Reading Habits and Stylistic Discrepancy in *Northanger Abbey*

The Evolution of Catherine Morland

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Abstract: In the past decades, scholarly discourse surrounding Northanger Abbey *has predominantly favoured a two-part structural division, attributing stylistic disparities to the novel's extended composition and publication process. However, a more intricate perspective emerges from a division into three stylistically unique sections. This reflects more closely the different stages of Catherine Morland's development and the impact of her reading habits within varying narrative contexts. While the novel explores the activity of reading books, it also delves into questions of interpreting and comprehending the world. Catherine's fascination with Gothic novels serves as both a narrative device and a thematic exploration, reflecting her vivid imagination and the tensions between fiction and reality. This essay contends that the trichotomous division offers a more nuanced perspective on the interplay between narrative structure and character evolution. It emphasises the role of reading habits in Catherine's growth and underscores the transformative potential of literature in shaping perspectives, shedding new light on the novel's narrative style. To investigate the stylistic changes of* Northanger Abbey *and their correlation with Catherine Morland's development, this essay utilises a blend of quantitative stylistic analysis and close reading, highlighting how Austen's narrative technique reflects and shapes the protagonist's journey.*

Since the second half of the twentieth century, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* has been analysed in terms of a dichotomous division of its structure. This

structural framework was first introduced by Andrew Wright in his work *Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure* (1953). Wright's dichotomous structural paradigm not only lays bare the thematic and stylistic intricacies woven by Austen but also accentuates the adroit fabrication of the narrative as a whole. This bipartite framework is most often seen as reflecting the intricate interplay involving a reciprocal critique between the Gothic and the satirical elements inherent to the narrative. Accordingly, the novel is usually divided into two distinct halves, each marked by different settings and narrative styles—one exhibiting a pronounced satirical intent at certain junctures and the other a distinctly novelistic disposition (Kearful 514). These stylistically different parts are usually thought to be woven together by thematic and structural elements, which lend coherence to the whole (Glock 36). Marilyn Butler also differentiates between the Bath scenes and the chapters taking place in Northanger (xviii), while Laura Baudot has described the two components as an "*Evelina*-esque comedy of manners" and the exploration of Catherine's "Gothic fantasies" (330n11). By the 2010s, a consistent approach to *Northanger Abbey*'s structure has emerged, dividing the novel according to its two volumes and highlighting the stylistic changes between them. More recently, *Northanger Abbey* has also been identified as a bridge between Austen's juvenile and mature works, where the "primary story involves a naïve country girl" and a "unifying framing device" in the form of the Gothic parody (Hemmingway). However, an alternative perspective emerges if we consider the division of the novel into not just two but three stylistically distinct sections, which coincide with Catherine's changing reading practices and character development. To substantiate this claim, I have divided *Northanger Abbey* into what I believe to be its three main structural units, thus subdividing the section generally referred to as Northanger chapters into two parts. The first nineteen chapters take up the first part, which may be identified as domestic fiction, the second part starts with Volume 2 Chapter 5 and ends with Volume 2 Chapter 9, while the last part covers the final seven chapters. To justify this trichotomous division, I examine the stylistic changes between the different segments, the related question of genre and Catherine's character development, together with her changing reading habits. I argue that this new take on the novel's structure puts more emphasis on the Bildungsroman-like aspects of Catherine's journey.

Stylistic Variety in *Northanger Abbey*

Jane Austen's creative process in crafting *Northanger Abbey* unfolded over a long time, starting approximately in 1798–1799 and undergoing revisions until at least 1816, when she ultimately claimed authorship of her work (Todd 26). Indicative of Austen's sustained composition, beyond the alteration of the protagonist's name, is the addition of Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) into the so-called "defence of the novel" section in Volume 1 Chapter 5. Thus, the question arises whether we may identify stylistically distinguishable segments in the novel. In my analysis, I will combine stylistic features with genre identification because the two are closely related to each other. The investigation relies on easily accessible browser-based digital tools such as Voyant Tools and Lexos. What I propose is a new approach to genre through a form of stylistic analysis; however, one that does not seek to arrive at a definitive classification of the novel's genres. Rather, it aims to explore how certain stylistic elements reflect various generic influences.

As a first step, I looked at the average words per sentence metric because it provides insight into the syntactic complexity and structural intricacy inherent within the text. Here, what we can observe is that if we think about *Northanger Abbey* in the dichotomous division, then Part 1 has a shorter average sentence length (20.5), which reflects a preference for simpler syntactic constructions and more concise expression.[1] The "Northanger Part" contains significantly longer sentences (25.1). However, when we look at this metric in terms of the trichotomous division, we find that Part 2 (24.4) noticeably falls behind Part 3 (25.7), which signifies that the last seven chapters of the novel have a propensity towards even more complex syntactic structures. Vocabulary density, as quantified by the ratio of unique words to total words in the text, offers a glimpse into the lexical diversity of the corpus. These pieces of information would be lost without looking at the novel in terms of three stylistically different parts. Part 1 demonstrates the lowest vocabulary density (0.099), indicative of a narrower range of lexical items and a propensity towards simpler language usage. Looking at the difference between the "Northanger Part" and Parts 2 and 3 only shows slight differences, as the later parts of the book have a higher vocabulary density than Part 1. While the "Northanger Part" has a density of 0.126, Part 2 exhibits a higher vocabulary density (0.186), suggesting a greater lexical richness

1 The first part includes the same chapters as the "Bath Part"; thus, throughout the analysis, I will refer to it as Part 1.

and potentially more intricate semantic nuances. Part 3 occupies an intermediary position in the trichotomous division (0.159), presenting a moderate level of lexical variation. These quantitative data offer valuable insights into the lexical richness, comprehensibility, and syntactic complexity of Austen's style throughout the novel (see Appendix A), and the observed stylistic differences confirm that we are, indeed, justified to talk about three stylistically different parts in connection with *Northanger Abbey*. It is also evident that Parts 1 and 3 share some stylistic similarities.

In examining the representative topics of the different parts, I used the content analysis tool within Lexos, where genre specific words are compared to the corpus to identify what genre the parts most likely belong to (see Appendix B). This examination aims to use quantitative methodologies to prove that Parts 1 and 3 differ from Part 2 both in terms of style and genre. This function helps to compare the words used in a given text with two "dictionaries" that contain a list of words frequently appearing in Gothic and domestic novels. I created these dictionaries sourced from what I take to be exemplary texts. In the case of domestic novels, these include Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* and *Pamela*, Frances Burney's *Cecilia* and *Camilla*, and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*. These are also novels that are referred to in *Northanger Abbey*; however, they are never quoted. For a better representation, the different grammatical forms of the words were also added to the list. The final list for domestic novels consists of the following words:

> "admiration," "admire," "admires," "admired," "admiring," "admirable," "admirably," "affection," "affections," "affectionate," "affectionately," "beauty," "beautiful," "courage," "courageous," "consent," "convincing," "convinced," "convince," "cried," "cry," "cries," "crying," "delicate," "delicacy," "delicately," "fashion," "fashionable," "fashionably," "gentleness," "gentlemen," "grace," "graceful," "gracefully," "happiness," "happy," "happily," "heart," "heartfelt," "hearts," "innocence," "innocent," "innocently," "interest," "interested," "interesting," "interestingly," "interests," "know," "knowing," "knowledge," "known," "lady," "love," "loved," "loves," "loving," "lovingly," "manners," "mind," "minds," "observe," "observed," "observer," "observes," "observing," "pity," "pitied," "poverty," "poor," "pride," "proud," "returned," "return," "returning," "silence," "silent," "silently," "spirit," "spirited," "spirits," "stay," "stayed," "stays," "taste,"

"tastes," "temper," "tender," "tender," "tenderness," "truth," "true," "truthful," "vain," "vanity," "vainly," "weak," "weakness."

For the Gothic words, I used the nine Gothic novels mentioned in the text of *Northanger Abbey*. These include *The Italian* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe, *Castle of Wolfenbach* and *Mysterious Warnings* by Eliza Parsons, *Clermont* by Regina Maria Roche, *Necromancer of the Black Forest* written by Karl Friedrich Kahlert and translated by Peter Teuthold, *Midnight Bell* by Francis Lathom, *Orphan of the Rhine* by Eleanor Sleath, and *Horrid Mysteries* by written Karl Friedrich August Grosse and translated by Peter Will. The list of representative words includes:

"abbey," "ambition," "ambitious," "ambitions," "ambitiously," "appear," "appeared," "appearing," "appears," "arisen," "chill," "dagger," "daggers," "dismay," "dismayed," "dismaying," "dismays," "doom," "doomed," "dooms," "feeling," "feel," "feels," "felt," "gloom," "gloomy," "glooms," "gloomier," "gloomiest," "haunt," "haunted," "haunting," "haunts," "heard," "hear," "hears," "hearing," "helpless," "helplessness," "helplessly," "horrified," "horrify," "horrifying," "horror," "horrors," "impatient," "impatiently," "impatience," "inhuman," "inhumane," "inhumanity," "maiden," "maids," "miserable," "misery," "miserably," "monster," "monsters," "peasant," "peasants," "retired," "retire," "retires," "retiring," "rise," "rises," "riser," "risers," "rising," "risings," "saw," "see," "sees," "seeing," "scorn," "scornful," "scorned," "scorning," "scorns," "shudder," "shuddered," "shuddering," "shudders," "shuddery," "sick," "sickened," "sickening," "sicklier," "sickliest," "sickness," "sickly," "storm," "struggle," "struggled," "struggles," "struggler," "struggling," "trembling," "tremble," "trembles," "trembled," "trembler," "trembly," "tyranny," "tyrannical," "unfeeling," "unfeelingly," "wrench," "wrenched," "wrenching," "vision," "visions."

After comparing the individual parts of *Northanger Abbey* with these "dictionaries," the results show that Part 1 has the highest overlap with the domestic novel vocabulary (3.8%) but Part 3 also has a significant amount (3.5%).[2] However, when we look

2 The score is the number of occurrences divided by the total word count within the given documents.

at the "Northanger Part," the number decreases to 2.9% because what I refer to as Part 2 has a low number of words that match the domestic novel "dictionary" (2.1%). When looking at the Gothic words, we can see a similar tendency, but on a smaller scale. This is because, whether we talk about Part 2 or the "Northanger Part," the chapters taking place in the abbey have a satiric tone. As a parody, they possess both the Gothic and domestic novel attributes. Still, the analysis shows that Part 2 has a higher score (0.7%) than the "Northanger Part" (0.6%), and more significantly, that it is different both from Parts 1 (0.5%) and 3 (0.4%). While the differences in vocabulary density and syntactic complexity between the three parts are subtle, they align with the narrative's thematic progression. The focus of Part 2 on Gothic elements, though expected, still significantly contrasts with the domestic focus of Parts 1 and 3. This contrast underscores the stylistic and thematic transitions that mirror Catherine's evolving understanding of the genres. If we think about *Northanger Abbey* in two parts, we not only miss a part of the story that most resembles domestic novels, and the one that least resembles a Gothic novel, but also the subtle changes between the different parts of the story.

These stylistic differences support the argument that the novel transitions from domestic through Gothic back to domestic, mirroring Catherine's development from naivety to maturity. The increasing complexity of sentences across the three parts reflects Catherine's intellectual growth and maturation. This stylistic evolution aligns with the Bildungsroman genre, underscoring Catherine's progression towards becoming a more critical and reflective reader.

Catherine in Bath: The Heroine in Training

In Austen's novel, "living in the world involves the reading of people, behaviour, dress and conversation as well as of books" (Butler xvi). The novel begins by highlighting Catherine's progression as a young girl "in training for a heroine," emphasising her literary education as a crucial aspect of her character development (7). Initially limited to works approved by her parents, Catherine's exposure to literature expands upon her arrival in Bath, introducing her to novels like *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and the Gothic genre in general. Hence the setting also corresponds to the genre.

The heroine-in-training also embarks on acquiring self-reflection, which in this context is the act of introspective analysis that pertains to both one's own psyche

and the demeanour of others. This aspect of education is exemplified in *Pride and Prejudice*, where a "young lady" has "deep reflection" and "read[s] great books, and make[s] extracts" (Austen 6). In the early chapters of *Northanger Abbey*, the reader learns about Catherine's restricted literary exposure. At first, her reading is confined to books sanctioned by her parents, for instance, *Sir Charles Grandison*, which is among the works that shaped her early perceptions. Nevertheless, upon entering Bath, the setting of her grand adventure, the focus of the novel expands, encompassing not only Catherine's education and transformation into a heroine but also her quest for a romantic suitor. The literary allusions throughout the novel, as well as the works that the characters claim to have read or want to read, show the reigning genres of the eighteenth century. Interestingly, these references also reflect the proposed three parts of the novel, as well as Catherine's development and the changes in style and genre. In Part 1, the references are mostly related to writers of sentimental and domestic novels, like the ones by Richardson and Burney. However, there are also mentions of Gothic writers, as Catherine starts to get immersed in the world of Gothic literature (33). Part 2 is filled with references to the conventional imagery of Gothic fiction, which can be traced back to Radcliffe and other pioneering writers of the genre. Interestingly, some of the references from Part 1 reoccur in Part 3, for instance, allusions to Richardson, Fielding and Johnson.[3] Richardson is explicitly mentioned in relation to the sentimental and domestic novels that influenced Catherine's early reading. His works, such as *Sir Charles Grandison*, are highlighted as part of Catherine's list of literary works approved by her parents. Furthermore, this reference has biographical relevance to Austen, as this was a book she really liked: "Every circumstance narrated in Sir Charles Grandison, all that was ever said or done in the cedar parlour, was familiar to her; and the wedding days of Lady L. and Lady G. were as well remembered as if they had been living friends" (Austen-Leigh 110). Jane Austen left a footnote at the end of Volume 1 Chapter 3, "Vide a letter from Mr. Richardson, No. 97, vol. II, *Rambler*" (22). This periodical was edited by Johnson. Another reference to Johnson occurs when Eleanor explains to Catherine why Henry

3 Just as the narrator of *Tom Jones* speculates on how the reader might interpret the novel, similarly, the narrator of *Northanger Abbey* interrupts the narrative to address the reader: "I leave it to my reader's sagacity to determine how much of all this it was possible for Henry to communicate at this time to Catherine" (256). The use of the word "sagacity" in this context recalls the moment when the narrator of *Tom Jones* compares Mrs. Wilkins to birds of prey and asserts that "[t]he sagacious reader will not from this simile imagine these poor people had any apprehension of the design with which Mrs. Wilkins was now coming towards them" (29).

is mocking her use of the word "nicest." "The word 'nicest,' as you used it, did not suit him; and you had better change it as soon as you can, or we shall be overpowered with Johnson and Blair all the rest of the way" (Austen, *Northanger Abbey* 109). Johnson was a favourite of Austen when it came to prose writers (cf. Austen-Leigh 110). In Volume 1 Chapter 7, John Thorpe mentions Fielding during a conversation with Catherine, praising *Tom Jones* as one of the best books in the world (Austen, *Northanger Abbey* 43). This is significant because Thorpe himself embodies some of the superficial qualities and bravado often associated with the picturesque heroes in the novels he admires. He convinces Catherine to go on a walk and a carriage ride with him by telling her that they are going to Blaize Castle.

In Volume 2 Chapter 10, these authors are referenced once again as Catherine realises that her earlier romanticised and clear-cut views on people's characters are unrealistic. This revelation occurs as she acknowledges that in real life, and particularly in English society, individuals are a mix of good and bad traits. This is contrasted with the Gothic settings she fantasises about, such as the Alps and Pyrenees, where characters are either entirely virtuous or completely villainous (205). In his essay *Rambler* no. 4, Johnson argues that authors should be careful in their portrayal of characters and situations, ensuring that they present the best examples for readers to emulate. He suggests that literature has the power to influence readers profoundly and that authors have a responsibility to use this power wisely, even more so because the readers who read novels with mixed characters are "the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life" (Johnson 203). These books also align with the ones written by Fielding, like *Tom Jones*, which John Thorpe enjoys in *Northanger Abbey*.

In this phase of her development, Catherine's literary horizon widens to include novels emblematic of the Gothic genre such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Still, she is a "vulgar" reader rather than a "sagacious" one, lacking diversity in her literary engagement (cf. Simon). Vulgar readers lack depth in their literary knowledge and often blur the lines between reality and fiction as a result of their uncritical and superficial reading. However, sagacious readers "possess the ability to self-reflect, which in this context refers to one's ability to distinguish between real life and imagination" (96).[4] The theme of female reading also appears in *Pride and Prejudice*: vulgar read-

4 I examine the difference between vulgar and sagacious reader, and apply these notions to the characters of *Northanger Abbey* in "Readers and Reading in Northanger Abbey." The term "sagacious reader" comes from Fielding's use of the word in *Tom Jones*. The defining characteristics of these

ers, like Catherine Morland, would not fit Mr. Darcy's requirements of an "accomplished woman," who, along with "what is usually met with," must "add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 27). We may note that Catherine, although being emotionally invested in reading *Udolpho*, still misremembers the name of Emily's father: "Oh! that we had such weather here as they had at Udolpho, or at least in Tuscany and the South of France!—the night that poor St. Aubin [i.e. St. Aubert] died!—such beautiful weather!" (81).

Central to Catherine's development is her intellectual engagement with the world around her, which is subtly depicted through her interactions with various characters, particularly Mr. Henry Tilney. The conversational interplay between Catherine, Henry, and Eleanor Tilney, set against their walk around Beechen Cliff, casts a spotlight on Catherine's distinct reading proclivities, particularly her preference for fiction over non-fiction, notably history. "I can read poetry and plays, and things of that sort, and do not dislike travels. But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in" (109)—these words resonate as a clear manifestation of her literary inclinations. In contrast, a deeper perusal of her juvenile essays shows Austen's literary versatility already in her formative years. Noteworthy here is her adept satirical handling of epistolary conventions, which is manifest in her mature works as well (Keymer 80). Austen's juvenile works even demonstrate an interest in nonfiction, evident in her playful parody of Oliver Goldsmith's *The History of England, from the Earliest Times to the Death of George II* in her *The History of England* (1791). From Peter Sabor's digitally recreated replica of the Library of Godmersham Park, we know that Austen had access to the four-volume set of the ninth edition of Goldsmith's book. She expressed her own political opinions by mimicking the writing employed in conventional history texts, all the while subtly satirising the claims of historians to present a neutral and detached perspective.[5] By echoing Austen's own literary experimentation, Catherine's assertion that "[t]he speeches that are put into the heroes' mouths, their thoughts and designs—the chief of all this must be invention," serves as a reflection

reader types are based on eighteenth-century literary sources, such as Laurence Sterne, Samuel Johnson, Clara Reeve, and Henry Fielding, and the works of reader-response theorists, such as Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, Umberto Eco, Wayne Booth, and Louise Rosenblatt.

5 James Edward Austen-Leigh, Austen's nephew and biographer recalls: "Jane, when a girl, had strong political opinions, especially about the affairs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (109). However, in later portions of her life, she paid less attention to current political issues (106–126).

of Austen's own literary philosophy, albeit in a more pronounced manner (Austen, *Northanger Abbey* 110).

However, books are not the only things that Catherine has to "read" while she is in Bath. Amidst the social whirlwind of the city, she has to learn to decipher not just words on pages but the intricate layers of human nature. Due to her inexperience and youth, this is a daunting task and her misinterpretations of people's intentions reveal her struggles. Through its narrative technique, the novel explores Catherine's imagination, innocence, and naivety, showing her youthful idealism. Catherine's infatuation with Gothic novels serves as a literary foil, emphasising the stark contrast between her vivid imagination and the sobering truths she discovers as the story progresses. This juxtaposition reveals the transformative power of literature and the impact of one's reading choices on one's understanding of the world.

Catherine Morland's Gothic Adventure: The Power of Reading and Imagination

In the second part of the novel, which includes Catherine's time in Northanger Abbey, Henry Tilney playfully teases her with an exaggerated and eerie description of life at the abbey, employing the very conventions typical of Gothic fiction. This tale functions as an introduction to Catherine's impressionability and shows Henry's playful purpose to juxtapose the probability and realism with the Gothic conventions to make them look more absurd. Interestingly, both Henry's storytelling success and Catherine's ensuing escapades can be attributed to her innocence, irrationality, and a notable lack of self-reflection. A distinctive element that adds a layer of parody to Mr. Tilney's narrative is its effect on Catherine herself. During Henry's recounting of the story, Catherine utters the same sentence twice: "Oh! But this will not happen to me, I am sure" (162). This repetition, resembling the formulaic expressions prevalent in the novels she avidly consumes, serves to underscore her readiness to employ Henry's reimagining of Gothic narrative dynamics as well as her knowledge of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as an interpretive tool to decode the anticipated mysteries destined to unfold at the abbey.

The reason why Catherine indulges in Gothic-like fantasies, contrary to the general rationale, is not the "wrong" reading material, but the "wrong" reading style, of which we can already see traces in Part 1. Critical remarks about inappropriate reading materials appeared in the conduct books of writers, such as James Fordyce

and Thomas Gisborne, who both argued against women reading novels.[6] The consensus was that the purpose of books should be to educate the reader, rather than create fantasies.[7] In Part 2 of *Northanger Abbey*, these fantasies manifest in a dramatic way. The catalyst might be the change in the setting, together with the unconscious motivation that Henry gives Catherine while telling her about life in the abbey. When she arrives, she immediately realises that the Tilney estate does not hold Gothic attributes: "To an imagination which had hoped for the smallest divisions, and the heaviest stone-work, for painted glass, dirt and cobwebs, the difference was very distressing" (167). Despite her disappointment, she continues to apply the same Gothic attributes to the abbey that Henry evoked in his story. As a result, Catherine, like paradigmatic Gothic heroines, sets out on an adventure. On a stormy night, her imagination runs wild as she connects the inclement weather with the circumstances described by Henry. However, her apprehension is quickly replaced with a more comforting thought about the abbey's true nature: "How glad I am that Northanger is what it is! If it had been like some other places, I do not know that, in such a night as this, I could have answered for my courage:—but now, to be sure, there is nothing to alarm one" (171). This accentuates her tendency to shift between Gothic expectations and rational comprehension. Within her room, Catherine discovers a chest akin to the one described by Henry. Here, her Gothic venture takes a parodic twist, as her quest centres on the chest's contents—an old laundry bill. This ironic twist adds a layer of humour and highlights the contrast between Catherine's expectations and the mundane reality of the abbey. Consequently, during her adventure,

6 According to Fordyce in *Sermons to Young Women*, "[t]here seems to me to be very few, in the style of Novel, that you can read with safety, and yet fewer that you can read with advantage" (113). Gisborne, in *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex,* claims that women should not hide their intellectual abilities, against which he recommends reading. However, he does not include novels in his recommendation, as even "those which are deemed to have on the whole a moral tendency, a very few perhaps might be selected, which are not liable to the disgraceful charge of being occasionally contaminated by incidents and passages unfit to be presented to the reader" (227). Furthermore, he claims that the reading habits of women "produce mischievous effects" (228) such as the corruption of mind.

7 Mary Wollstonecraft also discussed women's reading habits: "Yet, when I exclaim against novels, I mean when contrasted with those works which exercise the understanding and regulate the imagination.—For any kind of reading I think better than leaving a blank still a blank, ... besides, even the productions that are only addressed to the imagination, raise the reader a little above the gross gratification of appetites, to which the mind has not given a shade of delicacy" (216).

commonplace articles such as the chest's contents acquire Gothic attributes, thus encapsulating the deceptiveness of perception induced by literary engagement.

Throughout this part of the novel, the narrator provides parodic remarks on Catherine's actions and thoughts, illustrating the disparity between the protagonist of *Northanger Abbey* and the heroine of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Catherine's character is significantly shaped by her fervent imagination, standing in stark contrast to the rational considerations of Emily, the protagonist of Radcliffe's novel. Emily St. Aubert's stay in Udolpho castle is plagued by mysterious events, which she instinctively feels to be supernatural, while her logic insists on rational explanations (cf. Radcliffe 167). Conversely, Catherine anticipates and even craves the spectre of dread: "Yes, these were characteristic sounds;—they brought to her recollection a countless variety of dreadful situations and horrid scenes, which such buildings had witnessed, and such storms ushered in" (171). As a result, the main difference between the two protagonists is that, as a true heroine, Emily knows that she has to rely on her own sensibility and objectivity, while Catherine is afraid of Henry's opinion while her perception is still shaped by her reading. This is further highlighted when she envisions the potential revelations of the Tilney family vault, turning to her favoured literary source as a reference point: "Catherine had read too much not to be perfectly aware of the ease with which a waxen figure might be introduced, and a supposititious funeral carried on" (196). This excerpt emphasises another layer of parody, as Austen draws attention to the Gothic elements through Catherine's vulnerability to literary influence. Instead of incorporating the wax figure into the plot, she draws attention to it as part of a Gothic book Catherine has read.

At this point, Catherine is still a vulgar reader: her fantasies make her similar to a quixotic character whose "imbalance of reading" invites over-identification with fictional characters and situations (Alliston 255). Her naivety and impressionability make her fallible to the dangers of the novels she consumes. Her love for Gothic novels emerges from the emotions they evoke, serving as a source of suspense and thrill that compel her to engage in speculative conjectures about her surroundings. Her immersion within the narrative fabric of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* triggers the anticipation of suspenseful sequences, resonating in her reflections: "while I have Udolpho to read, I feel as if nobody could make me miserable. Oh! the dreadful black veil! My dear Isabella, I am sure there must be Laurentina's skeleton behind it" (34–35). In contrast to the Tilney siblings, Catherine lacks the necessary semantic competence to properly evaluate the literary materials she consumes (Simon 105).

Catherine's suspicions concerning General Tilney's potential involvement in his wife's demise intensify after Henry's temporary absence from the abbey. Catherine supposes that Mrs. Tilney could have fallen to a similar death as Madame Montoni, who died of fever after Montoni unjustly imprisoned her. Henry's departure removes the prior constraints imposed by his presence, thus allowing Catherine's ruminations to run free of the moderating influence he embodies (Charlton 187). When Catherine finds the laundry bill, her first thought is: "How could she have so imposed on herself?—Heaven forbid that Henry Tilney should ever know her folly!" (177). However, it is worth noting that she thinks her fantasies are a result of Henry's tale, the same person she fears most to find out about her folly: "And it was in a great measure his own doing, for had not the cabinet appeared so exactly to agree with his description of her adventures, she should never have felt the smallest curiosity about it. This was the only comfort that occurred" (177). She links her fantasies to Henry's tale, paradoxically making them originate from the very person she fears will judge them. However, upon Henry's return, their interactions steer her towards a re-evaluation of the reasons behind her misreading of people.

Domesticity and Self-Reflection: Catherine's Return to Fullerton

Volume 2 Chapter 10 is a turning point in the novel, as Catherine's development starts to take shape: "The visions of romance were over, Catherine was completely awakened" (204). Under Henry's guidance, she comes to acknowledge the misalignment between her preconceptions and the actualities of English society, where distinctions between virtuous and unvirtuous individuals are not straightforward; real people can embody both traits. This realisation is linked to Catherine's deep involvement in a domestic and historically rooted environment: "Among the Alps and Pyrenees, perhaps, there were no mixed characters. There, such as were not as spotless as an angel, might have the dispositions of a fiend. But in England it was not so; among the English, she believed, in their hearts and habits, there was a general though unequal mixture of good and bad" (205–206). Her ruminations about Woodston's attributes in this phase underscore this transformation, shifting her aspirations from the Gothic adventures she once envisaged at Northanger to Woodston, a domestic setting: "What a revolution in her ideas! she, who had so longed to be in an abbey! Now, there was nothing so charming to her imagination as the unpretending comfort of a well-connected Parsonage, something

like Fullerton, but better: Fullerton had its faults, but Woodston probably had none.—If Wednesday should ever come" (218). It appears that Catherine consistently assumes the role of a heroine upon entering a new environment. Whether in the abbey, where she endeavours to embody a Gothic heroine, or at home, where she envisages herself as a character in a domestic novel, or in Bath, where she presents a fusion of romantic and domestic traits, Catherine consistently aligns herself with the setting and the genre of her surroundings. This identification with the environment and the appropriate narrative genres pervades every level of the story.

During her carriage journey to Fullerton, the noticeable Gothic sensibilities that had hitherto coloured Catherine's disposition progressively dissipate, eventually giving way to a demeanour characterised by composure and a notable reintegration into her domestic sphere. In Part 1, when she leaves for Bath, the narrator makes comments about the journey, which evoke domestic and Gothic novels: "Neither robbers nor tempests befriended them, nor one lucky overturn to introduce them to the hero" (11). However, after being "awakened," there is no such description: "The journey in itself had no terrors for her; and she began it without either dreading its length, or feeling its solitariness" (238). As her familial house comes into view, an air of tranquillity envelops her, an outward manifestation of her adeptness at readjusting to her familiar domestic responsibilities. The setting of Fullerton serves as the backdrop against which Catherine's self-reflection flourishes, prompting her to confront her previous misjudgements and acknowledge her errors. The evolution in her character does not escape the notice of her mother, who remarks: "My dear Catherine, I am afraid you are growing quite a fine lady" (249). However, she also alludes to the possible mischievous effects of her daughter's change: "I hope, my Catherine, you are not getting out of humour with home because it is not so grand as Northanger. That would be turning your visit into an evil indeed ... I did not quite like, at breakfast, to hear you talk so much about the French-bread at Northanger" (250). Here, Mrs. Morland's sentiments encapsulate her desire for Catherine to maintain a balanced perspective, avoiding undue disenchantment with her home environment compared to her Northanger experience. Consequently, she encourages Catherine to peruse an essay from *The Mirror*, in which the author details the negative effects of his two daughters staying with a fine woman. This gesture is emblematic of the recurring thematic role of reading and its consequences within Austen's narrative. Catherine now is encouraged to engage with non-fiction, which she previously disliked. This is similar to what might have happened in her younger years, when

she read books advised by her mother. However, in this scene, Catherine does not get the chance to oblige her mother and her actions remain ambiguous. While she does not explicitly express a desire not to read the essay, her lack of verbal response and subsequent behaviour suggest a degree of reluctance or disinterest. However, her decision not to immediately engage with the reading recommended by her mother does not necessarily demonstrate disagreement or critical thinking. Rather, she seems to be navigating her emotions and responsibilities, as evidenced by her attempt to focus on her needlework "with an endeavour to do right" (250). This suggests that Catherine's reluctance to immediately pursue the book may stem more from her emotional state and sense of obligation rather than from a deliberate act of critical decision-making. It is also possible that Catherine's reluctance stems from her general attitude towards non-fiction. As her mother perceives that Catherine looks "absent and dissatisfied" even after starting knitting, she fetches the book for her. Thus, getting Catherine to read the book "some day or other" becomes a matter of now (205). Still, Catherine does not get the chance to read the essay when her mother returns with it, because Henry's arrival diverts the focus of the scene away from reading to himself.

Eventually, Catherine's progression is rewarded with the customary happy ending of any heroine—the promise of marriage, a characteristic feature of domestic novels (Fraiman et al. 170). This is a recurring feature in Austen's novels as a reward of the heroine's self-development. Equipped with the wisdom of rationality and discernment, instilled by the guidance of Henry and Eleanor, Catherine successfully transcends the allure of fantastical narratives, transforming into the embodiment of the true heroine intrinsic to the Bildungsroman tradition. In the Bildungsroman, "the imperative takes on a new importance," and the idea of an individual's self-evolution and progress becomes a personal choice (Bakhtin 414). This imperative can be seen at work when she does not read the essay her mother recommends, and when she makes the conscious decision to let go of her Gothic fantasies, although both choices are influenced by both internal reflection and external influences. In the Bildungsroman, the characters' development is closely tied to the environment they are in, and the challenges and opportunities they encounter. This correlation is evident in the transition of the setting from the commencement of Part 1 to the conclusion of Part 3, both situated in Fullerton. It is within this setting that the protagonist embarks on her journey of development, ultimately attaining the conventional reward of such growth.

Towards the final phases of the narrative, there is a perceptible thematic shift, where the focus of Austen's parodic intent is seemingly pivoting from Catherine herself to a satirical portrayal of the conventional heroine archetype. Her departure is unconventional, as seen in the narrator's claim that it is Henry, and not Catherine, who feels gratitude. As the narrator humorously comments: "It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own" (Austen, *Northanger Abbey* 253). This subversion of established expectations underscores Austen's penchant for injecting her narrative with subversive wit, as well as her astute awareness of the genre's conventions, which she playfully manipulates to underscore her distinct authorial voice.

The final phase of *Northanger Abbey* effectively encapsulates Catherine Morland's transformative journey from a naive girl captivated by Gothic imaginings to a self-assured heroine attuned to the nuances of her domestic milieu. Through Catherine's evolving character, Austen not only engages with prevailing literary conventions but she also offers a refined exploration of individual growth, and the transformative power of critical self-reflection.

Conclusion

Critical discourse surrounding Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* has evolved over the past decades, offering diverse perspectives on the structural intricacies and thematic content of the novel. There is a consensus among scholars about the dichotomous division of *Northanger Abbey*, which is based on the settings and the two volumes of the novel. The stylistic discrepancies of the narrative tend to be seen as a result of its prolonged composition and protracted publication processes. However, a more detailed perspective emerges when considering the division of the novel into three stylistically distinct sections, characterised by different reading habits, settings, and genres. Such an approach emphasises the evolution of the protagonist, Catherine Morland, while it also highlights the role of reading habits in character development in the stylistically different parts of the novel.

Through stylistic analysis, the essay has revealed how Austen's deliberate artistic choices accentuate Catherine's progression and reflect the narrative's thematic nuances. In Part 1, characterised by the conventions of domestic fiction, Catherine's naivety and limited reading experiences are mirrored in the restricted

syntactic construction and vocabulary density. As the narrative progresses into Part 2, marked by the presence of Gothic elements, Catherine's immersion in Gothic fiction is reflected in increased syntactic complexity (rising average sentence length) and higher vocabulary density. The final part showcases the highest syntactic complexity and moderate vocabulary density, indicating Catherine's matured understanding of the world. Therefore, the stylistic disparities within the text are not merely outcomes of its composition and publication process but deliberate choices to emphasise Catherine's maturation.

By analysing the context of the novel's literary references, the essay has also traced Catherine's development from reading sentimental novels to embracing and critically assessing Gothic stories. The recurrence of allusions to authors in the final chapters symbolises Catherine's integration of varied literary experiences into a balanced perspective. Thus, the division of the novel into three stylistically distinct sections emphasises Catherine's evolution and the role of reading habits in her character development. Austen uses this method to highlight the dynamic interplay between narrative structure and character growth. Catherine's fascination with Gothic novels serves as a narrative device and thematic exploration, illustrating the transformative power of literature. Her journey from vivid imagination to rationality, culminating in her return to domestic life, symbolizes her growth and integration into society as a heroine.

In conclusion, my analysis demonstrated notable differences among the three parts of the text. The first and third parts share similarities in generic terms, while the second part stands apart. Syntactic analysis, however, reveals a trend of increasing sentence complexity across the three parts. This indicates two key findings: firstly, the narrative structure transitions from domestic to Gothic and back to domestic genres, and secondly, stylistic complexity reflects Catherine's maturation. These findings align with my claims that Catherine's evolving readings are mirrored in the genres associated with each part, and that these readings correspond to her growth, thus framing the novel as a Bildungsroman. Thus, *Northanger Abbey* presents a tripartite structure that aligns with Catherine's developmental journey and reflects Austen's exploration of reading habits and their impact on character growth, while the observed, highly genre-specific stylistic variability also highlights the socio-historical determinacy of literary genres and forms.

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Appendix A

	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3	"Northanger Part"
Vocabulary Density	0.099	0.186	0.159	0.126
Words per Sentences	20.5	24.4	25.7	25.1

Appendix B

Document Name	Domestic Novel Words	Gothic Novel Words	Word Count	Score Domestic	Score Gothic
Part 1	570	219	15099	0.038	0.005
Part 2	111	93	5168	0.021	0.007
Part 3	220	72	6262	0.035	0.004
"Northanger Part"	331	165	11429	0.029	0.006

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