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Literature 1A

24 December 2015

The Gothic in *Northanger Abbey*: How setting and character work together to create a parody on the Gothic novel.

Jane Austen's book *Northanger Abbey* is a story that is unlike any traditional gothic novel but certainly contains gothic elements. This paper will therefore analyze Jane Austen's text with an emphasis on how it is distinctive from traditional Gothic novels and whether it could be considered rather as a parody on the gothic novel than a gothic novel in its own right. In order to do that, significant passages of the book containing information about the way this novel employs gothic elements and Catherine interprets these elements. First the novel as a whole will be examined looking at if the novel is really gothic or not and taking notice to any mention or reference to the gothic. Subsequently, the part of the book that is most outstanding for its gothic qualities will be examined with an emphasis on setting. The aim of this analysis is to demonstrate that the Jane Austen's text cannot be seen as a gothic novel but that a small part of the novel uses the character and setting to create a parody on the traditional gothic novel.

Looking at the novel at large one may be pensive about how this novel is actually to be considered Gothic and to what extent. A gothic novel has several key elements which are often employed. A certain surrounding which can be considered scary by the reader, like a castle. (Or an abbey if you will.) An air of mystery and suspense, omens, visions, supernatural events, women in distress, gloom and horror. But although a small part of the book contains certain of these gothic elements the whole of the book contains none of these. While looking at the book at large one will see

merely a book filled with detailed descriptions about leisure. About balls, dressing up, the relation between the sexes, etc. This is the case for roughly the first 145 pages of the book. It is about Catherine's (The protagonist) stay in Bath and her meeting people. Then there follows a passage which may be regarded somewhat gothic. This part of the book is only chapter five to ten of part two, five chapters out of a book of thirty one chapters. From this is concluded that *Northanger Abbey* should not be regarded to as a gothic book. But rather as a drama book.

However, stating the fact that the largest part of the book does not contain any nothing of the gothic is also erroneous. The first part of the book contains a number of references to gothic novels. Often cited as the archetypal Gothic novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, plays a prominent role in Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey*. References to *The mysteries of Udolpho* are made on multiple occasions. Catherine and Isabella (The first friend Catherine makes in Bath) shut themselves in together to read novels and on page 38 chapter 6 Isabella speaks to Catherine and asks her if she has continued reading Udolpho. They discuss the book together and indulge especially in the gothic qualities of the book. When Isabella recommends her some other Gothic books Catherine insists that they should be horrid. "Yes, pretty well; but are they all horrid, are you sure they are all horrid?" In a passage farther in the book Catherine talks to Mr. Thorpe and recommends to him the book *Udolpho*. And again in a different passage in the book Catherine talks with Mr. Tilney about the book *Mysteries of Udolpho*. Mr Tilney asks Catherine if she is fond of the kind of reading that *Mysteries of Udolpho* offers and she replies with: "To say the truth, I do not much like any other." She states that she doesn't really like other works like history. Catherine confessing here by her tendency towards gothic novels. Later in the book Catherine's tendency towards the gothic will play a bigger part.

Catherine's tendency towards the gothic really begins to play a role when the book actually enters the part which has the most gothic elements. This is in chapter twenty of the book when Catherine travels to Northanger Abbey. Catherine is really fixated on how the Abbey will look and has all kinds of gothic impressions in her mind. Before she goes a passage reads about her excitement about going to an old Abbey: "and, in addition to all the rest, this roof was to be the roof of an Abbey!-Her passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry Tilney" In a conversation with Mr. Tilney she says: "Is not it a fine old place, just like what one reads about?"

Keeping in mind that Catherine indulges in gothic novels this already subtly tells us about her expectations. Mr. Tilney in response begins to play on her emotion and begins to tell about Catherine entering the Abbey and discovering all kinds of mysteries and horrors. Catherine really enjoys this and says: "Oh! Mr. Tilney, How frightful! -This is just like a book!" Again stating that Catherine is drawing on her reading experience for her encounter with the Abbey. The reality is however very different from her imagination and Catherine soon becomes disappointed with the truth. The Furniture is all of modern taste, there is pretty English China, the house is basically a modern looking building on the inside. Catherine searches for the gothic elements. "To be sure, the pointed arch was preserved- the form of them was Gothic" Catherine's tendency towards the gothic makes her look for the Gothic.

That Catherine is shaping the world according to her Gothic imagination becomes even more evident in the part that follows, nothing is really happening but Catherine creates a Gothic plot in her head that is based on pure imagination. This is why it is a parody. A very normal situation is turned in to a Gothic plot by the imagination of an innocent girl. Through the imagination the reader reads a gothic novel which he realizes is all in the imagination of Catherine. This continues until Mr. Tilney discovers her suspicions and puts her out of her illusion and for there on the book is a drama book again. It begins innocently with her finding a cabinet with a locked compartment she opens it with the key and finds a piece of paper it is just a normal piece of paper but Catherine is having a gothic adventure in her imagination. Her reaction when she finds the paper tells us how serious she takes something so insignificant. "Her heart fluttered, her knees trembled, and her cheeks grew pale." The candle extinguishes at the zenith of the moment like in a real gothic. It turns out to be an errand's note. The gothic imaginations of Catherine however do not end here, she becomes biased against General Tilney because he does not like the walk his deceased wife used to make and he does not like one of her paintings, thus she concludes he was cruel against his wife. When later on Catherine hears that Mrs. Tilney died while only the General was at home she imagines that the General killed her. There is no basis for thinking that and a normal person wouldn't have made it up. She suspects General Tilney interrupted their exploration because he does not want her to see the room of his wife. When Catherine goes to the room she finds nothing but an ordinary room. At this peak moment Henry Tilney enters and puts her out of her illusion.

Although the book is not really a gothic novel one because it is largely about other topics which belong to the genre of drama, one may find a gothic part in it. This part is only gothic when you read it through the eyes of the protagonist. Nothing which is actually truly gothic happens. Thus the book makes a gothic parody by use of a character who is influenced by having read to many gothic novels.

Works cited

Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. Ed. Suffolk. England: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Print.