

1. Is *Northanger Abbey* a send-up of not just the gothic novel but also the romance novel? (And the sentimental novel)? Many commented on the rapidity of the marriages, esp. Eleanor's to the Viscount but also Henry and Catherine's and wondered what Austen thought about LOVE—does she, in fact, believe in it in the novel?
2. Much discussion not of Catherine's feelings for Henry but of his for her. Did he want to marry her because his father forbade it (based on his belief she had no money); that is, was Henry ultimately motivated by rebelliousness, the need to stand up to his controlling father or by genuine love? When specifically did Henry decide to marry Catherine?
3. So, what, in fact, did Henry really see in Catherine? Would she ever be an equal match for him? (We looked at a passage on p. 227) Someone suggested that Henry's affection for Catherine originated in his gratitude for Catherine's partiality to him; does it ever change to actual love?
4. Does Catherine really change? Last time, we talked about her tomboy stage and then her Bath stage, but doesn't she still have much of the tomboy in her—pleasure in adventures, exploring old abbeys, spontaneity—as well as learned social graces—knowing what to wear, how to walk around the Pump Room to see and be seen, etc.?
5. Naiveté in the novel is central to the plot—Catherine re Isabella, her parents re Catherine's emotional state when she returns home, Henry and Eleanor re their father—there's a lot of it! Catherine's naivete is like Marianne Dashwood's (C filled with gothic novels, Marianne with romance novels). To what extent is Catherine's naiveté reduced (or gone) by the novel's end? Evidence cited: Catherine sees through John Thorpe and dismisses him, she realizes she can't rely on her Oxford-educated brother, she discovers that friends will betray you while professing deep friendship.
6. The novel shows a gender reversal: here the female pursues and makes known (or unwittingly obvious) her emotions whereas usually it is the young man in pursuit and the woman's feelings are hidden. This comment might have led to a discussion, which we almost had several times, as to whether there were feminist impulses in Austen's writing.
7. There's a moment at the end when I laugh and think, "Oh, Jane. You can do better than this." It makes me think that she might have welcomed the chance to subject NA to a more experienced writer's eye before it was published. It might be fun to discuss elements of the story that we think the mature Jane Austen might have revised. (And discuss these elements we did and decided, yes, even though Austen sold it "finished" to a publisher in 1803 after writing it in 1797-98, and bought it back in 1815, there was still much more she should have done. Introducing the relationship and marriage of Eleanor and the Viscount at the very end with no preparation led to a productive discussion of

how introducing this topic at Bath would have forced other changes in the novel, changes that would have made the novel as it is fall apart.)

8. Does Jane Austen think so little of true love as a happy ending, or at least so little of it as a proper propulsion towards a happy ending? In this book our happy ending has been arrived at only because Eleanor married a right rich Viscount! Every excitement and secret mystery in this story turns out to be a revelation of money and perceived value, not of love. What kind of a romance is that?
9. What was Austen's real purpose/goal/intent in writing the novel?

Other topics discussed:

Some of her characters are simply unbelievable, esp. General Tilney. Would he take the word of John Thorpe re the financial situation of the Morland family?

Was the gothic section in Volume 11 just a "space filler"?

In her humiliation scene at Northanger, Catherine reveals herself as a xenophobe (such gothic monstrosity as she imagined just couldn't happen in England!)

All agreed that Catherine had an essentially good nature—she is natural, not affected, able to be a good friend, not a hypocritical one; infatuated with Henry, not a fortune hunter. “

The triviality and hypocrisy of the Bath society, the economic and social constraints and the expectations for men and women are not dissimilar to those today. Frederick Tilney exists today, for example, he who delights in the pursuit of the unavailable.

Irritating as she is throughout the novel, Isabella played “the game” but lost. At least one participant felt sorry for her, but felt she must have been “a really fun character for Austen to write.”

Austen's use of the deus-ex-machina (namely, the Viscount's marriage to Eleanor) as a means of “theological redemption” for the General!

We ended by pairing characters from *Northanger Abbey* to those in other Austen novels (we excluded *Persuasion*):

- mothers, fathers, families, villains, proteges, teachers
- romantics/sentimentalists, superficial, decent/good
- reasons for marrying (including desperation and love)
- complicated characters (hard to pigeonhole)—Crawford duo
- uncomplicated characters—Isabella and Miss Bingley

What fun!

Sian's chat entries responding to the discussion:

The washing bills push Catherine's invasive theory of the murdered mother.... Catherine is rejected by our “hero's father and thus from union - because she is supposedly penniless.

Isabella's own plot to land a wealthy husband is undone by her own avarice/husband-switching.

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It's not "filling space" - it's a young woman writer who probably would have LOVED reading all the Nancy Drews. Just feels like a young girl getting to be a detective.

She's ripping the surfaces off these myths of romance, gothic mystery, values and ethics. Manners and appearance are just surfaces - underneath is a fickle Isabella. She's saying underneath is so often an interest in money and security. And certainly, love is only skin deep! You can grow it in a year....

This is the set up for the wondrous appearance of Henry Tilney in the parlor. You can't have it be such a tidal wave of sentiment/demonstration of emotion if you don't have Catherine sitting there sadly dejected and rejected in the parlour. Jane set us up.

I don't know how much she's grown up - she's seen she was wrong about some people, but who's to say she wouldn't repeat the mistakes. At the end even her mother doesn't think she's grown up! She calls her a "sad young heedless housekeeper"... though her mother does say she could possibly learn with experience 'There being nothing like practice"... as a quick recoup.

p. 193 A MOST wonderful example of Jane Austen making a strong, sarcastic comment - without any authorial explanation. Catherine is talking blithely about how the General wants only his children's happiness, regardless of income, and Jane writes of Eleanor and Henry "The brother and sister looked at each other." She says nothing more, but in that simple sentence Austen upturns the entire thoughts and words of Catherine's misconception.

p. 28 - first conversation between Catherine and Henry.... She LAUGHS at him when he responds knowledgeably about muslin and cravats! "How can you," said Catherine, laughing, "be so-" she had almost said, strange. THIS IS WONDERFUL and why I think there was an attraction between the two from the very beginning. I doubt a whole lot of girls would have said that to him. Catherine pushes back. Jane likes a girl who doesn't give herself entirely up, to propriety and submission.

Yes, but Jane also named a book "Mansfield Park", no? Place is important to Jane. Buildings hold stories.