's language of perception and conjecture: terms such as "appear," "seem," "explore," "examine," "suppose," "discern," and "misgive"⁴⁶⁴ point to the thematic focus on the problem of knowledge that governs the plots of both Radcliffe's work and Austen's novel. In Henry's tale, Catherine reprises the role of first Emily and then Adeline when each attempts to "explore" the source of a "mystery" that lies at the heart of her story.⁴⁶⁵ When Catherine as Henry's fictional heroine embarks on a "search" to "discover" a vital "secret" concealed within the abbey's medieval walls, she must make her way "along many gloomy passages" and into rooms "dimly lighted," assisted by "only the feeble rays of a single lamp."⁴⁶⁶ In its highly compressed form, Henry's narrative functions as an inset tale, and, as often happens in Radcliffe's work, characterizes the frame narrative as a whole. As in *Udolpho*, where "obscurity" acts as "a metaphor" for the way in which the limitation of the senses hinder efforts to discover truths,⁴⁶⁷ Henry's tale figuratively depicts the challenges to perception and the difficulties in overcoming them which Catherine encounters on her travels in the "real" world.

⁴⁶⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 114-16.

⁴⁶⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 114, 116.

⁴⁶⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 114-16.

⁴⁶⁷ Victor Sage, "The Epistemology of Error: Reading and Isolation in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*," *arts, littératures & civilisations du monde anglophone*, no. 6 (1996): 108.

While Henry's tale casts Catherine in the role of Gothic heroine, Catherine also plays the part of the enthralled romance reader. Here, Austen facetiously acknowledges Radcliffe's celebrated talent for creating suspense and promoting the reader's close identification with her protagonist: "Mr. Tilney—This is just like a book!—But it cannot really happen to me. . . . Well, what then? . . . Oh! no, no—do not say so. Well, go on."⁴⁶⁸ When Henry abruptly ends his tale in mid-action, urging Catherine "to use her own fancy" in resolving the mystery,⁴⁶⁹ she is left in a predicament that comically suggests not only the experience of Radcliffe's protagonists and readers but also her own adventures at Bath and Northanger. Thus, Henry's Gothic improvisation points to ways in which the complex interplay between *Northanger Abbey* and Radcliffe's romance establishes a sense of aesthetic unity within Austen's narrative. Although Catherine often tends to be more gullible than Radcliffe's heroines, especially the more skeptical Emily, the trajectory of her experience is similar. At the beginning of the novel, she is, for the most part, completely unaware of what motivates her new acquaintances, but she grows wiser as she becomes better skilled in the art of reading others.

Henry's tale also figuratively suggests Catherine's foray into an unfamiliar world where events frequently excite her "astonishment" and "awe," a response that endows Bath's social spectacle with qualities of the natural sublime. Catherine finds her entrance into the world "as

⁴⁶⁸ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 115-16.

⁴⁶⁹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 116-17.

exciting, and as unlike the ‘natural’ world” as “a Gothic romance,”⁴⁷⁰ and, throughout the Bath section, Austen draws similar analogies between Catherine’s experience and the Gothic heroine’s. From the outset, her adventures are frequently represented in terms that imbue everyday life with the intensity of romance. According to Natasha Duquette, Austen creates a sense of “comic sublimity” through dramatizing Catherine’s capacity for “wonder” almost from the moment that she arrives in Bath.⁴⁷¹ Austen draws on the emotive force of Radcliffe’s landscape description when Catherine greets her introduction into Bath society with “utter amazement.”⁴⁷² As the novel’s action gets fully underway, the narrator alludes to the Radcliffe heroines’ journeys through magnificent mountain landscapes, ironically comparing Catherine’s first visit to the Upper Rooms with the treacherous but exhilarating adventure of alpine travel: “Miss Morland had a comprehensive view of all the company beneath her, and of all the dangers of her late passage through them. It was a splendid sight.”⁴⁷³ In considering this scene, Nina Auerbach notes how Austen recasts Radcliffe’s depiction of mountain travel by transposing it to an indoor setting: “Catherine’s first view of [the ball] from above seems a parody of the sublime

⁴⁷⁰ Mark Loveridge, “*Northanger Abbey*: Or, Nature and Probability,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 46, no. 1 (June 1991): 26. For Loveridge, Austen establishes this correspondence midway through the novel, once Catherine is invited to *Northanger*.

⁴⁷¹ Natasha Duquette, “‘Motionless Wonder’: Contemplating Gothic Sublimity in *Northanger Abbey*,” *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal On-line* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2010), <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol30no2/duquette.html?>.

⁴⁷² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 11.

⁴⁷³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 11.

ascents up Romantic mountains.”⁴⁷⁴ When the droll allusion to Radcliffe “applies the elevated diction of natural sublimity to the geography of a Bath ballroom,”⁴⁷⁵ the narration also conveys Catherine’s heightened emotions by referencing Radcliffe’s mode of rendering her heroines’ subjective experience through their response to nature.

Attending a ball is often fraught with drama for the heroine of the domestic courtship novel, sometimes signifying an arduous rite of passage. Austen again draws on this convention in the later episode of the cotillion ball to present the action as a parodic variation on the Radcliffe heroine’s exploits by investing Catherine’s experience with an aura of Gothic peril. When Catherine’s desire to dance with Henry is threatened by John Thorpe’s unwanted attentions, she must endure an “agony” of “suspense” until Henry’s sudden appearance effects her “escape.”⁴⁷⁶ In refiguring Bath’s Upper Rooms as a site of rescue from imminent “danger,”⁴⁷⁷ the scene encapsulates how Austen brings together romance and realism to create comedy throughout the novel.

For Catherine, the wonder excited by Bath’s social display is aligned with her pleasure in making new friends. Yet, her enthusiasm also renders her vulnerable given that she tends to take others at face-value and credit them with her own generous sentiments. According to Conger, Catherine’s sensibility leads her to place too much faith in appearances: initially, “she is

⁴⁷⁴ Auerbach, *Romantic Imprisonment*, 18.

⁴⁷⁵ Duquette, ““Motionless Wonder.””

⁴⁷⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 52-53.

⁴⁷⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 52.

indiscriminately good-natured and the difficulties she has at Bath stem as much from her ‘too susceptible heart’ as they do from her inexperience. She thinks well of nearly everyone.”⁴⁷⁸ In this respect, she resembles Radcliffe’s heroine Adeline, whose “confidence in the sincerity and goodness of others” makes her an easy target for others’ deceptions.⁴⁷⁹ When Radcliffe’s narrator expresses regret for Adeline’s “weakness,” the criticism highlights her heroine’s integrity,⁴⁸⁰ and, although Austen’s narrator treats Catherine’s naivete as an object of irony, this approach also enhances her heroine’s likability. As Courtmanche remarks, frequently in the Bath section, the ironic attitude toward “Catherine’s seeming inability to detect lying and posturing” stresses the disparity between “her honest virtue” and “the false sophistication surrounding her.”⁴⁸¹ While the narrative’s events validate Catherine’s initial interest in and liking for Henry and Eleanor, they reveal how her idealism adds to her difficulties in interpreting the behavior of Isabella and the General.

Catherine’s attempts at reading the world dramatize what Hume describes as the mind’s “remarkable propensity to believe,”⁴⁸² but Catherine is hardly the only character assigned this role in a novel whose plot complications stem from others’ misinterpretations. John Thorpe is primarily responsible for creating the misconceptions that propel the narrative’s action when he

⁴⁷⁸ Syndy M. Conger, “Austen’s Sense and Radcliffe’s Sensibility,” *Gothic* 2 (1987): 20.

⁴⁷⁹ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, 47.

⁴⁸⁰ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, 47.

⁴⁸¹ Courtmanche, “*Invisible Hand*,” 89-90, 91.

⁴⁸² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 113, quoted in Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, 117.

deceives Isabella and the General into believing that the Morland family is wealthy and that Catherine is the all but acknowledged beneficiary of the Allens' fortune. Although the reason why Isabella is misled by her brother is never explicitly addressed, the General's rationale for accepting John Thorpe's account as true is fully detailed, revealing how desire can play a powerful part in shaping belief. In determining that Thorpe shares his own values, the General mistakes his empty boasting for reliable "intelligence."⁴⁸³ Encouraged by what he perceives to be the mercenary nature of "Thorpe's interest in the family" he concludes that, beyond a "doubt," Thorpe speaks with the voice of "authority" on the matter of the Morland's finances.⁴⁸⁴

In *Northanger Abbey*, as in Radcliffe's fiction, the problems in bridging the gap between appearance and reality are frequently compounded by a variety of influences. As Zelda Boyd comments, Austen's characters "are always busily remaking the actual to suit their assumptions" and, in the process, they frequently demonstrate the inclination to "confus[e] desire with certainty."⁴⁸⁵ Both Catherine's idealism and the General's greed dramatize this tendency, illustrating how Austen depicts Hume's assertion that knowledge derived from sensory perception is often shaped by psychological factors.⁴⁸⁶ In respect to the General, his willingness to believe John Thorpe clearly recalls *Udolpho*'s Madame Cheron when her own matrimonial

⁴⁸³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 182.

⁴⁸⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 182.

⁴⁸⁵ Zelda Boyd, "The Language of Supposing: Modal Auxiliaries in *Sense and Sensibility*," *Women and Literature* 3 (1983): 143, 152.

⁴⁸⁶ Richard Handler and Daniel A. Segal, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Culture: An Essay on the Narration of Social Realities* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990), 105.

“calculations” are “guided rather by her wishes than by any . . . strong appearance of probability.”⁴⁸⁷ However, both Austen and Radcliffe show that, when their characters turn to probability, they rarely gain more than provisional knowledge. In *Northanger Abbey*, the General’s investigation into Catherine’s prospects provides an ironic case in point when he eagerly mistakes evidence for proof. Although far less scrupulous in his judgments, he also recalls *Udolpho*’s Count de Villefort when he not only gives to statements of “authority” the status of fact but also trusts his observations to provide him with a basis for certainty. Although satisfied by Thorpe’s testament to the Morland’s wealth, the General seeks and eventually finds what he takes to be confirmation of Catherine’s future fortune when he establishes “the absolute facts of the Allens being wealthy and childless, of Miss Morland’s being under their care, and, as soon as his acquaintance allowed him to judge—of their treating her with parental kindness.”⁴⁸⁸ The General’s rush to judgment distinguishes him from the fastidious Count, but they both show in Humean terms the mind’s readiness to depend on “fictions” in constructing “truths.”⁴⁸⁹ More specifically, Austen also shows how probable inferences derived from empirical methods rest on subjective interpretation, underscoring this principle when the General’s own lack of experience in exercising “parental kindness” provides him with a poor basis for identifying the quality in others.

⁴⁸⁷ Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 139.

⁴⁸⁸ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 182.

⁴⁸⁹ Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 208-09, 254-55.

As to the question of why Isabella is deceived by her brother, her resemblance to the General suggests the answer. Greed, too, motivates her to take maximum advantage of Bath's marriage market, which as Ann Bermingham remarks, was widely associated with "fortune hunting."⁴⁹⁰ Like the General, Isabella is eager to avail herself of the opportunities that it provides, but her desires also mislead her into making judgments that ultimately undermine her objectives. In the pursuit of their ambitions, the General as a male who belongs to the privileged classes and especially as a wealthy landowner enjoys many more advantages than Isabella has at her disposal. Yet, despite these gender and class differences, their methods and motives, as Claudia Johnson points out, make them "mutually illuminating."⁴⁹¹ Acting on John Thorpe's misinformation, Isabella and later the General create the basis for much of the novel's action when they attempt to exploit Catherine by assuming the role of her guardian in Bath and at Northanger respectively.

By making Mrs. Allen Catherine's official chaperone, Austen spoofs Radcliffe's female guardians who act to obstruct the welfare of her heroines. Mrs. Allen's "placid indifference"⁴⁹² stands in marked contrast to the machinations of her Gothic counterpart. However, her willingness to entrust her charge to the company of Isabella delivers Catherine into the care of a

⁴⁹⁰ Ann Bermingham, "Elegant Females and Gentleman Connoisseurs: The Commerce in Culture and Self-Image in Eighteenth-Century England," in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, and Text*, ed. John Brewer and Ann Bermingham (New York: Routledge, 1995), 490.

⁴⁹¹ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 45.

⁴⁹² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 43.

“chaperone” who is not only four years older and considerably more experienced but also motivated by the kind of intentions that animate *Udolpho*’s Madame Cheron. As Emily’s guardian, she uses her position to increase her own prospects of marrying into a higher social class, permitting Emily and Valancourt to become engaged solely to associate herself with his grand relations. Once she believes that she has achieved her aim by marrying Montoni, she callously ends their engagement, maintaining that, after all, Valancourt is not rich enough to marry her niece. Throughout *Northanger Abbey*, Isabella is bent on similar aims, initially arranging matters so that her relationship with Catherine will advance her plan to marry James Morland. Once they are engaged, James turns out to be less well off than John Thorpe led his sister to believe, and Isabella then attempts to use Catherine as an unwitting accomplice in her pursuit of Captain Tilney. Although Isabella’s scheme involves only her own marriage prospects, she reveals, much as Madame Cheron does, her readiness to sacrifice others to her ambitions as she acts to guarantee one proposal of marriage and then plots to end the engagement once she believes that she has ensured herself of another.

While Isabella’s scheme resembles Madame Cheron’s, the General’s plan for promoting a marriage between Catherine and Henry aligns him with Montoni. Once married, Emily’s aunt and Montoni share her guardianship, but he wields greater authority, especially once the three of them take up residence in Udolpho, where Montoni takes them not only to separate Emily from Valancourt but also to more freely pursue his plan of enriching himself by forcing Emily into a marriage of alliance. In less dramatic fashion, the General acts to remove Catherine from Bath and thus the vicinity of John Thorpe, who confides in the General his intention to marry

Catherine when he misrepresents her as the “future heiress of Fullerton.”⁴⁹³ The General “almost instantly determined to spare no pains in weakening his boasted interest and ruining his dearest hopes.”⁴⁹⁴ He loses no time in inviting Catherine to Northanger, where he can more easily further and control the progress of a match between Henry and Catherine. Once Catherine’s parents give her permission to visit the abbey, the General temporarily assumes the responsibility of Catherine’s guardianship, and, Montoni-style, he intends to use the position for his own gain. Although forced marriage seems a remote possibility in the comparatively modern midland counties of *Northanger Abbey*, the General also insists that “consequence and fortune” serve as the primary basis for matrimony.⁴⁹⁵

Isabella and the General, however, also appear to be the antithesis of their Gothic counterparts. Whereas Madame Cheron and Montoni openly disparage the values of sensibility, they simulate displays of sentiment. Yet their dishonesty places Catherine in a position analogous to Emily’s. Both Catherine and Emily lack the knowledge that they need to make informed judgments, Emily because her guardians often flatly refuse to provide it and Catherine because Isabella and the General mislead her into believing that she already possesses it. As Wilt remarks, “the exercise of power by the knowing over the ignorant” is “pure Gothic” and

⁴⁹³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 182.

⁴⁹⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 182.

⁴⁹⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 153.

operates as a key plot device not only in Radcliffe's work but also in *Northanger Abbey*.⁴⁹⁶ In Radcliffe's fiction, the villains routinely withhold information as part of their strategy to increase their dominance over others, and, although their stratagems differ, Isabella and the General rely on the tactic of deception for similar purposes.

While *Udolpho*'s narrator initially plays a role in revealing Madame Cheron's character to the reader, Austen almost entirely characterizes Isabella through dialogue and action. Catherine spends several weeks in Isabella's company before she begins to suspect her of duplicity, but the reader easily discovers Isabella's insincerity almost as soon as she appears in the novel given the obvious disparity between what she says and what she does. However, Austen departs from this strategy when, early in the story, the narrator indicts Isabella for her desire "to fix the attention of every man near her" and for her "exaggerated feelings of extactic delight or inconceivable vexation on every little trifling occurrence."⁴⁹⁷ As the narrator's comments suggest, the power to monopolize male attention is the means by which Isabella measures not only her self-consequence but also her ascendancy over others, while her theatricality signifies both her artificiality and her propensity to magnify the importance of her concerns at the expense of others.

In part, Isabella displays her egoism by expressing her displeasure whenever she is kept waiting, as she does when she and Catherine meet in the Pump-room early in their acquaintance.

⁴⁹⁶ Judith Wilt, *Ghosts of the Gothic: Austen, Eliot, and Lawrence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 138-39. Wilt refers to most of Austen's completed novels in making this remark.

⁴⁹⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 38.

Although Catherine shows up at the appointed hour, Isabella has arrived “nearly five minutes” before her: “My dearest creature, what can have made you so late? I have been waiting for you at least this age!”⁴⁹⁸ Isabella’s concept of time reveals her tendency to judge circumstances only insofar as they conform to her own wishes or convenience. In this scene, as elsewhere in the novel, her manner of speaking is also telling. As Juliet McMaster points out, it places her in the company of Austen’s “verbal aggressors,” whose “exclamatory” style acts to “trample on” others “in the process of drawing attention to themselves.”⁴⁹⁹ More significantly, Isabella exhibits her disregard for others by imposing on them her own desires and concerns. In “conversations” with Catherine, she has the habit of carrying on a virtual monologue by asking questions for which she herself supplies the answers, a behavior that she shares with Madame Cheron, whose “love of sway” often takes the form of laying claim to Emily’s right to speak for herself.⁵⁰⁰ When Isabella and Catherine meet at the theatre one evening, Isabella’s greeting is especially notable for the way in which it highlights her interests and propensities:

My sweetest Catherine, how have you been this long age? But I need not ask you, for you look delightfully. You really have done your hair in a more heavenly style than ever: you mischievous creature, so you want to attract everybody? I assure you my brother is quite in love with you already; and as for Mr. Tilney—but that is a settled thing—even *your* modesty cannot doubt his attachment now; his coming back to Bath makes it too plain.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁸ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 24.

⁴⁹⁹ Juliet McMaster, “Mrs. Elton and Other Verbal Aggressors,” in *The Talk in Jane Austen*, ed. Bruce Stovel and Lynn Weinlos Gregg (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2002), 75.

⁵⁰⁰ See, for example, Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 112.

⁵⁰¹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 49.

In her typical way, Isabella uses language here as a means of domination. Catherine is, in effect, “sentenced to silence,” a condition usually associated with the lack of “power” in Austen’s work.⁵⁰² At the same time, Isabella’s mode of expression conveys to the reader, although not to Catherine, her insincerity while the nature of her flattery indicates her motives for exploiting appearances.

Isabella is well attuned to the way in which she can improve her chances in the marriage market through manipulating appearances. While her “great personal beauty” gives her considerable advantage in this respect,⁵⁰³ she attempts to enhance nature with artifice by equipping herself with the trappings of sensibility and taste. During the eighteenth century, the notion of taste became associated with the concept of sensibility “as the expression of women’s literate and consumer culture. . . . Like sensibility, taste expressed distinction, not only from the ‘world’ but above the ‘vulgar.’”⁵⁰⁴ In signifying gentility, these qualities could provide a young woman without fortune or high rank an entrée into the upper reaches of society. Treating sensibility and taste as forms of cultural capital, Isabella intends to parlay them into an enviable match and so emerge victorious in the competitive marriage stakes.

In depicting Isabella’s motives, Austen explores how sensibility and taste had become implicated in British culture’s widespread consumerism. In Austen’s day, the consumption of

⁵⁰² Massimiliano Morini, *Jane Austen’s Narrative Techniques: A Stylistic and Pragmatic Analysis* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 125.

⁵⁰³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 21.

⁵⁰⁴ Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 206.

goods rose to levels not seen before, driven by cheaper imports, lower manufacturing costs, and the buying power of a more prosperous middle class.⁵⁰⁵ Among other things, novels became easier to acquire,⁵⁰⁶ contributing to a trend that, for decades, had made fiction more readily available to a wider public, especially through the borrowing practices of circulating libraries. As the novel increasingly became a sought after commodity, questions about the effects of its commercial success raised concerns that centered on the relationship between fiction and its promotion of sensibility. Already by the 1770s, “sentimental writing had become both fashionable and highly commercialized.”⁵⁰⁷ Critics worried that this development would undermine sensibility’s moral authority, largely by diminishing its value as a source of sympathy as it encouraged its adoption as a stylish pose. According to Brewer, this turn of events fueled “the fear that enacting sensibility [was] an empty performance,” one which could conceal an “unfeeling heart.”⁵⁰⁸ Sentimental fiction tends to contrast sensibility with the kind of inauthenticity by which it often characterizes polite society, but, when sensibility came into vogue among the privileged classes, it was suspected of being co-opted as another form of social pretense.

⁵⁰⁵ David Selwyn, “Consumer Goods,” in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 215, 224.

⁵⁰⁶ Barbara M. Benedict, “The Trouble with Things: Objects and the Commodification of Sociability,” in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 343.

⁵⁰⁷ Brewer, “Sentiment and Sensibility,” 39.

⁵⁰⁸ Brewer, “Sentiment and Sensibility,” 40.

By invoking the era's widespread consumerism, Austen both elaborates on her portrayal of Isabella and her thematic focus on the discrepancy between appearance and reality. In "performing sentimentally as a cover for her economic motivations," "Isabella attempts "to inflate the value of her character" by engaging in the "mimicry of fashionable society."⁵⁰⁹ As Austen illustrates Isabella's efforts at self-promotion, she dramatizes how "the attitude toward consumption" could render "even intangible feelings, relationships, and people themselves" potential objects of acquisition.⁵¹⁰ Isabella's methods for realizing her objective substantially rely on displays of simulated emotion designed to attract the notice of Bath's most eligible men. According to Zlotnick, she considers herself "both merchant and merchandize" as she acts to project an image that conforms to standards of gentility and reserve the right to "sell herself advantageously."⁵¹¹ In respect to the latter, her criteria rests on whether a suitor's social and material worth will ensure her position among members of the fashionable world.

Austen emphasizes the way in which Isabella treats sensibility as an acquisition by associating it with her parade of the latest fashions. In doing so, she points to similarities between contemporary critiques directed at the commodification of sensibility and those leveled against women's embrace of fashion. During the eighteenth century, the production of women's clothing made stylish dress available across most social classes, allowing many women to

⁵⁰⁹ Zlotnick, "Female Agency," 282, 284.

⁵¹⁰ Benedict, "Trouble with Things," 343, 349, 353.

⁵¹¹ Zlotnick, "Female Agency," 281, 282, 284.

emulate those above them on the social scale.⁵¹² This phenomenon, however, raised concerns that imitating clothing trends reflected a superficiality that devalued notions of taste. The growth of the fashion industry provoked anxieties among commentators who, as Bermingham notes, worried that the widespread popularity of its goods carried with it the possibility of using taste to conceal “an essential lack of individual authenticity.”⁵¹³

In *Northanger Abbey*, Isabella’s extensive knowledge of what is in and out of vogue gives her additional opportunities to outwardly assume the signs of gentility. Yet, like many contemporary women novelists, Austen makes the preoccupation with dress the mark of a shallow and grasping character,⁵¹⁴ presenting it as antithetical to the sense of refinement that Isabella intends to convey. Both Isabella and *Udolpho*’s Madame Cheron signify their superficiality and avarice through their references to the importance of dress, but Isabella’s talk more thoroughly depicts her obsession with clothes, for it is continuously filled with concrete details describing what she wears, plans to wear, and would like to wear. Isabella’s repeated allusions to the paraphernalia of everyday life—its ribbons, hats, and gowns—foreground the novel’s realism but also suggest continuities with Radcliffe’s use of the veil motif in indicating how dress serves Isabella as a mode of disguise. In Radcliffe’s fiction, veil imagery takes various literal and figurative forms that provide characters with methods for evading detection, but it is

⁵¹² Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 174, 175.

⁵¹³ Ann Bermingham, “The Picturesque and Ready-To-Wear Femininity,” in *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770*, ed. Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 94.

⁵¹⁴ Bermingham, “Ready-To-Wear Femininity,” 95.

also linked to the “metaphorical unmasking” that moves Radcliffe’s plots toward closure.⁵¹⁵ As often happens in the detective story, the means of deception ultimately suggest the perpetrator’s guilt.⁵¹⁶ Initially, Catherine admires Isabella’s fashion sense but eventually identifies it, along with her sentimental posturing, as another form of her “artifice.”⁵¹⁷

Austen also draws parallels between Isabella’s attitude toward fashion and her attitude toward social relationships. This similarity is particularly evident in Isabella’s choice of accessories, notably the turban, which was typical of contemporary fashion in “trading on the novel and exotic,” although its novelty depended on revising previous designs.⁵¹⁸ In the time that elapsed between April and July of 1804, the turban represented the height of fashion, subsequently fell out of favor, and then came back into vogue, somewhat modified.⁵¹⁹ Isabella’s adherence to rapidly changing fashion trends is analogous to her fickle treatment of James when she accepts, then rejects, and finally seeks to renew his proposal of marriage after she herself has been discarded by Captain Tilney. As Jillian Heydt-Stevenson notes, given that “clothes and men are inseparable as commodities to her, it makes sense that she interchanges them

⁵¹⁵ Lipski, “The Masquerade,” 332.

⁵¹⁶ Glen W. Most, “The Hippocratic Smile: John le Carré and the Traditions of the Detective Novel,” in *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, ed. Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 342.

⁵¹⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 160.

⁵¹⁸ Bermingham, “Ready-To-Wear Femininity,” 100.

⁵¹⁹ Bermingham, “Ready-To-Wear Femininity,” 101.

promiscuously.”⁵²⁰ Above all, the turban represents the kind of “extravagant ostentation” with which Madame Cheron habitually dresses to “command” not only “attention” but “submission.”⁵²¹ Austen invests Isabella’s ambition to achieve social preeminence with Gothic overtones by designating the turban as a symbol of her motives and methods. At the time, the turban was widely identified with Turkey,⁵²² a country that the British routinely associated with “despotism.”⁵²³ By the late eighteenth century, the association of Turkey with exotic tyranny was so common that Radcliffe drew on it in *The Romance of the Forest* to characterize Gothic villainy.⁵²⁴

Through her influence over Catherine, Isabella plays a principal part in shaping the story’s plot. This narrative development highlights Isabella’s affinity with not only Madame Cheron but also Radcliffe’s other female villains who assume similarly crucial roles in her major work. In dramatizing Isabella’s manipulation of Catherine, “Austen draws quiet analogies between the trials of a Radcliffe heroine and the everyday but no less absorbing tribulations of an ingénue at Bath.”⁵²⁵ Although Isabella succeeds in deceiving Catherine throughout most of their acquaintance, she meets with less success when she attempts to dupe Catherine into lending an

⁵²⁰ Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 124-25.

⁵²¹ Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 121, 183.

⁵²² Bermingham, “Ready-To-Wear Femininity,” 101.

⁵²³ Roy Porter, *Modern World*, 323.

⁵²⁴ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, 222.

⁵²⁵ Keymer, “Northanger Abbey,” 29.

air of propriety to her plan of exchanging James for Captain Tilney. Ironically, Isabella's successful efforts at disguise prove to weaken her powers of concealment. Up to this point, Isabella has misled Catherine by simulating sentiment, but, to Catherine, she "seem[s] an altered creature" when her attentions toward the Captain fly in the face of her former declarations of undying love for James and, "of all things," her "aversion" to "inconstancy."⁵²⁶

Catherine finds herself no longer able to take appearances at face value when they call into question rather than confirm her assumptions. When her belief in Isabella's sincerity turns to doubt, she takes her first decisive step toward becoming a better interpreter of her own experience. In this respect, Catherine's situation most resembles Adeline's in *Romance of the Forest*. Doubt empowers them to move from passively accepting to actively questioning other people's fictions but also confronts them with the painful prospect of discovering that those in whom they have placed their faith have betrayed their trust. As Radcliffe's narrator remarks, the possibility of such a discovery "is often rejected before it is finally admitted."⁵²⁷ Similarly to Adeline, Catherine is eager to find grounds for dismissing her suspicions: "It seemed to her that Captain Tilney was falling in love with Isabella, and Isabella unconsciously encouraging him; unconsciously it must be, for Isabella's attachment to James was as certain and well acknowledged as her engagement. To doubt her truth or good intentions was impossible; and yet, during the whole of their conversation her manner had been odd."⁵²⁸ Although Catherine strives

⁵²⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 86, 94, 107.

⁵²⁷ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, 118.

⁵²⁸ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 107.

for certainty in her effort to absolve Isabella of deliberate wrongdoing, her speculations lead her into further quandaries. Much like Adeline, she becomes lost in a “labyrinth of conjecture.”⁵²⁹ By taking the part of “active investigator and interpreter,” however, she “become[s] a reflector upon, as well as a participant in, her own mystery story.”⁵³⁰ Despite her confusion, this stage in the narrative marks the critical turning point in Catherine’s training as a heroine.

When Catherine’s efforts at detection substantiate rather than allay her suspicions, she assumes a more assertive role, seeking clarification by interrogating Henry about his brother’s intentions. Taken aback—“you are a very close questioner,”⁵³¹ Henry eventually offers answers in turning to probability. Drawing inferences that take little account of human vagaries, he overestimates both Isabella’s shrewdness and his brother’s integrity. As Christopher Miller points out, “in Henry’s thinking, there is technically always some *chance* for deviation from the norm but not a very big one.”⁵³² Quickly moving from considering what is likely to determining what is certain, he inadvertently highlights the limits of probability: “Though Frederick does not leave Bath with us, he will *probably* remain but a very short time, perhaps only a few days behind us. His leave of absence *will* soon expire, and he *must* return to his regiment.—And what *will* then be their acquaintance?—The mess-room *will* drink Isabella Thorpe for a fortnight, and

⁵²⁹ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, 107.

⁵³⁰ Belton, “Mystery Without Murder: The Detective Plots of Jane Austen,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 43, no. 1 (June 1988): 44. Belton, however, identifies this moment with Catherine’s suspicions of the General at the abbey rather than of Isabella in Bath.

⁵³¹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 109.

⁵³² Miller, “Jane Austen’s Aesthetics and Ethics of Surprise,” 244.

she *will* laugh with your brother over poor Tilney's passion for a month."⁵³³ Henry's use of such terms as "must" and "will" forecasts a happy ending to a routine flirtation, an outcome which subsequent events fail to justify. In Austen's fiction, such terms frequently express suspect convictions, often revealing the speaker's wish for reality to conform to desire or the ironic discrepancy between "the smooth logic of hypothetical scenarios" and "the unpredictability of the actual world."⁵³⁴ When Catherine defers to Henry's authority, her notion that "Henry *must* know best" turns out to be as erroneous as her notion that Isabella "*must* be attached to [James]."⁵³⁵ In Austen's work, as in Radcliffe's, relying on figures invested with authority usually provides a poor basis for making judgments given that their assertions usually turn out to be deliberately misleading or inaccurate. Yet this episode also highlights the limits of experience, stressing the subjectivity of perception when the observation of Isabella's behavior evokes conflicting interpretations. Whereas Catherine considers her conduct in Gothic terms, as an infliction of "pain" and "torment," Henry sees it as nothing more serious than a harmless move in a social game.⁵³⁶ Catherine's departure from Bath leaves her investigation into Isabella temporarily suspended, but, when Catherine confronts similar enigmas at Northanger, these

⁵³³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 110-11; emphasis added.

⁵³⁴ Boyd, "Language of Supposing," 151, 152; According to Hume, judging from past experience cannot determine what the future holds, for it is impossible to "prove by any probable argument that the future must be conformable to the past." *An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1965), 188-89.

⁵³⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 109, 111; emphasis added.

⁵³⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 108-09.

overlapping mysteries point to the kind of Gothic repetitions that, as in Radcliffe's work, suggest how the attempt to overcome the limits of knowledge is a continuous, ongoing process.

As the narrative action shifts from Bath to Northanger in the novel's second volume, Catherine moves from reading Gothic romance to relying on it for reading the world around her. Austen gives added dimension to her Gothic parody as she incorporates additional source material into her narrative through juxtaposing Radcliffe's romance with the quixote story. As she amplifies her novel's affinities with and differences from the Gothic, she simultaneously establishes parallels between *Northanger Abbey* and the literary legacy of quixoticism. Throughout much of volume two, Austen's novel demonstrates continuities with the anti-romance tradition embodied in the orthodox variation through its narrative strategies and frequent deflation of Catherine's Gothic expectations. Yet Austen also rejects traditional conventions associated with Lennox's *Female Quixote* in refusing to make her heroine's happy ending dependent on vows to reform a wayward imagination and in dramatizing the effects of Catherine's romance reading in positive terms.⁵³⁷ Ultimately, Austen undermines what Gordon describes as the typical quixote's journey from "blindness" to "sight,"⁵³⁸ presenting her narrative as an unorthodox version of the genre. Moreover, in volume two, as in volume one, Austen's adaptation of Radcliffe's romance undercuts the kind of distinctions between fiction and truth on which the epistemology of the quixote tale is based.

⁵³⁷ Neill "'the trash with which the press now groans,'" 164-65; Wyett, "Female Quixoticism Refashioned," 262, 268.

⁵³⁸ Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism*, 46.

In volume two, Austen further explores the limits of knowledge, principally by depicting how the General's duplicity creates additional epistemological predicaments for Catherine. However, in contrast to her characterization of Isabella, she makes the General a less transparent figure. In disclosing little about his reasons for inviting Catherine to the abbey, Austen makes the General "an enigmatic and rather foreboding figure."⁵³⁹ Before arriving at the abbey, Catherine has noticed how he "seemed always a check on his children's spirits,"⁵⁴⁰ and, once at Northanger, she also finds his company oppressive and turns to Radcliffe to articulate the feeling of "restraint which the General's presence [has] imposed."⁵⁴¹ Although the General's renovations at Northanger have eradicated any suggestion of Gothic gloom, "the pall that he casts over his household" encourages her to seek Gothic explanations for his mysterious behavior.⁵⁴² In large part, clues to his intentions and motives reside in the intratextual and intertextual similarities that Austen establishes between the General and Isabella and between the General and Montoni respectively.

Both the General and Isabella display their egoism through their preoccupation with time. In contrast to Isabella, however, the General marks time precisely to ensure that those around him comply with his demands. As Catherine observes on the morning of their departure for

⁵³⁹ Frank J. Kearful, "Satire and the Form of the Novel: The Problem of Aesthetic Unity in *Northanger Abbey*," *ELH* 32, no. 4 (December 1965): 522.

⁵⁴⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 113.

⁵⁴¹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 162.

⁵⁴² Nancy Armstrong, "Gothic Austen," in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. by Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) 239-40.

Gloucestershire, any deviation from the General's timetable excites his "displeasure,"⁵⁴³ and, almost as soon as she arrives at the abbey, she is given to understand that "the strictest punctuality to the family hours would be expected."⁵⁴⁴ The General's domestic tyranny, however, goes beyond his insistence on punctuality. As the narrator remarks, he is "accustomed on every ordinary occasion to give the law in his family,"⁵⁴⁵ and he has no scruples about exercising this authority over his guests. Compared to Montoni, who informs Emily that she would do well to consider "his will" as "law,"⁵⁴⁶ the General employs less obvious methods to insist that Catherine agree to his wishes.

When he sets out to dictate every aspect of Catherine's tour of his estate, he characteristically cloaks his objective in empty compliments and lavish gallantry. Much like Isabella's apparent solicitude for Catherine, the General's seemingly benevolent attentions take the form of ascribing to her his own inclinations by asking questions for which he himself provides the answers. Although Catherine is eager to be shown around the abbey, the General prefers to begin the tour outdoors:

And when they had gone over the house, he promised himself moreover the pleasure of accompanying her into the shrubberies and garden.' She curtsied her acquiescence. 'But perhaps it might be more agreeable to her to make those her first object. The weather was at present favorable, and at this time of year the uncertainty was very great of its continuing so.—Which would she prefer? He was equally at her service.—Which did his daughter think would most accord with her fair friend's wishes?—But he thought he

⁵⁴³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 112.

⁵⁴⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 118.

⁵⁴⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 183.

⁵⁴⁶ Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 380.

could discern.—Yes, he certainly read in Miss Morland’s eyes a judicious desire of making use of the present smiling weather.—But when did she judge amiss?—The Abbey would always be safe and dry.—He yielded implicitly, and would fetch his hat and attend them in a moment.⁵⁴⁷

For Catherine, the tour nevertheless begins auspiciously when the abbey’s picturesque exterior and surrounding grounds present her with a view that, with few changes, would not appear out of place in a Radcliffe novel. The view that so pleases Catherine, however, prefigures Austen’s more detailed focus on the General’s tyranny. It suggests his affinity with the improving landowner who, as Michasiw notes, adopted the widespread practice of harnessing the picturesque to “remaking the landscape” by appropriating its aesthetics to assert his “mastery” over nature.⁵⁴⁸ As the tour later shows, the General’s despotism is tied to his zeal for improvement, which, as Catherine learns to her disappointment, is clearly evident elsewhere at the abbey.

Numerous critics have pointed out how the novel’s modernized abbey heightens Austen’s parody by providing a backdrop that serves as a realistic foil to Catherine’s romantic expectations. According to Wilt, for example, the abbey constitutes “the most deliberately parodic element in the book.”⁵⁴⁹ Austen uses this technique from the moment of Catherine’s arrival by referring to one of *Udolpho*’s most famous scenic passages, where Radcliffe weaves together key aspects of the sublime. Imagining the abbey to be “a fine old place, just like what

⁵⁴⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 129.

⁵⁴⁸ Michasiw “Nine Treatises,” 83, 84.

⁵⁴⁹ Wilt, *Ghosts of the Gothic*, 140.

one reads about,”⁵⁵⁰ Catherine anticipates her first view of it in ways that draw on Emily’s initial impressions of Udolpho: “every bend in the road was expected with solemn awe to afford a glimpse of its massy walls of grey stone, rising amidst a grove of ancient oaks, with the last beams of the sun playing in beautiful splendor on its high Gothic windows.”⁵⁵¹ Rather than being transported by a Udolphoesque vision, she is confronted instead with no vision at all given that the abbey stands in low ground and is invisible from a distance. Such ironies recur throughout *Northanger Abbey*’s second volume, but Austen also assimilates elements of Radcliffe’s settings into her narrative, refashioning them in terms consistent with her realistic depiction of early nineteenth-century England. Although Catherine’s fantasies involving moldering ruins and subterranean passages remain entirely unfulfilled at Northanger, she encounters a contemporary version of the Gothic sublime where she least expects it, in its entirely modern kitchen-garden.

During Catherine’s tour, she has ample opportunity to observe the General’s passion for renovation, especially in the kitchen-garden where she is “dismayed” to discover its effects on full display: “the walls seemed countless in number, endless in length; a village of hothouses seemed to arise among them, and a whole parish to be at work within the inclosure.”⁵⁵² From Catherine’s perspective, the space seems limitless, a perception that echoes Adeline’s response to the “boundless” expanse of the villainous Marquis de Montalt’s garden in *Romance of the*

⁵⁵⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 114.

⁵⁵¹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 117; Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 226-27.

⁵⁵² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 130.

Forest.⁵⁵³ The General's garden—it walls, “countless in number, endless in length”—also brings to mind what Lynda Bayer-Berenbaum describes as the “sense of infinity” associated with Gothic architecture's pattern of “persistent repetition”⁵⁵⁴ and, more specifically, recalls Udolpho's vast network of medieval passages. Catherine's sense of its magnitude conveys the “uninterrupted progression” that, for Burke, gives to “bounded objects the character of infinity,” a quality which fulfills, in his words, “the truest test of the sublime.”⁵⁵⁵

Unlike the earlier scene of Catherine's arrival, this one suggests an implicit though direct correspondence between Northanger and Udolpho by indicating that the General's garden serves to denote his ambitions. As Radcliffe does, Austen gives significance to the description of an estate in treating it as a device for illustrating the owner's character.⁵⁵⁶ In Radcliffe's novel, Emily associates Udolpho's “features” with the treacherous mountain landscape over which “it seemed to stand the sovereign,” rendering Montoni's castle a symbol of his tyranny by relating the human to the natural sublime.⁵⁵⁷ In mock contrast to Emily's reaction, Catherine finds the General's garden completely devoid of romantic interest, comically exemplifying her failure to

⁵⁵³ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, 166.

⁵⁵⁴ Lynda Bayer-Berenbaum, *The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Gothic Literature and Art* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982), 67.

⁵⁵⁵ Burke, *Inquiry*, 67, 68.

⁵⁵⁶ Berglund, *Woman's Whole Existence*, 235. Berglund's comment refers to Radcliffe's and Austen's major fiction.

⁵⁵⁷ Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 226-27. Radcliffe's description may owe something to Burke, who found that the utter authority vested in “kings and commanders” renders their “power” a source of the sublime in that it possesses “the same connection with terror” as the “strength” displayed by “natural power.” *Inquiry*, 61-62.

perceive how the Gothic at Northanger manifests itself in up-to-date, quotidian terms. By reenvisioning the Gothic castle as a contemporary site in which its owner has installed a “village of hothouses” in his efforts to exercise control over nature, Austen draws from and reworks Radcliffe’s analogy to create a realistic setting that gives a modern dimension to the General’s style of Gothic villainy.

Moreover, Austen builds on this association when Catherine, in seeming contradiction, perceives the garden as a bounded space, an “inclosure” in which “a whole parish” labors at the General’s behest.⁵⁵⁸ Austen’s use of the term “inclosure” attributes the enormous scale of the General’s garden to the contemporary practice of enclosing common lands.⁵⁵⁹ Enclosure had been carried out for centuries but was intensified after 1750 and, by the late eighteenth century, had become a widely debated topic.⁵⁶⁰ To a significant extent, the late eighteenth-century Gothic revival contributed to the denunciation of the practice, for it inspired a mythic vision of feudal England as an era in which the members of rural communities—lords and peasants—coexisted in a harmonious, mutually beneficial relationship until enclosure destroyed their way of life by undermining the customs that supported the period’s agrarian economy.⁵⁶¹ From this perspective, the abbey’s picturesque exterior represents medieval architecture’s emblematic association with

⁵⁵⁸ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 130.

⁵⁵⁹ See, for example, Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, 124-25.

⁵⁶⁰ Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 625, 626.

⁵⁶¹ W. J. T. Mitchell, “Country Matters,” in *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 254.

England's feudal past, whereas the garden signifies its antithesis. Given the abbey and its park screen the garden from view, the contrast points to the General's habit of deploying old-style gallantry to mask his aggressive pursuit of power.

Generally speaking, enclosure was praised or denounced for displacing populations from lands claimed by the upper classes for agricultural schemes. Its supporters applauded the practice for increasing agricultural production and profits, while its detractors condemned it for eroding rural traditions and, in particular, for undermining the autonomy of the laboring classes: "Above all it was believed to destroy the livelihood of independent cottagers and small farmers."⁵⁶²

Austen's allusion to enclosure, however, seems to consider the controversy from both sides to depict the General as a despot. On the one hand, the General provides no material benefit to society by contributing to the nations' agricultural production or to its economic well-being given that he reserves its harvest solely for his friends and family and derives his chief profit from the enjoyment of an enhanced social status. On the other hand, his garden has supplanted village and parish, divesting the previous occupants of their former livings and homes. As Butler remarks, the General's garden "benefits no one but himself."⁵⁶³ Austen alludes to the enclosure debate to emphasize the way in which the General shares with Radcliffe's villains the willingness to deprive others of freedoms in order to increase their own.

The General more openly wields his authority as he conducts Catherine on an exhaustive tour of the garden. Although the action is presented from her point of view, the General imposes

⁵⁶² Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 626.

⁵⁶³ Butler, "Introduction," 161.

his own perspective on the scene as he insists on leading her “into every division” and “under every wall.”⁵⁶⁴ She is left feeling “heartily weary of seeing and wondering,” having been “forced” by the General into repeatedly expressing “surprise” at the breadth and reach of his horticultural pursuits.⁵⁶⁵ Through her choice of language, Austen suggests parallels in this scene between the General’s treatment of Catherine and the control he exerts over his garden given how the latter relies on the then current practice of “forcing.” This technique allowed gardeners not only to grow non-indigenous fruits, vegetables, and flowers in what would normally be unfavorable conditions but also to speed up their maturation.⁵⁶⁶ In boasting about the success of his gardening methods, he focuses on the output of his pinery by which he measures his mastery over nature. As Lynch remarks, “to be a complete forcing gardener” was to create “artificial climates,” to possess “the wherewithal for conquering time—for replacing the seasonal with the simultaneous—as well as for conquering geographical space.”⁵⁶⁷ The General’s system for cultivating pineapples further underscores the correspondence between his garden and Montoni’s castle. In drawing an analogy between the two, Austen adapts the way in which Radcliffe associates the sublime with overcoming the limits imposed by space and time, although, in this

⁵⁶⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 130.

⁵⁶⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 130, 131.

⁵⁶⁶ As Deidre Lynch explains, “forcing houses,” also known as succession houses, were “arrayed as a sequence and differentially heated so that plants might be moved in succession through a regular gradation of climes.” “‘Young ladies are delicate plants:’ Jane Austen and Greenhouse Romanticism,” *ELH* 77, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 704, 712.

⁵⁶⁷ Lynch, “Jane Austen and Greenhouse Romanticism,” 704.

respect, Udolpho derives its sublimity from its physical dominion over the landscape and the passage of centuries.⁵⁶⁸

In Austen's day, growing pineapples was invested with social prestige. As a pastime, it betokened wealth and status, largely because it depended on an elaborate, labor-intensive process that made the pineapple an "exotic" and "edible luxury."⁵⁶⁹ For Saglia, the pineapple in *Northanger Abbey* takes on more disquieting connotations by exemplifying the General's "Gothic villainy," as it conveys his desire to exert a "monarch-like control" over the people and the system employed in the garden's production.⁵⁷⁰ To judge by the General's evident pride, he "loved a garden"⁵⁷¹ for satisfying his deepest ambitions. Much as Udolpho provides Montoni with a base of operations from which to wage his campaign for greater political power, the comparatively mundane kitchen-garden furnishes the General with the means to elevate and extend his social dominance. For similar reasons, he looks forward to the marriage of Catherine and Henry. In parodying the machinations of the Gothic villain, Austen ironically links his approach to engineering the match to his methods for carrying out his gardening pursuits.⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁸ Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 226-27. Alison describes the Gothic castle as "more sublime than all [other architecture]," in part because it has prevailed over "the desolation of time." *Essays*, 208.

⁵⁶⁹ Diego Saglia, "Luxury: Making Sense of Excess in Austen's Narratives," in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 360-361.

⁵⁷⁰ Saglia, "Making Sense of Excess," 360, 361.

⁵⁷¹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 130.

⁵⁷² In making this analogy, Austen may have in mind William Cowper's 1785 poem *The Task*, which likens gardening to matchmaking, characterizing each as an "assistant art" that promotes

Rather than leaving “nature” to take its course, the General does all that he can to bring to fruition—in accelerated fashion—the budding romantic relationship between Catherine and Henry. He also carefully lays the groundwork, taking every opportunity to persuade Catherine of the benefits that she would reap from transplanting herself to Woodston. While the General’s efforts to bend nature to his will are not always successful, his well-laid plans for marrying his son to an heiress will fall disastrously short of realization. When he complains that “the utmost care could not always secure the most valuable fruits,”⁵⁷³ he not only makes a veiled allusion to his motive for taking an interest in Catherine but also foreshadows his disappointed expectations of her “fortune.”

When the tour of Northanger moves indoors, Austen continues to depict the General by focusing on his role as an improving landowner. In both Austen’s novel and *Udolpho*, the renovation of domestic interiors aligns sensibility or its lack with matters of taste. The changes that *Udolpho*’s Monsieur Quesnel carries out to update the rooms of his chateau reflect his “false taste and corrupted sentiments” as does the work of the General’s “improving hand” within the

“the glad espousals and insures the crop.” *The Task, a Poem in Six Books*, in *The Poems of William Cowper*, ed. John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), Book 3, 542-43. Rachel Crawford points out that Cowper’s lines allude to the ways in which numerous eighteenth-century works on botany, and a later poem, Erasmus Darwin’s *Loves of the Plants* (1789), “sanctioned broad parallels between plant and human sexuality,” often by focusing on reproduction. *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 212-13, 214, 220-21, 222. In respect to the General’s immediate objective, though, he encourages Catherine and Henry’s mutual attraction in order to produce a “cash crop,” an increase in his wealth rather than the size of his family.

⁵⁷³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 130.

abbey.⁵⁷⁴ Compared to Radcliffe's approach, however, Austen more fully takes into account the era's widespread consumerism in developing the relationship between the portrayal of characters and their ownership of things. As the General conducts Catherine from room to room, his running commentary reveals habits of consumption similar to Isabella's in illustrating that a desire for self-aggrandisement also serves as his basis for deciding issues of taste. More specifically, the General's preoccupation with food and Isabella's fixation on dress dramatize important facets of their "identity" in signifying their "personal values."⁵⁷⁵ Although they frequently exhibit their obsessions by referring to everyday objects, the ethical implications of their focus on things are symbolized by exotic consumer items that the novel associates with Radcliffean tyranny. Thus Austen ties the prosaic to the Gothic in demonstrating that the General's pineapples and Isabella's turban are emblematic of their readiness to treat both people and things as a means to their own ends. As their efforts to exploit Catherine show, the General and Isabella share the Radcliffe villain's characteristic lack of sympathy for others. Although their heartlessness is identified with domestic products made possible by "modern invention,"⁵⁷⁶ it would be equally at home in the distant past and southern Europe of Radcliffe's fictional world.

While the General's penchant for what is modern has transformed much of the abbey's interior, Catherine nevertheless remains determined to discover within its walls clues to a

⁵⁷⁴ Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 23; Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 134.

⁵⁷⁵ Benedict, "Trouble with Things," 346, 351, 352.

⁵⁷⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 134.

romantic past worthy of the kind of “fine old place” which “one reads about.”⁵⁷⁷ Reading *Udolpho* has given her “the hope of some traditional legends, some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun,”⁵⁷⁸ and Henry’s Gothic tale has added to those already high expectations. Although she has assured him that she has not “the smallest apprehension of really meeting with what he related,”⁵⁷⁹ Catherine is by now primed for adventure. Radcliffe’s romance and Henry’s mock version of it, as well as the abbey itself, act in concert to influence Catherine’s perceptions. As Waldron remarks, they “ultimately work upon her imagination.”⁵⁸⁰ Although the General’s renovations initially confound Catherine’s “Radcliffean presuppositions,” Henry bolsters them by embedding within his tale mimetic details derived from the actual abbey.⁵⁸¹ By incorporating “realism” into his romance, Henry’s tale both reflects Austen’s practice throughout the novel and fuels Catherine’s anticipation.

Thus Catherine is persuaded that the abbey offers exciting opportunities for discovery when she finds her room furnished with strikingly similar versions of the “ponderous chest” and “cabinet of ebony and gold” described in Henry’s tale.⁵⁸² “Well-read in the art of concealing a

⁵⁷⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 114.

⁵⁷⁸ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 102.

⁵⁷⁹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 117.

⁵⁸⁰ Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, 32.

⁵⁸¹ Hermansson, “Neither Northanger,” 345.

⁵⁸² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 115-16.

treasure,”⁵⁸³ she sets about comically reenacting the role of Radcliffe’s detective-heroine in her search to uncover some dark secret belonging to the abbey’s medieval past. The ironic contrast between her expectations and her discoveries—a plain, white cotton counterpane and an ordinary pile of washing bills—both foregrounds the novel’s realism and highlights the epistemological concerns that *Northanger Abbey* shares with Radcliffe’s romance. These scenes recall one of *Udolpho*’s most famous episodes, that of the black veil. When rumors and material evidence lead Emily to wrongly suspect that the veil conceals some terrible secret, she dramatizes Hume’s notion of how “customary conjunctions” are frequently mistaken for “the logical necessity of cause and effect.”⁵⁸⁴ Similarly, Catherine’s investigations illustrate Hume’s “principle of association” whereby the likeness between “sensible objects” and “those ideas, to which they are related” commonly serve to produce, maintain, or reinforce belief.⁵⁸⁵ Catherine’s reading also leads her to look at the General in a Gothic light, but her suspicions of him are not as easily dismissed as her expectations of discovering clues to crimes buried in abbey’s medieval past. Conjecturing that his “strange” behavior stems from his guilt over murdering or imprisoning his wife, Catherine draws from events depicted in *Udolpho* and *A Sicilian Romance* respectively. For Catherine, the General comes to possess “the air and attitude of a Montoni” as she seeks to explain why he inspires feelings of “dread,” “alarm,” and “terror.”⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 123.

⁵⁸⁴ Ding, ““Searching After the Splendid Nothing,”” 558.

⁵⁸⁵ Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 97, 99-100.

⁵⁸⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 119, 120, 137, 143.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's focus on the problem of knowledge involves not only her characters but also her readers. Most modern critics see the novel as a variation on the *Bildungsroman*, and, among them, many have found that Austen intends the trajectory of Catherine's education to engage her readers in a comparable learning process. Numerous critics have agreed that *Northanger Abbey*, as Karl Kroeber points out, encourages its readership to question its "conventionalized expectations" about life and art.⁵⁸⁷ Yet, in this respect, less consensus has coalesced around the issues of exactly what Catherine and the novel's readers are invited to learn and how they are meant to learn it. The traditional view has frequently considered Henry's tutelage to be the instrumental factor in educating Catherine (and implicitly the reader) by leading her to reject Radcliffe's Gothic and thus become a better interpreter of her own experience.⁵⁸⁸ According to Patey, Austen assigns Henry the role of mentor and Catherine the role of quixotic heroine to fulfill the neoclassical aim of educating her readers in the importance of forming "rational expectations" based on "the probabilities of real experience rather than of romance."⁵⁸⁹ Other critics have challenged this view in finding that Radcliffe

⁵⁸⁷ Karl Kroeber, "Subverting a Hypocrite Lecteur," in *Jane Austen Today*, ed. Joel Weinsheimer (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975), 33, 36. For Kroeber, Austen's irony targets the Gothic reader's preconceptions but not Radcliffe's work.

⁵⁸⁸ See for example, Howard S. Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1962), 88, 106; Tave, *Some Words*, 37, 56; and Melissa Schaub, "Irony and Political Education," *Persuasions On-Line* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2000), <http://jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol21no1/schaub.html?>. Their analyses find that Henry mentors Catherine in how to assume a more critical stance toward the world through teaching her the value of reason, probability, and irony respectively.

⁵⁸⁹ Douglas Lane Patey, *Probability and Literary Form*, 217-18; For further discussion of Henry as mentor and Catherine as deluded Female Quixote, also see Cynthia Griffin, "The Development of Realism in Jane Austen's Early Novels," *ELH* 30, no. 1 (March 1963): 38-42;

serves, to varying degrees and in various ways, as Catherine's mentor. According to Keymer, "reading Radcliffe has in the most important sense not misled Catherine at all; on the contrary, Radcliffe has helped her perceive the General's nature more accurately than anyone else, including his son. Her one mistake has been to think of Gothic as literally applicable to a modern world."⁵⁹⁰ Indeed, Austen plays on Radcliffe's narrative conventions and strategies to encourage readers to reconsider their preconceptions.

Radcliffe foregrounds the way in which faulty assumptions routinely inform judgment by suggesting the solution to a mystery, staging its revelation, and then undermining its validity. According to Scott Mackenzie, "In her novels' conclusions, we are presented with catalogues of our persistent misreadings."⁵⁹¹ In referring to *Udolpho*, Miles points out how the novel "questions the expectations it invokes" by creating a "trail of misinformation" that leads the heroine and the reader "from belief, to doubt, to final 'recognition' and reversal" as "part of the questioning process."⁵⁹² In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen employs a somewhat similar strategy for the same purpose. Although the solution to the mystery of Isabella's behavior is resolved in a straightforward fashion—as Catherine moves from belief in her sincerity, to doubt about her

and Kenneth L. Moler, *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), 32-34.

⁵⁹⁰ Keymer, "Northanger Abbey," 31; also see, for example, Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 48; Wyett, "Female Quixoticism Refashioned," 268.

⁵⁹¹ Scott Mackenzie, "Ann Radcliffe's Gothic Narrative and the Readers at Home," *Studies in the Novel* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 425.

⁵⁹² Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing, 1750-1820: A Genealogy* (London: Routledge, 1993), 76-77.

motives, to the recognition of her duplicity—that owes a debt to Radcliffe, the revelation of the General’s intentions incorporates Radcliffe’s more complex pattern of deferral. However, in keeping with Austen’s paradoxical treatment of Radcliffe’s romance, she both parodies and imitates this process.

Unlike Radcliffe, Austen clearly conveys the implausibility of her heroine’s suspicions. Given the narrator’s frequent deflation of Catherine’s romantic expectations, the reader never suspects, as Catherine does, that the General has murdered or imprisoned his wife. In this respect, the sense of distance that Austen creates between her heroine and the reader represents a sharp departure from Radcliffe’s work. Yet, Austen largely achieves this result through appropriating Radcliffe’s development of free indirect discourse to present a good deal of the action at Northanger from Catherine’s point of view. According to Clara Tuite, Austen’s parody crucially relies on her approach to adapting this aspect of Radcliffe’s narrative strategy.⁵⁹³ Through juxtaposing Catherine’s and the narrator’s perspectives, Austen draws on Radcliffe’s technique but often deploys it for contrary purposes. In comparing *Northanger Abbey* and *Udolpho*, Bette Roberts also identifies close similarities in their narrative styles as well as marked differences in their effects. In *Udolpho*, the interplay between the narrator’s and the heroine’s viewpoints creates “complex ambiguity” by obscuring the distinction between the real and the imagined, and, as a result, “the reader experiences Emily’s anxiety and at the same time

⁵⁹³ Clara Tuite, *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 62-64.

questions her observations.”⁵⁹⁴ Whereas Radcliffe’s technique promotes uncertainty, the narrator’s “consistently ironic voice” in *Northanger Abbey* “prevents [the reader] from seriously sharing Catherine’s anxieties” by routinely “puncturing her illusions.”⁵⁹⁵ In this respect, Austen harnesses strategies employed by the traditional quixote story. As Gordon notes, narration in the orthodox version “encourage[es] readers to distance themselves from the quixote figure” to “reinforce readers’ confidence in the clarity and objectivity of their own perceptions and clearly mark the ‘real’ from its distortions.”⁵⁹⁶ Thus, the reader is led to expect a climactic “moment of truth” in which Catherine, rather like Arabella in *The Female Quixote*, comes to realize that her romance reading has misled her into entertaining foolish and harmful illusions.

The prelude to this moment occurs in the episode in which Catherine visits Mrs. Tilney’s former apartment, where she goes in search of material evidence that will substantiate her suspicions of “the General’s cruelty,” possibly “in the shape of some fragmented journal, continued to the last gasp.”⁵⁹⁷ She makes certain to carry out her investigation in broad daylight to better explore an apartment in which she expects to encounter the kind of Gothic gloom that shrouds the chamber of *Udolpho*’s Marchioness de Villeroi when Emily searches it for clues to

⁵⁹⁴ Bette Roberts, “The Horrid Novels: *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Northanger Abbey*,” in *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition and Transgression*, ed. Kenneth W. Graham (New York: AMS, 1989), 104-05. Roberts refers to Radcliffe’s “selective omniscient voice,” the technique that more recent criticism has identified as Radcliffe’s use of free indirect discourse.

⁵⁹⁵ Roberts, “The Horrid Novels,” 104-06.

⁵⁹⁶ Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism*, 5.

⁵⁹⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 142. Austen refers to Adeline’s discovery of the mysterious manuscript in Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest*.

her mysterious death. Catherine anticipates finally investigating what she imagines to be an “ancient” and “awful” section of the abbey, having previously noted the apartment’s proximity to a winding staircase,⁵⁹⁸ a key architectural feature of Radcliffe’s castles, convents, and abbeys. On reaching her destination, Catherine is nonplussed to discover only a modern, well-kept, comfortably furnished apartment where “the warm beams of a western sun gaily poured through two sash windows!”⁵⁹⁹ Overcome by “astonishment and doubt,” she resolves to give up looking for proof, realizing that “whatever might have been the General’s crimes, he had certainly too much wit to let them sue for detection.”⁶⁰⁰ Catherine’s Radcliffean insight suggests the partial nature of knowledge as she comes to understand that no tangible, definitive proof may exist for assigning cause to effect.

Henry undermines this insight when he reprimands Catherine for entertaining suspicions of what would be impossible in a country like England, “where roads and newspapers lay everything open.” (145-46): In his lecture, he recalls “eighteenth-century literary criticism” which “frequently invokes the probable as an antonym or even antidote to romance,” yet the invocation of probability provides no “guarantee [of] narratorial endorsement” in either *Udolpho* or in *Northanger Abbey*.⁶⁰¹ In much briefer form, this scene recalls the penultimate chapter of

⁵⁹⁸ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 136.

⁵⁹⁹ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 142.

⁶⁰⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 142.

⁶⁰¹ Margaret Russett, “Narrative as Enchantment in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*,” *ELH* 65, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 175-76.

The Female Quixote as Henry reprises the role of the unnamed clergyman whose lecture on the value of judging from “Reason,” “Experience,” and “accurate Observation” convinces Arabella that romance reading has deceived her into mistaking “Fictions” for “Truth.”⁶⁰² In reproaching Catherine for “the dreadful nature” of her “suspicions,” Henry advises her to reconsider her basis for drawing inferences.⁶⁰³ In urging Catherine to “consult your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you,” Henry echoes the good doctor’s appeal to Arabella and achieves similar results: “The visions of romance were over. Catherine was completely awakened.”⁶⁰⁴ True to literature’s quixotic tradition, the heroine’s enlightenment is accompanied by self-recrimination. Austen again alludes to Lennox’s novel when Arabella, persuaded of her “Follies,” spends “near two hours wholly absorb’d in the most disagreeable Reflections on the Absurdity of her past Behavior and the Contempt and Ridicule to which she now saw plainly she had exposed herself.”⁶⁰⁵ In similar though more exaggerated fashion, Catherine castigates herself for a “folly” made even worse now that she has “exposed” the “criminal absurdity” of her actions to Henry.⁶⁰⁶

Some modern critics have taken this episode to represent Austen’s rejection of romance as a literary form largely unsuited to the novel’s purpose: Henry’s lecture and Catherine’s

⁶⁰² Lennox, *Female Quixote*, 372, 378-79.

⁶⁰³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 144-45.

⁶⁰⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 145-46.

⁶⁰⁵ Lennox, *Female Quixote*, 383.

⁶⁰⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 146.

subsequent vows to reform her wayward imagination convey aims similar to those of *The Female Quixote*'s.⁶⁰⁷ Yet Austen misleads the reader by drawing on this tradition. As Loveridge remarks, "the reader's probable expectations . . . would encourage anticipation and recognition of this moment as that necessary, almost inevitable climax where the overimaginative, overenthusiastic heroine is reproached and humbled by the (usually male) voice of reason and realism"⁶⁰⁸ Austen's use of not only such plot conventions but narrative strategies drawn from the orthodox quixote model prompt readers to assume a superior attitude toward Catherine. Austen, however, ultimately aligns *Northanger Abbey* with unorthodox quixoticism when she undermines readers' sense of complacency to startle them into questioning their own powers of perception and the priorities of a generic hierarchy that elevates the representations of realism over those of romance in praising the former for its "Resemblance to Truth" and disparaging the latter for its "Absurdity" in "disfigur[ing] the Appearance of the World."⁶⁰⁹ Austen targets readers' expectations by employing Radcliffe's strategy of dramatizing a revelation that is then undercut by subsequent events.

⁶⁰⁷ Patey, *Probability and Literary Form*, 217-18. Also see, for example, Cynthia Griffin, "The Development of Realism in Jane Austen's Early Novels," *ELH* 30, no. 1 (March 1963): 38-42; Kenneth L. Moler, *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), 33-34; and John Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 20-22.

⁶⁰⁸ Mark Loveridge, "Nature and Probability." 20.

⁶⁰⁹ Lennox, *Female Quixote*, 378, 379.

In contrast to Arabella's recognition scene, Catherine's fails to signal narrative closure. Despite the episode's outcome, the issue of the General's "crimes" remains unresolved. Although Henry's defense of his father lays Catherine's suspicions to rest, his equivocal tone fails to absolve the General of cruelty towards his wife:

He loved her, I am persuaded, as well as it was possible for him to—We have not all, you know, the same tenderness of disposition—and I will not pretend to say that while she lived, she might not often have had much to bear, but though his temper injured her, his judgment never did. His value of her was sincere; and, if not permanently, he was truly afflicted by her death.⁶¹⁰

On examination, Henry's speech tends to create rather than to dispel doubts about his father's character. As Kearful points out, "Henry through his careful qualifications and deviously negative and double negative circumlocutions actually raises more questions than he answers," rendering "the General perhaps even more sinister than before."⁶¹¹ When Catherine revises her opinion of the General in light of Henry's account, she not only comically echoes his speech but also clearly understates the General's flaws by now finding him "upon serious consideration, to be not perfectly amiable."⁶¹² Ironically, Catherine's revised reading of the General owes more to the authority with which she invests Henry's pronouncements than to those powers of observation that he advises her to rely on for making judgments.

The subsequent scene of recognition and reversal goes a long way toward vindicating Catherine's previous suspicions of the General. As Catherine comes to decide, her fears, after all,

⁶¹⁰ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 145.

⁶¹¹ Kearful, "Form of the Novel," 523.

⁶¹² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 147.

were not a “self-created delusion,” for “in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty.”⁶¹³

Austen’s epistemological focus is evident in her approach to dramatizing Catherine’s shifting perceptions of the General as she adopts, then discounts, and ultimately modifies Radcliffe’s romance. In discussing this strategy, Garrett argues that Austen creates a sense of verisimilitude by relying on “oppositional self-definition,” a technique by which she contrasts the probable with the improbable of Gothic romance and, then, narrows the distinction between the two. When Catherine Morland chastises herself for believing General Tilney behaved with Montoni-like cruelty toward his wife, she blames herself for succumbing to romantic illusions. Garrett finds that “the effect is to enforce the authority of Austen’s realism.” Yet, as he points out, this effect is undercut when Catherine discovers the General’s reasons for first seeking her acquaintance and then turning her out of his house. Once she understands his motives, she again reconsiders his character, but in a considerably less favorable light. Thus, “Gothic extremity is not just dismissed but appropriated: the humor of Catherine’s overstated response invites a moderated restatement, through which the General can be recognized as a version of villainy all too probable in the midland counties of England” (215-16).

Austen challenges the traditional quixote tale by using its own narrative techniques to subvert its assumptions about the perception of reality and the value of literary representations by encouraging and then undermining the superiority that readers routinely assume toward the

⁶¹³ Austen, *Northanger Abbey* 146, 183.

quixote's apprehension of the world. She also subverts the orthodox quixte model by presentng Radcliffe's romance as a guide to Catherine's enlightenment.

Through deploying the Gothic, Austen dramatizes the process of knowing as a revisionary process that evolves over time but is never complete. At the end of the story, the General's future plans to exploit Catherine rely on Gothic repetitions, underscoring this point.

CHAPTER 5

EMMA: AUSTEN'S GOTHIC REALISM

In literary history, Jane Austen's contribution to the English novel has often been characterized in terms of her development of realism. Many modern accounts of this genre have accepted or promoted a view of Austen's work as playing a pivotal role in laying the foundation for nineteenth-century realism by adapting and transforming the tradition of the eighteenth-century English realistic novel.⁶¹⁴ Her fiction has long been celebrated for its verisimilar representations of the middling classes in early nineteenth-century England's provincial world. Within this context, the accuracy that Austen brings to depicting her period's cultural norms and practices has been considered a hallmark of her style. According to Janine Barchas, for example, Austen's "scrupulous realism" owes a great deal to a "historical specificity" that endows her work with a decidedly modern flavor.⁶¹⁵ Additionally, as "a chronicler of the everyday,"⁶¹⁶ Austen has been widely praised for her new approach to depicting "real life and manners."⁶¹⁷ In *Emma*, as in *Northanger Abbey*, she highlights these aspects of her style through parodying

⁶¹⁴ Karen O'Brien, introduction in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, ed. Patrick Parrinder, vol. 2, *English and British Fiction, 1750-1820*, ed. Peter Garside and Karen O'Brien (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), xxviii.

⁶¹⁵ Janine Barchas, *Matters of Fact in Jane Austen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 1, 2, 3.

⁶¹⁶ William H. Galperin, *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 2.

⁶¹⁷ See, for example, Jones, "Jane Austen's Domestic Realism," 281.

Radcliffe's romance, but in doing so, she also demonstrates "how the two poles of romance and reality . . . actually interpenetrate."⁶¹⁸ Austen enhances her realism in *Emma* both by contrasting her fiction with Radcliffe's and enlisting her predecessor's romance to support a skeptical perspective on contemporary epistemological concerns. As Austen explores serious philosophical issues in a comic vein, she establishes an interrelationship between the prosaic and the Gothic that significantly contributes to the modern, innovative nature of her realism.

Although modern scholarship has recognized that Austen's *Northanger Abbey* depends on Radcliffe's work, it has rarely identified her predecessor's romance as important to any other Austen novel. During Austen's lifetime, Radcliffe enjoyed an "international reputation as one of the first English novelists,"⁶¹⁹ and, as critics have shown, her work represents an important literary legacy for, among others, Austen's contemporaries and later nineteenth-century British novelists.⁶²⁰ According to Butler, "if imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Ann Radcliffe was a much flattered woman," for "echoes of her situations, her scenes, and her scenic effects recur again and again, sharply and knowingly in the 1790s, her own decade, and with less particularity throughout the nineteenth century."⁶²¹ As Berglund points out, "Radcliffe's impact was so great," Austen would have been hard pressed to "avoid her influence."⁶²² This chapter

⁶¹⁸ Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 133-34.

⁶¹⁹ Rogers, introduction, xx.

⁶²⁰ Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), 250-56.

⁶²¹ Butler, "Woman at the Window," 128.

⁶²² Berglund, *Woman's Whole Existence*, 19.

discusses how Radcliffe's Gothic fiction served as a crucial source for the composition of *Emma* (1816), the novel widely considered Austen's masterpiece of domestic realism.⁶²³

Judging from their commentaries, most modern critics have seen little to no continuity between Radcliffe's work and *Emma*. While they have disagreed about the extent to which *Northanger Abbey* expresses admiration or disparagement of Radcliffe's work, their views on *Emma* reflect a greater consensus given that they usually identify her major literary sources among those which belong to the Richardson-Burney tradition.⁶²⁴ Undeniably, this tradition was instrumental in the development of Austen's oeuvre. Yet, as Doody points out, determining the literary allusions in Austen's work can be difficult given their "complex and hidden texture of novel reference."⁶²⁵ She, too, however, finds that Austen derived most of her literary sources from eighteenth-century English domestic realism.⁶²⁶ Ever since the publication of Walter Scott's highly influential review of *Emma* (1816), the novel's realism has been a persistent topic

⁶²³ For more information on critics' assessment of *Emma* as Austen's masterpiece, see Fiona Stafford, introduction in *Jane Austen's Emma, A Casebook*, ed. Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4, 13, 15, 19.

⁶²⁴ For some recent examples, see Jane Stabler, "Literary Influences," in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 43-47; Spacks, *Novel Beginnings*, 279; Isobel Grundy, "Jane Austen and Literary Traditions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 200-01.

⁶²⁵ Margaret Anne Doody, "Jane Austen's Reading," in *The Jane Austen Handbook*, ed. J. David Grey (London: Athlone Press, 1986), 358.

⁶²⁶ Doody, "Jane Austen's Reading," 362.

among Austen scholars.⁶²⁷ His review credits Austen with developing a new approach to writing fiction, especially in *Emma*, praising her for the “spirit and originality” that she brings to realistically depicting subjects that had been left largely unexplored in the novel, “such common occurrences as may have fallen under the observation of most folks” and “such characters as occupy the ordinary walks of life.”⁶²⁸ In doing so, it characterizes Austen’s realism as the antithesis of Radcliffean romance. Although Scott makes no mention of Radcliffe, his comparison of Austen’s work with novels of a “romantic cast” makes thinly veiled allusions to Radcliffe’s school of fiction, implicitly setting up a sharp contrast between the two authors.⁶²⁹

As in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen foregrounds her realism in *Emma* in presenting its narrative as a parody of Radcliffe’s romance.⁶³⁰ Although as Wilt notes, *Emma*’s parody is less obvious than *Northanger Abbey*’s, it also treats Gothic conventions ironically to achieve realistic effects. While Austen’s approach to the Radcliffean Gothic in *Emma* is more subtle, it, too, encompasses most narrative elements, including theme, structure, plot, characterization, and

⁶²⁷ Fiona Stafford, introduction to *Emma*, by Jane Austen, ed. Fiona Stafford (London: Penguin, 1996), vii.

⁶²⁸ Walter Scott, review of *Emma* from the *Quarterly Review* (March 1816), in *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, ed. B. C. Southam, vol. 1, 1811-1870, ed. B. C. Southam (London: Routledge, 1998), 63-64.

⁶²⁹ Scott, review of *Emma*, 63-68.

⁶³⁰ On *Emma* as a parody of Radcliffe’s Gothic, see Judith Wilt, “The Powers of the Instrument: Or, Jane, Frank, and the Pianoforte,” *Persuasions* no. 5 (1983): 43; Susan Allen Ford, “How to Read and Why: *Emma*’s Gothic Mirrors,” *Persuasions* 25 (2003): 114; Andrew McInnes, “Labyrinths of Conjecture: The Gothic Elsewhere in Jane Austen’s *Emma*,” *Gothic Studies* 18, no. 1 (May 2016): 73.

setting as well as formal techniques. The interplay between *Emma* and Radcliffe's romance reveals that Austen drew on her predecessor's legacy to shape this novel in significant ways. Their affiliations demonstrate what Suzanne Keen calls "the migration of conventions" by which subgenres "cross boundaries" and thus establish continuities between types of fiction traditionally considered dissimilar.⁶³¹ In this regard, a number of similarities between *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma* help illuminate *Emma*'s Gothic legacy. Moreover, *Emma* makes more extensive contributions to the emerging genre of the detective story, pointing to additional similarities between Austen's and Radcliffe's fiction.

Compared to *Northanger Abbey*, *Emma*'s more sustained use of the quixote trope makes for a more complex and subtle parody whose literary realism substantially relies on subverting the orthodox quixotic narrative through adapting Radcliffe's conventions and motifs to convey the provisional nature of knowledge, demonstrating what Behrendt describes as "unresolved inconsistencies, contradictions, ambivalences, and 'dead ends'" to be as common to everyday life as they are to the Radcliffean Gothic. In *Emma*, as in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen harnesses her adaptation of Radcliffe's work to depicting the subjectivity of perception as she underscores the role of perception in deriving knowledge and, at the same time, emphasizes its limits. In *Emma*, too, Austen suggests the unbridgeable divide between appearance and reality through dramatizing her characters' shifting perceptions, mistaken conjectures, and conflicting interpretations. In contrast to her practice in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen draws on Radcliffe's

⁶³¹ Suzanne Keen, *Narrative Form*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 141-42, 147.

later work to reinforce her focus on the fallibility of perception by constructing a plot in which conflicting solutions to significant mysteries remain unresolved. Thus Austen denies the notion of a “universally valid” truth on which the epistemology of the traditional Quixote story relies.⁶³² Closure in *Emma*, however, also recalls *Northanger Abbey* in challenging the conventions of the orthodox quixote model by refusing to make her heroine’s marriage to the hero dependent on vows to abandon her role as an “imaginist” and in ultimately depicting the benefits of Emma’s romance making.

In Austen’s day, authors were expanding the boundaries of Gothic fiction, reworking its conventions by resituating them within new settings, including the contemporary drawing room.⁶³³ As with *Northanger Abbey*, Austen makes a major contribution to this trend with *Emma*, fulfilling Hutcheon’s definition of modern parody by serving to “recontextualize,” “synthesize,” and rework” her targeted texts.⁶³⁴ Compared to *Northanger Abbey*’s plot, *Emma*’s more closely follows the trajectory that shaped a variation on Radcliffe’s romance, the domestic Gothic novel that emerged in the late eighteenth century. As Spacks describes it, this version features “heroines who, unlike Radcliffe’s, essentially never leave home.”⁶³⁵ At the same time, its authors “adapt the situation of an orphaned girl confined to a sinister castle” by a “tyrant,”

⁶³² Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism*, 2

⁶³³ Emma McEvoy, “Gothic and the Romantics,” in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (London: Routledge, 2007), 22.

⁶³⁴ Hutcheon, *Theory of Parody*, 33.

⁶³⁵ Spacks, *Novel Beginnings*, 217.

whose “power is ultimately overcome” as “family secrets are revealed.”⁶³⁶ In its broad outline, this strand of the Gothic retains the principal elements that govern the structure of Radcliffe’s heroine-centered novels, while relocating the action from a distant time and southern Europe to contemporary Britain. More generally, Emma’s story conforms to the cyclical romance pattern of departure and return that shapes *Northanger Abbey* and Radcliffe’s heroine-centered novels.⁶³⁷ This similarity extends to the way in which *Emma* presents the heroine’s efforts to resolve mysteries as a “journey of discovery” that has crucial implications for her future.⁶³⁸ Although Emma remains almost entirely within familiar territory, she must also contend with the strange and the unknown before the novel’s courtship plot can come to its traditional close in the heroine’s marriage to the hero.

In the early nineteenth century, Austen was writing within a genre of fiction that was at risk of exhausting itself. Authors who modeled their novels on the courtship plot were faced with the challenge of generating interest in stories based on a long familiar pattern.⁶³⁹ Compounding this difficulty, Radcliffe’s romance continued to exert a powerful influence on readers’

⁶³⁶ Spacks, *Novel Beginnings*, 217-18.

⁶³⁷ On *Emma*’s similarity to Frye’s description of the romance structure, see Laura Mooneyham White, “Traveling to the Self: Comic and Spatial Openness in Jane Austen’s Novels,” in *Critical Essays on Jane Austen*, ed. Laura Mooneyham White (New York: G. K. Hall, 1998), 201-02, 205; Tauchert, *Romancing Jane Austen*, 31-32.

⁶³⁸ Elizabeth Lenckos, “From Sublime Abbey to Picturesque Parsonage: The Aesthetics of *Northanger Abbey* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*,” *Persuasions* no. 32 (2010), 106, 108.

⁶³⁹ Charles H. Hinnant, “Jane Austen’s ‘Wild Imagination’: Romance and the Courtship Plot in the Six Canonical Novels,” *Narrative* 14, no. 3 (October 2006): 294.

expectations. As Katherine Ding points out, “in the generation that followed Radcliffe, writers who focused on crafting realistic fiction inherited the readerly desire for fictional engagement that Radcliffe’s texts provoked among the public.”⁶⁴⁰ Some of these writers responded by producing within their work the “larger-than-life incident” associated with the Gothic.⁶⁴¹ Austen’s commitment to depicting “the ordinary walks of life” precluded the same approach,⁶⁴² but her resolution of this dilemma also involved adapting Radcliffean romance to the legacy of realism as she assimilated other aspects of Radcliffe’s Gothic to enhance her fiction’s affective force. According to Todd, Austen learned from Radcliffe strategies for developing and maintaining narrative interest over the length of a novel: she “deriv[ed] from her predecessor the Gothic techniques of suspense—how to keep . . . readers guessing and waiting, eager to move on to the next volume, persuaded for the moment to live in the fictional world.”⁶⁴³ In *Emma*, she uses them in especially complex ways to make her Gothic parody also a compelling detective story. By incorporating Radcliffean romance into a novel constructed around three courtship plots, Austen presents both readers and characters with an increasingly difficult series of mysteries.

⁶⁴⁰ Katherine Ding, ““Searching After the Splendid Nothing,”” 564.

⁶⁴¹ Linda Bree, “*Emma*: Word Games and Secret Histories,” in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 134.

⁶⁴² Walter Scott, review of *Emma*, 63.

⁶⁴³ Janet Todd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 25. My reading, however, differs from Todd’s in respect to her claim that *Emma*, compared to Austen’s previous novels, shows a decline in her assimilation of these techniques.

Like Radcliffe's Gothic, Austen's fiction has been associated with the development of the detective story, suggesting an important literary relationship between the two authors that goes beyond *Northanger Abbey*. For Ellen Belton, Austen's work resembles Radcliffe's romance and the later detective story in that it also places a "special emphasis on the hermeneutic code" by employing "the pattern of mystery" as "a vitalizing structural principle."⁶⁴⁴ Numerous critics have identified *Emma* with what was, at the time of the novel's first publication, the emerging detective genre.⁶⁴⁵ Among them, the acclaimed mystery writer P. D. James finds that the novel possesses essential ingredients of the classic detective story, for it continually involves the characters in assessing evidence, challenges readers to decode ambiguous clues, and eventually elucidates prior misreadings of characters and events.⁶⁴⁶ This claim could apply equally well to Radcliffe's major novels given that interpretation as action similarly drives their plots and characterizes to an important extent their readers' experience. *Emma* further resembles the Gothic and traditional detective fiction in its double plot as its revelations, like *Northanger Abbey*'s, also entail an excavation of the past. As Emma seeks to uncover the histories behind

⁶⁴⁴ Ellen R. Belton, "Mystery Without Murder" 43, 45.

⁶⁴⁵ See, for example, Joseph Litvak, "Reading Characters: Self, Society, and Text in *Emma*," *PMLA* 100, no.5 (October 1985): 765; Catherine Kenney, "The Mystery of *Emma* . . . Or the Consummate Case of the Least Likely Heroine," *Persuasions* 13 (1991), 139; Penny Gay, "*Emma* and *Persuasion*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet M. McMaster, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 55.

⁶⁴⁶ P. D. James, appendix two, "Emma Considered as a Detective Story," in *Time to be in Earnest: A Fragment of Autobiography* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 243-44. This text is a transcript of a talk delivered to the Annual General Meeting of the Jane Austen Society at Chawton on July 18, 1998. James points out that, although mystery in detective fiction usually originates in murder, it does not depend on it.

Harriet's parentage and Jane's visit to Highbury, her investigations and their outcomes generate much of the plot's development. Although these core mysteries stem from the desire to conceal social transgressions rather than murder, Austen emphasizes the novel's continuities with the Gothic by employing its trope of secrecy as a recurring motif. Simultaneously, she foregrounds her realism by not only reducing the scale of Gothic crime but also using the literary figure of the quixote as a vehicle for spoofing its outsize events.

Emma makes comedy out of featuring a detective heroine who draws on Radcliffe to construct solutions to the mysteries which she encounters in a prosaic world. Many critics have noted that Emma's tendency to devise plots based on fictional conventions situates her within the literary tradition established by Lennox's *The Female Quixote*.⁶⁴⁷ Still others have commented on the way in which, to varying degrees, Emma's quixoticism demonstrates her similarity to Catherine.⁶⁴⁸ When Emma seeks to penetrate the secrecy surrounding Harriet's birth and Jane's return to Highbury, she also treats Radcliffe's Gothic as her primary source for reading romance into everyday life. In respect to Harriet's story, Knox-Shaw points out that, "where Catherine transposes *Udolpho*, Emma's preoccupation with the type of the noble orphan" is "fully

⁶⁴⁷ See, for example, Kenneth Moler, *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), 156-57; Adena Rosmarin, "'Misreading' *Emma*: The Powers and Perfidies of Interpretive History," in *Jane Austen: Emma, A Casebook*, ed. David Lodge, rev. ed. (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1991), 224; Olivia Murphy, *Jane Austen the Reader: The Artist as Critic* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 137.

⁶⁴⁸ See, for example, Frank Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 91-93; Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time*, 33, 112-13; Andrew McInnes, "Labyrinths of Conjecture," 74-75, 77-78.

prefigured by *The Romance of the Forest*.⁶⁴⁹ *Emma*'s explicit references to *Romance of the Forest* point to how Radcliffe's novel provides Emma with material for conceiving of Harriet, "the natural daughter of somebody," as a heroine who embodies the fair unknown.⁶⁵⁰ In keeping with Austen's transposition of the Gothic from an exotic to a quotidian world, Emma envisions for Harriet not Adeline's aristocratic lineage but, more plausibly, a father who is a gentleman of means.

More generally, *Emma*'s references to Radcliffe's third novel are emblematic of how *Emma*'s parody, like *Northanger Abbey*'s, depends on allusions to all of Radcliffe's heroine-centered adventures. In conjecturing why Jane has resolved on an extensive visit to Highbury, Emma turns to *Udolpho*, assigning Jane the role of antiheroine in what Claudia Johnson describes as "a tale of guilty passion presented amid an assortment of eroticized details that derive from the Gothic."⁶⁵¹ Although also cast in more probable terms, Emma's suspicions about Jane's relationship with her best friend's husband recalls the story of Laurentini when she seeks refuge from the world after her love affair with a married man has left a trail of lasting consequences in its wake. Emma additionally expresses her affinity with Catherine in her tale of the Jane-Dixon affair given how it represents a variation on those "traditional legends" that

⁶⁴⁹ Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, 197.

⁶⁵⁰ Austen, *Emma*, 19, 23, 26, 27.

⁶⁵¹ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 134.

Catherine hopes to discover after reading *Udolpho* has inspired her romantic expectations of Northanger Abbey.⁶⁵²

Despite their similarities, Emma and Catherine also markedly differ in their personalities and circumstances. While Emma's "story-making" propensities identify her as Catherine's "sister-heroine," Emma is far less naïve, having a much shrewder sense of judgment as well as greater advantages in terms of age, status, and independence.⁶⁵³ More astute in evaluating characters and situations, Emma nevertheless tends to be overconfident in her ability to perceive what lies beneath the surfaces of social life. As Elena Pallares-Garcia remarks, "she often engages in mind reading."⁶⁵⁴ When Emma gathers evidence for her romance solutions by drawing inferences from her observations, her empirical approach, according to Piper, is similar to Emily's in *Udolpho*: "She notes the circumstances around her, sifts and collects and composes them, reaching through them to general conclusions."⁶⁵⁵ However, while Emily recognizes "the dangers of misreading,"⁶⁵⁶ Emma often shows little use for the caution that Emily generally practices in attempting to solve mysteries. Especially in the first volume of Austen's novel, Emma frequently jumps to conclusions, an inclination that stands in ironic contrast to the

⁶⁵² *Northanger Abbey*, 102.

⁶⁵³ Wilt, *Ghosts of the Gothic*, 161-62, 163-64.

⁶⁵⁴ Elena Pallares-Garcia, "Narrated Perception Revisited: The Case of Jane Austen's *Emma*," *Language and Literature* 21, no. 2 (May 2012): 182.

⁶⁵⁵ Piper, *Reconcilable Differences*, 188, 197.

⁶⁵⁶ Jane Spencer, "Narrative Technique: Austen and Her Contemporaries," in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 192.

Radcliffe heroine's methods of investigation, which usually entail prolonged periods of uncertainty.

In *Emma*, Austen departs from the traditional quixote model to a crucial extent by subverting the way in which it continually and explicitly alerts readers to the illusory nature of the quixote's perceptions. While *Northanger Abbey* follows convention in featuring a narrator who frequently renders Catherine's misinterpretations transparent, *Emma*'s narrator usually plays a much more covert role. Frequently, *Emma* obscures "what authority" can be derived from the narrative situation,⁶⁵⁷ and thus leaves readers in doubt about whether Emma's interpretations are valid. In discussing the contemporary quixote story, Gordon identifies such a strategy with an unorthodox approach because it undermines the traditional model's opposition "between those who see clearly and those whose vision suffers distortions" by challenging readers' abilities to determine "what is 'evident.'"⁶⁵⁸ *Northanger Abbey* also contests the orthodox version's distinction between illusion and reality, but in *Emma*, Austen much more fully adapts Radcliffe's use of limited perspective both to express a sceptical attitude toward the nature of knowledge and write a more complex detective story.

In making Emma "a kind of narrator" of the novel, Austen filters most of the action through her point of view.⁶⁵⁹ In *Emma* and elsewhere in her major work, Austen built on Radcliffe's formal techniques in also experimenting with free indirect and other modes of

⁶⁵⁷ Linda Bree, "Word Games and Secret Histories," 137.

⁶⁵⁸ Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism*, 5, 45-46.

⁶⁵⁹ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 245.

discourse to create narrative situations that juxtapose the heroine's and the narrator's perspectives.⁶⁶⁰ According to Butler, "Radcliffe [taught] her successors, Austen included, how to give the reader access to a heroine's consciousness."⁶⁶¹ As in Radcliffe's novels from *Romance of the Forest* to *The Italian*, the narrative style in *Emma* serves to mystify the reader in allowing for the extensive use of limited perspective. As later detective fiction also shows, this device fulfills a key role by substantially hindering the reader's ability to resolve the story's mysteries.

Although *Emma* displays a much less directive narrative style than does either *Northanger Abbey* or the traditional quixote story, the level of information that its narrator provides can vary significantly. In volume one, the narrator is more forthcoming in providing commentary which suggests or, more rarely, makes plain Emma's mistakes in reading the world around her.⁶⁶² As a result, *Emma* may initially, as Adena Rosmarin claims, give readers "confidence" in their "ability to read," but, in any case, as she points out, volumes two and three pose greater difficulties for their interpretive skills as "the narrator increasingly handicaps [them] by withholding information that Emma does not have."⁶⁶³ Limiting the narrator's overt

⁶⁶⁰ Numerous critics have found that Austen perfected in *Emma* what had been, up until the novel's first publication, the use of free indirect discourse in literature. See, for example, Vivien Jones, "Jane Austen's Domestic Realism," 291.

⁶⁶¹ Butler, "Introduction to *Northanger Abbey*," 156. Of course, this relationship between the two authors allows for important differences, perhaps most notably in terms of genre. Daniel P. Gunn remarks that Austen's method for writing comedies is tied to how her use of free indirect discourse is "inflected throughout by the narrator's irony." "Free Indirect Discourse and Narrative Authority in *Emma*," *Narrative* 12, no. 1 (January 2004): 41.

⁶⁶² Rosmarin, "'Misreading' *Emma*," 219, 221.

⁶⁶³ Rosmarin, "'Misreading' *Emma*," 221, 225.

mediation prompts readers to act as detectives, motivating them to become actively involved in evaluating for themselves Emma's as well as other characters' interpretations of what happens in the novel.

In volumes two and three, Austen much more frequently renders the narrator's information ambiguous or withdraws it altogether, largely by adapting two of Radcliffe's key narrative techniques. Increasingly, Austen includes passages where distinguishing between Emma's voice and the narrator's proves impossible.⁶⁶⁴ Together with Radcliffe, Austen erased "the line between character and narrator" in developing free indirect discourse,⁶⁶⁵ and both authors use this strategy to confuse readers' attempts to assign definitive meaning to behavior and events. Austen further complicates their efforts by creating a narrator who increasingly refrains from making judgments or even from offering nonjudgmental commentary.⁶⁶⁶ Massimiliano Morini finds that this strategy "produces epistemological uncertainty because readers cannot be sure whether the narrator knows or does not know about people's morals and feelings, about past and future events."⁶⁶⁷ For Levine, free indirect discourse constitutes an

⁶⁶⁴ David Lodge, introduction to *Emma*, by Jane Austen, ed. James Kinsley and David Lodge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), xi; also, see Morini, *Jane Austen's Narrative Techniques*, 54.

⁶⁶⁵ Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, 252.

⁶⁶⁶ Rosmarin, "'Misreading' *Emma*," 221; Gunn, "Free Indirect Discourse," 48.

⁶⁶⁷ Morini, *Jane Austen's Narrative Techniques*, 28. Morini makes this point about all of Austen's completed novels except for *Northanger Abbey*. In his 1996 article, Victor Sage makes the same point about *Udolpho* in finding that Radcliffe creates "epistemological uncertainty" by employing a narrator who seems to lack knowledge about characters and events. "The Epistemology of Error," 107.

important development in literary realism, in part because it “gives the sense that the narration is like life, in which there are no omniscient narrators to help us decide what to think about what we experience.”⁶⁶⁸ As Radcliffe does, Austen employs this tactic to raise doubts about the narrator’s omniscience and, at the same time, privilege the heroine’s perspective, encouraging readers both to depend on and question the heroine’s subjective impressions and judgments.

Thus, Austen rejects an enduring convention of the orthodox quixote model, whose readers, as Gordon notes, “are never permitted to share the quixote’s perceptions.”⁶⁶⁹ To prompt them to do so would threaten to destabilize the orthodox tale’s clear-cut distinction between what is real and what the quixote imagines to be real.⁶⁷⁰ In blurring the distinction between the two, the nontraditional tale of quixoticism “frustrate[es] readers’ desire to assume the mantle of objective vision.”⁶⁷¹ In *Emma*, curtailing the extent to which readers can depend on the narrator’s authority and reliability has important epistemological implications for the way in which readers approach the text. *Emma*’s “particularly evasive narrative voice,” as Tara Ghoshal Wallace points out, “keep[s] readers on the watch, interpreting and reinterpreting this slippery text.”⁶⁷² Thus its readers “are very inclined to find themselves, as in a maze, following a blind alley and

⁶⁶⁸ Levine, “Literary Realism Reconsidered,” 18, 19.

⁶⁶⁹ Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism*, 44.

⁶⁷⁰ Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism*, 45-46.

⁶⁷¹ Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism*, 8.

⁶⁷² Tara Ghoshal Wallace, *Jane Austen and Narrative Authority* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 77.

having to retrace their steps.”⁶⁷³ Austen’s use of limited perspective operates in a fashion similar to Radcliffe’s as readers become caught up in a “labyrinth of conjecture.”

In tandem with the narrator’s growing reticence, Highbury’s fictional society expands after volume one, further adding to the reader’s challenges through heightening the narrative’s ambiguities. Whereas the first volume primarily focuses on Emma and Mr. Elton’s mutual misunderstanding, volumes two and three enlarge the scope for misreading to include a range of characters. With the introduction of Miss Bates and the arrivals of Jane, Frank, and Mrs. Elton, the narrative unfolds to dramatize how “characters keep construing and misconstruing one another.”⁶⁷⁴ According to Andrew McInnes, *Emma* owes a debt to *Romance of the Forest* in its depiction of the way in which characters generate action through constructing stories shaped by misinterpretation.⁶⁷⁵ In confronting readers with additional obstacles to locating a trustworthy source of information, the novel hinders readers from resolving the narrative’s mysteries and shows its affiliation with the unorthodox quixote model by making it difficult for readers to choose from among competing narratives.

In terms of setting, Austen’s Highbury appears remote from Radcliffe’s Gothic world. As many critics have observed, *Emma*’s realism derives to a substantial extent from the way in which Austen treats this aspect of the narrative. Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan point out that, compared to Austen’s other major work, “the novel is set with unusual precision in space

⁶⁷³ Bree, “Word Games and Secret Histories,” 137.

⁶⁷⁴ Litvak, “Reading Characters,” 766.

⁶⁷⁵ McInnes “Labyrinths of Conjecture,” 76-77.

and time.”⁶⁷⁶ According to Janine Barchas, Austen firmly positions Highbury within the wider realm of early nineteenth-century Britain in large part through situating it within a “network of objects, foods, names, and geographies.”⁶⁷⁷ Although the scene of the main action is wholly imaginary,⁶⁷⁸ a mesh of detail provides a realistic context for its fictional events. Critics have also found that Austen endows her depiction of Highbury with a greater degree of realism than she gives to her portrayals of other villages and towns, especially in noting the careful delineation of its social landscape⁶⁷⁹ and the concrete descriptions of its typography.⁶⁸⁰ Such techniques sharply distinguish *Emma* from Radcliffe’s romance. Indeed, when Scott contrasts Austen’s work with fiction of a “romantic cast,” he figuratively employs setting to emphasize their differences, finding the two as dissimilar as “cornfields, cottages, and meadows” are to “the rugged sublimities of a mountain landscape.”⁶⁸¹ His remarks seem particularly apt in the case of

⁶⁷⁶ Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan, introduction to *Emma*, by Jane Austen, ed. Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), lxvi, lxxiv.

⁶⁷⁷ Janine Barchas, “Setting and Community” in *The Cambridge Companion to Emma*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 130, 132.

⁶⁷⁸ According to R.W. Chapman in the index to his edition of *Emma*, Austen describes Highbury’s geographical position with “such detail that many attempts have been made to construct a map,” but “no possible place is at once 16 miles from London, 9 from Richmond, and 7 from Box Hill.” *The Novels of Jane Austen*, 3rd ed., vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 521.

⁶⁷⁹ See, for example, Oliver MacDonagh, *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 136-37, 143-44.

⁶⁸⁰ See, for example, Richard Jenkyns, *A Fine Brush on Ivory: An Appreciation of Jane Austen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 152.

⁶⁸¹ Scott, review of *Emma*, 68.

Emma, yet Austen's novel and Radcliffe's Gothic also show important continuities in their evocations of place.

In *Emma* and Radcliffe's romance, spatial and temporal markers invest their novels' sense of place with an atmosphere of confinement. The Gothic motif of confinement pervades Austen's novel, illustrating limitations imposed by ordinary physical and social conditions. Characters must contend with restrictions imposed by "influences as various as weather, health, social status, and economics."⁶⁸² Except for the effects of weather, Emma's privileges exempt her from such restrictions, but, like everyone else in the novel, she is expected to conform to accepted norms that demand their own forms of constraint. For Tanner, Highbury's "claustrophobic aspect" stems from the "degree of repression" required to maintain the standards of politeness in a small society where proximity forces characters into strained relationships.⁶⁸³ Given that only a handful of families comprise Highbury's genteel society, its events and excursions allow Emma no possibility of escaping, for example, the "insufferable" Mrs. Elton as numerous scenes amply demonstrate.⁶⁸⁴ When Emma remarks on "their confined society in Surry,"⁶⁸⁵ she refers to not only her limited acquaintance but also the sameness that governs her day-to-day social life in a village slow to change. The "everyday remarks, dull repetitions, old news, and heavy jokes" which dominate the conversation at the Coles' dinner party typify what

⁶⁸² Barchas, "Setting and Community," 120.

⁶⁸³ Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 189, 193.

⁶⁸⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 218.

⁶⁸⁵ Austen, *Emma*, 114.

Tanner describes as the “force of inertia” that underpins the humdrum quality of Highbury’s provincial world.⁶⁸⁶

Among the village’s inhabitants, Mr. Woodhouse, above all, personifies the relationship between inertia and confinement. His overriding concern with his health provides the rationale for his embrace of a routine that tolerates little fluctuation and seldom takes him from home. The novel repeatedly ties the pattern of his daily life to a lack of mobility, emphasizing this connection even in respect to his habits of exercise: he “never went beyond the shrubbery, where two divisions of the grounds sufficed him for his long walk or his short, as the year varied.”⁶⁸⁷ In “hating change of any kind,” he rarely leaves his own fireside, but, when he embarks on a visit to Donwell Abbey, his arrival highlights his desire to “go nowhere” as he immediately resumes the same position in one of Mr. Knightley’s rooms.⁶⁸⁸

Mr. Woodhouse’s aversion to anything unfamiliar characterizes the notions of “comfort” and “safety” by which he dictates the rhythm of life at Hartfield.⁶⁸⁹ Emma’s first consideration as mistress of Hartfield is to ensure her father’s peace of mind, an obligation that largely limits her sphere of action. Mr. Woodhouse’s respect for his nerves means that Emma spends most of her evenings as well as her days confined at home. Thus, Austen transposes the Gothic motif of confinement into the more realistic idiom of Highbury’s prosaic world. As Richard Jenkins

⁶⁸⁶ Austen, *Emma*, 172; Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 191.

⁶⁸⁷ Austen, *Emma*, 21.

⁶⁸⁸ Austen, *Emma*, 7, 165.

⁶⁸⁹ Austen, *Emma*, 101, 166, 281.

observes, despite Emma's "authority and independence," her "imprisonment is a recurrent theme throughout the book."⁶⁹⁰ Emma's limited mobility is thrown into greater relief by the way in which so much of the conversation in the novel concerns journeys. As Barbara Hardy notes, "the confinement of Emma, who has never seen the sea, is the more marked for the busy comings and goings of the other characters."⁶⁹¹ Emma openly expresses feelings of constraint after her attempt to make a match between Harriet and Mr. Elton ends in failure: "Their being fixed, so absolutely fixed, in the same place, was bad for each, for all three. Not one of them had the power of removal, or of effecting any material change of society."⁶⁹² Her perceptions, however, best describe her own situation, for she remains in Highbury for the duration of the narrative, without the kind of freedom that allows Harriet to make a month-long visit to London or Mr. Elton to stay four weeks in Bath. On the two occasions that Emma travels beyond Highbury, she is gone from home for less than a day, but her journeys nevertheless represent rare events. When Emma takes the one-mile trip to Mr. Knightley's estate, she is "eager to refresh and correct her memory" given how much time has passed since her last visit,⁶⁹³ and, when she joins the excursion to Box Hill, she sees the celebrated tourist spot for the first time, although it lies only seven miles outside of Highbury. In attributing the "seclusion" of Emma's life to Mr.

⁶⁹⁰ Jenkyns, *A Fine Brush on Ivory*, 154-55.

⁶⁹¹ Barbara Hardy, *A Reading of Jane Austen* (London: Peter Owen, 1975), 108.

⁶⁹² Austen, *Emma*, 113.

⁶⁹³ Austen, *Emma*, 281.

Woodhouse's "state of health," Mrs. Elton is uncharacteristically accurate in making an observation consistently supported throughout the narrative.⁶⁹⁴

As in Radcliffe's romance, *Emma*'s ambiguous environment creates epistemological problems for the heroine. The uncertainty of the Radcliffe heroine's situation is underscored by her surroundings, where the gloom of ancient Gothic buildings and mist-shrouded scenery figuratively reflect the obscurity that overshadows her present and future. *Emma*'s well-lit rooms and ordered landscapes, on the other hand, serve as a contrast to the social labyrinth created by the heroine's uncertain circumstances. Whereas the Gothic heroine's situation inspires her anxiety and dread about what life may have in store, Emma feels secure in her position as mistress of Hartfield. Although she believes her status distinguishes her from "the second and third rate of Highbury," her conception of rank appears out of step with the social currents of Highbury. She perceives its "genteel society" as a "static community" in which gradations of rank are firmly demarcated, but the interactions among its members reflect a tension between "continuity" and "change" that frequently renders such distinctions ambiguous.⁶⁹⁵ The narrative represents a society in flux that calls into question Emma's notions of a fixed hierarchy and her preeminent role within it. As Butler notes, Emma's belief in her own "precedence" is built on a

⁶⁹⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 215.

⁶⁹⁵ Handler and Segal, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Culture*, 53, 54-55, 57.

“precarious” foundation.⁶⁹⁶ As Emma’s social orbit expands, she finds herself in a “confusing environment” that gradually undermines her sense of herself as “first in consequence.”⁶⁹⁷

Confusion over social positions significantly contributes to the misunderstandings that predominate in volume one when Emma’s investigation into Harriet’s parentage provides the impetus for her plot to forge a match between Harriet and Mr. Elton. A central facet of Emma’s Gothic parody concerns Emma’s detective work to uncover a family relationship concealed in the past. Beginning with Walpole, Gothic writers made the discovery of lost relatives an important plot catalyst, and, during the last decade of the eighteenth century, Radcliffe and her many imitators also continued to use it as such to play on the romance motif of the fair unknown.⁶⁹⁸ According to Kamilla Elliott, in Gothic fiction, “unknown, hidden, lost, stolen, and mistaken social identities are everywhere; as often as Gothic narratives lose, obscure, falsify, and usurp social identities, they offer copious ways to recover, reveal, clarify, and restore them,” frequently reestablishing characters’ aristocratic lineage through “testimonies” and “circumstantial evidence.”⁶⁹⁹ In *The Romance of the Forest*, such clues play a pivotal role in returning Adeline to her legitimate place among the French nobility.

⁶⁹⁶ Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1987), 272-73.

⁶⁹⁷ Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*, 116; Austen, *Emma*, 7.

⁶⁹⁸ Ann B. Tracy, *The Gothic Novel, 1790-1830: Plot Summaries and Index to Motifs* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1981), 203. Tracy’s survey of 208 Gothic texts indicates the wide use of this motif in identifying its use in eighty-two of them.

⁶⁹⁹ Kamilla Elliott, *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction: The Rise of Picture Identification, 1764-1835* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 66.

In speculating on Harriet's identity, Emma gathers clues also supplied by testimony and circumstantial evidence, interpreting ambiguous information gleaned from Mrs. Goddard and Harriet's situation as parlour boarder to confirm her gentility. Before Emma meets Harriet, Mrs. Goddard unintentionally encourages her to imagine Harriet as Highbury's version of the fair unknown. When she proposes that Emma invite Harriet to Hartfield, she "signal[s] that Harriet is somehow special, fit in some way to be singled out from other pupils," and, in considering "Hartfield a suitable background for her," Mrs. Goddard gives Emma a basis for thinking of Harriet as a gentleman's daughter.⁷⁰⁰ Emma reads Harriet's elevation to parlour boarder at Mrs. Goddard's school as further proof of her gentle birth in taking it to mean that "nothing has ever been grudged for her improvement or comfort."⁷⁰¹ Mr. Knightley, however, reads the evidence very differently, finding that "after receiving a very indifferent education [Harriet] is left in Mrs. Goddard's hands to shift as she can."⁷⁰² In the early nineteenth century, the term *parlour boarder* embraced various connotations that could encompass both Emma's and Mr. Knightley's meanings, suggesting how the potential fluidity of social roles renders Emma's environment difficult to decipher.⁷⁰³ On the one hand, the term referred to a pupil who, in exchange for considerably higher fees, was granted special privileges, which commonly included mixing socially with the headmistress and teachers, receiving additional instruction, and having a private

⁷⁰⁰ Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time*, 117.

⁷⁰¹ Austen, *Emma*, 50.

⁷⁰² Austen, *Emma*, 50.

⁷⁰³ Cronin and McMillan, "Emma," 22.

room.⁷⁰⁴ On the other, the term referred to a woman who had completed her education but remained at the school because it provided respectable accommodations for someone who had no home of her own.⁷⁰⁵ The uncertainty surrounding Harriet's position exemplifies the ambiguity attached to status and, more generally, to the various other clues which characters rely on to decode the narrative's mysteries.

As a young woman with a secret history, Harriet proves to be an irresistible subject for Emma's quixoticism. As Susan Allen Ford remarks, Emma resolves the question of Harriet's birth "with a confidence born of her reading."⁷⁰⁶ In deciding that "there can be no doubt" of Harriet's gentility,⁷⁰⁷ Emma departs from the Radcliffe heroine's usual role to take on the more assertive part of novelist.⁷⁰⁸ Moving from fashioning a narrative to explain a mystery posed by past events, she constructs a plot to direct the future in planning to rescue Harriet from what she perceives to be social obscurity and isolation. As she tells herself with a good deal of complacency, "she would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society."⁷⁰⁹ As she attempts to dissuade Harriet from

⁷⁰⁴ Cronin and McMillan, "*Emma*," 19-20, 21.

⁷⁰⁵ Cronin and McMillan, "*Emma*," 20.

⁷⁰⁶ Susan Allen Ford, "How to Read and Why: *Emma*'s Gothic Mirrors." *Persuasions* 25 (2003): 116.

⁷⁰⁷ Austen, *Emma*, 25.

⁷⁰⁸ Cicely Havely, "*Emma*: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman," *The Journal of the English Association* 42, no. 174 (Fall 1993): 222-23; Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions*, 179.

⁷⁰⁹ Austen, *Emma*, 19.

the “degradation” of marrying Robert Martin and promote a match with Mr. Elton, Emma hopes to achieve the kind of outcome that reflects well on “her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers” and, as in *The Romance of the Forest*, validates her heroine’s gentility.⁷¹⁰ Ironically, however, Emma’s plot takes on more disquieting Gothic overtones as Emma inadvertently erects obstacles in the way of Harriet’s happy ending, creating a situation that resembles not Adeline’s but Emily’s in *Udolpho* and Ellena’s in *The Italian* when the possibility that they share with Adeline the status of the fair unknown threatens rather than contributes to their future happiness.

To further her matchmaking plot, Emma continues to turn to Radcliffe’s romance, drawing on its use of the portrait as a device for providing clues to hidden identities. According to Elliott, frequently in Gothic fiction, “resemblance to the portrait of forbears attests to kinship.”⁷¹¹ Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, Reeve’s *The Old English Baron*, and Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* follow this convention, but in *Udolpho* and *The Italian*, Radcliffe’s use of the portrait establishes an unstable relationship between resemblance and representation as she dramatizes how perceiving likeness can compound rather than resolve questions surrounding identity. Like Radcliffe’s later work, *Emma* explores the limits of perception in showing the influence of psychological factors on the process of evaluating likeness. In the scenes involving Emma’s portrait of Harriet, Austen foregrounds “one of the great preoccupations” of the novel

⁷¹⁰ Austen, *Emma*, 20, 50.

⁷¹¹ Elliott, *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction*, 66-67.

as she depicts “the subjectivity of perception and the way in which judgments depend on the personality and prejudices of the judge.”⁷¹²

In *Emma*, Austen draws on contemporary debates over the aesthetics of portraiture, which were driven by conflicting notions of likeness.⁷¹³ The controversy that emerged in the late eighteenth century still resonated in early nineteenth-century Britain, where the objections made by Joshua Reynolds and his followers to conceiving of the portrait as a mimetic art continued to fuel disagreement.⁷¹⁴ As the concept of portraiture became a contentious issue, its meaning became much less clear-cut, and some authors chose to explore this turn of events within the context of the novel.⁷¹⁵ Like Radcliffe before her, Austen considers it in light of her skeptical approach to the problem of knowledge, but, in keeping with her dramatization of everyday life, Austen differs from her predecessor in focusing on common social interactions associated at the time with painting portraits.

In Austen’s day, portraiture was enormously popular in not only public but private life where it was widely embraced as an amateur pursuit.⁷¹⁶ In particular, women in genteel society

⁷¹² Stafford, introduction to *Emma*, xii.

⁷¹³ Joe Bray, “*Belinda*, *Emma*, and the ‘Likeness’ of the Portrait,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 33, no. 1 (February 2011): 1.

⁷¹⁴ Kamilla Elliott, “Jane Austen and the Politics of Picture Identification,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 34, no. 4 (September 2012): 314.

⁷¹⁵ Bray, “The ‘Likeness’ of the Portrait,” 1.

⁷¹⁶ Louise Lippincott, “Expanding on Portraiture: The Market, the Public, and the Hierarchy of Genres in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, ed. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (New York: Routledge, 1997), 81.

usually numbered among their accomplishments some degree of skill in portrait painting.⁷¹⁷

When Emma paints Harriet's picture, she deploys her own artistic skills to bring Harriet and Mr. Elton together in an intimate setting where she can closely observe the development of her plot. In private life, both the process and function of portrait painting were tied to societal norms. Sitting for one's portrait was "a recognized social pastime" that chiefly served to document and affirm relationships among family members or friends and mark the passage of significant events, such as marriage.⁷¹⁸ Emma foresees the portrait as fulfilling each of these purposes in representing "a standing memorial" of her friendship with Harriet and the "likely" outcome of "Mr. Elton's very promising attachment."⁷¹⁹ Through such misinterpretations, Emma and Mr. Elton become increasingly involved in a mutual misunderstanding. While Emma mistakes Mr. Elton's flattering attentions toward herself as evidence of his love for Harriet, Mr. Elton misreads his welcome at Hartfield as evidence of his success in wooing Emma by impersonating a man in love.

Harriet's portrait itself generates misinterpretations, acting as a an embedded text that reflects how the subjectivity of perception also drives the action elsewhere in the novel. Emma is inspired to paint Harriet's picture when she misconstrues Mr. Elton's attempts to curry favor

⁷¹⁷ Lance Bertelsen, "Jane Austen's Miniatures: Painting, Drawing, and the Novels," *Modern Language Quarterly* 45 (December 1984): 352.

⁷¹⁸ Lippincott, "Expanding on Portraiture," 81, 82.

⁷¹⁹ Austen, *Emma*, 38.

with her as admiration for Harriet.⁷²⁰ “‘You have given Miss Smith all that she required,’ said he; ‘you have made her graceful and easy. She was a beautiful creature when she came to you, but, in my opinion, the attractions you have added are infinitely superior to what she received from nature.’”⁷²¹ Well aware that Harriet has made no such “striking improvement,” Emma reads Mr. Elton’s praise as among the more “agreeable proofs” of “his growing attachment” to her protégé.⁷²² In interpreting Mr. Elton’s description, Emma’s portrait illustrates its creator’s quixotic tendencies in advancing her plan of casting Harriet as an actual romance heroine.⁷²³ “She meant to throw in a little improvement to the figure, to give a little more height, and considerably more elegance.”⁷²⁴ As Austen describes the way in which Emma embellishes Harriet’s beauty to bring it into conformity with her literary counterpart’s, she underscores her realism by drolly alluding to the way in which family likeness in Gothic fiction often supplies proof of identity.

Austen endorses concepts of portraiture that make the viewer’s response central to determining likeness, unsettling notions of a direct correspondence between resemblance and representation. In a fashion similar to Radcliffe’s use of the portrait as “a recognition device,”⁷²⁵

⁷²⁰ Joseph Wiesenfarth, “*Emma*: Point Counter Point,” in *Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. John Halperin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 209.

⁷²¹ Austen, *Emma*, 34.

⁷²² Austen, *Emma*, 34.

⁷²³ Moler, *Jane Austen’s Art of Allusion*, 173.

⁷²⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 38.

⁷²⁵ Miles, *Ann Radcliffe*, 150.

Austen foregrounds the viewer's imaginative participation in evaluating the extent to which the image of the sitter captures "reality." As Catherine Soussloff notes, recognition "be[came] of great importance to the concept of portraiture precisely because it turns resemblance into a matter of viewing, rather than maintaining that a standard of likeness resides in the portrait itself."⁷²⁶ Reynolds's aesthetics accommodate the notion of recognition in incorporating his principle of the general effect into his theory of portraiture. For Reynolds, "the grace, and, we may add, the likeness, consists more in taking the general air, than in observing the exact similitude of every feature."⁷²⁷ He elaborates on this point in praising Gainsborough's portraits for achieving a "striking resemblance," finding that the way in which he treats the familiar to convey "the general effect" provided "enough to remind the spectator of the original" and encouraged "the imagination [to supply] the rest."⁷²⁸ What Reynolds acknowledges as the subjective nature of assessing likeness, Emma takes as a given, at least in matters of love.

The conflicting responses to Emma's picture of Mr. John Knightley demonstrate that perceiving likeness is shaped by how viewers feel about and what they know or think they know of the subject. Whereas Emma and Mrs. Weston find it "very like" except "only too handsome—too flattering," it elicits his wife "Isabella's cold approbation of 'yes, it was a little like—but to

⁷²⁶ Catherine Soussloff, *The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 6.

⁷²⁷ Reynolds, *Discourses*, 118; Bertelsen associates Reynolds's remarks on Gainsborough with Austen's fiction but by considering how they relate to her method for creating physical descriptions of her characters. "Jane Austen's Miniatures," 362.

⁷²⁸ Reynolds, *Discourses*, 314.

be sure it did not do him justice.”⁷²⁹ In this scene and elsewhere in the novel, “the lover’s perception of her or his beloved object is shown to be relative to [their] relationship.”⁷³⁰ In attributing her sister’s response to the illusions of love, Emma anticipates using her deliberately idealized image of Harriet as a kind of recognition device by which Mr. Elton will reveal himself to be operating under similar illusions. Having already resolved the mystery of Harriet’s birth to her satisfaction, Emma seeks to develop her narrative by accumulating more substantial proof of Harriet’s identity as Mr. Elton’s beloved. Although, for the Radcliffe heroine, the portrait as a recognition device provides evidence closely linked to her legal identity, the device generates uncertainty in her later work as the subjectivity involved in determining resemblance creates cases of mistaken identity. Although Emma means to better gauge and clarify the strength of Mr. Elton’s feelings for Harriet by evoking his subjective response, her attempt backfires as she misidentifies the object of his apparent admiration.

The scene in which Emma unveils Harriet’s portrait draws parallels between reading texts and reading behavior as it conveys how interpretations generate action in falling short of achieving objective truth. As Havely points out, “it furthers Emma’s matchmaking plot very neatly and simultaneously provides Austen with a base from which to elaborate Emma’s first misreading of Mr. Elton’s intentions.”⁷³¹ When Mr. Elton maintains, “I never saw such a likeness

⁷²⁹ Austen, *Emma*, 36-37.

⁷³⁰ Tauchert, *Romancing Jane Austen*, 121.

⁷³¹ Havely, “Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman,” 224.

in my life,”⁷³² Emma is gratified by what she sees as the portrait’s success in achieving its desired effect. As Emma misattributes his praise to “the influence of a strong passion” inspired by Harriet,⁷³³ Mr. Elton also misjudges the situation in assuming that his feigned admiration will advance his plan to present himself as Emma’s ardent suitor. While Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley find that the portrait lacks representational accuracy, Mr. Elton’s “continual raptures” resolutely counter their comments.⁷³⁴ When Mrs. Weston remarks, “Miss Woodhouse has given her friend the only beauty she wanted. . . . The expression of the eye is most correct, but Miss Smith has not those eye-brows and eye-lashes,”⁷³⁵ Mr. Elton disagrees. “It appears to me the most perfect resemblance in every feature. . . . We must allow for the effect of shade, you know.”⁷³⁶ When Mr. Knightley’s adds, “You have made her too tall, Emma,” Mr. Elton insists, “the proportions must be preserved, you know. Proportions, foreshortening—Oh, no! it gives one exactly the idea of such a height as Miss Smith’s. Exactly so indeed!”⁷³⁷ Given that the likeness of the portrait is supported solely by Mr. Elton’s bogus appreciation, this scene may seem to endorse mimetic representation. Yet, as Stafford points out, such a suggestion is undercut as “characters reveal themselves through their responses to the portrait, which are clearly

⁷³² Austen, *Emma*, 38.

⁷³³ Austen, *Emma* 54.

⁷³⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 38.

⁷³⁵ Austen, *Emma*, 38.

⁷³⁶ Austen, *Emma*, 38.

⁷³⁷ Austen, *Emma*, 38.

influenced by their own preconceptions, their views of the artist and their relationship with each other.”⁷³⁸ Mrs. Weston’s and Mr. Knightley’s comments figuratively echo their disagreement in chapter five over Emma’s friendship with Harriet when Mrs. Weston maintains that it provides Harriet with advantages denied to her by her background and Mr. Knightley contends that it can only unrealistically raise Harriet’s social expectations.⁷³⁹

In other scenes, Austen extends her focus on the subjectivity of perception from evaluating images to assessing a host of other matters, both tangible and intangible. According to Handler and Segal, Austen dramatizes her “narrative epistemology” in large part by conveying the way in which “multiple readings” suggest “the provisionality of any one reading.”⁷⁴⁰ Throughout *Emma*, shifting judgments and conflicting observations show that “perception remains contingent.”⁷⁴¹ Despite Mr. Elton’s counterfeit response to Harriet’s picture, his references to Emma’s use of “shade” and “the proportions” point to the significant role played by context and perspective in influencing perception. As the novel repeatedly indicates, interpretation is crucially affected by the circumstances surrounding an object, behavior, or event and the viewpoint from which it is observed.

Although Emma may be the novel’s most committed imaginist, she is hardly alone in fulfilling this role. As Jocelyn Harris points out, not only the heroine but many other characters

⁷³⁸ Stafford, introduction to *Emma*, xiii.

⁷³⁹ Stafford, introduction to *Emma*, xiii-xiv.

⁷⁴⁰ Handler and Segal, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Culture*, 127.

⁷⁴¹ Tauchert, *Romancing Jane Austen*, 121.

exercise their imaginations by speculating on and forecasting matches.⁷⁴² Like Emma, Highbury's gossips tend to perceive "the lives of others" in ways that "transform them into narrative."⁷⁴³ Miss Bates, Mrs. Cole, and Mrs. Perry play principle roles in "a kind of Greek chorus" whose talk reflects how conjectures about marriage represent for both major and minor characters an "all pervading preoccupation."⁷⁴⁴ Even Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley, the novel's two most sensible characters, participate in constructing scenarios around the likelihood of matches and, in some cases, become involved in promoting them. As these narratives multiply, conflicting interpretations emerge to heighten the novel's sense of mystery, challenging readers to use their own ingenuity to figure out who will marry whom.

While characters often rely on trusting the evidence of their senses in making conjectures, secondhand accounts are an important factor in generating their speculations. Emma observes many of the events that occur in the novel, but she must frequently depend on others to gain information about those that have happened in the past. In the opening chapter, for example, Mr. Knightley's return from London brings her recent news of her sister's family, and, in volume two, Miss Bates's announcement of Mr. Elton's upcoming marriage tells her his reasons for spending the previous four weeks in Bath. On the one hand, this technique contributes to Austen's realism. According to David Lodge, Austen's "realistic illusion" depends in part on the

⁷⁴² Jocelyn Harris, *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 172-73.

⁷⁴³ Casey Finch and Peter Bowen, "'The Tittle-Tattle of Highbury': Gossip and the Free Indirect Style in *Emma*," *Representations* 31 (Summer 1990): 13-14.

⁷⁴⁴ Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time*, 117.

way in which she constructs chronological plots by often having her characters provide “a retrospective account of some event antecedent to the main action or a delayed explanation of some event in the main action.”⁷⁴⁵ On the other hand, when these narratives are misleading or misread, they also emphasize Austen’s thematic focus on the problem of knowledge. In this respect, Austen’s use of the embedded tale in *Emma* recalls Radcliffe’s strategy of employing the device to elaborate on her epistemological concerns and develop her narratives. As in Radcliffe’s work, the embedded tale in *Emma* acts as a plot catalyst by introducing a mystery. In performing this function, Miss Bates’s story of the circumstances surrounding Jane’s return to Highbury plays a pivotal role in the novel as it simultaneously parodies and pays tribute to Radcliffe’s romance.

In the opening chapter of volume two, Miss Bates relays the news of Jane’s impending visit when she explains to Emma and Harriet why she has received an unexpected letter from her niece. Initially, however, she delays her explanation to shed light instead on a lesser mystery, the letter’s disappearance:

Oh! Here it is. I was sure it could not be far off; but I had put my huswife upon it, you see, without being aware, and so it was quite hid, but I had it in my hand sovery lately that I was almost sure it must be on the table. I was reading it to Mrs. Cole, and since she went away, I was reading it again to my mother, for it is such a pleasure to her—a letter from Jane—that she can never hear it often enough; so I knew it could not be far off, and here it is, only just under my huswife.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁵ David Lodge, “Jane Austen’s Novels: Form and Structure,” in *The Jane Austen Handbook*, ed. J. David Grey (London: Athlone Press, 1986), 173.

⁷⁴⁶ Austen, *Emma*, 123.

The trivial nature of Miss Bates's dilemma and her method for solving it appear designed to poke fun at Radcliffe's dramas of knowledge and her heroines' attempts to uncover what is hidden by often inferring cause from effect.

Miss Bates's narrative points to additional similarities with Radcliffe's romance in terms of its delivery and effect. Although Jane's letter is brief, Miss Bates requires many more words to reveal its purpose in echoing the narrative style of the garrulous Gothic servant. As Isobel Grundy notes, her "talk," like the Gothic servant's, is marked by "a mass of trivial circumstantial detail" and lacks any "sense of proportion."⁷⁴⁷ Famously, Walpole introduced the loquacious servant into Gothic fiction by drawing on Shakespeare's legacy to create scenes of comic suspense, and Radcliffe subsequently expanded on his example in her later work by amplifying the character's tales. According to Spacks, the results were not always happy ones (or successful): "As Radcliffe would demonstrate more fully than Walpole, the talkativeness of servants often intolerably postpones revelations, to an extent that may produce impatience rather than suspense in the reader."⁷⁴⁸ In *Emma*, Miss Bates's long-windedness tends to evoke a similar response in both the reader and the heroine. When Scott, for instance, declares her "prosing" to be "tiresome," he uses Emma's choice of words to complain that Miss Bates's volubility is "too often brought forward."⁷⁴⁹ For Scott, Miss Bates's recitations are too realistic, focused as they

⁷⁴⁷ Isobel Grundy, "Why Do They Talk So Much? How Can We Stand It?: John Thorpe and Miss Bates," in *The Talk in Jane Austen*, ed. Bruce Stovel and Lynn Weinlos Gregg (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: University of Alberta Press, 2002), 42.

⁷⁴⁸ Spacks, *Novel Beginnings*, 196.

⁷⁴⁹ Scott, review of *Emma*, 68; Austen, *Emma*, 68, 132.

are on the mundane particulars of daily life.⁷⁵⁰ More than anywhere else in *Emma*, her voice dominates the action in the opening chapter of volume two, giving her ample opportunity to test her audience's patience.

Almost a monologue, Miss Bates's tale further demonstrates her resemblance to the Gothic servant by the way in which her frequent repetitions and digressions create a seemingly endless pattern of promising and delaying disclosure. Miss Bates may assure Emma and Harriet that she will read them her news, "but, first of all, [she] really must, in justice to Jane, apologize for her writing so short a letter."⁷⁵¹ As if to make up for its brevity, she embarks on a comical, protracted account that encompasses Jane's usual mode in writing letters, her own routine in reading them, the beauty of Jane's handwriting, as well as lengthy asides about the state of her mother's eyesight and hearing. Like the servant Annette's rambling discourse in Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, Miss Bates's appears to parody her own author's skill in the art of giving and withholding information.⁷⁵² At the same time, as her tale ranges among the related practices of writing and reading, telling and listening, it refers in realistic terms to interpretive acts that, in both Austen's and Radcliffe's texts, suggest the constructed nature of knowledge.

Fabricated histories in *Emma* and Radcliffe's work prove effective at misleading characters, readers, or both in providing ambiguous clues that are capable of being interpreted in

⁷⁵⁰ Scott, review of *Emma*, 68.

⁷⁵¹ Austen, *Emma*, 123.

⁷⁵² Elaine Bander makes this point about Radcliffe. "Reading Mysteries at Bath and Northanger," *Persuasions* no. 32 (2010): 55.

various ways. The narrative that Emma constructs to explain Jane's return to Highbury recalls Laurentini's in *Udolpho* when Emma figuratively equates Jane's apparent plans to find employment as a governess with her entrance into a nunnery and uses the language of expiation to describe her state of mind. "With the fortitude of a devoted novitiate, she had resolved at one-and-twenty to complete the sacrifice, and retire from all the pleasures of life, of rational intercourse, equal society, peace and hope, to penance and mortification for ever."⁷⁵³ The novel also suggests parallels between Emma's narrative about Jane and Laurentini's story when Emma perceives Jane's behavior in terms that characterize her manners as a form of disguise. Standards of decorum in Austen's work frequently fulfill a purpose similar to that of the veil motif in Radcliffe's romance. Chaplin points out this continuity between their fiction in noting that "observ[ing] social manners" in Austen often acts "to 'veil' oneself according to contemporary notions of public propriety."⁷⁵⁴ In Radcliffe's Gothic, the veil motif frequently serves as a vehicle that contributes to her narrative's pervasive sense of obscurity. Radcliffe's use of it takes a variety of forms, ranging from "literal covers" and "cloaks" to "the secrets that [characters] keep from one another," although its imagery often occurs in "a religious context."⁷⁵⁵ In *Udolpho*, Laurentini permanently assumes the veil by taking the vows of a nun to conceal her past transgressions and atone for her guilt.

⁷⁵³ Austen, *Emma*, 129.

⁷⁵⁴ Chaplin, "Ann Radcliffe and Romantic-Era Fiction," 215-16.

⁷⁵⁵ Elizabeth P. Broadwell, "The Veil Image in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*," *South Atlantic Bulletin* 40, no. 4 (1975): 78, 85.

Although, for Emma, manners may serve as an index to character, they frequently operate in the novel as an ambiguous mode of disguise. According to Cottom, “social forms” in Austen, cannot “be interpreted with any certainty.”⁷⁵⁶ In Austen’s day, rules for polite behavior were largely justified as a means to promote “social harmony,” but Austen also considers how they are employed as a tool for practicing deception.⁷⁵⁷ Disbelieving ill health is the reason for Jane’s visit to Highbury, Emma’s suspicions are increased by her reticence on the subject of Mr. Dixon. “There was no getting at her real opinion. Wrapt up in a cloak of politeness, she seemed determined to hazard nothing. She was disgustingly, was suspiciously reserved.”⁷⁵⁸ In conjecturing that a romantic entanglement lies behind Jane’s visit to Highbury, Emma’s narrative offers insights into Jane’s motives, even though it associates them with a hopeless attachment to Mr. Dixon rather than a secret engagement to Frank. As Susan Morgan points out, Emma’s suspicion that Jane’s intentions “have something of romance in them” is eventually justified when the nature of Jane’s relationship with Frank is revealed.⁷⁵⁹ Except for Emma, all of Highbury accepts Jane’s cover story without question, drawing attention to the difficulty in telling the difference between the apparent and the actual. It also points to how, much like Catherine’s reading of romance in *Northanger Abbey*, Emma’s romance making proves to have

⁷⁵⁶ Cottom, *The Civilized Imagination*, 92.

⁷⁵⁷ Maggie Lane, *Understanding Austen: Key Concepts in the Six Novels* (London: Robert Hale, 2012), 178, 184.

⁷⁵⁸ Austen, *Emma*, 132.

⁷⁵⁹ Morgan, *In the Meantime*, 60-61.

its benefits by encouraging imaginative perceptions that bring her closer to the truth. Although the revelation of Jane's engagement to Frank clears up one of the novel's central mysteries, her reasons for agreeing to marry him remain ambiguous. In place of the former mystery, a new one emerges, and, for an explanation, Emma revises her romance narrative about Jane by casting her in the role of "heroic victim."⁷⁶⁰ Emma's new scenario draws on *The Italian*, recalling Radcliffe's Ellena and Vivaldi as she imagines Jane playing Juliet to Frank's Romeo. "She loves him then excessively, I suppose. It must have been from attachment only, that she could be led to form the engagement."⁷⁶¹ In contrast to the heroine of the orthodox quixote tale, Emma quixotry remains unreformed.

The most important revelation in the novel occurs when recognition and reversal bring Emma to realize that she loves Mr. Knightley. Her own romance recalls the Gothic heroine's, but in prosaic terms. Before her marriage to the hero can take place, she too is confronted by "terror," finds herself "lost in a labyrinth of conjecture," threatened by a dismal future, and faced with a guardian figure who throws obstacles in the way of her happy ending. In Radcliffe's work, uncovering hidden family relationships moves the plot toward closure, clearing the way for the heroine to marry the hero. To bring about Emma's comic ending, Austen reworks this plotline by assimilating it to her own purposes. An excavation of the past also untangles plot complications in *Emma*, although the mysteries that are resolved concern not murder but those of the heart.

⁷⁶⁰ Ford, "Emma's Gothic Mirrors," 118.

⁷⁶¹ Austen, *Emma*, 315, 329.

When Mr. Weston tells Emma, “there are secrets in all families, you know,”⁷⁶² he speaks a truth later borne out by the discovery of the novel’s deepest secret, which leads Emma and Mr. Knightley to transform their familial relationship from brother- and sister-in-law to husband and wife. In Radcliffe’s fiction, the protagonists’ wedding usually signifies their freedom from the villain’s power, and, in *Emma*, it also represents a liberation but one that cannot entirely dispel Mr. Woodhouse’s tyranny.

Imagining matches in *Emma* shows how the characters repeatedly dramatize Hume’s assertion that “fictions” routinely inform beliefs.⁷⁶³ In his essay “Of Miracles,” Hume observes that stories inspired by matchmaking possess a kinship with reports of supernatural events in deriving their power to elicit belief from the same narrative appeal:

The strong propensity of mankind to the extraordinary and marvelous . . . [informs] our natural way of thinking, even with regard to the most common and most credible events. There is no kind of report, which rises so easily, and spreads so quickly, especially in country places and provincial towns, as those concerning marriages; insomuch that two young persons of equal condition never see each other twice, but the whole neighborhood immediately join them together.⁷⁶⁴

Hume’s comparison points to a correspondence between Austen’s novel and Gothic romance in suggesting that envisioning marriages in *Emma* is analogous to seeing ghosts in Radcliffe’s romance. In *Emma*, almost all of the conjectures about marriage are overturned by the disclosure

⁷⁶² Austen, *Emma*, 95.

⁷⁶³ Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, 198-99.

⁷⁶⁴ Hume, *Inquiry*, 125-26.

of Frank and Jane's engagement and the revelations that follow in its wake. When *Emma*'s narratives turn out to be fictions, they operate in a fashion similar to Radcliffe's supernatural explained by elucidating for both characters and readers the ways in which their powers of invention have contributed to creating events.⁷⁶⁵

In *Emma*, Austen transposes the Gothic to the prosaic, as she enlists and reworks Radcliffe's romance to repeatedly dramatize the Humean concept of how the desire to impose order on experience harnesses "the creative power of the mind" to shape belief.⁷⁶⁶ Austen populates her novel with "a wide cast of imaginists" and "is out to show that her reader is an imaginist too."⁷⁶⁷ In revealing to readers their own quixotic tendencies through her adaptation of the Gothic mystery story, Austen creates in *Emma* a novel that incorporates a chief feature of the unorthodox quixote story. Austen's narrative and its effects express what Gordon describes as key aspects of the nontraditional variation, "a model of perception that acknowledges the subject's *activity* in making the very world he or she seems to find," a concept more in keeping with postenlightenment thought than with the prevailing epistemology of Austen's own era.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁵ Here, I'm extending Peter Otto's point about *Udolpho* when he says that the explained supernatural reveals to Emily and the reader "just how active [their] imaginations have been," by illuminating their participation in "constructing events." "Inside the Imagination-Machines of Gothic Fiction," in *Minds, Bodies, Machines, 1770-1930*, ed. Deirdre Coleman and Hilary Fraser (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 34.

⁷⁶⁶ Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 84.

⁷⁶⁷ Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, 199.

⁷⁶⁸ Gordon, *The Practice of Quixoticism*, 6-7.

Both *Emma* and *Northanger Abbey* reflect Kroeber's concept of how "in the history of modern fiction, realistic novels . . . incorporate the new dimensions of reality explored by the immediately preceding romances."⁷⁶⁹ In doing so, they dramatize what Levine identifies as a key aspect of literary realism, a "flexibility" that allows it to accommodate cultural changes which reflect shifting "concept[s] of the real."⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁹ Kroeber, *Styles of Fictional Structure: The Art of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971), 118.

⁷⁷⁰ Levine, "Literary Realism Reconsidered," 16, 31.

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