

JANE AUSTEN'S *NORTHANGER ABBEY* AS A PARODY OF SENTIMENTAL AND GOTHIC NOVELS

Emese KUNKLI¹

Article history: Received 31 May; Revised 25 August 2023; Accepted 12 September 2023;

Available online: 30 September 2023; Available print: 30 September 2023.

©2023 Studia UBB Philologia. Published by Babeş-Bolyai University.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

ABSTRACT. *Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey as a Parody of Sentimental and Gothic novels.* Jane Austen is one of the most outstanding British literary figures of the early nineteenth-century. In my article, I attempt to interpret her first completed novel, *Northanger Abbey*, regarding moral-philosophical, aesthetic and literary motifs. I would like to emphasize why it is advisable to read the novel both as a *Bildungsroman* and as a parody of sentimental and Gothic novels. In my opinion, in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen shows both the similarities and differences between sentimental and Gothic novels in such a way that she wants to break out of their usual patterns. In Austen's works, the heroines need to get to know new places and people in order to re-evaluate their perspective. In addition, they must learn to face their mistakes and their consequences. What makes the heroine of *Northanger Abbey* even more relevant for the proposed reading is that her personality traits are apparently created by denying the characteristics of the idealized heroines of sentimental and Gothic novels. Furthermore, from the way Jane Austen closes her story, we can conclude that she rejects the conventions of Gothic and sentimental novels and makes explicit the possible psychological reading of female Gothic novels and at the same time she rewrites romantic literature and even the conventions of the female Gothic novel ending.

Keywords: *Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey, sentimental novels, Gothic novels, Bildungsroman, parody, moral philosophy*

¹ **Emese KUNKLI** is a PhD candidate in the field of modern philosophy at the University of Debrecen, Hungary. In 2018, she held a bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts and in 2020 a master's degree in Aesthetic and Art Theory in the same institution. In 2019, she reached the finals of the *National Scientific Student Associations Conference* organised by the Aesthetics Department. As part of her doctoral research, she analyzes the personalities of the characters in Jane Austen's six completed novels, focusing on the problematic relationship between happiness and virtue. In 2021, she ranked second in the finals of the *National Scientific Student Associations Conference* in the aesthetics section, with a paper about her current research topic. Since she became a PhD candidate, she has had the opportunity to teach four university courses. In addition, she has given lectures at university workshops, scientific conferences and other popular science events. Email: kunkliemese@gmail.com.

REZUMAT. „*Northanger Abbey*” de Jane Austen: o parodie a romanelor sentimentale și gotice. Jane Austen este una dintre cele mai remarcabile figuri literare de la începutul secolului al XIX-lea britanic. În acest articol, îmi propun să analizez primul său roman adus la bun sfârșit, *Northanger Abbey*, din perspectiva motivelor sale filosofice, estetice și literare. Voi încerca să subliniez de ce acest roman trebuie înțeles atât ca *Bildungsroman*, cât și ca parodie a romanelor sentimentale și gotice. În opinia mea, în *Northanger Abbey*, Austen scoate la iveală similaritățile și diferențele dintre romanele sentimentale și gotice cu scopul de a depăși convențiile acestora. În scrierile lui Austen, eroinele sunt nevoite să întâlnească persoane și să vadă locuri noi pentru a-și interoga propria perspectivă asupra lumii. Mai mult decât atât, sunt forțate de împrejurări să își recunoască greșelile și să suporte consecințele. Ceea ce o face pe eroina romanului *Northanger Abbey* cheia unei astfel de lecturi este faptul că este înzestrată cu trăsături care se opun celor ce aparțin în mod tradițional eroinelor idealizate din romanele sentimentale sau gotice. În plus, din modul în care Jane Austen își aduce la bun sfârșit povestea, putem trage concluzia că ea respinge convențiile romanelor gotice și sentimentale și că face posibilă o lectură psihologică a romanelor gotice scrise de femei, dar și că rescrie literatura romantică împreună cu convențiile legate de modul în care se termină în mod obișnuit romanele gotice scrise de femei.

Cuvinte-cheie: Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, romane sentimentale, romane gotice, *Bildungsroman*, parodie, filosofie morală

Novel Genre Reviewer

Uncertainty surrounds the publication of *Northanger Abbey*. Austen wrote the novel in 1798-1799, and then sold the edition rights in 1803, but it was published posthumously only fifteen years later. Crosby, the publisher who bought the rights, changed their mind about publishing, which Austen complained about and corresponded with Crosby (Shield 2007, 176-78). There are possible reasons why the publisher shied away from editing *Northanger Abbey* after buying the rights. On the one hand, Crosby was the publisher of Ann Radcliffe, whose novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was parodied by Austen in *Northanger Abbey*. Thus, by publishing Austen's work, they would have undermined their market position. On the other hand, Austen openly criticized the neglect of women authors in the nineteenth-century century, which could easily have stirred up a lot of dust (Sélie 2015, 27-29). Austen's efforts eventually paid off, as she managed to buy back the rights to *Northanger Abbey* in 1816. However, not only the publication process of the novel but also its reception history is quite complex. The fact that it is not possible to clearly define its literary genre also makes this

novel a particularly interesting subject of investigation. *Northanger Abbey* can be read as a *Bildungsroman*, romantic literature, a realist novel, a novel of manners, a sentimental or Gothic writing, or a parody of the last two (Séllei 2015, 43). At several points in the plot, the novel's narrator revives what schemes she could use and that she instead creates something new, which is sometimes the opposite. So, it is as if she is constantly in dialogue with contemporary novel types and questions their conventions and clichés, radically rewriting them for herself within certain limits. In this way, a fictional space is created, which will become a habitable, homely space for the heroines of Austen's later novels, and in which the narrator no longer has to create her own novel model in opposition to other types of novels (Séllei 2015, 34). I read the novel as a parody of Gothic and sentimental novels, and also as a (female) *Bildungsroman*. That is why I would like to briefly explore the characteristics of these three novel genres and their relationship with women.

Sentimental literature spread in both poetry and prose in the eighteenth-century. Typically, sentimental novels do not seek to imitate the sense and direct experience but to embody feelings and artistic foresight. These fictions assert the supremacy (Braudy 1973, 5) "of the inarticulate language of the heart" over the ruse of social and literary forms and the articulate mind (6). They are mainly characterized by an emotionally overheated and refined style, often exhausted by mere rhetoric (Séllei 2015, 48). Sentimental novels reject established forms of intellectual self-awareness, as well as the formal literary refinements validated by tradition – just as they often attack socially potent, intelligent women for the benefit of those who do not live in public and who are characterized more by family devotion and spiritual depth (Braudy 1973, 6). Sentimental novels had a great impact on the concept of femininity. These novels, read mainly by women, have been blamed by many for setting ideals for their readers that favour an unhealthy, sensitive, and therefore sick female body, and for providing educational models that predispose women to live out their fantasies (Séllei 2015, 36). We can say that in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen reacts to the artificiality of sentimental novels with the destructive power of the ridicule. With the subversiveness of the ridicule, Austen's narrator gets rid of the inheritance she considers useless, but she carefully preserves some trifles (primarily from female writers) that may be useful to her later (Séllei 2015, 30-32), such as the negative characters typical of sentimental novels (47-48). We can read the following from Albert J. Rivero: "For Austen, the best kind of sentimental novel would be that which inoculates its readers against its potentially toxic effects by teaching them to read critically, with discriminating minds as well as feeling hearts" (Rivero 2019, 208).

Moving on to Gothic novels, not only Jane Austen's novel but also Ann Radcliffe's works can be seen as a bridge between sentimental and Gothic novels, too. As we can read from Nelson C. Smith,

Mrs. Radcliffe's novels: far from being an advocate of sensibility, she, like Jane Austen two decades later, shows its weaknesses and flaws. (...)Mrs. Radcliffe could take the heroines of the sentimental novels, expose them to the conventions of the Gothic novels, and thereby show the defects of the former. In doing so, she manages to have her novels both ways: she can evoke the (for her) pleasurable emotions of fear and terror and then expose the rational causes to show the weaknesses of the sensibility which had given in to those emotions. How she accomplishes these effects may be seen by considering Mrs. Radcliffe's heroines, by specifying her criticisms of sensibility, and finally by discussing her experiments with the Gothic mode, especially in *Udolpho*. Such considerations will show that Mrs. Radcliffe did indeed know and express, like her greater successor, the difference between sense and sensibility. (Smith 1973, 577)

One characteristic of early Gothic novels was that they tried to engage readers in new ways (Hume 1969, 284). According to Robert D. Hume,

In the sentimental literature of the age, one is invited to admire fine feelings; in Gothic writing the reader is held in suspense with the characters, and increasingly there is an effort to shock, alarm, and otherwise rouse him. Inducing a powerful emotional response in the reader (rather than a moral or intellectual one) was the prime object of these novelists. In this endeavour, they prepared the way for the romantic poets who followed them. (Hume 1969, 284)

The Gothic novel is a widespread genre of the eighteenth-century, which is closely related to the new world of taste that emerged in the second half of the century. The new taste can be more closely associated with romanticism than with classicism. The name of the genre comes from the fact that it opens towards the Gothic as an artistic trend. Gothic novels usually remove their action from contemporary England in both space and time. Mainly the haunted castles and abbeys of medieval (or supposed medieval) Italy and France serve as their background. Due to the dark secrets and violence found in them, Gothic novels can be seen as an antitype of today's horror stories (Séliei 2015, 28). Gothic novels also feature supernatural elements but there is only one significant Gothic novelist, the aforementioned Ann Radcliffe, who took pains to explain the apparent supernatural effects. For many readers, however, these explanations were more disturbing than valuable (Hume 1969, 284). Nelson C. Smith suggests that

For she takes the typical heroine of sentimental novels and, using the techniques of the Gothic novel, reveals how such a state of mind brings about many of the terrors which the heroine faces. The cure for such an attitude, Mrs. Radcliffe makes clear, lies in a return to common sense. (Smith 1973, 580)

The distinguishing feature of early Gothic novels was the creation and use of their specific mood and atmosphere. Engaging the reader's imagination is central to Gothic endeavours. This Gothic atmosphere has a mechanical effect even in the best Gothic novels, but it was originally intended to waken and sensitize the imagination of the reader and to give a greater scope than usual. Also, the use of supernatural elements was intended to stimulate the imagination, concurrently trying to elicit a strong emotional reaction from the readers, as Hume suggested (Hume 1969, 284). As we will see, the imagination of the heroine of *Northanger Abbey* is also fuelled by these novels (sometimes too much so). In her novel, Austen shows both the similarities and differences between sentimental and Gothic literature. For example, she emphasizes and mocks the inherited clichés of both genres, according to which a heroine must have a troubled fate, must deal with the cruelty of her father and the loss of her mother, and be radiantly beautiful (Séllei 2015, 36). In the very first chapter of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen makes it clear that none of these is true for Catherine, so we can wonder how she can become a heroine (Austen 1903, 5-7).

Now I would like to reflect on the *Bildungsroman* as a novel genre. From the thematic point of view, we can consider the following as the main characteristics of a *Bildungsroman*: society in a broader sense, self-education, childhood, conflict between generations, alienation, trials of love, the search for a profession and activities that are based on stable principles (Buckley 1974, 18). This genre focuses on the development of individuals, and the stages of development are built on each other in such a way that they all have their self-worth. The last phase is the one in which the given individual is already a responsible, mature person who has found their place and vocation in the world (Dilthey 1985, 390). The characteristic of the *Bildungsroman* is that it shows how certain people learn to control their emotions, instincts and desires so as to become respected and responsible citizens of their community. Initially, these novels had male protagonists, since completely different ideas about the education and development of women and men prevailed in the period under scrutiny: while men had to strive for rationality, women were expected to aspire to spirituality, thus not only redirecting their development but also limiting it. Women could not live a public life, and there were many fields whose gates were open only to men. In order to be successful, they usually had to rely not on their intellect, but on typically feminine qualities such as self-sacrifice or beauty. For a woman, to go through a similar development and upbringing as a man, she had to step out of the general

role assigned to her, which might have seemed a scandalous, rebellious act in the eyes of others (Deczki 2019, 103-04). Jane Austen was one of the nineteenth-century women writers who did not comply with traditional expectations. Her heroines go through stages of character development one by one by the end of their story. That is why we can call Austen's works (female) *Bildungsromans*.

Austen's Distinctive Writing Style

Here, I consider it relevant to note that during Jane Austen's time, issues of the history of the novel came into focus. We can think of the aesthetic debate centred on the sentimental novel associated with Richardson and the picaresque novel associated with Fielding, or the Wollstonecraft debate. In addition, the self-conscious female writers' novels were published in this period, and they received a controversial reception. Jane Austen is regarded by many as one of the translators of the novel literature paradigm. By this I mean that her novels cannot be classified under one genre. As already mentioned, she created her own novel model in opposition to other types of novels (Séleli 2015, 34). The conscious definition of Jane Austen's paradigm shift can already be detected in her first completed novel, *Northanger Abbey*, but her earlier shorter works also differed from the norm (Séleli 2015, 31-32). Mark Schorer claims that

by the end of the 18th Century, the novel had become a tremendously popular literary form without yet having become quite respectable. Like many of Jane Austen's characters, the novel finds a large part of its ancestry in "trade" or something lower, and readers, too, are not without their pride and prejudice. Jane Austen's own novels did much to free the form of the stigma of its humble origins. (Schorer 1956, 73)

He continues as follows:

Literature and a quiet life brought about Jane Austen's earliest literary efforts, composed when she was a girl in her teens for her pleasure and for that of her family. She chose first of all the path of literary burlesque, burlesque of that popular and sentimental fiction with which her whole family was familiar, of literary stereotypes and of irrational but possibly powerful clichés of feeling, of the whole emphasis on the importance of feeling unfettered by reason which was so much the substance of the sentimental novel at the end of the century. (Schorer 1956, 73)

Her best works strike a balance between comedy and sentimentality. It is as if the young Austen strove for her works to be entertaining and moving at the same

time (Shields 2007, 48). Looking at her entire oeuvre, we can say that Austen wrote elliptically and sophisticatedly, which testifies to the keen eye that she was able to observe the world around her and then depict it in a somewhat exaggerated way. Furthermore, we can discover in her writings some kind of mysterious superiority of children over their parents. MacIntyre argues that

her novels are a moral criticism of parents and of guardians quite as much as of young romantics; for the worst parents and guardians – the silly Mrs. Bennet and the irresponsible Mr. Bennet, for example – are what the romantic young may become if they do not learn what they ought to learn on the way to being married. (MacIntyre 2007, 239)

Jane Austen's early short stories differ from the first works of other writers in two important ways. On the one hand, because she always read them to her close family (so in a sense she made them public) and there was no trace of the secrecy and big confessions typical of young girls in any of them. On the other hand, her early works are characterized by a kind of continuity (Shields 2007, 48). However, Austen did not attempt to publish these short stories, unlike *Northanger Abbey*, which can appeal to two types of readers. On the one hand, we have the naive readers of romantic novels who are used to stereotypes related to a novel heroine and do not necessarily realize that the writer is parodying these conventions and them, too. On the other hand, the novel can also attract more sophisticated readers who reject the usual romantic novels and recognize parody when they see it. While the first type of readers may be confused by *Northanger Abbey*, the others may find themselves in a comfortable world based on shared beliefs. Austen not only invites her readers to join in refuting the conventions of sentimental and Gothic novels but also encourages them to establish a new type of novel based on psychological realism and probabilities (Wallace 1988, 262). Tara Ghoshal Wallace has observed that

she mocks and undermines her own chosen method – parodic discourse – so that both narrative and reader are kept off-balance. In working toward her own concept of what constitutes novelistic discourse, Austen makes the reader a participant, now perhaps colluding with, now perhaps resisting the narrator's evaluation of her own novel. The reader thus becomes not only a partner in the unfolding of the narrative, but also an opponent who struggles with the narrator for control over the text. (Wallace 1988, 262)

Due to the collision of genres, *Northanger Abbey* has been the subject of many critical reviews over the past two hundred years, and based on these reviews we can discover an implicit hierarchy of values, according to which parody is superior to romance because it exposes its excesses. The realist novel surpasses

both novels because it takes the events and attitudes of everyday life as its material and deals with human nature itself. This is why in *Northanger Abbey* characters like the Morlands, by not having presentiments of evil and not suffering romantic alarm are above those who act as “conventional” romantic heroines or villains (Wallace 1988, 269-70).

As I have already mentioned, Austen managed to buy back the rights to *Northanger Abbey* in 1816, but the novel was not published until 1818, after the writer's death. Many critics believe that it is most likely that between 1816 and 1817, Austen reworked *Northanger Abbey* somewhat in terms of style, as a significant part of the text is characterized by an indirectness that was a usual narrative device in Austen's writings after 1814 and this method was only used occasionally in her early works (Shaw 1990, 592). This can be one of the reasons why critics cannot reach a consensus on whether *Northanger Abbey* is more of a foreshadowing of Austen's later, more mature writings, or a kind of summary of Austen's oeuvre itself (Séllei 2015, 27). Narelle Shaw puts it as follows:

A form requiring considerable authorial finesse, free indirect speech is characterized by a number of reliable indicators. Syntactical choice of tense and pronouns is dictated by the constituents of ordinary indirect speech – past tense dislodging present, the first person pronoun ceding place to third. A character's idiom is audibly mimicked by the author who retains ultimate control of the operative passage. Jane Austen's use of inverted commas to designate such a passage clarifies her conscious choice of the stylistic form in preference to indirect speech. (Shaw 1990, 592)

This is also the reason why I believe it is important that the genre of the novel cannot be strictly defined. In particular, I would like to emphasize that Austen easily mixes the sentimental comedy of manners and the depiction of Gothic novels in her writing with her already mentioned indirectness. As we can also read from Narelle Shaw about *Northanger Abbey*,

a fundamental incongruity devolves around the uneasy coexistence of the novel's two sections: self-contained Gothic burlesque is grafted unceremoniously upon sentimental comedy of manners, the anomalous characterization of General Tilney throws into contrast the cast of rigidly functional two-dimensional characters, Jane Austen's tentative handling of Henry Tilney counters the adroit deployment of Catherine Morland, the relatively immature narrative point of view is compensated by the stylistic polish, the consistency and assurance of the comic tone. (Shaw 1990, 591)

These aspects clearly show Austen's deviation from the usual patterns. Isabella Thorpe's sentimental vocabulary is an excellent example of the sentimental comedy of manners:

They met by appointment; and Isabella had arrived nearly five minutes before her friend, her first address naturally was: "My dearest creature, what can have made you so late? I have been waiting for you at least this age!" [...] "Oh, these ten ages, at least! I am sure I have been here this half-hour. But now let us go and sit down at the other end of the room and enjoy ourselves. I have a hundred things to say to you." (Austen 1903, 37)

Austen parallels Catherine's two friendships. Isabella Thorpe is artificial and self-righteous, so her relationship with Catherine is mostly determined by these qualities. Elenor Tilney, on the other hand, is an honest, uncomplicated, sophisticated lady, therefore her friendship with Catherine is characterized by simplicity, sincerity and amiability. The narrator mockingly points out that this will make their contact with each other "uncommon" (Austen 1903, 82). Also, when Catherine uses expressions typical of some contemporary heroines, Henry points out how careless her use of words is (128-29). While Catherine's lively imagination is a parody of Gothic novels, since the heroine can easily imagine many things that she would encounter in a Gothic literary work. The divided work is set in different locations, and one can say that the two main locations of the novel not only play topographical roles but also function as semantic spaces. The location of the first half of the novel is Bath, a fashionable spa town, which was one of the authentic environments of British social life at the time and is also a great location for evoking sentimental novels. The second volume takes place in Northanger Abbey, which evokes the haunted cloisters of Gothic novels (Séllei 2015, 43). The two locations, although apparently sharply different from each other, are nevertheless somewhat claustrophobic places for Catherine. The heroine does not really have her own space in either Bath or the Abbey. In the former place the Thorpe siblings, and in the latter General Tilney are the ones who hinder her the most (Séllei 2015, 55). One can feel that the comic tone that the writer strikes in *Northanger Abbey* is both consistent and confident (Shaw 1990, 591-92). In the words of MacIntyre,

Jane Austen's moral point of view and the narrative form of her novels coincide. The form of her novels is that of ironic comedy [...] Her irony resides in the way that she makes her characters, and her readers see and say more and other than they intended to, so that they and we correct ourselves. The virtues and the harms and evils which the virtues alone will overcome provide the structure both of a life in which the *telos* can be achieved and of a narrative in which the story of such a life can be unfolded. (MacIntyre 2007, 243; emphasis in the original).

Austen uses an authorial narrative situation in her novels. The heterodiegetic narratorial voice she strikes is specifically self-reflective and through it she

makes it easier for us, as readers, to perceive the irony inherent in her stories, including the extent to which some of her characters can converse without understanding each other's true intentions.

Austen, the Emphasis on Self-knowledge and the Relevance of Good Novels

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction, we can find plenty of examples of the refreshing effect a trip could have due to the much more limited circumstances compared to today, and these restrictions were sometimes even more true for young girls. We can also look at Jane Austen's novels as such precedents, especially at her first completed novel, *Northanger Abbey*. In my opinion, Catherine's physical journey and her moral development take place in parallel: both are the consequence of, and criterion for, the other. As MacIntyre points out, the writer attributes a key role in her stories to Christian self-knowledge, which leads to the path of repentant behaviour. A recurring moment in her novels is when the heroines come to recognise themselves. All of this is significant because, apparently, for Austen, self-knowledge is both a moral and an intellectual virtue (MacIntyre 2007, 241). That is why I think it is advisable to read her works, including *Northanger Abbey*, as *Bildungsromans*. In Austen's works, the heroines need to get to know new places and people in order to re-evaluate their perspective. In addition, they must learn to face their mistakes and their consequences. The great character development that her heroines go through is not linked to a specific journey in any of them, as is for the heroine of her first completed novel, *Northanger Abbey*. Nothing could prove this better than the fact that the heroine is away from home for most of the story. Catherine's travel experience, be it real or imaginary, is particularly important. I am thinking of Catherine's actual physical journey, the adventures inspired by her reading of fiction and her subsequent spiritual and moral journey. I believe that "being on the road" is not only a metaphor for the character development of the heroine but also one of the conditions of virtue in Austen's sense. In my interpretation, the fact that Catherine is only in her family home at the very beginning and the very end of the novel frames the physical and mental journey she takes throughout the story. After she comes back, she is no longer the unguarded creature that was let out. What makes the heroine of *Northanger Abbey* even more interesting is that her personality traits are developed by denying the characteristics of the idealized heroines of sentimental and Gothic novels (Séllei 2015, 35). One of the central questions of the novel is what makes a heroine a heroine, and how much Catherine does not meet the expectations that were usually set for a heroine at the beginning of the nineteenth-century. On the one hand, the self-reflective

narrator draws our attention to this point on several occasions and, on the other hand, the male protagonist of the story, Mr. Tilney, also repeatedly points out how a young lady should behave. In addition, the self-reflective voice that Austen uses in the novel constantly reminds the reader that it is all fiction, but it can still reveal truths. She concludes *Northanger Abbey* with the following lines: "I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience" (Austen 1903, 308). Consequently, she leaves it up to us to determine the moral message of her novel, but neither of the two options can be said to be positive in the traditional sense – that is, she tries to break out of the usual patterns until the very end of her novel. In her work, Austen seems to criticize contemporary novels, their censorship as well as female readers when she writes about Catherine and Isabella reading novels together on a rainy day:

Yes, novels; for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom, so common with novel-writers, of degrading, by their contemptuous censure, the very performance to the number of which they are themselves adding; joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the basest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally takes up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. Alas! if the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard. (Austen 1903, 35)

She believes that writers should stick together and support each other:

Let us leave it to the reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another: we are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers. (35)

Austen did not perceive novels as a kind of escape from reality. She saw their relevance in the fact that they shed more light on life itself than history (Mathison 1957, 150). This is why she wanted to voice her observation that "there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them" (Austen 1903, 35-36). She emphasizes the importance of fiction by highlighting that even a less good novel has its own value (Mathison 1957, 146). Thanks to the Gothic novels parodied by the narrator, the heroine

of *Northanger Abbey* realizes her own ignorance and how foolish her behaviour is at times. In the past, real-life events also made Catherine allude to a fictional story, and then the fact that she is staying at the Abbey for a month, one of the most common locations in her favourite Gothic novels, blinds her sense of reality even more than before. The period she spent here may suggest the fact that, while the moderate use of our imagination can make our everyday life more colourful, we can easily ignore reality by creating excessive fiction. The fact that she has to spend her first night in the Abbey listening to the storm and that she already finds some documents that seem mysterious sparks the girl's imagination (Austen 1903, 200-06). This is why it is important to mention that Austen does not identify with the narrative of Gothic and sentimental novels, but defines her own heroine and her actions in opposition to these two types of novels. The narrator regularly refers to what schemes she could use and that she acts differently on purpose (Séllei 2015, 33-34). In Bath, Catherine does not identify with Isabella's style of speech and behaviour suitable for sentimental novels. Instead, she is more influenced by the positive impact of Elenor and Henry. And in the Abbey, Catherine imagines many things that a heroine would normally encounter in a Gothic literary work, forgetting that she is not the protagonist of such a novel. As a result of this, one aspect of her character development is that she realizes that even ordinary life can be harsh and torturous enough. She does not have to let her imagination run wild or pick up a novel to see and experience pain. That is why I believe that *Northanger Abbey* can also be read as a (female) *Bildungsroman*.

Northanger Abbey Goes against the Grain of Sentimental and Gothic Novels

In my view, John Thorpe, the male antagonist of the novel, is the prototype of the negative male characters who regularly appear in Austen's later novels, who can only lead the heroines for a short time and ends up with a much worse fate than what they strive for. Therefore, it is not necessarily advisable to state that John is the antitype of the tyrannical suitors in contemporary Gothic and sentimental fiction (Gallon 1968, 802). In such stories, the naive, overly sensitive, weak heroine often becomes a victim, seduced and exploited by the mentioned tyrannical suitor and either dies or is saved from the fall by the "hero." Some critics have also pointed out that this is true mainly for works written by men, since the heroines in female Gothic writings show more independence and initiative and do things to get out of their unfortunate situations. This difference appears intertextually in Austen's novels. Matthew Lewis's novel *The Monk*, which is loved by John Thorpe, is an excellent example of the former, while Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which is appreciated by Catherine, Isabella and Henry, is of the latter (Séllei 2015, 57-58). Catherine is more like Radcliffe's

heroines: when confronted with the fact that John mistakenly believes that they are engaged, she unflinchingly asks his sister Isabella to clear up the misunderstanding (Austen 1903, 170-72). Austen's stories are dominated by a negative view on unmarried women, which MacIntyre explains by saying that from the beginning of the eighteenth-century, unmarried women had to fear being forced into sorage or prostitution. That is why one of the central themes of one of Austen's later novels, *Mansfield Park*, is so relevant: it explores how brave it was of a woman to reject a bad marriage proposal (MacIntyre 2007, 239-40). One can even say that it was a brave act on Austen's part to regularly emphasize such motifs in her novels. This theme already appears here, in the writer's first completed novel, when Catherine refuses to even consider marrying Mr. Thorpe, despite the misunderstanding. In *Northanger Abbey*, the main heroine Isabella, who looks after her interests like her brother, will be the one who naively succumbs to the seduction of the older Tilney brother, and thus loses her good reputation and at the same time her hope of marrying James Morland in the future. And all of this is ironic, since Isabella can be seen as the antitype of the character of Gothic novels who initiates the heroine into the conventions of romance, although she is the one who succeeds in leading a man in this field (Gallon 1968, 802).

John Thorpe exaggerates Catherine's financial situation in front of General Tilney, first in a positive and then in a negative way. Both excesses have consequences. Because of the former, he tries to get his son to marry Catherine and, as a result of the latter, he sends the girl alone at dawn on her one-day trip home, without any explanation. This is why Catherine's last night there is much worse than the very first because, apart from her imagination that is deceiving her, she has a real reason to feel uncomfortable (Austen 1903, 276). Therefore, the girl, who is on the very first trip of her life, fortunately stands up to the task at hand and finally gets home without any problems. The novel begins with the following sentence: "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be a heroine" (Austen 1903, 5). Unlike the heroines found in sentimental or Gothic novels, she does not even need a rescuer, but has to get by on her own through the unpleasant journey. Here too, the writer highlights the schemes she could use:

A heroine returning, at the close of her career, to her native village, in all the triumph of recovered reputation, and all the dignity of a countess, with a long train of noble relations in their several phaetons, and three waiting-maids in a travelling chaise-and-four behind her, is an event on which the pen of the contriver may well delight to dwell; it gives credit to every conclusion, and the author must share in the glory she so liberally bestows. (Austen 1903, 283)

The following quote about Catherine's arrival home also emphasizes that Austen wanted to break out of the limitations of the usual sentimental and Gothic heroine's behaviour, too:

But my affair is widely different: I bring back my heroine to her home in solitude and disgrace; and no sweet elation of spirits can lead me into minuteness. A heroine in a back post-chaise is such a blow upon sentiment as no attempt at grandeur or pathos can withstand. Swifty, therefore, shall her post-boy drive through the village, amid the gaze of Sunday groups; and speedy shall be her descent from it" (283).

The financial stories about Catherine, invented by John Thorpe and then thought up by General Tilney, make her the object of the two men's financial targets, as they do not even allow her to reveal her true financial situation. This is where the relevance of the indirect speech act, which is particularly characteristic of the General among the characters, is most evident to me. But John also does not openly ask the girl how much she will inherit, instead he tries to ask her about it indirectly. Thus, Catherine has no idea what kind of misunderstanding has ensued. Yet, unlike sentimental heroines, she still does not need rescuing when both she and Henry are put to the test by the General led by Mr Thorpe. Miss Morland, as already shown, must travel alone for the first time in her life and Henry must prove that he dares to go against his father's objections and stand up for his tender feelings and commitment to Catherine. So the indirectness that characterizes the two men in their communication with Catherine, as well as John's distortions about her, do indeed cause difficulties for Miss Morland and Mr Tilney. However, they also promote the character development of the two protagonists and their confession of their tender feelings for each other.

One can also consider Isabella, Mr. Thorpe and Colonel Tilney as negative characters that Austen "borrowed" from the toolkit of sentimental novels. However, as we move into the parody of Gothic novels in the second volume, they are gradually pushed out of the plot. The first two persons disappear completely, but the General no longer sees the situation only in black and white. He opens up to other points of view, and perhaps that is why he can remain part of the narrative. In *Northanger Abbey*, one can notice how Austen goes against the intertextual unfolding of the plot structure of the sentimental novel based on artificial intrigue by emphasizing the simpler and clearer world of her heroine. In such cases, after an almost unfollowable sentence, there are a few simple, direct statements. Austen often uses the rhetorical device of silence in *Northanger Abbey* and, frequently, the seemingly most important scenes of the story are the ones which she barely says a few words about. The writer is aware of the rhetorical traditions and uses brevity instead. I assume that Austen directly

emphasizes this artificial characteristic of sentimental literature, where it would be unthinkable that certain dramaturgical climaxes would be obscure due to their emotional charge (Séllei 2015, 47-49). However, I believe that, when the writer describes the couple's wedding this way, we can interpret this method differently. The plot of the story moves towards Catherine and Henry getting married, but on the last page of the novel we can only read the following few lines about the wedding itself:

The bells rang, and everybody smiled; and as this took place within a twelvemonth from the first day of their meeting, it will not appear, after all the dreadful delays occasioned by the General's cruelty, that they were essentially hurt by it. To begin perfect happiness at the respective ages of twenty-six and eighteen is to do pretty well; and professing myself, moreover, convinced that the General's unjust interference, so far from being really injurious to their felicity, was perhaps rather conducive to it, by improving their knowledge of each other, and adding strength to their attachment. (Austen 1903, 308)

One can argue that, similar to other Austen novels, although marriage is the goal that the heroine must reach, the emphasis of the novel is on the path she takes to get there in terms of her character development. This is one of the reasons why I believe that *Northanger Abbey* is not only a parody of sentimental and Gothic novels but also a *Bildungsroman*. Furthermore, we can conclude that by the way Jane Austen closes her story, she not only rejects the conventions of Gothic and sentimental novels and makes explicit the possible psychological reading of female Gothic novels – by placing the horror story originally set in an outlying abbey back in England – but also rewrites romantic literature and even the conventions of the female Gothic novel ending. After all, for a happy ending, not only the heroine but also the hero must undergo development (Séllei 2015, 60).

WORKS CITED

- Austen, Jane. 1903. *Northanger Abbey*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Braudy, Leo. 1973. "The Form of the Sentimental Novel." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 7, no. 1: 5-13.
- Buckley, J. H. 1974. *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Deczki, Sarolta. 2019. "A másik nő. A nevelődés regény női változatai a kortárs magyar irodalomban." In *Női reprezentációk*, 103-10. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó.
- Dilthey, Wilhelm. 1985. *Poetry and Experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gallon, D. N. 1968. "Comedy in 'Northanger Abbey'." *The Modern Language Review* 63, no. 4: 802-09. Modern Humanities Research Association.

- Ghoshal Wallace, Tara. 1988. "Northanger Abbey and the Limits of Parody." *Studies in the Novel* 20, no. 3: 262-73.
- Hume, Robert D. 1969. "Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel." *PMLA* 84, no. 2 (March): 282-90.
- Macintyre, Alasdair. 2007. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Mathison, John K. 1957. "Northanger Abbey and Jane Austen's Conception of the Value of Fiction." *ELH* 24, no. 2 (June): 138-52.
- Rivero, Albert J. (ed.). 2019. *The Sentimental Novel in the Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schorer, Mark. 1956. "Pride Unprejudiced." *The Kenyon Review* 18, no. 1 (Winter): 72-91.
- Sélei, Nóra. 2015. *Lánnyá válik, s írni kezd – 19. századi angol írónők*. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Kiadó.
- Shaw, Narelle. 1990. "Free Indirect Speech and Jane Austen's 1816 Revision of 'Northanger Abbey'." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 30, no. 4: 591-601.
- Shields, Carol. 2007. *Jane Austen*. Íggyártó Judit ford. Budapest: Ulpius-ház.
- Smith, Nelson C. 1973. "Sense, Sensibility and Ann Radcliffe." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 13, no. 4 (Autumn): 577-90.