Jane Austen and her Publishers: *Northanger Abbey* and the Publishing Context of the Early Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

In this essay, I consider the publication context of *Northanger Abbey*, focussing in particular on the pressures exerted by the literary marketplace, and Austen's alertness to it, on that novel. Beginning with a discussion of Austen's interactions with the two publishing firms which failed to publish her works, Cadell & Davies and Crosby & Co, I then consider the changes in places, manners, books and opinions that occurred between the novel's first conception in 1797-8, and its final publication in December of 1817. Placing *Northanger Abbey*'s literary allusions in the context of the changes in the literary marketplace through the three decades of its production, I suggest that some of the novel's tonal oddities, and its relative unpopularity with its contemporary readers and reviewers are a direct result of Benjamin Crosby's decision not to publish the novel then known as 'Susan' in 1803.

Essay

In the 'Author's Advertisement' to *Northanger Abbey,* Jane Austen noted ruefully that the work had been sold for publication in 1803, but that the publisher had 'proceeded no farther' in the business. The thirteen years that had then passed, Austen worried, might have made some parts of the work 'comparatively obsolete', since 'during that period, places, manners, books and opinions have undergone considerable changes.'[1] In this essay, I will consider the pressures exerted by the literary marketplace, and Austen's alertness to it, on *Northanger Abbey*. In so doing I will suggest that the complicated composition and publication history of *Northanger Abbey* may go some way to explaining the novel's relative lack of popularity with contemporary readers and reviewers, as well as some of its oddities of tone.

I will begin with a brief description of Jane Austen's interactions with her 'non-publishers', as Antony Mandal describes them in his excellent *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author* (2007)). Austen began her career as a professional author with two publishing failures, and it is my contention that these two failures coloured her impressions of the literary marketplace in important ways. In 1797, her father, George Austen, offered the novel *First Impressions* (later to become *Pride and Prejudice*) to the publisher Cadell & Davies, presumably on Jane Austen's behalf. He described it as 'a Manuscript Novel, comprised in three Vols. about the length of Miss Burney's Evelina'.[2] It was rejected, sight unseen, and no reason was given. Cadell & Davies were a big name publisher, 'the highest aristocracy of the Trade', as Theodore Basterman puts it, and in approaching them, George Austen demonstrated both a remarkable confidence in his daughter's abilities, and a total

[1] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; first published 1818), p.1. Hereafter *Northanger Abbey*.
[2] George Holbert Tucker, *History of Jane Austen's Family* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1998; first published 1983 as *A Goodly Heritage*), p.34.

failure to understand the dynamics of the publishing market.[3] Cadell & Davies did publish novels – and had been very successful in promoting novels by eminent authors such as Frances Burney, Dr John Moore, Ann Radcliffe and Charlotte Smith – but they very rarely invested in unknown authors, and fiction 'formed only a minor part of their literary investment'.[4] It was perhaps not surprising that they showed no interest in the manuscript of a novel recommended to them by an obscure Hampshire clergyman. It is also possible that the mention of Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778) backfired. By 1797, the reference to an already old-fashioned epistolary novel could hardly have been a selling point for a firm that prided itself on its forward-looking business model.

The Austens learned their lesson from Cadell & Davies, and in 1803, when Austen approached Crosby & Co, this time through her brother Henry's man of business, William Seymour, she had learned enough to offer her novel 'Susan' (later *Northanger Abbey*) to a publisher whose main business was in novels, and in particular in the kind of novels that sold well to circulating libraries. As Antony Mandal points out, Crosby & Co was 'the fourth most prolific publisher of novels during the 1800s, and, despite ceasing operation in 1814, the seventh during the 1810s'.[5] He describes Crosby's output as 'consisting typically of sentimental romances and Gothic tales especially during the 1790s and late 1800s'[6]. Crosby was, in fact, the ideal publisher for the novel that would become *Northanger Abbey*.

However, although Jane Austen sold 'Susan' to Crosby & Co, in the spring of 1803, for the price of £10, for reasons unknown, he never brought it out, despite having advertised it. Six years later, in April of 1809, Austen wrote to Crosby & Co, using the pseudonym 'MAD', and asking why the novel had never appeared in print, 'tho an early publication was stipulated for at the time of Sale'. Offering to supply another copy of the manuscript if the original had been lost, she told Crosby that if he did not respond, she would feel herself 'at liberty to secure the publication of my work, by applying elsewhere'.[7] Richard Crosby (either the younger brother or son of Benjamin Crosby, the senior partner) replied three days later acknowledging that his firm had bought a novel named 'Susan' and paid £10 for it, but claiming that 'there was not any time stipulated for its publication, neither are we bound to publish it'. He added, 'should you or anyone else we shall take proceedings to stop the sale', and offered her the manuscript back 'for the same as we paid for it' (*Letters*, p.175).[8]

There the matter rested, perhaps because Austen could not at that time command the £10 needed to buy the manuscript back, until the spring of 1816, when Henry Austen bought back the manuscript of 'Susan' for his sister. She revised it, giving it the new title of 'Catherine', probably because another novel called *Susan* had been published in 1809. She intended then

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[3] *The Publishing Firm of Cadell & Davies: Select Correspondence and Accounts 1793-1836*, ed. Theodore Besterman (London: Oxford University Press/ Humphrey Milford, 1938), p.viii.
[4] Antony Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2007), p. 59.
[5] *Ibid*, p. 66.
[6] *Ibid*, p.67.
[7] *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.174. Hereafter *Letters.*
[8] For a much fuller discussion of Austen's interactions with Crosby & Co, see A. A. Mandal, 'Making Austen MAD: Benjamin Crosby and the Non-Publication of *Susan'*, *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 57, No. 231 (Sep., 2006), 507-525.

to offer it for publication, but she was concurrently working on the first draft of *Persuasion*, already beginning to feel the effects of the illness that would eventually kill her in July of 1817, and dealing with the fallout of the failure of her brother Henry's bank. Henry – or one of his representatives– usually acted as her agent in negotiations with publishers, and it is probable that he was simply too occupied with this crisis in his own affairs to spare the time to offer the manuscript to another publisher. Or it is also possible that, while revising the text and writing the Advertisement, Austen experienced a lack of confidence in the work, and decided not to publish it. Whatever may be the case, she wrote to her niece Fanny Knight in March of 1817 that 'Miss Catherine is put upon the Shelve for the present, and I do not know that she will ever come out' (*Letters*, p.333). *Northanger Abbey* was finally published posthumously, by John Murray (who had also published Austen's *Emma* in 1816, and a second edition of *Mansfield Park* the previous year), in December of 1817. It appeared as a four-volume set with *Persuasion*, with a 'Biographical Notice' by Henry Austen attached, and a publication date of 1818 on the title page.

A number of previous critics have suggested that Crosby failed to publish *Susan* because to publish such a parody would potentially have soured the market for 'true' Gothic fictions and thus spoiled sales of his other works.[9] This seems improbable, given that so many Gothic parodies already existed (see below), and despite critics' and reviewers' regular denigration of the genre, sales of Gothic novels in fact remained fairly robust until at least the 1810s. Mandal argues convincingly that the reason for the non-publication of *Susan* was, instead, Crosby's financial difficulties, brought about by the acrimonious dissolution of his partnership with another publisher, J. F. Hughes. He suggests that the £10 paid for *Susan* may have seemed a 'fair sacrifice' when set against the £150 or so that it would have cost to produce 'at a troublesome time'.[10] Nonetheless, Crosby's failure to publish *Susan* in 1803 clearly affected Austen's confidence in the work, reflected in the tone of the Advertisement, and I would argue that it was also responsible for some of the novel's slight oddities of tone, discussed further below.

In many ways, Austen was right to feel uneasy about the changes in 'places, manners, books and opinions' that had taken place during the nearly 20 years (*Northanger Abbey* was first drafted between 1798 and the winter of 1799) between the conception and the 1816 revision of her work. [11] I will return to 'books', as the central theme of this essay, shortly, but let us begin with considering why she might have felt anxious about 'places'. Austen's novel is set firmly and solidly in Bath, making use of real street names and recognisable geographical features, such as the Pump Rooms and Assembly Rooms, Beechen Hill, Brock Street and Milsom Street. Bath was a town that, in 1797, when Austen first visited it, remained a popular resort for the genteel classes, although its star had first begun to vane in the 1780s. But by 1816 it had been almost totally eclipsed by Brighton, where the Prince Regent's Royal

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[9] See, for example, Jane Aiken Hodge, *Only a Novel: The Double Life of Jane Austen* (London: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1972), p.85; Park Honan, *Jane Austen: Her Life* (London: Ballantine Books, 1997; first published 1987), p. 384; and Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 144.

[10] *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, p. 71.

[11] While attempts have been made to date the composition to as early as 1794 (see C.S. Emden, 'The Composition of *Northanger Abbey*', *Review of English Studies* 19/75 (August, 1968), 279-87), I am here following the chronology established by Deirdre Le Faye on the basis of Cassandra Austen's memorandum of the dates of composition of her sister's novels. Cassandra dated the work as 1798-99, and Le Faye narrows this further to between August 1798 and June 1799 (see *Family Record*, pp. xxii- xxix).

Pavilion acted as the unofficial court of the Regency. As both Janine Barchas and Jocelyn Harris have argued, Jane Austen followed Royal scandals with interest, and commented, both directly and allusively, on the Prince Regent's actions in her novels and letters.[12] Under these circumstances, it would have been impossible for her to miss the growing importance of Brighton in his life, and thus in the fashionable life of the nation. In addition to her knowledge of the Prince Regent's affairs, Austen had a keen sense of the levels of competition between resort towns, as shown in her last, unfinished, novel, *Sanditon*, and her eye for the fine gradations of geographical fashion is also a hallmark of *Persuasion*, where the differences between Camden Place and Westgate Buildings are so snobbishly articulated by Sir Walter Elliot. To someone so alert to the resonances of place, the shifts in fashion that had made Bath the preserve of elderly invalids rather than dashing young heroes, might well have led her to feel that even her most naïve of heroines would have preferred a visit to Brighton.

'Opinions' – by which I think Austen means primarily political options – had shifted radically from the 1790s. The early 1790s were remarkable for freedom of opinion, in many regards. In that decade, a number of respectable writers supported the political movements that emerged to urge parliamentary reform. Some of these movements were organised and supported mainly by skilled craftsmen and labourers; others were formed by intellectuals and political elites. They pursued political objectives drawn directly from French examples, and wanted to replace royal and aristocratic rule with representative government based on ideas of the inalienable rights of man. Radical political opinion was discussed and debated everywhere, including in respectable Tory families like Jane Austen's own.[13] But from about 1795 onwards, the government of William Pitt the Younger enacted a series of increasingly repressive legislative acts that curtailed the freedoms of speech, movement and assembly. From 1794, radical leaders could be arrested without trial, for example, and in 1795 further laws were enacted that redefined the law of treason and made it almost impossible to hold public meetings in support of parliamentary reform. Pitt's attempts to repress support for reform succeeded, at least on the surface. Britain was at war with France from 1793 to 1815, with one brief intermission in 1802-3, for the Peace of Amiens. Throughout the remainder of the wars with France, support among all ranks in society for what was increasingly seen as a patriotic war helped the government's popularity, and radical political opinions were widely considered to be pro-French and hence treasonable. Disaffected radicals were thus driven underground, and radical opinions no longer debated at Tory dinner tables.

Not unrelated to the changes in political opinion outlined above, Jane Austen was right to perceive a substantial change in public 'manners'. Between 1797 and 1816, the manners of the court of George III had given way to those of his son, the Prince Regent. The extended war with France, the influence of Anti-Jacobin, anti-slavery and Evangelical forces in both politics and literature, as well as the changes in fashion attendant on all of these, had given a new flavour to manners, both public and private. So public taste in 'places' 'opinions' and

[12] See Janine Barchas, *Matters of Fact in Jane Austen: History, Location, and Celebrity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), and Jocelyn Harris, *Satire, Celebrity and Politics in Jane Austen* (Lewisberg PA: Bucknell University Press, 2017), *passim.*

[13] See Peter Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), for further discussion of the extent to which the Austen family enjoyed debating controversial issues in the 1790s.

'manners', had indeed shifted, and Austen, acutely attuned to the nuances of the literary marketplace, and determined to gain both 'praise' and 'pewter' for her books, was too astute not to have both realised this and worried about the effects it might have on the reception of her book (*Letters*, p.287).

With regards to 'books', of all her novels, *Northanger Abbey* is the most overtly intertextual, presenting a lengthy and sustained parody of the Gothic genre, and explicitly naming the books that had been most popular in the late 1790s. Of the seven 'horrid' novels recommended by Isabella Thorpe, for example, all are published between 1794 and 1798. Catherine Morland's beloved *Mysteries of Udolpho* was published in 1794, and the vogue for Radcliffe's works belongs squarely to the 1790s. By the early 1800s, so many writers had jumped on the Gothic bandwagon that literary reviewers rejected Gothic novels almost out of hand, and parodies of the genre that mocked its sensationalist tropes were popular as early as the latter 1790s. Key parodies of that period include William Beckford's *Modern Novel Writing* (1796) and *Azemia* (1797), F. C. Patrick's *More Ghosts!* (1798), and *The New Monk* (1798) by one 'R.S.', a hilarious re-writing of John Thorpe's favourite novel, M.G. Lewis's Gothic shocker *The Monk* (1796), that sets it within the context of 1790s Methodism. Another source of opinion about the Gothic in the period was the periodical culture of review, in which so many critics parodied Gothic fictions in order to make their point that this was a moribund, highly repetitive genre. The many 'recipes for writing a novel' in contemporary reviews (and echoed in Jane Austen's own 'Plan of a Novel') are a trope that suggests that the composition of Gothic was a rote and formulaic activity not unlike the baking of a cake.[14] Mary Alcock's 1799 poem 'A Receipt [*sic*] for Writing a Novel' (1799) makes the same point. The poem begins:

> Would you a favrite novel make,
> Try hard your readers heart to break
> For who is pleasd, if not tormented?
> (Novels for that were first invented.)
> Gainst nature, reason, sense, combine
> To carry on your bold design,
> And those ingredients I shall mention,
> Compounded with your own invention,
> Im sure will answer my intention.

Alcock continues by recommending 'a copious share' of 'horror', 'Hysteric fits at least a score', as well as 'fainting fits', 'duels', 'sighs and groans', storms, ghosts and carriage accidents, as well as many other familiar Gothic 'terrors'.[15]

In 1797-8, then, Austen's parody must have seemed fresh and amusing (as well as bang on-trend), but even by 1803, when she sold 'Susan' to Crosby & Co, Gothic parodies might have

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[14] Jane Austen's 'Plan of a Novel, according to hints from various quarters' is a hilarious pastiche of advice given to Austen from various friends, correspondents and family members about how she might improve her novels. The original manuscript is in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. It is reproduced in Jane Austen, *Later Manuscripts*, ed. Janet Todd and Linda Bree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 226-9. The editors date 'Plan of a Novel' tentatively to between November 1815 and April 1816. It is likely, therefore, to be contemporaneous with the period when Austen was revising *Northanger Abbey* for the last time.

[15] Mary Alcock, 'A Receipt for Writing a Novel' (1799), in *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.466.

begun to seem an outworn theme. However, the high point of parodies of the Gothic was in fact the period between the sale of 'Susan' and the publication of *Northanger Abbey.*[16] The popularity of Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine; or, Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader,* published in 1813, with further editions in 1814 and 1815, in particular, might have given Austen pause for thought. Jane Austen had read *The Heroine* in 1814, when it first came out, writing to Cassandra that it was 'a delightful burlesque, particularly on the Radcliffe style', and that it had 'diverted me exceedingly' (*Letters,* pp. 255-6). As the title suggests, Barrett's novel follows the adventures of a female protagonist who reads too many novels. The 'heroine' of the title, Cherry Wilkinson, imagines herself to be living in a world of Gothic horrors, and makes a series of faulty judgements based on this misperception. The similarities with the basic plot structure of *Northanger Abbey* are too obvious to miss, and I think it highly likely that Austen had *The Heroine* in mind in 1816, and that the first pages of *Northanger Abbey*, with their almost over-written arch and ironic insistence on the disjunction between Catherine Morland's self-perception as 'an heroine' and her actual character and situation were re-written in that period, and owe something to her awareness of Barrett's work, and her anxieties that her own might seem too close to it (*Northanger Abbey*, p.5 and ff).

For all the legitimate concerns about opinions, manners and places articulated in Austen's preface, then, it is the worry about books that seems to me the most essential. The novels of Austen's youth permeate – indeed saturate – *Northanger Abbey*, but by the end of 1817, when the work was first introduced to the public, many of these were deeply unfashionable or, perhaps worse, forgotten. And because *Northanger Abbey* engages so intensely with those works – and assumes a deep and comfortable familiarity with them on the part of the reader – it is entirely understandable that Austen would have worried that readers without that familiarity might not have known what to make of her novel. For the remainder of this essay, then, I will therefore focus in more depth on the novel's intertextual aspects.

Northanger Abbey explicitly names seventeen works, and quotes directly from six others.[17] There are also two important discussions of the relative values of particular genres (novels and history), and more general allusions – both ironic, as in the case of *The Heroine*, discussed above, and serious – to a number of well-known works of literature dispersed throughout the novel. In every case, Austen's deployment of the work of literature serves to

[16] Gothic parodies of the period in addition to *Northanger Abbey* and *The Heroine* include Bellin de la Liborlière's *La Nuit anglaise* (1799), which was translated into English by Matthew Lewis's sister as *The Hero* in 1817, Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) and the 'Norman' cantos of Byron's *Don Juan* (published slightly later than our period, in 1823).

[17] Austen names Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), Frances Burney's *Cecilia* (1782) and *Camilla* (1796), Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), 'The Hare and Many Friends', published in John Gay's *Fables* (1727-38), Ann Radcliffe's, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Italian* (1797), Henry Mackenzie's *The Mirror* (1779-80), Eliza Parsons's *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793) and *The Mysterious Warning* (1796), Peter Teuthold's, *The Necromancer; or, The Tale of the Black Forest* (1794), Regina Maria Roche's *Clermont* (1798), Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), Eleanor Sleath's, *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798), Peter Will's, *The Horrid Mysteries:a Story. From the German of the Marquis of Grosse* (1796), and *The Spectator.* She quotes from Thomas Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard' (1751), James Thompson's *The Seasons* (1730), Alexander Pope's 'Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady' (1717), and William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1603), *Othello* (1603) and *Twelfth Night* (1601-2).

tell us something about the characters involved in the discussion of that work, or about the narrative voice's opinion of the work. Austen's use of books, in other words, functions as a kind of shorthand, evoking the reputation of the book in the service of her plot or character development. The cultural resonances of the books thus deployed are therefore clearly vital to our understanding of what is going on in *Northanger Abbey.*

This strategy is encapsulated in a lovely comic scene between Catherine Morland, and her would-be lover, John Thorpe. Catherine begins by asking if Thorpe has ever read *Udolpho.* The scene continues:

"Udolpho! Oh, Lord! Not I; I never read novels; I have something else to do

Catherine, humbled and ashamed, was going to apologize for her question, but he prevented her by saying, "Novels are all so full of nonsense and stuff; there has not been a tolerably decent one come out since Tom Jones, except the Monk; I read that t'other day; but as for all the others, they are the stupidest things in creation."

"I think you must like Udolpho, if you were to read it; it is so very interesting."

"Not I, faith! No, if I read any, it shall be Mrs. Radcliff's; her novels are amusing enough; they are worth reading; some fun and nature in *them.*"

"Udolpho was written by Mrs. Radcliff," said Catherine, with some hesitation, from the fear of mortifying him.

"No sure; was it? Aye, I remember, so it was. I was thinking of that other stupid book, written by that woman they make such a fuss about, she who married the French emigrant."

"I suppose you mean Camilla?"

"Yes, that's the book; such unnatural stuff! – An old man playing at see-saw! I took up the first volume once and looked it over, but I soon found it would not do." (*Northanger Abbey*, p.43)

The literary works mentioned here are Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), and Frances Burney's *Camilla* (1796), and the key point to note is that John Thorpe exposes his ignorance, poor taste and stupidity with every line. When he fails to recognise *Udolpho* as a work by Ann Radcliffe while simultaneously praising her books, it suggests that he has never read a book by 'the great enchantress', knowing her only by reputation.[18] This clearly makes him unsuitable as a mate for Catherine, whose adoration of the author has been made abundantly clear. Moreover, his liking for *Tom Jones* and *The Monk*, both works with a reputation for libertinism, reveals his moral shadiness. His failure to appreciate *Camilla*, a work which the narrative voice describes, only two chapters earlier, as being one 'in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language,' speaks for itself (*Northanger Abbey*, p.31). In this case fully to understand the ways in which the allusions work, it is necessary to know that *The Monk* is a work of violent horror, including mob violence, ghostly nuns, murder, sorcery and incest. A huge popular success on first publication, it was

[18] See Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), for a discussion of Radcliffe's astonishing contemporary popularity.

scathingly reviewed by S.T. Coleridge in the *Critical Review*, in which he described it as 'a poison for youth, and a provocative for the debauchee'. [19] It was, he said, a novel 'which if a parent saw in the hands of a son or daughter he might reasonably turn pale' (*ibid*). *Camilla*, on the other hand, was a critically-respected and morally unexceptionable work of domestic fiction by an author whom even those commentators who disliked novels on principle could recommend. Published by the reputable Cadell & Davies (Austen's first rejecters), *Camilla* was one of the foremost novels of the 1790s. John Thorpe's rejection of *Camilla*'s domestic realism as 'unnatural' is decidedly ironic when read alongside his preference for a work of Gothic horror, whose very mode depends on the genuinely 'unnatural' – ghosts, incest and sorcery. When Thorpe is described, a couple of sentences later, as 'the discerning and unprejudiced reader of *Camilla*' (p.44), the reader has no trouble in recognising the scathing irony of this description, and rejecting Thorpe accordingly. It takes Catherine, whose experience of the world is so very limited, a little longer to take John Thorpe's measure, but the reader is, from this moment on, never in doubt of his essential badness.

It is a mark of Austen's brilliance as a writer that the strategy works perfectly well to demarcate character, even if one knows nothing about any of the texts discussed – but it is also a moment of tonal oddity, where the time-lag between *Northanger Abbey*'s composition and publication is most obvious. To a reader of 1818, Catherine's obsession with *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and Thorpe's with *The Monk* (as well as Isabella's with the seven 'horrid' novels of the 1790s), would have seemed somewhat odd. While it is entirely probable that the old-fashioned Mrs Morland's favourite novel could remain *Sir Charles Grandison*, published in 1753 (an old-fashioned book for an old-fashioned mother), it seems much less probable that the fashionable young people of the novel would still have been discussing works that had been 'the' novels of twenty years earlier. Since the anonymous publication of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* in 1814, the hot topic in the literary world had been its authorship, and the publication of 5 further 'Waverley' novels (*Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Antiquary* (1816), *Tales of My Landlord* (1816), *Rob Roy* (1818) and the second series of *Tales of My Landlord* (1818)) in quick succession between 1814 and 1818 had made the historical novel the fashionable sub-genre of the Regency period, entirely displacing the Gothic. But to have revised *Northanger Abbey* accordingly, in 1816, would have been completely impossible. Although it is relatively easy to imagine a dialogue between Catherine and Isabella where they breathlessly debate the identity of the 'Wizard of the North' in place of their conversation about the seven 'horrid' novels, so much of both the novel's comedy and indeed its very structure depends on its parody of Gothic atmosphere and Gothic tropes that a further revision to take account of literary trends is unimaginable. Austen was wise not to attempt it, but such moments in *Northanger Abbey* give credence to the concerns articulated in the Advertisement.

Another example of Austen's strategy of using books as a shorthand to delineate character and compatibility is visible in Catherine's interactions with Henry Tilney, and demonstrates the same slight time-lag problem. Where John Thorpe clearly despises good literature, and will not take the trouble to read novels that do not immediately appeal to his thirst for the vulgar and sensational, Henry Tilney has read, as he says, 'hundreds and hundreds' of them (p.108). Earlier in the same chapter, he tells Catherine that 'the person, be it gentleman or

[19] S.T. Coleridge, 'Review of Matthew G. Lewis, *The Monk', The Critical Review* (February, 1797), 194-200 (p. 197).

lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid. I have read all of Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and most of them with great pleasure' (pp.107-8). He goes on to tell Catherine, "Do not imagine that you can cope with me in knowledge of Julias and Louisas," and backs up his claim with an appropriate simile, drawn from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* itself (p.108). Henry's deep and affectionate knowledge of 'Mrs Radcliffe's works' – the books that Catherine loves – bodes well for them as a couple. However, it also marks him, in 1818, as a very unfashionable young man (which Henry clearly is not meant to be). Here, Henry Tilney refers to a long tradition of sentimental and Gothic novels with which readers of the 1790s and early 1800s would have been familiar, but readers of 1818 would have felt were rather dated.[20] While Julia and Louisa remained popular names for heroines into the Regency period (Austen herself uses both names, in *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* respectively, and, indeed, an anonymous novel entitled *Julia of Ardenfield* was published in 1816), the sentimental novels in which such heroines belonged were primarily fashionable between the 1740s and the 1790s. By 1818 tastes had shifted, and the success of anti-Jacobin novels and conduct books, such as Hannah More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1798), which equated liking for sentimental novels with dangerous pro-French Radical ideas, had produced some quite different associations in the readers of the Regency period. Expressing a liking for sentimental novels in 1797, or even in 1803, was fairly unexceptionable, even to respectable Tory families. But, by 1818, to do so was to align oneself strongly and conclusively with the revolutionary political thinking of the 1790s.

These (among many other) intertextual traces of Crosby's decision in 1803 not to publish the novel then known as 'Susan' thus mark *Northanger Abbey* in ways that only an understanding of the publishing trends of the three decades of its composition and publication can really illuminate. With such an understanding, we can imagine ourselves back into the mindset of a contemporary reader or reviewer, and begin to understand why it was so much less popular than her other novels. Criticisms of *Northanger Abbey* as uneven, erratic, or rough, for example, owe much to the disjointed nature of its composition, while the responses of readers such as Maria Edgeworth and Henry Crabb Robinson, who found the novel disappointing in comparison to Austen's other mature works, become more explicable to modern readers, for whom the nuances of literary reputation in the period are now largely lost. It is impossible to know whether, had she lived, Austen would have consigned 'Miss Catherine' permanently 'to the Shelve', or whether she would eventually have risked its publication, as her brother did. The success of later negotiations with publishers who did value her works – Thomas Egerton and John Murray – must surely have taken the sting off her earlier failures with Cadell & Davies and Crosby & Co, and encouraged her to believe that her books were indeed worth both 'praise' and 'pewter'. The sales of Austen's books in the past 200 years have certainly proven Egerton and Murray right, and Cadell and Crosby wrong.

[20] As Barbara Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye point out, 'within the previous twenty years, these names had appeared in such titles as *Julia, a Novel; Julia Benson; Julia de Gramont; Julia de Roubigné, Julia de Saint Pierre; Julia Stanley; Louisa, a Novel; Louisa, a Sentimental Novel; Louisa Forrester; Louisa Matthews; Louisa, or the Cottage on the Moor; Louisa, or, the Reward of an Affectionate Daughter; Louisa Wharton.*' (*Northanger Abbey*, p.330). In addition to these titles, one might add the heroines of such novels as Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* (Louisa Dudley), and Ann Radcliffe's own *A Sicilian Romance* (Julia Mazzini).

Glossary

Intertextuality

Circulating Library

Sentimental Novel

Gothic Novel

Jacobin Novel

Anti-Jacobin Novel

Evangelical

Radical

Tory