"Let me go, Mr. Thorpe; Isabella, do not hold me!": *Northanger Abbey* and the Domestic Gothic

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Austen's *Northanger Abbey* is the most exuberant and perhaps the most daring of her adult works, combining numerous literary genres, parody, and humor. However, much of Austen's parody, and the social commentary it veils, is subversive and can only be seen after several readings, for Austen delights in tricking her readers as much as she does Catherine. This duplicitous humor becomes evident when comparing three scenes focused on maternal concern. The first scene presents Mrs. Morland as the anti-gothic or anti-sentimental mother, advising Catherine prior to her trip to Bath. Although Mrs. Morland, as Austen ironically tries to convince us, is "supposed to be" filled with "anxiety, . . . [a] thousand alarming presentiments of evil," and "sadness," she remains disappointingly calm, admonishing Catherine only to keep her throat wrapped warmly and her expenditures written down (18-19). Ignorant of "lords and baronets," and their "mischievousness," she "was wholly unsuspicious of danger to her daughter from their machinations" (18). Austen intends us here to laugh *with* Mrs. Morland, for we suspect that Catherine will not be subject to "violence" by wicked "noblemen" (18). But what we and Mrs. Morland do *not* know, though we find out later on, is that Catherine *will* be subject to violence from other unscrupulous men. Thus, what appears to be Mrs. Morland's common-sense practicality reveals a lack of maternal knowledge, and hence concern about the dangers that Catherine will face, a lack that Austen underlines when Catherine returns from Northanger, dejected and miserable. When neither of her parents can guess the cause, Austen draws

more censorious, serious attention to their ignorance: "They never once thought of her heart, which, for the parents of a young lady of seventeen, just returned from her first excursion from home, was odd enough!" (235).

These episodes contrast with and are subtly referenced by the scene where Mr. Allen, in *loco parentis*, condemns "'[y]oung men and women driving about the country in open carriages,'" and asks his wife whether she finds "'these kind of projects objectionable'" (104). Her response, humorously and characteristically, focuses on clothes: "'Open carriages are nasty things. A clean gown is not five minutes wear in them. You are splashed getting in and getting out; and the wind takes your hair and your bonnet in every direction'" (104). By this point in the novel, Mrs. Allen's well-known obsession with fashion makes her answer frustrating, as well as funny. *Get a clue*, the reader thinks—and doubtless so do Mr. Allen and Catherine. *Take your mind out of the muslin!*

Although none of the characters, especially Mrs. Allen, realizes it, however, her remarks are spot on. Austen uses clothing in other novels to signal women's loss of virginity. Lydia Bennet, in her letter to Harriet Forster announcing her elopement with Wickham, mentions "'a great slit in [her] worked muslin gown'" (292). Fanny Price urges Maria Bertram at Sotherton not to slip through the iron bars of the locked gate into the ha-ha with Henry Crawford, using the danger to Maria's clothing as an inducement to propriety: "'you will certainly hurt yourself against those spikes—you will tear your gown'" (99). Fanny's warning, which forecasts Maria's future illicit liaison with Henry, includes allusions to phalluses as well as hymens, which would certainly shock her had she realized what she was implying. Mrs. Allen's sartorial concerns symbolize the dangers inherent in a young woman's riding out alone with a man. Such a ride could lead to a girl's losing her virginity, which is protected and signified by the "clean gown." The "splashing" while "getting in . . . and getting out" references the sexual act even more explicitly, with its allusions to the spilling of semen and hymeneal blood. A woman's hair, tonsorial or pubic, would be tangled after such an encounter; the loss or disorder of her bonnet signals the loss of her maidenhead, and would also be a natural result of a sexual encounter, particularly a violent one. Even though presumably most young women kept their virtue during open carriage rides, their disheveled state *after* the ride might well suggest sexual misconduct, and lead to censure. Mr. Allen's vaguely phrased views on the impropriety of open carriage rides, especially his remark that "'it has an odd *appearance*'" (104, emphasis mine), are actually in harmony with the more explicitly stated concerns of his wife. In

composing Mrs. Allen's sartorial objections to open carriage rides, Austen could be alluding to Pope's famous passage in "The Rape of the Lock," when Ariel, predicting some dire affliction to befall Belinda, posits that she might "stain her honor, or her new brocade," and appoints "fifty . . . Sylphs" to guard Belinda's "petticoat" since "Oft have we known that sevenfold fence to fail,/Though stiff with hoops, and armed with ribs of whale" (2: 107, 117-120).

The real genius of these scenes is that no one reading them for the first time recognizes Mrs. Allen's unintentional wisdom or Mrs. Morland's lack of foresight. Austen has tricked her audience into thinking that Mrs. Allen is a vapid, silly woman, so they take nothing she says seriously, even about clothes, when this speech is actually the most useful counsel she gives Catherine. Likewise, Austen presents Mrs. Morland as such a sensible woman that readers fail to see how *in*sensible she is to Catherine's social and sexual vulnerability. Mrs. Allen's accidental advice makes her, for that moment, a better parental figure than the Morlands or even Mr. Allen. The joke is on everyone—except Austen, who, in these scenes and throughout the novel, cleverly casts her characters and her audience into a sophisticated *meta*-parody, seamlessly interwoven with gothic, sentimental, *and* realistic elements. Thus, Catherine's learning to distinguish gothic fantasy from reality, as Margaret Drabble notes (viii), or Austen's using parody as a "tribute," in the Johnsonian sense, to "create and satisfy an interest in [sentimental] conventions," as Everett Zimmerman observes (54-55), reflects but a small portion of the art of *Northanger Abbey*. Austen doesn't simply juxtapose different genre conventions; she blends them into a complex, subtle genre: the domestic gothic. Its purpose is to underscore the realistic, but seemingly innocuous, dangers and misfortunes that beset Catherine and Eleanor. Austen uses the domestic gothic to expose the sexual and social threats that young women face in her society, threats that are made even more alarming by young women's ignorance of or passive acceptance of them.

Catherine, with her naivety, diffidence, and candor, seems unprepared for these difficulties. Her distrust in her own opinions and dependence on those of others lead her astray in Bath and, to a lesser extent, in Northanger, since her extreme innocence exposes her to the intrigues and social pitfalls of Bath. For a young woman like Catherine, who, as Drabble points out, "wishes to please and to do right, but . . . is not sure of the rules . . . , Bath . . . is like a minefield; at any moment she may blow herself up" (xi). As McMaster notes, Catherine is even uncertain if it is permissible for her to laugh at Henry Tilney's imitation of an affected dandy (214). The unspoken but strict social codes of Bath—and

of polite society—are to Catherine as murky and labyrinthine as the passageways of Udolpho are to Emily St. Aubert. Her instincts are generally right, but her female guides—Mrs. Allen and Isabella—are worse than useless, and she often makes choices that could harm her reputation and happiness, especially since Bath is also loaded with sexual "minefields." Austen frequently uses Bath and other watering-places as loci of sexual impropriety. Willoughby seduces Eliza Williams in Bath; and Wickham nearly elopes with Georgiana Darcy in Ramsgate and succeeds with Lydia Bennet in Brighton. Austen's use of resort towns for seductions and abductions reflects their nature and purpose. People traveled to watering-places for pleasure, profit, and spouse-hunting; Bath was especially visited for the latter purpose (Zlotnick 280). Thus, young women in Bath were in danger from those who enjoy using women for financial gain, and sexual pleasure.

Catherine's awareness of "her own ignorance" (92) and lack of trust in her own judgment blunt her ability to penetrate and navigate this maze of manners, as when she tries to apologize to the Tilneys the day after their thwarted walk. Her anguish at appearing to have slighted them results in a "sleepless" night with many "tears" (90), followed by a day in which several futile attempts to explain leave her feeling "humbled" and "miserable" (91-93). Part of her misery comes from her confusion about the *severity* of her mistake: "She knew not how such an offence as her's might be classed by the laws of worldly politeness, to what a degree of unforgivingness it might . . . lead, nor to what rigours of rudeness . . . it might justly make her amenable" (92). Afraid of giving offense, afraid of being angry, Catherine "[takes] to herself all the shame of misconduct, or at least of its appearance, and was only eager for an opportunity of explaining its cause" (93). Catherine's emotions cannot be dismissed as teenage self-dramatization: Henry *is* angry with her until she has explained the situation, so she *does* risk losing his regard; his cold looks at the theatre, combined with Eleanor's not receiving her, convince her that her error was egregious. Catherine's unintentional "breach of propriety" (105) could have resulted in a permanent breach with the Tilneys and perhaps injured her character. Catherine's fears for her reputation are as justified as Emily's fears for her life—and more probable, as a young woman in Regency England had a greater chance of being unjustly maligned than of being murdered. While Catherine's extreme naivety and lack of self-assurance are annoying, they are natural for a girl of seventeen with a pastoral—in both senses of the word—upbringing and a sketchy education. She cannot help but blunder in the big city.

However, Catherine does have powerful defenses. She is open, affectionate, and principled, as Austen informs us (18), and, as Juliet McMaster and Sheila J. Kindred demonstrate, intelligent and discerning. McMaster points out that Catherine "is capable of *thinking* right" (218), and that Henry Tilney teaches her to participate in and enjoy complex conversation, to explore language, and to reflect upon and form her own opinions of others (214-16). Kindred notes that "Austen does show Catherine periodically engaged in reasoned deliberation where she knowingly identifies true premises and makes good inferences based on them" (198), and that Catherine has "standards of morally sound behavior" and "knowingly acts in a way that is consistent with a virtuous form of behavior that is valuable in itself" (199). Learning quickly, she "is clever and thoughtful" (Merrett 222) enough to realize by the second day of their acquaintance "that John Thorpe . . . was quite disagreeable" (69), and by their second drive that he is a liar. She is polite to him only out of respect for James; as she tells Henry Tilney, who is adorably miffed that John was taking her attention away from him at the cotillion ball: "'Mr. Thorpe is such a very particular friend of my brother's, that if he talks to me, I must talk to him again'" (78). She is more gullible for a longer time with Isabella, but Isabella is pretty, ingratiating, and, as Susan Zlotnick points out, often speaks like a heroine from a sentimental novel (283)—and Catherine adores such books.

Catherine's love of the gothic and sentimental, in fact, turns out to be one of her greatest assets, though a liability in the short term. Her obsession with things grand and gothic blinds Catherine to the humbly gothic threats surrounding her. She is so comically absorbed in the possibility of experiencing improbable adventures that she doesn't expect or fails to realize when she experiences ordinary ones. On her journey to Bath she longs for "robbers [and] tempests [to] befriend[] them" (19), but never considers that the real dangers lie in her destination. Because she never knows when she is being menaced in a Gothic or "horrid" manner, she can fight against the menace without fear or intimidation. When she thinks she's erred, she tries to fix her mistakes without hesitation. Because she doesn't recognize when she's in a domestic gothic crisis, her responses are swift and effective, unlike those of gothic heroines, who are often hyper-aware of the people and forces that threaten them. Catherine's ignorance is her salvation, especially when she is sexually threatened, which happens on several occasions. John Dussinger aptly observes that because of "Austen's stress on the landed classes that equated marriage . . . to mainly an enhancement of the family estate, . . . there is at least a residue of sexual violence, if only imagined, toward the woman, in her narratives" (165).

For Catherine, the threat of sexual violence is real, and it comes from the repulsive John Thorpe, who deceives and seduces her—through place, rather than person—in order to abduct her on the abortive drive to Clifton. When Catherine declines to go because of her engagement with the Tilneys, John tricks her into believing they have gone for a drive. He is by turns assertive and ingenuous, making his lies more plausible and getting valuable information about Catherine's feelings. When Catherine says she expects the Tilneys "'soon,'" John boldly contradicts her, then immediately seems less certain: "'Not they indeed. . . . I saw them—does he not drive a phaeton with bright chesnuts?'" (85). Catherine's *actual* uncertainty, "'I *do not know*,'" makes John more confident in his lies: "'Yes, I *know* he does'" (85, emphases mine). Again under the pretense of uncertainty, John follows his assertion with a question: "'You are talking of the man you danced with last night, are not you?'" (85). John wants to ascertain whether it is Miss Tilney alone, or Miss Tilney and her brother, whom Catherine wants to see. He has seen Henry dancing with Catherine the previous night and realizes that he has a rival. Anxious to knock Henry under a bus—or a phaeton—John claims to have seen Henry "'turn up the Lansdown Road,—driving a smart-looking girl,'" and that he "'knew him again directly'" (85).

More powerful than John's lies, though, is his seductive power. He mentions that they will go "'to Blaize Castle'" (84-85); Catherine is intrigued; and John easily leads her into her own imaginary pleasures of the place, inflaming her desire to go:

> "Blaize Castle!" cried Catherine; "what is that?"
> "The finest place in England. . . ."
> "What, is it really a castle, an old castle?"
> "The oldest in the kingdom."
> "But is it like what one reads of?"
> "Exactly—the very same."
> "But now really—are there towers and long galleries?"
> "By dozens."
> "Then I should like to see it. . . ." (85)

John notes Catherine's "passion for ancient edifices" (141) and, with his usual exaggeration, feeds it, turning an eighteenth-century folly into an English Udolpho. When Catherine, wavering, asks whether they might "'go all over [Blaize Castle]? . . . up every staircase, and into every suite of rooms?'" John sinisterly agrees: "'Yes, yes, every *hole and corner*'" (86, emphasis mine). John's response is disturbingly fraught, as the term "hole and corner" refers to

clandestine, especially clandestine sexual, schemes. John diminishes—atypically for him—the putative large spaces of Blaize Castle into small, hidden enclosures: loci for illicit sexual relations and emblems of female genitalia. John would like nothing better than to trap Catherine into a dark corner—and hence into marriage with him.

Even more sinister than John's seduction of Catherine is his abduction of her, since it includes restraint and violence. When Catherine sees Eleanor, whom the bungling John points out to her, she realizes she's been tricked, and, furious at John, "impatiently crie[s]" for him to release her: "'Stop, stop, I will get out this moment and go to them'" (87). John not only refuses, but "lashe[s] his horse into a brisker trot," taking Catherine from Laura Place "into the Market-place" (87). Austen deliberately employs Bath cartology here: Laura Place, the location of some of Bath's most elegant residences, symbolizes the Tilney siblings' gentility and aversion to greed; the vulgar, mercenary John conveys Catherine, whom he desires for her fortune and body, into the marketplace, turning her into a commodity. Catherine's increasing lack of power over her abductor and her own person manifests itself in the less assertive manner in which she speaks to John, and John's increasingly controlling behavior:

> [S]he *intreated* him to stop. "*Pray, pray* stop, Mr. Thorpe.—I cannot go on.—I will not go on. . . ." But Mr. Thorpe only laughed, smacked his whip, encouraged his horse, made odd noises, and drove on; and Catherine, angry and vexed as she was, *having no power of getting away*, was *obliged to give up* the point *and submit.* (87, emphases mine)

Eleanor Ty sees this episode "as a reworking" of a gothic abduction scene: through it Austen highlights the potential cruelty of a patriarchal figure like Thorpe. . . . [H]is wielding of the whip, his glee at her helplessness, his control of the situation reveal Austen's recognition of the ease with which a comic social encounter could turn into a kind of Gothic horror" (251). The encounter never was comic, however; John sets out to deceive Catherine from the moment she refuses to go to Clifton. Austen makes him *seem* a laughable villain with his mediocre looks, clumsy manners, and vulgarity, but these qualities add to his menace. He is rude and unfeeling towards his mother and sisters, showing his lack of respect towards and objectification of all women, upon whose physical appearance he impudently comments when with Catherine. John's physical and social repulsiveness highlights his moral ugliness. His lies, blatant violation of Catherine's wishes, and delight in violating them show him fully capable of coercion and rape. Austen deliberately strips her villain of any

charm, thus stripping away the veneer of romanticism disguising the sordidness of abduction.

Catherine, however, never realizes the gothic nature of her plight; she is "angry and vexed" (87), but not frightened. She accuses John of "'deceiv[ing]'" her and causing the Tilneys to think her "'rude'" (87), but she focuses on his false speech rather than his oppressive actions. Significantly, Catherine's ignorance of the danger she is in helps rather than hinders her. Had she seen herself as a gothic heroine-victim, she would have failed to assert herself; unaware of her victimization, though, she doesn't "spare" John her outraged "reproaches," and for the rest of the drive is aloof and taciturn (87-89). She may be physically in John's power, but she comes into her own psychological agency as the drive progresses. Her "complaisance was no longer what it had been in their former airing. She listened reluctantly, and her replies were short" (88). When John calls James "'a fool for not keeping a horse and gig of his own,'" Catherine defends her brother "warmly" for living within his means; afterwards, "she was less and less disposed either to be agreeable herself, or to find her companion so; and they returned to Pulteney-street without her speaking twenty words" (89). By refusing to be pleasant to John or to let him get away with maligning James, Catherine is asserting her opinions and her independence, unconsciously readying herself for John's next attempt to restrain her, when he and Isabella try to get her to break her renewed engagement with Eleanor in order to go on another drive. They are more desperate now, as the Tilneys constitute a greater threat to their matrimonial schemes.

On this occasion Catherine manifests her increasing, and ungothic, self-confidence and volition. She declares her resolve to keep her engagement, resisting the efforts of the Thorpes, and, what is much harder, of her brother, who ought to be encouraging Catherine, but, duped by Isabella's crocodile tears, tries to guilt her into flouting propriety. When John announces having "'made [her] excuses'" to Eleanor, Catherine, showing complete autonomy, proclaims that she will act upon her intentions and not allow others to control her: "'I *cannot submit* to this. I must run after Miss Tilney directly and set her right'" (100, emphasis mine). Catherine's growing sense of self and her refusal to "submit" to others both frees and entraps her, for, immediately upon her declaration, "Isabella . . . caught hold of one hand; Thorpe of the other; and remonstrances poured in. . . . Even James was quite angry" (100).

Though she sets this gothic episode—thus disguising its nature—on the Crescent in broad daylight, Austen makes Catherine a prisoner. This incident has much in common with the gig scene, but there are disturbing

differences. Catherine is being bodily restrained. Before, she was confined in a rapidly moving vehicle where the probability of injury, were she to alight, was the only force restraining her. Now the force is two people binding her hands; the Thorpes become her gaolers *and* her manacles. More disturbing is James's complicity; he not only *allows* the Thorpes to imprison Catherine, he tacitly encourages it by his angry speeches, and only intervenes *after* Catherine has freed herself: "'Let her go, let her go, if she will go'" (101). James's willingness, through most of this scene, to sacrifice his sister for his sweetheart is too close to that of *Udolpho*'s Madame Cheron for comfort.

Again, Catherine remains ignorant of the "horrid" nature of her dilemma, staying focused on John's rudeness and lies, and her determination to put things right:

> "Mr. Thorpe had no business to invent any such message. If I had thought it right to put it off, I could have spoken to Miss Tilney myself. This is only doing it in a ruder way; and how do I know that Mr. Thorpe has——he may be mistaken again perhaps; he led me into one act of rudeness by his mistake on Friday. Let me go, Mr. Thorpe; Isabella, do not hold me." (100-01)

Though her last sentence is a stock speech for many a gothic heroine, Catherine utters it without melodrama. There is no exclamation point, no fear. It is of a piece with the earlier part of her speech: John was wrong to interfere in her business; he is—she politely but firmly implies—a liar, so she doesn't trust him; and he and Isabella must release her so that she can undo the damage he's caused. When they refuse, and John tells her that the Tilneys have already reached home, her response is even more determined: "'Then *I will* go after them, . . . wherever they are *I will* go after them. . . . If I could not be persuaded into doing what I thought wrong, *I never will* be tricked into it.' And with these words she *broke away* and hurried off" (101, emphases mine).

Significantly, Catherine's breaking away from her physical imprisonment coincides with her repeated assertion of her will; she now allows neither her body nor her mind to be shackled. Had she reacted romantically to this situation, she might have fainted, as Emily St. Aubert frequently does, thus allowing herself to be imprisoned more securely. But Catherine reacts *against* imprisonment, and, more importantly, against the seductively disempowering titillation of feminine helplessness and exposure that gothic imprisonment, abduction, and loss of consciousness promote. She *is* "fearful of being pursued" after she escapes, but her "determin[ation]" outweighs her fear (101).

This is Catherine's most heroic scene. Paradoxically, her lack of con-

sciousness that she is acting heroically enables her heroism. Indeed, Catherine, in her physically active endeavors, resembles a *hero* or a picaresque heroine rather than a gothic one; Ty asserts that both Catherine and Adeline in *The Romance of the Forest* "are prepared to take risks and face dangers. They act like heroes rather than helpless heroines of a romance" (258). It is vital that Catherine remain ignorant of her heroism, since, as McMaster notes, "[s]he is all too apt to accept . . . artificial constructions": when the narrator tries to make her a conventional gothic heroine, "Catherine makes her attempt at becoming an Emily St. Aubert, with disastrous consequences" (219). When Catherine acts self-consciously, she gets things wrong; more essentially, her heroism and attractiveness increase when she acts only from a wish to do right, rather than a wish to show off.

Catherine's lack of heroic *or* gothic self-consciousness sustains her through her longest gothic trial of all: General Tilney's banishing her from Northanger. Though Catherine experiences anger, resentment, and misery, she never feels frightened. As the narrator notes, "The journey in itself had no terrors for her; and she began it without either dreading its length, or feeling its solitariness" (230). Unlike on her previous journeys, she neither wishes for nor imagines bandits or accidents. Without the hindrance of excessive romanticism, she acts effectively: she is ready to leave nearly an hour before her forced departure time; and, after an initial bout of weeping in the carriage, she pays close attention to her route, asking directions and behaving in a "civil" and "liberal" manner (232)—not easy for a heart-broken seventeen-year-old.

The young woman who *does* behave with excessive sensibility during this episode is Eleanor, and the scene in which she tells Catherine of the General's orders is written in high, rather than parodic, gothic style. As Zimmerman observes, Eleanor's hesitant, trembling approach to Catherine's room and her "pale" looks and "greatly agitated" behavior once there (223) are "full-blown Gothic" (60). Again, when Catherine is finally in a "full-blown Gothic" situation, she resists the urge to dramatize or even recognize it. She thinks Eleanor is approaching, but "convict[s] her fancy of error" when Eleanor stops; she hears "something moving close to her door," which "ma[kes] her . . . tremble a little, . . . but resolving not to be again overcome by trivial appearances of alarm, or misled by a raised imagination, she stepped quietly forward, and opened the door" (223). In a startling role reversal, she quietly tries to comfort Eleanor, whose speech is more hyperbolic than even Isabella's: "'This kindness distracts me—I cannot bear it—I come to you on such an errand! . . . How shall I tell you!—Oh! how shall I tell you!'" (222-23).

Eleanor's distress excuses her dramatic language, but her tone, even given the circumstances, is overdone. Her apology to Catherine combines self-pity with pity for Catherine, minimizing Catherine's distress in comparison with her own:

> "no displeasure, no resentment that you can feel at this moment, however justly great, can be more than I myself—— . . . Dear, dear Catherine, in being the bearer of such a message, I seem guilty myself of all its insult; yet, I trust you will acquit me, for you must have been long enough in this house to see that I am but a nominal mistress of it, that my real power is nothing." (225)

There is something more here than concern for Catherine, especially since Eleanor, in this speech and elsewhere, dwells rather tactlessly on the insult to Catherine and the dangers facing her. The General's abuse of Catherine and Eleanor's unwilling part in it are catalysts for Eleanor's anger at the General's constant abuse of *her*. Eleanor has borne her father's mistreatment uncomplainingly, but when this mistreatment extends to her friend, her feelings burst forth, fittingly, in a gothic manner, for Eleanor Tilney is the real gothic heroine of *Northanger Abbey*.

Catherine, ironically and humorously, never realizes that Eleanor is as sentimental a figure as any in Mrs. Radcliffe's novels. She never learns, as do we, that the laundry bills she found belong to Eleanor's lover, the future Viscount, and that she has indeed, as she had so ardently hoped, discovered the pages of a secret romance. Men's smallclothes, in her mind cannot be linked with love, though she does fixate on Henry's hat and many-caped greatcoat. Her search for ostentatious gothic elements at Northanger, especially her belief that General Tilney has murdered his wife, blinds her to the General's real gothic crime of abusing his daughter. In Catherine's defense, however, the clues to Eleanor's gothic plight are subtle. Eleanor cannot receive Catherine when the latter calls to apologize for the botched country walk, as the General and she "'were just preparing to walk out, and he, . . . not caring to have it put off, made a point of her being denied'" (94). The General frequently calls her away from amusements to answer notes: two instances are when Henry is reading *Udolpho* to her (107) and when she is about to show Catherine her mother's bedroom (191-92); he often shouts at her; and he censors her letters (228). Even when cheerful, his presence subdues her. Henry and Frederick are also subdued, but they can escape him more easily. Eleanor admits to feeling lonely, and laments her mother's death, especially since "'A mother would have been a constant friend; her influence would have been beyond all other'" (180).

Tales of Wonder! *by James Gillray. London (1802). © Trustees of the British Museum.*

Eleanor alludes to her father's tyranny, assuming that her mother, in running the household and softening her husband's temper, would have lightened Eleanor's burden.

Eleanor's frequent isolation from other women of her class—a typical trial of gothic heroines but atypical for Regency ones—speaks to the General's obsessive behavior towards his daughter. Henry, when thanking Catherine for coming to Northanger, notes that "[h]is sister . . . was uncomfortably circumstanced—she had no female companion" (157). A motherless, sisterless young woman of Eleanor's station would usually have a female companion: Georgiana Darcy and Emma Woodhouse do; so does heiress Anne de Bourgh, though she is not motherless. Perhaps the General, who loves exerting power over his children, realizes that a female companion might bolster Eleanor's spirits, making her less docile. Indeed, Catherine's presence at Northanger emboldens Eleanor to agree to show Catherine her mother's apartments. Even with Catherine present, though, Eleanor must constantly submit to the General's unreasonable whims; she narrowly escapes his tyranny when the man she loves unexpectedly inherits a title and fortune. The marriage that

frees her from her father's cruelty underscores the hopelessness that preceded it, for the General had prevented the marriage previously. Austen deftly reveals the full extent of Eleanor's abuse only when Eleanor escapes it: "The marriage of Eleanor Tilney, her removal from all the evils of . . . Northanger . . . , is an event which I expect to give general satisfaction. . . . I know no one more entitled, by unpretending merit, or better prepared by habitual suffering, to receive and enjoy felicity" (250-51).

Austen's juxtaposition of Eleanor's "suffering" from *one* man with her "removal" from that suffering through the agency of *another* man underscores her dependence on men for happiness. For all her education, intelligence, and awareness of her bleak situation, Eleanor's "real power" to escape "is nothing." Her powerlessness results from her passive acceptance of her state, as Zlotnick argues:

> She remains imprisoned and immobilized, a spiritless version of the Radcliffean heroine. . . . Reading only male historians (she mentions Hume and Robertson), Eleanor seems unable to make creative use of her history lessons, so that instead of drawing on history to imagine her own future differently, Eleanor's reading confirms her acquiescence to authority. (286-87)

Eleanor enjoys novels too, but she trusts history—male history—more, and therefore trusts herself less. She enjoys the "inventions" of male historians, but lacks the imagination and initiative to invent herself a better history.

Catherine, because of her dislike of history and her love of novels, is better able to exercise her power; Zlotnick posits that "Catherine's prescient critique of women's absence from history arises from her reading of Radcliffe," and her "devotion to Radcliffe . . . leads to a revision of the (male-authored) historical past . . . and thereby leaves open the possibility of a different future" (288). Catherine is free to imagine and invent, and therefore free to act. Austen shows Catherine's superior agency through clothing, as well as her sexual and romantic self-determination: she buys the sprigged muslin despite Mrs. Allen's disapproval, while Eleanor lets Henry choose her muslins (28, 105); she has "her packing almost finished" on the morning of her departure from Northanger by the time Eleanor, who packs clothes "with more good-will than experience" (227), comes to help. Mrs. Morland speaks truly when she declares that Catherine "'is *not a poor helpless creature*, but can shift very well for herself'" (237, emphasis mine). Indeed, Catherine *wants* to shift for herself: she insists on choosing her own romantic partner—and, ultimately, her friends—just as she chooses her own muslin; and, insofar as possible, she arranges her

life as neatly as she does her trunk. Her independence regarding her clothes and her beloved very likely informs Henry's independence in his choice of *her* as a wife despite his father's opposition. Her courage to do not only what she "knows to be right" but what she knows is right for *her* could inspire his courage to defy his father for the first time in his life in order to follow "honour" and "affection" (247). Her teachings are as powerful as his. It is Catherine's subconscious refusal to *be* helpless and passive that makes her powerful; she is not bound by "'tiresome'" history, with its "'men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women'" (108). Catherine makes her own history, just as Austen makes Catherine's history "a new circumstance in romance" (243), in which the heroine now plays an active role.

In refashioning the gothic, however, Austen reinstates its original function, which is primarily instruction under the guise of entertainment. Like folktales, fairytales, and romance, gothic and sentimental fiction—which draw heavily from these earlier genres—are heavily encoded but richly mimetic reflections of the trials experienced by marginalized, younger members of society. Austen, like her more sensational predecessors, uses *Northanger Abbey* to warn young women—and men—not about the dangers of reading too many novels, but about the dangers to their amorous and socio-economic security from powerful and opportunistic members of society. She refashions the gothic into a more quotidian but more vital genre, where her heroines face dangers more real, and ultimately with more tragic potential, than those encountered by all the Emilys, "'Julias and Louisas'" (107) in the world, and where, paradoxically but realistically, women must behave un-self-consciously and unromantically to overcome them.

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