



APPENDIX

Northanger Abbey

Summary

Catherine Morland is an innocent, inexperienced country girl who has never left her home until taken to Bath for six-week visit by Mr and Mrs Allen. In Bath Catherine meets a variety of characters and begins to learn the ways of the world, though never losing her fundamental simplicity and honesty. An avid reader of Gothic novels, she shares this taste with a new friend, Isabella Thorpe, and quite fails to see through Isabella's self-serving, designing nature, though she never warms to Isabella's boorish brother John. The other new pair of friends with whom she contrasts the Thorpes are the brother and sister Henry and Elanor Tilney, people of cultivation and intelligence. When Catherine is invited to go back with them to their home in Gloucestershire, and when she learns that home is an Abbey, she is in raptures. Only the forbidding nature of their father, General Tilney, threatens to spoil her enjoyment, though he treats her with almost oppressive courtesy.

At the Abbey, Catherine indulges her imagination, even going so far as to suppose that the General has murdered his wife, or incarcerated her for years. With the utmost kindness, Henry disabuses her of this notion, but then something dreadful does happen, when the General suddenly and angrily turns Catherine out of his house. Without even the chance to say farewell to Henry, who is staying at his nearby rectory, Catherine miserably makes her way home, where her unimaginative mother supposes she is pining for the luxuries

of the Abbey when in reality she is pining for Henry. Within two days, however, Henry turns up and, in defiance of his father, asks her to marry him. Before too long the General – who first thought Catherine an heiress, then that she was penniless – is put in good humour by Elinor’s engagement to a viscount, and is brought to give his blessing on the marriage.

Gothic Horrors

Jane Austen’s earliest writing had been in the form of burlesque, that is, making fun of the literary convention by exaggerating or flattening its features. The adventures that befall Catherine at Northanger, always ending in bathos, are a burlesque on the Gothic novel tradition.

Gothic novels were usually set castles or abbeys in mountainous regions like Italy or South of France, and involve the heroine discovering dark deeds. These are what Catherine Morland calls ‘horrid novels’ - the equivalent of our horror films. She reads them for the pleasure of being frightened, and her imagination is so filled by them that she begins to regard them as a true representation of real life. At Northanger Abbey she fancies all kinds of horrors and is disabused either by her own discovery of reality or by Henry Tilney’s putting her right. Northanger Abbey contains Jane Austen’s famous defence of the novelist’s art. Catherine Morland’s favourite reading is novels.