

A YOUNG LADY, touring a country house, comes face to face with a family portrait. She studies it, bringing to bear memory, tracing resemblance, inferring character. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the scene ratifies the heroine's development, her new willingness to confront a variety of viewpoints, including a new perspective on the hero. Austen repeats this evocative scene, with a difference. Like Elizabeth Bennet, who "walk[s] . . . in quest of the only face whose features would be known to her," stands "several minutes before the picture in earnest contemplation, and return[s] to it again," Catherine Morland is also drawn to a portrait that she "contemplate[s] . . . with much emotion; and, but for a yet stronger interest, would have left . . . unwillingly." But in *Northanger Abbey* the likeness that attracts the heroine is not that of the hero. Catherine Morland, moreover, is no Elizabeth Bennet.

Elizabeth's guide is Pemberley's housekeeper, Mrs. Reynolds; her name, pointing back to the eminent painter Sir Joshua Reynolds, playfully underscores the significance of the portrait. Elizabeth's attention is "arrested" by "a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy," a portrait "taken in his father's lifetime," before his untimely accession to the responsibilities of a great estate and a young sister. Elizabeth places this view of his past self in connection to her experience with him—and simultaneously adjusts her understanding of that experience. Darcy's portrait engages its viewer "with such a smile over the face, as she remembered to have sometimes seen, when he looked at her," an image that suggests a change in her own memory. Confronting the portrait, Elizabeth refigures its subject: "as she stood before the canvas, . . . and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression." Memory and perception both reveal a generosity that Elizabeth, in her "uncommonly clever" and "decided dislike" of Darcy, has not previously displayed. The scene resonates, not least because Elizabeth and the Gardiners immediately walk out of the house to confront the portrait's original: a new stage in the relationship begins.

By contrast, Catherine's interaction with Mrs. Tilney's portrait is easily overlooked. The portrait, which Eleanor has earlier described as "very like," hangs in Eleanor's bedchamber and "represent[s] a very lovely woman, with a mild and pensive countenance, justifying, so far, the expectations of its new observer." Catherine's expectations govern her reading of this apparently conventional image; she works to fit it into the conventional wis-

dom she's acquired:

Catherine had depended upon meeting with features, air, complexion that should be the very counterpart, the very image, if not of Henry's, of Eleanor's;—the only portraits of which she had been in the habit of thinking, bearing always an equal resemblance of mother and child. A face once taken was taken for generations. But here she was obliged to look and consider and study for a likeness.

Even as Catherine looks and considers and studies, her understanding fails. In reading the deceased Mrs. Tilney *only* as the victim of the gothic villain, in seeking out only the pleasing terrors of that narrative, Catherine misses the true significance of the female gothic, in which the heroine, in Claire Kahane's words, confronts "the spectral presence of the dead-undead mother" as a sign of her own problematic femininity. More important, Catherine also overlooks the more homely and very real sufferings of Eleanor, whose struggles against loss and loneliness Catherine (like Marianne Dashwood) fails to see. Catherine's "stronger interest" is Mrs. Tilney's chamber, which she expects will reveal evidence of the General's crimes. Unlike Elizabeth Bennet's dynamic encounter with a portrait, Catherine's presents her as limited in sympathetic imagination. Jane Austen in this portrait scene very subtly depicts her heroine's need for growth.

Coming to *Northanger Abbey* with the certainty—or even the suspicion—that it doesn't measure up to *Pride and Prejudice*, or to Austen's other novels, we risk falling into the same trap as the happily naïve Catherine. JASNA's 2010 AGM, "Jane Austen and the Abbey: Mystery, Mayhem, and Muslin in Portland," organized by Susan Schwartz, Pauline Beard, Frank McClanahan, and Mary Margaret Benson, countered this danger with its wealth of sessions ranging from gothic novels to currency crises, theatrical fashion to clerical absenteeism. A selection of these diverse perspectives, revealing the richness of Austen's underappreciated novel, appears here and in *Persuasions On-Line*. The Miscellany provides an equally rich variety of approaches to Austen's artistry as well as to how and why we—and others—read her.

As ever, my deepest gratitude is due to our contributors, to the members of the Editorial Board for their disciplined and generous readings, and to JASNA's outgoing president, Marsha Huff, for her energetic commitment to *Persuasions* and *Persuasions On-Line*.