

Economic Motivation: Injured Bodies in Austen's *Northanger Abbey*

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In many Gothic works, action unfolds within the arrangement of spaces of a haunted castle or other domestic arena, and the distribution of power that generates Gothic plots primarily occurs within those spaces. Thus, the home becomes more than a setting; it also becomes a character or agent in bodying forth narratives that reflect social relations. Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* is a parody, a Bildungsroman, and sentimental fiction, but also a Gothic tale in its own right since the exchange of domestic dwellings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reminds readers of the volatility of patriarchal power that caused many real Gothic situations for females.

Austen's role in uncovering some very accurate economic and political events that shaped male and female understanding of the role of the home and its surroundings remains neglected. If we examine Catherine Morland's experiences beyond those of a seemingly naïve heroine, how female bodies became the site of 1790s anxieties about changing social, economic, political, and familial order appear. In particular, Austen shows how the alignment of the home with the female body highlights two primary eighteenth-century anxieties: enclosure of property and the unstable position of women generally.

Women's physical bodies have long been considered synonymous with the landed properties to which they were connected. In the late eighteenth century, the home became the locus of contradiction for the new female who was supposed to be someone who sees, hears, and commits no evil, but who also was expected to retain greater control of their bodies, all within the confines of the "safe" domestic space. Protection from societal evils meant one was less likely to lose propriety (which would equate to loss or gain of property). In light of women being encouraged to remain at home, their leisure time and novel reading are two main elements Austen uses to force readers to re-evaluate the circular argument that women were enticed by what they read because their domestic duties were uneventful. Private reading occurred, but group readings among women were highly favored. The reading was harmless in that meeting a foe on the pages of a novel seemed safer than an actual run-in with a bedroom intruder at night. But being locked away created further issues extending to vast cultural differences between men and women of the time. The home as a physical edifice contained its female inhabitants and, in turn, the male inhabitants go to great lengths to further keep or gain property. *Northanger Abbey* may have been Austen's earliest novel, but it remains one of the greatest social commentaries on these issues.

We would do well to first briefly consider the underpinnings of property law and etiquette before examining Austen's text. Concern over keeping property within families of the same class became the basis for the majority of Gothic novel plots of the time. Gothic works subvert or reverse the transfer of property among the

upper class, reflecting fears of loss of property and breach of enclosures (control) to someone in a lower class. No citizen was safe from the English enclosure movement.¹ Land that was open in 1700 rapidly became enclosed by the mid-eighteenth century through private Acts of Parliament--acts partly spawned by anxieties over the many revolutionary concerns that shaped eighteenth-century British culture. Britain, itself literally enclosed on all sides by the sea, was at war with its northern territories, lost its American colonies, and constantly feared Napoleon's wrath. Enclosures surfaced at an alarming rate across the countryside, because landowners assumed that containment generated profitable productivity. Thus, the home in the early Gothic novel represents class power, exploitation, and provides the main scene of struggle whereby women played crucial roles in helping maintain property—a primary public face of males.

Austen mocks the culture of materialism and the focus on property to determine one's worth. In *Northanger*, she creates a marriage between an aristocratic hero and non-aristocratic heroine. Her creation exposes the contradiction that enclosure is productive or leads to gain; instead, spatial codes that extended to imperial prospects, architecture, cultivated landscapes, and literature followed. Enclosures physically alter the land in permanent ways, and such visible containments provided ideas and influences that defined evolution of manners of the time. The spaces and social relations defined by these borders in *Northanger Abbey* reflect how Austen subverts the nature of enclosures, further revealing a world where the upper-class cannot maintain full possession of property (or bloodlines once marriages across social classes occur).

For much of the middle class, enclosures meant the loss of property, which included the Morlands in Austen's novel. The Allens owned the Morland property and the land of the surrounding village of Fullerton. Even though Mr. Morland retained a respectable position that enabled him to support a wife and ten children, he relied on the support provided by the Allen's enclosures too much to be completely self-sufficient. This containment also meant that Catherine "reached the age of seventeen, without having seen one amiable youth who could call forth her sensibility; without having inspired one real passion, and without having excited even any admiration but what was very moderate and transient" (Austen 8). Furthermore, there "were no lords or barons" in the neighborhood. Out of fondness, but probably pity as well, the Allens take Catherine to Bath to expose her to other people and customs. However, they also expose her to a false world, more limited than Fullerton, a shallow world where Catherine's own flaws and lack of accomplishments are sorely noticed.

In meeting other people, neither the Allens nor the Morlands offer advice or even contemplate what a young woman will be exposed to. "Cautions against the

¹ Parliamentary enclosures from roughly 1750 to the early nineteenth century were several policies legislating the hedging of open agricultural fields. Stephen Daniels's (1993) *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* discusses in greater depth how enclosures set in motion a loss in ideological force that moved from the stone walls in the countryside to common gardens. It was this ideology that sparked debate about enclosed space and productivity levels.

violence of noblemen and baronets as delight in forcing young ladies away to some remote farm-house" are not known by the Morlands, leaving Catherine's best advice to be, "always wrap yourself up warm about the throat" and "keep account of the money you spend" (9). Catherine's reading of Ann Radcliffe and other tales of horror actually expose her to more realistic probabilities than this pallid advice. While she desperately tries to identify with the trapped Gothic heroines in her readings, such fictive trappings often overflowed into real life situations, establishing female delicacy and propriety as paramount values that necessitated a male protector. Catherine's father, as a male "protector" instead gives his daughter only ten guineas, and sends her away with neighbors. It is "under these unpromising auspices" that Catherine's experiences begin.

Criticism of Catherine's naiveté and desire for a Gothic heroine's life is well documented. However, a commonly overlooked quality about her is that she remains one of the most teachable characters as well. The opening pages of the novel establish her as a hopeless romantic, but Catherine's ability to detect affronts in others surfaces throughout the novel. Austen purposely emphasizes that Catherine is "no heroine," and that her real flaw stems more from a faulty sense of confidence in others and their knowledge. Catherine does not listen to her instincts most of the time: she misjudges the Thorpes as scheming individuals, and she misjudges the General being a murderer. But her fabrications still accurately reflect these characters' greedy natures. When faced with licentiousness from others, she convinces herself that her beliefs are frivolous and ungrounded, quickly brushing off any negative sensations so as not to disturb others. She yearns for the excitement she believes Gothic novel heroines confront, yet she does not shrink from criticism or admonishment. Unable to interpret some of the most common social signals, she becomes vulnerable to the afflictions of real life. Catherine's initial weaknesses are common among young women at the time and reflect Austen's own critique of the dangers in trying to isolate women about political and economic issues.

Catherine's naiveté also stems from not being prepared to deal with the arbitrary and willful protection from males of patriarchal society that she confronts in both Bath and at Northanger Abbey. Austen infers that education allows women to understand their culture and their motivations more effectively. Instead, Catherine must rely on her meager education and "protection" from hosts like the Allens, who are arguably the most materialistic characters in the novel; Mrs. Allen is more impressed by Henry Tilney's knowledge of muslin, since "dress was her passion" instead of ensuring her ward was in safe company. Mrs. Allen also pressures Catherine go along on the carriage ride with John Thorpe, in spite of Catherine's pleas that such an act may appear imprudent in public. Correct in her assumptions, Catherine's carriage ride scene reflects the arbitrary protection actually afforded by males.

After making an appointment to visit with Henry and Eleanor Tilney, rain prevents the morning visit. After the showers cease, the Thorpes arrive and request

Catherine's company to visit the haunted Blaize Castle. While she can barely contain her desire to see what she feels would be a fantastic Gothic place, she declines their invitation to wait for the Tilneys. Mrs. Allen, the Thorpes, and even Catherine's brother James, aggressively suggest that Catherine acts rudely by refusing. John Thorpe outright lies and claims he saw the Tilneys walking away from Catherine's home only moments before. Under these false pretenses, Catherine agrees to go: "Catherine's feelings, as she got into the carriage, were in a very unsettled state [...] she could not think the Tilneys had acted quite well by her without sending her any message" (58). Upon turning the corner, she sees the Tilneys heading towards her house, looking quite surprised to see her leaving. Embarrassed, Catherine demands that John stop the carriage, "but to what purpose did she speak? Thorpe only lashed his horse into a brisker trot; the Tilneys were in a moment out of sight [...] 'Pray, pray stop Mr. Thorpe--I cannot go on. I must go back to Miss Tilney'" (58). Thorpe only laughs, smacks his whip, and drives on. Catherine, "angry and vexed as she was, having no power of getting away, was obliged to give up the point and submit" (59). The cruelty of a patriarchal figure is exemplified here in Thorpe who, while he may have no intention of seducing Catherine on this trip, literally wields his whip and shows joy in her helplessness. Earlier, Catherine felt initial disappointment on her journey to Bath that "it was performed with suitable quietness and uneventful safety. Neither robbers nor tempests befriended them, nor one lucky overturn to introduce them to the hero" (10). However, in scenes like the carriage ride, Catherine is effectively kidnapped and no one lent assistance or made any heroic rescue. Thorpe's control reveals Austen's recognition of the ease with which trust of reckless individuals can, as Eleanor Ty notes, turn a comical social encounter into a kind of Gothic horror (251).

Eleanor and Henry Tilney may seem like more prudent friends, but ultimately no true allies exist for Catherine. Henry teases Catherine in ways that encourage her to search out her own real Gothic story. Before her arrival at Northanger, Catherine creates a mental picture of what she hopes the abbey looks like:

Her passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry--castles and abbies made usually the charm of those reveries which this image did not fill. To see and explore either the ramparts and keep of the one, or the cloisters of the other, had been a darling wish [...] Northanger turned up to be an abbey, and she was to be its inhabitant. Its long, damp passages, its narrow cells and ruined chapel, were to be within her daily reach and she could not entirely subdue the hope of some traditional legends, some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun. (96)

Henry encourages Catherine's imagination, saying, "are you prepared to encounter all the horrors that a building such as what one reads about may produce? Have you a stout heart?--nerves fit for sliding panels and tapestry?" (107). He tells her that she will likely be confined to her own, isolated end of the abbey, out of ear range of every person, and left to explore all the secrets of

every chest and passage on violently stormy nights. He is amused by Catherine's eagerness and eventually stops teasing her, but clearly never considers the repercussions of the exchange. Catherine's preparation for her "real" horrors come directly from Radcliffe's pages, which she is unable to put into perspective until after she experiences the denigration represented in being viewed as a commodity herself.

The desire to explore the prohibited aspects of the abbey and discover the secrets Catherine concocts can be viewed as her response to a rather insulated life. In private, she reveals her longing for adventure and a wish to experience what lies beyond her reach as a woman. Catherine consciously acts imprudent by her own standards by embarking on forbidden explorations of the abbey. Catherine's romanticized view of what life *could* be within the abbey and of its dangers seems titillating precisely because she does not have to actually live it. What she does endure and learn is that women's Gothic situations do not need crumbling castles and literal confinement to their bedrooms. Moreover, her choices illustrate how her patriarchal upbringing that was designed to "protect" her propriety from such unchecked desires proves deficient and exposes an even worse mistake: assuming females are beings who do not also desire.

Catherine's hopeless situation is aggravated by her inability to grasp the economic motivation behind marriage exchange and social connections. Austen shows how men speak advantageously from the economical viewpoint that all people have the luxury of being consumers independently of gender. Henry knowingly lectures Catherine about the evils inherent in materialism, yet offers blatantly misguided advice from a man responsible for his own sister's material needs. Readers see this from the first meeting between Mrs. Allen and Henry when they discuss the bargains of muslin, and Henry states he buys all of his sister's gowns because when the choice was left to her, she chose unwisely and her gown frayed, resulting in a handkerchief. Neglecting Henry's advice regarding the value of durability, Mrs. Allen instead focuses on the pretty muslin of Eleanor. As a guardian for Catherine, her protection extends only so far as the latest fashion, and she can only encourage her ward to mimic Eleanor's fashion by wearing a white gown so as to be "properly equipped" to be seen on Milsom street (61). Catherine is sent out with the belief that fashion masks her social status. Mrs. Allen injuriously establishes the idea in Catherine that consumer skills match rank and taste, although Austen invites readers to critique the alliance.

Materialism defines relations between men and women throughout the novel. The choices Henry makes for his sister's welfare reflects more male control than consideration, however. A conversation between Henry and Catherine about marriage more accurately reflects the real choices women had in consumer culture. Henry compares dancing to marriage when he playfully chides Catherine for spending time with John Thorpe instead of with him. Catherine believes that dancing and marriage are "very different things." She says, "People

that dance, only stand opposite each other in a long room for half an hour" (51). Henry again speaks from the perspective of independent consumerism by aptly pointing out that, by her standards, the resemblance between dancing and marriage is not striking. However, he claims, "You will allow, that in both, man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal; that in both, it is an engagement between man and woman, formed for the advantage of each; when once entered into, they belong exclusively to each other" (51-2). Henry aggressively argues that marriage means man is supposed to "provide for the support for the wife, while she makes the home agreeable to him; she is to smile while he purveys" (52). Austen stresses how consumption of material things by women encourage them to play a part in dancing and shopping for marriage contracts, emphasizing a more serious social reality underlying her fictive parody.

Catherine's inability to understand economic motivations are also what prevent her from grasping General Tilney's underlying reasons for bringing her to Northanger Abbey. Readers can interpret these connections when Catherine initially tours the estate. The General assumes Catherine appreciates and expects a newer, grand house with lavish grounds because he assumes she will inherit similar landed fortune. Catherine's reaction to the General's economic and modish improvements to the abbey is not critical or truly reflective. She feels overwhelmed by his "enclosed" grounds: the walls seem countless; the hothouses contain the whole village (122). She hardly notices the drawing room: Catherine's "indiscriminating eye scarcely discerned the color of the satin" (125). Her antique tastes, garnered by her romance readings, cause her to resist appreciating costly and elegant products: she liked "no furniture of a more modern date than the fifteenth century" (125). Guest rooms fitted up with everything money and taste could do to make them comfortable and elegant do not please Catherine (127). She thinks the windows, while still possessing the arch of Gothic panes, were too large, clear, and light (111). These passages reflect Catherine's ignorance of material reality.

Her disappointment with the house further illustrates her inability to see the function of Gothic aesthetics of the time. Robert Merrett (1998) explores this point, emphasizing that Catherine "treats domestic design clumsily" (p. 226). When Catherine praises the breakfast place settings, for instance, the General, "enchanted by her approbation," tries to preserve modesty by saying it is an old set, and the manufacturers have many new, improved items. He hopes to have the opportunity of selecting another soon, "though not for himself." Far from noticing his matrimonial inferences, "Catherine was probably the only one of the party who did not understand him" (120). She instead keeps hoping something Radcliffean will confront her and is discouraged by the newness of the house. Catherine's feelings of disappointment create both comedic moments, as well as elicit pity from readers. Even when she explores Mrs. Tilney's apartment to unlock what she hopes are the General's sordid secrets, the chamber is bright and airy with many new features. Catherine is surprised because she expected far more ancient furnishings. Similar to her ignorance as to the social meanings

of landscape aesthetics that the General points out, readers cannot miss how Catherine fails to grasp the need for modern architectural style and function.

The General's lack of astuteness to Catherine's ignorance on estate issues is equally comical. He aligns himself with materialistic and aristocratic values of the time. Landscape treatises applauded the expansion of grounds surrounding the home as the emblematic British prospect. Northanger's extensive gardens with specific containments and designs preserved a sense of the bounded, domestic space of the house. The General aggressively inquires about the Allen's estate in order to compare Northanger's marketability. His constant inquiries emphasize that size does matter in sex and real estate. His need to pace out the full length of each room to emphasize this concept shows readers his own need to compensate literally and figuratively in sexual terms to maintain a sense of superiority. Part of the comedy in *Northanger* stems from reader's knowing the General's wooing efforts are wasted on Catherine, even the blatant remarks: "the property being chiefly my own, you may believe that did Henry's income depend solely on this living, he would not be ill provided for" (120) and "Money is nothing, it is not an object, but employment is the thing" (121). Catherine misses all insinuations, and this allows readers to see Austen's ironic stance on the Gothic novel and its popularity as both playful and critically astute. In mocking the desire for fantasy of contemporary female readers, she shows how males, especially father figures, often fall short of the benevolent ideal in reality.

While marketed as a space where women are generally sheltered from harm, the home offered little actual protection from male owner's anger and lust. Women's behavior could be controlled by the threat of violence alone. Furthermore, men exhibited greater anxieties during a time when they were frequently out of the home, leaving their property and female propriety without tacit supervision. While the home protects with its walls, the same walls became a prison with limitations imposed by males comprising the head of estates. To this end, Austen, and even those writers she mocked, aptly root the language of bourgeois villains and notions of terror in terrifying domestic castles or abbeys. Kate Ellis asserts that if women were, as traditionally believed, the source of temptation, the whole structure of patriarchy would collapse under these new social arrangements. The new woman of the 1790s spent her focus on improving herself for the benefit of those around her to better ensure she would live free from physical or gainful labor (12-13). These "improvements" have been extensively documented in etiquette pamphlets and periodicals from the eighteenth century. Most explicitly state that women ought to confine themselves to the home and contribute to the comfort of husbands, brothers and sisters, friends, and "model the human mind" so as to form and improve general manners and conduct of the other sex by example.² Left alone to discern the subtleties of attitude, tone, and gestures of the people she interacts with, women like Catherine must educate themselves.

² The campaign to reform English morals in general, beginning with women, dictated most of the female etiquette procedures written by the likes of religious leaders like Hannah More and Thomas Gisborne (1758-1846) (paraphrase from Gisborne's *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*).

Henry's admonishment of Catherine's assumptions that the General is a murderer provides her most painful learning experience, but also reflects egregious errors in *his* perspectives of Catherine's level of education:

Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? [...] Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you--Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighborhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open? (136)

Few critics have spent time on the function of these words to see the inconsistencies. To be sure, Henry's rebuke allows Catherine to feel humbled about her overactive imagination regarding the house and the General--an imagination he initially encouraged. However, the "education" and the "us" Henry refer to do not include Catherine. Henry assumes Catherine's education aligns her perspectives with his patriarchal ones. He thinks that safe communities exist throughout England, an assumption that is even more erroneous than Catherine's fantasies because he has greater exposure to the world and knows his father's intentions more intimately. Henry overlooks the fact that Catherine developed her deductions about the General's character not just from an overactive imagination, but also from a desire for knowledge beyond domestic duties. Additionally, Henry's confidence that atrocious crimes do not occur in "a country like this" where everyone is a "voluntary spy" to prevent such atrocities is misplaced. These words point out aspects of society that Catherine and many other women did not know about or were "protected" from by men--laws, for example, and especially the notion of these "voluntary spies" that help secure any positive "social and literary intercourse."

Any protection from "voluntary spies" was not likely considering the enclosure process caused people to compete against one another. Additionally, the Poor Laws in place further encouraged a decline in the sense of community.³ While the General may not have physically murdered his wife, no neighbors, servants, or others exist to support an enlightened view of women and domestic life. Henry defends his parent's relationship before fully admonishing Catherine in that:

³ The Poor Laws were enacted during Elizabeth I's reign, and not formally reevaluated until 1834. The basic premise put power in the hands of parishes or a handful of overseers who were to assess a compulsory property tax, known as the poor rate, to assist those within the parish. Steven King's *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective* explains the process by which relief was provided, including apprenticeships or domestic charges in which poor children were forced to take advantage. Because the enclosure movement caused the sharp increase in the plowing over of common land, access to areas for growing food, grazing animals, and gathering fuel was severely reduced.

He [General] loved her 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* [emphasis mine] of her was sincere. (136)

The "value" inferred here directly correlates with the declining sense of community that might elicit those voluntary spies. Kate Ellis points out that the General's isolation of his wife from neighbors and servants supports the prevalent ideology of domestic privacy that was being consolidated in Henry's enlightened England (5). In reality, no restraints upon men in their homes existed that may have prevented the General from ill-treating anyone.

The same lack of restraint allows the General to banish Catherine suddenly and cruelly simply because she has no fortune. One seriously doubts that the presence of prying neighbors would have prevented this situation. As long as men and women viewed females as an inferior sex dependent on males for protection, women were not safe from abuses of male power, especially within the unmonitored home. A world with no legal protection for women overshadows the pages of Austen, and the shadow of "voluntary spying" turns into another enemy of women's freedom to follow their consciences (6). From Henry's perspective, direct violence within the home is inconceivable since his primary space is not domestically charged, unlike Catherine's.

Henry's faith in a benevolent patriarchal order, supported by reason and custom, is clearly a point of view that women were expected to share with men, regardless of their experiences. Catherine soon learns that urban life is more impersonal, lacking in the integrated social network Henry Tilney seems to believe in. Visible indicators of social status were prioritized--the home and number of servants were primary indicators, and Henry and the General both understood this. But Catherine, one of many children contained within specific grounds, does not possess the privilege of mobility or servants. Her lack of experience leads her to conclude, more out of guilt, that her fancies were irrational and that at least "in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence even of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age. Murder was not tolerated" (137). Had the General been a more amiable man, Catherine might not have sensed any negative qualities about him to fill the gap between her own discomforts in his presence.

Catherine's desire to be a Gothic heroine comes true with the General's expulsion of her from Northanger in the middle of the night. Economic motivation is the singular reason the General commits this horrific act. To better analyze this motivation, Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory of dramatism provides an interesting lens through which to situate Catherine's experiences as a domestic subject. Doing so allows one to see how Northanger is both a setting and agent that helps reveal the earlier noted patriarchal social apprehensions.

To briefly explain, Burke believed we form identities through various properties or substances, including physical objects, occupations, friends, activities, beliefs, and values. As two entities are united in substance through common ideas, values, beliefs, or property, they are "consubstantial" or identified synonymously: "men [sic] have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial" (21). In this sense, verbal (language) and nonverbal (gestures) elements body forth literal motion and speech that generates meaning and action. "Dramatism" is what Burke called the study of that action and human motivation.

A basic breakdown of dramatism in *Northanger Abbey* could be: General Tilney (agent) cruelly expels (act) Catherine from Northanger (scene), justifying his act by claiming she lied (agency) to him about being rich, and justifying his attempts to avoid tainting his own family line (purpose) with a non-profitable marriage. However, the relationship between act and purpose reflects a severe lack of propriety in the General's own character. By demanding Catherine's immediate removal, he sends a single, young female off to travel for seventy miles alone by rented coach, with no money, and no one to meet her or ensure her safe return. By viewing the points Burke's pentad as parts of a life drama about women's conditions, readers can investigate relations and develop an interpretation of the rhetor's motivation. Burke claims:

We are in pure Symbolic when we concentrate upon one particular integrated structure of motives. We are in the region of rhetoric when considering the identification whereby a specialized activity makes one a participant in some social or economic class. "Belonging," in this sense is rhetorical. (27-28)

Let us not overlook the meaning of "belonging" here. The scene determines the agent's motivation, but not actions. Money determines action in *Northanger Abbey*. The General becomes frustrated when he realizes Catherine has no money, since that is the object that he "identified" with her. After this disclosure, only division between him and Catherine in terms of property exists. He solidifies the division with a literal break by sending Catherine away. The house as a scene/property to keep (and Catherine's distinct lack of providing any property) determines the General's motivation socially, politically, and economically. His house is his public face; he is consubstantial with it, giving readers a seemingly clear agent-setting ratio. Yet, the house is also an agent because its marketability by other characters gives them agency. Subsequently, characters like Henry can mend the break caused by his father by marrying Catherine, and rejoining the family line identified with the house. Catherine's expectations that hidden rooms and secrets "identify" with and divulge foul family secrets in the very walls of the house (scene) provoke her action of seeking them out to prove the General is a murderous tyrant (purpose) and fulfill her desire to be a heroine in her own "real" Gothic drama--her motivation.

Anne Williams notes that objects not ordinarily a signifier may become signs that function in a sinister way to serve a purpose of explanation (70). The portrait of Mrs. Tilney and her bedchamber exemplify this point. Eleanor tells Catherine that her father did not like the portrait and, after her mother's death, was finally able to procure it as part of her own bedchamber decorations. Catherine immediately presumes, "Here was another proof. A portrait--very like--of a departed wife, not valued by the husband!--He must have been dreadfully cruel to her!" and such cruelty "to such a charming woman made him odious to her" (124). Having never known the mother, Catherine concocts agency for her own assumptions, as well as the General's.

Catherine's experiences become a detective story where the heroine mistakes the General for Bluebeard. Readers must wait to find out the General has not killed his wife, forcing them to initially identify with Catherine's perspective only. Catherine invents a drama about Northanger for her amusement, yet readers are disturbingly aware that Catherine's assumptions are very real in many homes of the time. Her exploration of Mrs. Tilney's bedchamber only to find nothing but cheerful furnishings and a bright, new room, elicits both disappointment as well as relief for Catherine's situation; readers may be conflicted between feeling pity for the heroine, yet frustrated by her naiveté and, therefore, justify Henry's chiding of her. But readers may also justify Catherine's lack of being able to detect the General's falseness in his appeals to her as marriage material, since he openly addresses his children in very stern fashions, and restricts certain spaces of the residence from others. Of course many people do not reveal private areas to anyone not intimately known. But Catherine overlooks this aspect, which prevents her from taking necessary motion to shield herself from false economic motivations. Her lack of sophistication towards fantastical fiction causes her own blindness in understanding "real" human motivation.

Catherine's drama includes conflict, purpose, and after her expulsion, reflection and even choice about her economic situation and imagination. As it turns out, even a deficient upbringing in education of social relationships does not erase Catherine's and her parent's correct assumption that:

General Tilney had acted neither honorably or feelingly--neither as a gentleman nor as a parent. Why he had done it, what could have provoked him to such a breach of hospitality, and so suddenly turned all his partial regard for their daughter into actual ill-will, was a matter which they were far from divining. (161)

Her afflictions are precisely what allow Catherine to assess her situation at Northanger. She concludes, "in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty." (170)

Although readers may feel pleased at Henry's rejection of his father's cruelty and determination to marry Catherine anyway, both characters still rely on the

General for basic means of happiness and living. The Morlands refuse to sanction the engagement of their daughter without the General's blessing (172). Catherine learns that the vanity and avarice of the General may have victimized her, and his external gratification continues to be the means of her ability to marry in the end. Only when Eleanor marries a wealthy Viscount does the General rescind his anger and give his consent. What motivates his change of mind then is not the love of a father, but rather a daughter. Upon her engagement to the aristocrat, "never had the General loved his daughter so well in all her hours of companionship, utility, and patient endurance, as when he first hailed her, 'Your Ladyship!'" (173). The influence of a Viscount and Viscountess convinces the General that Catherine is not entirely penniless, "greatly contributing to smooth the descent of his pride" (173). Furthermore, the General learns that the Fullerton estate, "being entirely at the disposal of its present proprietor, was consequently open to every greedy speculation. On the strength of this, the General permits Henry to return to Northanger and makes him the bearer of his consent, worded in a page of empty professions to Mr. Morland" (173). Austen sarcastically adds that, the dreadful delays occasioned by the General's cruelty left the couple essentially "unhurt." Her point is that the happy marriage that ends these novels merely shows how aristocratic power is re-inscribed with the General's placement of status before "companionship, utility, and patient endurance." Thus, while Austen's novel parodies the Gothic, readers should closely scrutinize the political aspects that are also offered in the text. Indeed, one of the greatest ironies shown through *Northanger Abbey* is that the imagined violence may be dispelled, but only to be replaced by a more rational view of a world just as dark for women.

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