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Abstract

This paper analyzes Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey* in terms of genre. In particular, it examines the theatrical in *Mansfield Park* and the Gothic in *Northanger Abbey*. The production of Elizabeth Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* and Catherine's Gothic novel reading are key to the analysis of these genres. However, the use of subgenres goes far beyond the Bertrams' production and Catherine's books. Rather, the characters themselves adopt theatrical and Gothic characteristics throughout the novel. Furthermore, when these subgenres appear, they are presented in a manner that is harmful to the main characters. In this sense, Austen invokes the theatrical and the Gothic in order to underplay them, and in doing so, she validates the emerging realistic novel.

Keywords

Jane Austen, Mansfield Park, Northanger Abbey, Genre Studies, Gothic, Theater, Lovers' Vows, Inchbald, Novel, Realism

Disciplines

English Language and Literature

Comments

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Triumph of the Realistic Novel

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In studying the novels of Jane Austen, it is helpful to analyze their place in the history of the novel as a genre. As the novel emerged in the early eighteenth-century, it was inevitably intermingled with other literary genres. Authors such as Defoe and Fielding called some of their novels non-fictional histories, despite the fact that these works were actually domestic fiction. Writing at the turn of the century, elements of other genres were still very much present in Austen's novels. While consciously establishing them as works of a realistic vein, Austen still inserts elements of other genres—Gothicism, epistolary writing, and drama—into her fiction. In *Northanger Abbey*, for example, Austen uses the Gothic as a subgenre, including frequent references to popular works in the genre as well creating her own Gothic plots and characters. To a greater extent in *Mansfield Park*, Austen also uses the subgenre of drama and the theater; in fact, a significant portion of the novel is devoted to a private amateur production of Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows*.

The subgenres in each of these works are in some way problematic for some of their main characters. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland's insistence on applying the literary conventions of the Gothic to her real life experiences hinders her development as a character, and it is only after she abandons her Gothic expectations that she is able to fully mature. In *Mansfield Park*, the Bertram production of *Lovers' Vows* ultimately destroys the reputation and future happiness of Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford, while Fanny, who consistently rejects the production during the novel, is rewarded with a happy domestic ending. Ultimately, these subgenres in Austen's novels help to illuminate the problems with other genres as mediums of realism in literature. It is through the problematic situations her characters find themselves in while engaging with these subgenres that Austen establishes the realistic novel as the most successful mode of narrative literature.

Mansfield Park is a quintessentially domestic novel, which almost entirely takes place on the manor for which the novel is named.¹ Fanny Price is a young woman who rarely leaves the domestic sphere even to attend social functions; Fanny's first ball is fittingly held at Mansfield Park. In fact, the only time she leaves the estate for any length of time is to visit her family at Portsmouth, in another household. Since domesticity was one of the distinguishing characteristics of eighteenth and nineteenth-century realistic novels, the domesticity of *Mansfield Park* helps firmly establish the novel as being in the realm of novelistic tradition.²

Apart from *Mansfield Park* exemplifying a traditional mode of realism, the novel also contains interpolated genres, namely the epistolary and the theatrical. The subgenres in *Mansfield Park* are major plot drivers; thus, it is the letter from Mrs. Norris to the Prices in the beginning of the novel that brings Fanny to Mansfield Park in the first place. Often, letters between characters also reveal crucial plot information; for example, it is through a letter from Mary Crawford that Fanny discovers the elopement between Henry Crawford and her cousin Maria. Austen also characterizes Mary through her letters, as, after reading some of Mary's letters, Fanny thinks her superficial and undeserving of Edmund's affection.³ Even more significant than the epistolary subgenre in *Mansfield Park* is the subgenre of the theater. A sizeable portion of the novel is devoted to the production of *Lovers' Vows*, and during this production a number of relationships are forged which later lead to disaster. For example, the flirtation that begins between Yates and Julia during the rehearsals eventually leads to their

¹Sandie Byrne recognizes the importance of domesticity to Austen's novels, stating that "the concept of estate is essential to Austen's work" (108).

² At the same time though, Miranda Burgess analyzes *Mansfield Park* through an imperialist perspective in "Fanny Price's British Museum: Empire, Genre, and Memory in *Mansfield Park*." This argument somewhat complicates the idea of *Mansfield Park* as a domestic novel.

³ For an analysis of Jane Austen's own letters, see Mirella Agorni's "Jane Austen's Letters: The Public and Private Spheres in the Epistolary Genre." In her essay, Agorni argues that "the split between the letters and the novels, or the woman and the novelist, reflects a dichotomy between the private and public sphere, which is still a legacy of the Victorian period" (172).

elopement. Even worse, the romance sparked between Henry Crawford and Maria Bertram results in Maria's ruin; after she leaves her husband for Mr. Crawford, Maria is rejected by her family and society. Accompanied into exile by her tedious aunt, there is little foreseeable happiness in Maria's future.

During the production of *Lovers' Vows*, the more each character becomes involved in the role he or she performs in the play, the more that character is damaged by the play. In other words, the more a character is invested in playing a specific role in *Lovers' Vows*, the more that character takes on the role of that character in real life, always with harmful results. The characters who are most invested in their roles in *Lovers' Vows* are Maria, Henry Crawford, and Mr. Rushworth; accordingly, these are the characters who suffer most from their roles in the play. (It is important to note that even though Tom is heavily involved in the production of the play, he is not devoted to playing a single role. Thus, he is not affected by his involvement in *Lovers' Vows* to the extent of some of the other characters.) Interestingly enough, as Paula Byrne points out in *Jane Austen and the Theater*, the roles that Maria and Mr. Rushworth take on during the production of *Lovers' Vows* parallel the roles these characters have in the novel.⁴ For example, Maria plays Agatha Friberg, the fallen woman who is the protagonist of the play (164). Like Agatha, Maria too becomes a fallen woman by the end of *Mansfield Park* as a result of her illicit affair with Henry Crawford. At the end of *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas thinks through the fall of his daughter:

Maria had destroyed her own character, and he would not, by a vain attempt to restore what never could be restored, by affording his sanction to vice, or in seeking to lessen its

⁴The choice of *Lovers' Vows* as a play is especially problematic, as one of its main characters, Agatha Friberg, is a fallen woman. Sandie Byrne calls *Lovers' Vows* an "immoral and Jacobin" (204) play in that its protagonist is loose and depraved. Paula Byrne likewise describes *Lovers' Vows* as an immoral and sexually licentious play in *Jane Austen and the Theatre*.

disgrace, be anywise accessory to introducing such misery in another man's family as he had known himself. (432)

Through the eyes of Sir Thomas in this passage, Austen reveals the havoc Maria has wreaked upon herself as result of her indiscretions. Because Maria has brought shame on her family through her elopement, she has ruined her prospects. Not only will she never marry again, but her own family will also no longer welcome her, leaving Maria in a state of loneliness and isolation.

The state of ruin Maria is in is a result of the flirtation she had with Henry Crawford. Furthermore, Maria's flirtation was solidified during the rehearsals for *Lovers' Vows*; during these rehearsals, Fanny observes:

Henry Crawford acted well, and it was a pleasure to *her* to creep into the theater, and attend the rehearsal of the first act, in spite of the feelings it excited in some speeches for Maria. Maria, she also thought, acted well, too well. (153)

Here, Austen reveals that through acting in *Lovers' Vows*, Henry Crawford and Maria can openly flirt with each other without being accused of indecency; thus, this capability enables their flirtation to grow to an extent that would not have been possible with the *Lovers' Vows* rehearsals. Later, even when Sir Thomas suddenly returns home from Antigua and puts an abrupt end to the production, Austen describes Maria as "still feeling her hand pressed to Henry Crawford's heart, and caring little for anything else" (169). Through this remark, Austen shows Maria is reluctant to end the open flirtation with Crawford that the production enabled. Eventually, out of a desire to live out the romance with Crawford which began during *Lovers' Vows*, Maria leaves her husband and becomes a ruined woman.

To an only slightly lesser extent than Maria, Crawford is likewise ruined by his affair. While it is true that there is no indication that Crawford is rejected by his family as a result of the affair, his prospects of future domestic happiness are certainly bleak:

Could he have been satisfied with the conquest of one amiable woman's affections, could he have found sufficient exultation in overcoming the reluctance, in working himself into the esteem and tenderness of Fanny Price, there would have been every probability of success and felicity for him. His affection had already done something. Fanny must have been his reward ... Henry Crawford [provided] for himself no small portion of vexation and regret: vexation that must rise sometimes to self-reproach, and regret to wretchedness, ...so forfeited his best, most estimable, and endeared acquaintance, and so lost the woman whom he had rationally as well as passionately loved. (434-5)

In this passage, Austen reveals that had Crawford not eloped with Maria, he would have been eventually rewarded with a happy marriage to Fanny, the woman he truly loves. It is true that one could argue Crawford has merely deluded himself into thinking he would be happy with Fanny. After all, Crawford falls in love with Fanny while he is trying to get her to fall for him, and in this sense, one could say that Crawford has deluded himself into succumbing to his own scheme. However, Crawford's regret at having lost his love seems genuine; instead of being happy with Fanny, Crawford feels "self-reproach" and "wretchedness" (435) for ruining his prospects. As there is no mention of Crawford pursuing or marrying another woman at the end of the novel, readers are left with the image of him as a regretful, self-reproaching man.

In addition, the role Maria's suitor Mr. Rushworth has in *Lovers' Vows* reflects the relationship he has with her in *Mansfield Park*. In his role in as Count Cassel in *Lovers' Vows* and in the novel, Mr. Rushworth is something of an incompetent fiancé. To the father figures in

Lovers' Vows and *Mansfield Park*, Count Cassel and Mr. Rushworth are seen as advantageous matches due to their wealth and social position (Paula Byrne 166). At the same time though, Count Cassel and Rushworth are also seen by the women they are pursuing as being incompetent suitors. Amelia, the woman Count Cassel pursues in *Lovers' Vows*, finds the Count tedious and foolish. In discussing Count Cassel with her father, Amelia states that "I do not remember a word of [his conversation]...I love to laugh at him myself" (Inchbald Act II Scene 2). When her father responds with "Then I do not think you like him," Amelia agrees, saying "I believe not" (Act II Scene 2). Maria finds Rushworth similarly tedious. In Chapter XII of *Mansfield Park*, Austen states that

Maria, with only Mr. Rushworth to attend to her, and doomed to the repeated details of his day's sport, good or bad, his boast of his dogs, his jealousy of his neighbours, his doubts of their qualifications, and his zeal after poachers, subjects which will not find their way to female feelings without some talent on one side or some attachment on the other, had missed Mr. Crawford grievously. (108)

In this passage, Austen divulges Maria's dislike for Mr. Rushworth. As Austen describes Maria as being "doomed to the repeated details" of Rushworth's daily life, she shows that Maria finds him tiresome and dull. Because she further describes Maria's relationship with Rushworth as being "without...some attachment," Austen shows that Maria has little or no affection for Rushworth. In addition, the fact that Rushworth also has "zeal after poachers" registers somewhat ironically, considering the flirtation between Maria and Crawford during the rehearsals. This line suggests that Rushworth would passionately pursue any man who tried to pilfer his hunt but is more or less oblivious when Crawford steals his fiancée. Since Crawford is so interested in matters of hunting but not of courtship he is rendered even more dull and obtuse

to Maria. Ultimately, the parallel between the rejected suitor Rushworth plays and Rushworth as a character in *Mansfield Park* foreshadows that Rushworth will also be rejected by Maria.

During the rehearsals for *Lovers' Vows*, Rushworth takes his role in the play very seriously, to the point that he eventually takes on part of the role of Count Cassel in his real life. He takes pride in playing the Count, stating that "I come in three times, and have two-and-forty speeches. That's something, is not it?" (130). Throughout the chapters concerned *Lovers' Vows*, Rushworth continuously emphasizes that he has to learn his forty-two speeches, and although he proves to be a poor actor, he tries his hardest to learn his part. As a result of Rushworth's earnest attempt to become the character of Count Cassel, he eventually takes on the appearance of the Count as a rejected suitor in real life. After all, Maria does eventually leave Rushworth to elope with Henry Crawford. At the same time, it is at least worth noting that for all Rushworth's eagerness to learn his lines, he is not very successful in memorizing them. Even when rest of the cast has more or less learned their lines, Rushworth is still "wanting a prompter through every speech" (152-3). Because he never actually memorizes his part, it is possible that Rushworth fears becoming an incompetent suitor himself, and thus does not even want to act the part of one in any form. Nevertheless, because Maria does eventually reject him for Crawford, Rushworth's participation in *Lovers' Vows* still damages him.

To a somewhat lesser extent, Julia Bertram and Mr. Yates are also damaged by their active roles in *Lovers' Vows*. As a result of the flirtation that began between Julia and Mr. Yates during the rehearsals for *Lovers' Vows*, the pair elopes at the end of the novel, thus compromising their reputations. Austen only gives a brief mention of the beginning of the beginning of Julia and Mr. Yates's flirtation, when Mrs. Grant remarks that "I am sure *Julia* does not [care for Mr. Crawford], or she would not have flirted as she did last night with Mr. Yates"

(149). Here, Mrs. Grant's comment shows that even while it is not alluded to in as much depth as Maria and Henry Crawford's flirtation, Julia and Mr. Yates's romance was also sparked during the rehearsals for *Lovers' Vows*. After discovering Julia's elopement, Sir Thomas muses on her condition, thinking that "though Julia was yet as more pardonable than Maria as folly than vice, he could not but regard the step she had taken as opening the worst probabilities of a conclusion hereafter like her sister's" (419). Sir Thomas's thoughts show that even though Julia and Yates eventually marry, their actions had the potential of forever ruining their reputations. At the same time though, it is important to note that Austen never states that the pair actually commits adultery; rather, Sir Thomas predicts that they will when given the chance. In contrast to Maria and Crawford, Julia and Yates are thus eventually welcomed back to Mansfield Park and recognized as a legitimate couple. Therefore, unlike Maria and Crawford, who take their roles in *Lovers' Vows* so seriously that they ruin their character, Julia and Yates are much less damaged at the end of the novel.

By the same token, the characters in *Mansfield Park* who are either not very invested in the play, or do not focus too strongly on a specific role in the play, are less affected by their part in *Lovers' Vows*. For example, since Edmund does not take his role in the production of *Lovers' Vows* overly seriously, he is not especially affected by his part in the play. Initially, Edmund is adamantly against the idea of putting on a private theatrical, stating that:

I think it would be very wrong. In a *general* light, private theatricals are open to some objections, but as *we* are circumstanced, I must think it would be highly injudicious, and more than injudicious to attempt anything of the kind. It would shew great want of feeling on my father's account, absent as he is, and in some degree of constant danger;

and it would be imprudent, I think, with regard to Maria, whose situation is a very delicate one, considering everything, extremely delicate. (117)

Here, Edmund shows his disapproval of Tom's idea to put on a play. He views the prospect of a Bertram production as being morally unsound and lacking in propriety. Edmund in particular expresses anxiety about Maria, since as she is engaged to be married, any indiscretions on her part could potentially result in an end to her engagement. Even though Edmund eventually agrees to act in *Lovers' Vows*, his early disapproval of the project shows his endeavors toward performing his part will be minimal in comparison with those of other members of the cast.

When Edmund does decide to act, he does so grudgingly, stating that "there is but *one* thing to be done... I must take Anhalt myself...it is not at all what I like" (142). Here, Edmund's words show that even when he decided to act, he still dislikes the idea of the Bertrams' production and so is not as invested in playing his role in the play as is the rest of his family. It is true that readers may be question whether or not Edmund is being honest when he states that he will play the role of Anhalt reluctantly. Considering that his part in the play allows him to flirt with Mary Crawford, it is certainly possible that Edmund has a different motive in accepting the part of Anhalt. Nevertheless, because Edmund's commitment to playing his role in *Lovers' Vows* is minimal, he is not damaged by his part in the play in the same way as are Maria, Henry Crawford, or even Julia and Yates.

At the same time though, Edmund is not praised as a character in quite the same way as is his cousin Fanny. In contrast with the rest of her friends and family, Fanny is the only character who consistently opposes the Bertram's production of *Lovers' Vows*.⁵ When Sir Thomas returns,

⁵ In fact, J.A. Hobson describes Fanny as "the spiritual mistress of Mansfield Park," which further reinforces the idea of her as the most morally sound character in the household (Byrne 207).

and much to his disappointment finds that his household has been involved in a private production of a scandalous play, Edmund states that:

We have all been more or less to blame...every one of us, excepting Fanny. Fanny is the only one who has judged rightly throughout; who has been consistent. *Her* feelings have been steadily against it from first to last. She never ceased to think of what was due to you. You will find Fanny every thing you could wish. (174)

Edmund's statement about Fanny praises her for her consistent opposition to the improper *Lovers' Vows* production. At the same, Edmund's words cast himself in an unfavorable light, showing that as a result of his part in *Lovers' Vows*, he is shamed before Sir Thomas. Indeed, Sir Thomas looks at Edmund in such a way as to suggest "on your judgment, Edmund, I depended; what have you been about?" (172)

As a result of her unwavering disapproval of *Lovers' Vows*, Fanny is praised and rewarded for her lasting moral fiber. At the end of the novel, Fanny is the only character who realizes the future she has been dreaming about for almost the entire novel—a marriage to her cousin Edmund. Even though Fanny and Edward are in fact rewarded with each other, Fanny's reward is greater than Edmund's because she has loved Edward for most of the novel, while in comparison Edmund's love for Fanny is relatively new. Close to end of the novel, right after Fanny returns to Mansfield Park from Portsmouth, Austen reveals:

My Fanny, indeed, at this very time, I have the satisfaction of knowing, must have been happy in spite of everything. She must have been a happy creature in spite of all that she felt, or thought she felt, for the distress of those around her. She had sources of delight that must force their way. (428)

In contrast, at this point in the novel, Edmund "was very far from happy himself" (428); as he has only recently had his hopes of a match with Mary Crawford shattered, it is some time before

he can realize and fully appreciate his love for Fanny. Edmund does eventually become “as anxious to marry Fanny as Fanny herself could desire,” and concerning his feelings at the end of the novel, Austen states “and it must have been a delightful happiness” (437). At the same time though, Austen reveals “but there was happiness elsewhere which no description can reach. Let no one presume to give the feelings of a young woman on receiving the assurance of that affection of which she has scarcely allowed herself to entertain a hope” (437). Thus, even though Edmund is certainly rewarded by a marriage to Fanny at the end of *Mansfield Park*, the happiness he feels pales in comparison to the happiness of Fanny herself.⁶

Besides the production of *Lovers' Vows*, there is also a great deal of general theatricality in *Mansfield Park* that damages the novel's main characters. Reflected by his skillful acting in *Lovers' Vows*, Henry Crawford is also an excellent actor in life, and this real life acting is detrimental to other characters throughout the novel. As demonstrated by Henry's attempt to make Fanny fall in love with him, he often plays the part of a devoted suitor and flirt, acting out feelings he does not really have in order to assert a sort of dominance over the women he encounters. Henry tells his sister “my plan is to make Fanny Price in love with me...I cannot be satisfied without Fanny Price, without making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart” (212). When Henry devises his plan to make Fanny fall in love with him, he does not have any real affection for her besides the notion that she is “absolutely pretty” (212); however, he acts as if he does, showing his skill as an actor in real life matters. Henry plays his part so well that even Fanny's brother William believes he has a true regard for her; in fact, William thinks that “any one in the habit of such idle observations *would have thought* that Mr. Crawford was the admirer of Fanny Price” (220). Indeed, Henry's acting while he is playing the role of Fanny's suitor is so

⁶ Even though she is highly upheld as a character and praised by Austen, many readers find it difficult to sympathize with Fanny. In fact, Lionel Trilling once said “no one, I believe, has ever found it possible to like the heroine of *Mansfield Park*” (Byrne 8).

convincing that he himself eventually is fooled by it, and actually falls in love with her. Henry tells Mary that “I am fairly caught. You know with what idle designs I began; but this is the end of them. I have (I flatter myself) made no inconsiderable progress in her affections; but my own are entirely fixed” (269). Here, Henry reveals that he has fallen victim to his own acting, even while Fanny remains unaffected by the scheme. Unfortunately though, Henry’s love for Fanny, which came about as result of his real life acting, is generally the source of pain and distress to Fanny.

The fact that Henry’s acting causes Fanny distress though, is not to say that his acting is wholly without merit. For example, his skillful reading of Shakespeare in an attempt to woo Fanny gives the Bertrams a great deal of pleasurable entertainment; he even succeeds in gaining the prudent Fanny’s admiration:

She could not abstract her mind five minutes: she was forced to listen; his reading was capital, and her pleasure in good reading extreme. To *good* reading, however, she had been long used: her uncle read well, her cousins all, Edmund very well, but in Mr. Crawford's reading there was a variety of excellence beyond what she had ever met with. The King, the Queen, Buckingham, Wolsey, Cromwell, all were given in turn; for with the happiest knack, the happiest power of jumping and guessing, he could always alight at will on the best scene, or the best speeches of each; and whether it were dignity, or pride, or tenderness, or remorse, or whatever were to be expressed, he could do it with equal beauty. It was truly dramatic. His acting had first taught Fanny what pleasure a play might give. (312)

Fanny observes that Crawford gives each character “in turn... the happiest knack, the happiest power of jumping and guessing” and furthermore “whatever were to be expressed, he could do it

with equal beauty,” showing that Henry is so skilled as an actor that he can convincingly play multiple roles at once.⁷ It is crucial to note that in this passage, Henry reads Shakespeare as a part of his larger scheme to win Fanny over as a suitor, and to some extent, it works. After all, Crawford’s performance brings Fanny joy; as Austen notes, his “acting had first taught Fanny what pleasure a play might give...with [great] enjoyment” (312). Before his acting of Shakespeare, Crawford had never before gained any amount of approval from Fanny; in this sense, it is through his acting that Crawford begins to win Fanny over. Thus, Fanny’s admiration of Henry’s acting Shakespeare complicates the role of the theater in the novel. The positive view toward Henry’s acting in this passage further shows that Austen is not against the use of the theater in general, but rather when it is misappropriated to serious real-life matters.

Nevertheless, Henry’s real life acting is damaging to a number of characters. Even in this passage, there is the sense that through his skills as an actor, Henry is capable of deception and duplicity. As Susan Harlan notes in “‘Talking’ and Reading Shakespeare in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*,” “[Crawford’s] reading is marked by ‘a variety of excellence,’ which suggests both that it is uniquely excellent and that... [the variations] signify distinctions between characters and the feelings that set them apart from one another” (43-44). Harlan’s comments further emphasize Henry’s skill in acting out multiple roles simultaneously; it is precisely Henry’s ability to play multiple roles at once that is so damaging in the novel.⁸ After all, this skill

⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the function of Shakespeare’s *Henry III* in *Mansfield Park*, see Elaine Bander’s “The Other Play in *Mansfield Park*: Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII*.” Bander argues that Austen’s conscious decision to include *Henry VIII* in the text is significant for several reasons. The play, like *Mansfield Park*, advocates self-examination and self-discipline. The manner in which “nobles give way to commoners” also mirrors the manner in which “the poor Portsmouth cousins, Fanny and Susan Price, replace the wayward Bertram daughters at Mansfield Park” (116). Furthermore, Bander asserts that “In Shakespeare’s play, King Henry’s adulterous passion for Anne Bullen begins when he is masked” just as “in *Mansfield Park*, of course, sexual mischief begins with masks” (116).
⁸ In “‘Talking’ and Reading Shakespeare in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*,” Harlan argues that by having Crawford read Shakespeare, Austen “[imbues] his play with a ‘meaning’ or ‘sense’ that is uniquely novelistic” (43).

is what allows him to pretend to be a devoted suitor to Maria (and at first Fanny), and an upstanding gentleman to Sir Thomas, while revealing his true self to his sister.

The worst consequences are, however, felt by Fanny, who is deeply distressed by Henry's advances and Sir Thomas's insistence that she accept his marriage proposal. In the same way that Fanny was the only character who consistently opposes the production, she is also the only character who does not succumb to Henry's pretending to be a proper gentleman. As she recognizes that Henry has been acting a part rather than revealing his true feelings for most of the novel, she never truly believes him to be honorable even when his pursuit of her is genuine. When Mary writes Fanny a letter congratulating her on Henry's attachment, Fanny feels a sense of dread, thinking that "there was wretchedness in the idea of its being serious; there was perplexity and agitation every way" (280). The "wretchedness" Fanny alludes to in her thoughts is that at least once during the novel, Henry has been acting a part for his own self-amusement, oblivious to the disastrous effect this insincerity has on others. From his flirtation with her cousin during the rehearsals, Fanny thinks of Henry as

the clandestine, insidious, treacherous admirer of Maria Bertram... her abhorrence, whom she had hated to see or to speak to, in whom she could believe no good quality to exist, and whose power, even of being agreeable, she had barely acknowledged...[who] was now the Mr. Crawford who was addressing herself with ardent, disinterested love; whose feelings were apparently become all that was honourable and upright, whose views of happiness were all fixed on a marriage of attachment. (303)

Her low opinion of Henry Crawford stems from how he has been acting out a part rather than being sincere about his feelings and intentions. By calling him the "insidious, treacherous admirer of Maria Betram," Fanny attacks him not only for meddling in the affairs of a married

woman, but also because he was acting when doing so. As a result of his acting insincerely with Maria, Fanny therefore has trouble believing him capable of genuine emotions.

Ultimately, Fanny's refusal to accept Henry causes her a great deal of pain and suffering in the novel. Paralleling her disapproval of Henry for acting emotions he did not feel for Maria, Fanny sees marrying without affection (or in other words acting out a regard for a person that is not truly there) as an unpardonable offense. She is stunned that her morally upright uncle cannot see "how wretched, and how unpardonable, how hopeless, and how wicked it was to marry without affection" (299). The disparity between Fanny's moral qualms about acting affection and her uncle's expectations that she will form an alliance through marriage brings them into dramatic conflict. Fanny becomes very distraught when Sir Thomas lectures her after he has learned that Fanny intends to refuse Henry Crawford's proposal:

you have now shewn me that you can be wilful and perverse...very different from anything that I had imagined...You think only of yourself...I should have been very much surprised had either of my daughters, on receiving [such] a proposal of marriage...put a decided negative on it...I should have thought it a gross violation of duty and respect...of *ingratitude*. (294)

Sir Thomas's cruel words profoundly perturb Fanny. Following her uncle's speech, Fanny "was by this time crying so bitterly" that "her heart was almost broke by such a picture of what she appeared to him" (294-5). The reason Fanny gives for being unable to accept Mr. Crawford (aside, of course, from not loving him) is his "ill...principles" (295): she suffers because he acts.

Furthermore, the scene between Fanny and Sir Thomas is in itself implicitly theatrical. When Sir Thomas chastises Fanny for not accepting Mr. Crawford's proposal, his dialogue is highly dramatized through the use of words like "willful and perverse," and "gross violation."

Taking into consideration his laundry list of derogatory statements about Fanny's behavior and his assertion that Mr. Crawford would have been a more than acceptable partner for either of his daughters, Sir Thomas's dialogue in this scene is very much a dramatized lecture. During Sir Thomas's speech, Fanny is barely able to say a word except when directly answering his questions with "Yes, sir" or "No, sir." The fact that Fanny does not participate in the dialogue, combined with the fact that Sir Thomas's words are highly dramatic, renders Sir Thomas's speech similar to a theatrical monologue. Further emphasizing the theatricality of Sir Thomas's speech, the scene of his encounter with Fanny even involves dramatic irony, in that Fanny (as well as the readers) knows the true nature of Mr. Crawford's character but Sir Thomas does not.

Like her brother, Mary Crawford is also a damaging in character in ways that are linked to the theater. Mary's attraction to Edmund is, after all, based upon the physical appearance, or his exterior theatrical mask, rather than his personality and character. In a letter to Fanny at Portsmouth, Mary reveals the basis of her feelings for Edmund:

Of the last-mentioned hero, what shall I say? If I avoided his name entirely, it would look suspicious. I will say, then, that we have seen him two or three times, and that my friends here are very much struck with his gentlemanlike appearance. Mrs. Fraser (no bad judge) declares she knows but three men in town who have so good a person, height, and air; and I must confess, when he dined here the other day, there were none to compare with him, and we were a party of sixteen. (386)

In this letter, Mary reveals her affection for Edmund due to her physical attraction to him. Furthermore, her attachment is increased by the idea other members of the London social elite are "very much struck with his gentlemanlike appearance." After reading the letter, Fanny disgustedly exclaims "The woman who could speak of him, and speak only of his appearance!"

What an unworthy attachment!” (387). Thus, Mary cares for Edmund not for his person, but rather for his surface appearance and how he initially appears to society—in other words, his mask, the most theatrical part of him. Moreover, Mary’s superficial affection for Edmund is deeply damaging to him; even though she knows fairly early on in the novel that she has no intention of marrying a clergyman, Mary leads him on to such an extent that he is wretched when the attachment is finally over. After their flirtation has ended, Fanny observes that Edmund is “in misery...very ill...evidently suffering under violent emotions” (413). Thus, the theatricality of Mary’s affection, like Henry’s real-life acting, damages one of the most the morally upright model characters in the novel.

Mary and Henry Crawford are to some extent type-cast characters, and in their generic roles, the Crawfords represent another damaging theatrical force at work in *Mansfield Park*.⁹ In the novel, Henry Crawford is generically cast as the rake, a familiar role in eighteenth-century drama. Through the eyes of prudent Fanny, Crawford is seen as improper and amoral. For his own pleasure, he seeks to make as many women fall in love with him as possible, without considering any of the consequences the women may experience as a result of their attachments to him. For example, Crawford never takes into consideration that by making Maria Bertram fall in love with him, he will eventually ruin her marriage as well as her future: he acts like a theatrical rake. Crawford’s love for Fanny further casts him in the role, as by the end of many dramas, the rake characters become reformed by the women in the play and form a genuine attachment.¹⁰

⁹For a contrary analysis of the character of Fanny, see the work of D.W. Harding, who finds the seemingly perfect character of Fanny to be a real problem in the novel. He instead suggests that readers find more sympathy for and identification with the character of Mary Crawford.

¹⁰For example, in Wycherley’s *The Country Wife*, the character of Harcourt is a reformed rake after he falls in love with Alithea.

Similarly, Mary Crawford is cast as the superficial high-society London socialite.¹¹ Her generic role is emphasized by the fact that she loves Edmund on the basis of his appearance, and furthermore that she feels satisfaction when his physical appearance is complimented by members of her social circle in London.¹² She also does not seriously entertain the idea of marrying Edmund because he intends to be a country clergyman, for whom she would have to give up London, in addition to money and fortune. Expressing her disapproval of his future profession, Mary asks Edmund

why are you to be a clergyman? I thought *that* was always the lot of the youngest, where there were many to choose before him...For what is to be done in the church? Men love to distinguish themselves, and [other] lines distinction may be gained, but not in the church. A clergyman is nothing. (86)

Here, Mary degrades Edmund for choosing to be a clergyman by expressing her belief that no one would ever choose to be one unless absolutely forced.¹³ Specifically, Mary disapproves of the profession due to the clergyman's inability gain fame, fortune, and accolades. Whereas Edmund may still earn himself a place in society with a profession in law, the military, or the navy (positions that can earn wealth and affluence), as a parson at Thornton Lacey he will be of little significance in the world at large and at a complete remove from all the society that Mary prizes. Later, during the ball, Mary tells Edmund "it is to be the last time that she ever will dance with him... she never has danced with a clergyman, she says, and she never *will*" (248), thus

¹¹ In *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, Marvin Mudrick argues that the character of Mary Crawford is Austen's critique of herself.

¹² For a contrary analysis of the character of Mary Crawford, see Chapter 6 of *Jane Austen and the Theater* in which Byrne argues that Mary exemplifies the traditional heroine of eighteenth-century fiction.

¹³ It is true that Mary's opinion that no one would ever choose to be a clergyman may be well-founded, and in this sense her failure to genuinely love Edmund may arise from her inability to imagine him as sincere. Given, however, her preoccupation with wealth, one gets sense that Mary's aversion to clergymen arises from their low salary and relative insignificance in the circles of high society.

reinforcing her role as superficial and socially motivated. Further, Mary Crawford's role as a shallow woman is damaging to Edmund. While it is true that the ultimate cause of Edmund and Mary's separation is Henry's affair with Maria, Mary Crawford's superficial values certainly play a part in bringing about the painful separation. After Mary tells Edmund that "she never has danced with a clergyman... and she never *will*" (139), Edmund tells Fanny "I have almost given up every serious idea of her" (139). Here, Edmund's words signify that Mary's inability to balance his calling as a future clergyman with her love of prestige, wealth, and London's social landscape plays in major part in ending their relationship. Considering that as a result of their separation Edmund initially suffers, it is Mary's generic role as a superficial London socialite that is damaging to him.

However, Jane Austen's treatment of the *Lovers' Vows* production in *Mansfield Park* is much more complicated than just a denouncement of the theater. As Paula Byrne demonstrates, Jane Austen was very involved in the theater during her life. Not only did she regularly attend plays, but she also was involved in private theatricals and even wrote her own plays early in life. Byrne points out that Austen was an active participant in the theatrical productions in her home at Steventon, as well as in Kent, Southampton, and Winchester (28). Certainly, the theater is more successful in particular aspects of storytelling than is the novel. Through the use of its visual elements, such as costuming, staging, and lighting, the theater is able to create a spectacle that immediately sets out to engage its viewers. In contrast with the novel, in which readers must do a certain amount of work in reading a fair amount just to set the scene, and much more to really understand the characters, the theater does the work for its viewers. After all, through the use of staging, the audience is immediately presented with the scene, and through costuming and make-up, the audience instantly sees not only what the character looks like but also some basic

characteristics about that character. For example, if a character is dressed in a gaudy manner with excessive finery, an audience member might safely assume that character is superficial and enjoys flaunting his or her wealth. In some ways, the theater is also possibly more effective than the novel in its use of satire, in that it can make the satire of a specific person very obvious. Through costuming, a director might make an actor dress exactly like a specific person, so that even if that character is not specifically called that person by name, audience members will still recognize who is being mocked in the play. In her *Juvenilia*, Austen seemed to recognize the usefulness of the theater in terms of parody and satire, writing three spoof playlets, "The Visit," "The Mystery," and "The First Act of a Comedy."

Similarly, in *Mansfield Park* there are some positive aspects of the theater. For example, as Paula Byrne explains, the father figure in *Lovers' Vows* is in some ways a more successful than Sir Thomas. Baron Wildenheim, the father of Amelia (the young woman pursued by the foolish suitor Count Cassell), understands that he cannot and should not force his daughter to marry a laughable man for whom she has no affection, whereas Sir Thomas does not. Byrne states "Sir Thomas and Baron Wildenheim have different values. Both respect the dual claim of 'birth and fortune' in matrimony, but Sir Thomas is prepared to overlook the claims of love and affection" (174). As Byrne here argues, Sir Thomas, in contrast to Baron Wildenheim, fails to recognize that love and affection are equally (indeed, if not more) important as social class in terms of a successful marriage. As a result, Sir Thomas advocates Maria's marriage to Rushworth, even though this union is a loveless one, and derides Fanny for considering it impossible to marry Crawford without affection. Consequently, Sir Thomas comes off as a disconnected, unaffectionate father figure. Considering that Maria's loveless marriage ends after

her affair with Crawford, Sir Thomas's advocating marriages purely as alliances without affection comes off as foolish and ill-considered.

In the novel, it is also interesting to note that if Sir Thomas would have returned home a few months later and the play would have been performed, it is very likely that many of harmful consequences that came about as a result of the *Lovers' Vows* rehearsals may have never occurred. For example, should the play have been performed, it is very likely that the flirtation between Mr. Crawford and Maria would have resulted in a marriage, rather than a scandalous elopement. As a result, Mr. Rushworth, while still slighted as a suitor, would only have to endure a broken off engagement rather than a scandalous and painful divorce. Indeed, Fanny's observation that Crawford and Maria acted "well, too well" during the rehearsals for *Lovers' Vows* reveals that the play provided the pair an opportunity to act out the real desires they have for each other. In this context, had Maria and Crawford been able to continue rehearsing, their attachment would have only been strengthened. Furthermore, the actual production of *Lovers' Vows* would have provided the pair with an opportunity to publicly act out their feelings for each other, similar to the way a betrothal also allows a couple to publicly announce a man and woman's attachment to one another. As a result, the reader gets the sense that an engagement between Maria and Crawford would have occurred following the actual public performance of *Lovers' Vows*.

Nevertheless, by allowing the *Lovers' Vows* production to continue, Austen would have been rewarding the most morally ambiguous characters in the novel while neglecting her model protagonist. Fanny, after all, is benefitted by the termination of the *Lovers' Vows* scheme. The end of the rehearsals weakens the attachment between Edmund and Mary Crawford, eventually allowing Fanny herself to be considered by Edmund as a possible partner. Like Maria and Henry

Crawford, readers also get the sense that the actual production of *Lovers' Vows* would have resulted in an engagement between Edmund and Mary. Thus, because the end of the rehearsals helps to distance Edmund from Mary to and hinder their attachment, the termination of the scheme benefits Fanny. Likewise, Edmund, who is consistently depicted as a kind and moral gentleman, is benefitted by the end of the production. After all, the end of the play distances him from Mary and allows him to eventually become available as a potential partner for Fanny. Edmund recognizes that “even in the midst of his late infatuation, he had acknowledged Fanny's mental superiority...She was of course only too good for him” (242). Here, Edmund acknowledges that he is far better off married to Fanny Price than he would have been should he have married Mary Crawford.

Nonetheless, in most of *Mansfield Park*, the theater serves as a damaging force, causing a multitude of problems for the main characters of the novel. In analyzing the theater as being a problematic entity in fiction, it is important to consider questions of representation. If, in fact, drama is damaging to characters by encouraging them to act out the scenes they see in the plays in real life (think of how Maria assimilates her role as Agatha Friberg by actually becoming a fallen woman), one might reasonably question whether or not fiction is damaging in the same way. It is true that the novelist uses fictional characters in the novel in a similar manner as does the dramatist in a play, as each character acts his or her role to drive the plot forward. However, the key difference between representation in the novel lies in the nature of novel in comparison to the nature of the theater. As Ian Watt points out in *The Rise of the Novel*, during which he discusses the emerging novel of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, “the novel raises more sharply than any other literary work—the [epistemological] problem of the reality which it

imitates” (11).¹⁴ In other words, Watt argues that out of all literary forms, the novel is most wary of the misappropriation of literary fiction to real life situations. In comparing the theater with the novel, Watt states that the theater is based upon apparent “universals,” and “[has] no regard to the distinction of time or place” (23-26).¹⁵ In contrast, the novel is based upon “the actual experience of individuals...[encompassing] the adaptation of prose style to give an air of complete authenticity” (27), which “involved a many-sided break with the current literary tradition” (35). In other words, the theater is by its very nature relatively superficial, implying that all human experiences are universal can be represented by being condensed into key scenes.

In the theater, we also only see characters in their most compelling, crucial moments rather than in everyday situations, which renders the characters in drama all the more exaggerated and superficial. On the other hand, the novel, in focusing on everyday experiences and closer to life characters, is much more natural. In contrast with the theater, the novel does not present extraordinary characters and situations (which in their extravagance, lend themselves to acted out) but rather the everyday and commonplace. Thus, the nature of the novel does not lend itself to be acted, and in maintaining this closeness to real life, it seems to caution against the possible application of the theatrical to actual experience.

In switching from writing plays and other genres in her early years to novels in her later life, Austen clearly saw some problem with drama that caused her to choose the novel over the play as her main creative medium. Although she experimented with drama in her *Juvenalia*, in the end Austen rejected the genre. Ultimately, one of the advantages the novel has over drama is

¹⁴ Two of authors Watt focuses on most in *The Rise of the Novel* are Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, two of first successful English novelists. In her book *The Author's Inheritance*, Jo Alyson Parker sees Jane Austen as the culmination of the Richardson and Fielding's work in establishing the novel as a genre.

¹⁵ Interestingly, *Mansfield Park* has been analyzed as being similar to a Victorian novel for the long span of time covered in the novel. In “Jane Austen's Victorian Novel,” Barbara Bail Collins brings up the point that *Mansfield Park* encompasses a longer period of time than any of Austen's other novels. The long period of time covered in the novel, from Fanny's ninth birthday to her marriage, distinguishes *Mansfield Park* even further than the theater, in that dramas were traditionally set to take place in a twenty-four hour time period.

its sense of intimacy and authenticity, its sense of being realistic and close to real life experience. The reader sees many sides to each character and can sympathize with as well judge the character accordingly. Additionally, what is present in the novel (at least in the third person form) that is absent in the theater is the author's voice of reason. The influence of the author puts readers at a further remove from the characters; through the distance presented by the author's voice, readers have a chance to step back and question whether or not the characters' actions are estimable. According to Paula Byrne, one of the reasons Austen may have chosen the novel over the play was for the author's ability to have a strong voice in the novel:

the ironic third-person authorial voice...is so important to Austen's narrative method...whereas dramatic dialogue and epistolary form render the *words* of the characters, free indirect discourse renders their *thoughts*...the author is able to be simultaneously inside and outside the consciousness of the character, to be both engaged and ironic...this technique is unique to the novel. (99)

In other words, the novel allows the author to give an additional perspective on the characters a further lens through which to view the characters that is impossible to achieve in drama (or even in the epistolary or first person novel). The third person novel and Austen's free-indirect discourse allow for a different perception of characters in the novel than that is presented in drama. What Austen is perhaps most famous for today is her witty ironic voice as novelist. Indeed, at moments Austen pokes fun at her most esteemed characters, showing that none is exactly the perfect model on which we should base our lives. Thus, in the end, Austen's ironic judgment gives readers a distance from her characters that inhibits them from wanting to act out their roles in a similar manner as the characters in *Mansfield Park* act out the roles in *Lovers' Vows*.

Another way Austen elevates the novel over the theater is by using her narrative technique to reveal subtleties in her characters which would be impossible to divulge in drama. With the possible exception of Fanny, there is no character in *Mansfield Park* who is completely good or evil. For example, Edmund, who is generally a morally upright model character, knowingly goes against his father's wishes when he acts in the *Lovers' Vows* production. Even Henry and Mary Crawford, who are arguably the least principled characters in the novel, are not always portrayed as being malicious. For much of the novel, Mary is a friend to Fanny, and she recognizes Fanny's goodness in reveling in the possibility of having Fanny as a sister. When Henry reveals to his sister that he intends to propose to Fanny, "there was even pleasure with the surprise. Mary was in a state of mind to rejoice" (269). Mary tells Henry "I approve your choice from my soul, and foresee your happiness as heartily as I wish and desire it. You will have a sweet little wife" (269). Here, Mary recognizes that Fanny's kindness, morality, and general goodness outweigh the prospect of a social alliance through marriage. Thus, Austen shows that even though Mary is generally superficial, at moments she is a good-hearted character more interested in her brother's happiness than increasing her family's fortune. In addition, even though Henry has loose morals and is a damaging character in many parts of the novel, he still has redeeming attributes. Henry is certainly not without a conscience, since at the end of *Mansfield Park* he feels genuine remorse for having ruined Maria's life and losing Fanny. After all, he feels "vexation," "self-reproach," and "wretchedness" at having "so injured family peace, so forfeited his best, most estimable, and endeared acquaintance, and so lost the woman whom he had rationally, as well as passionately loved" (435); he is certainly not an evil character. In the end, the subtleties revealed in the characters of *Mansfield Park* are aspects of personality that cannot be revealed through drama.

In addition, *Mansfield Park* offers a curious survey of paths not taken, as Austen imagines what might have happened should certain characters have acted in different ways. For example, Austen conceives that if Henry Crawford had not engaged in his affair with Maria and instead “have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward, and a reward very voluntarily bestowed, within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary” (240). Here, Austen shows that if Henry had acted differently and not caused the separation of the Crawford and Bertram families, Edmund would have probably married Mary. Consequently, after the object of her affection would no longer have been a possible partner, Fanny eventually would have learned to love Henry and would have accepted his hand in marriage.

Through her imagination of what might have happened in the novel under different circumstances, Austen adds an additional layer of subtlety to *Mansfield Park* which would certainly have never been possible in theater in the absence of an authorial voice. Austen's retrospective imaginings, after all, add to the complexity and depth of her characters, revealing additional elements of personality and motivation. By stating that Fanny would probably have married Henry Crawford “within a reasonable period of Edmund marrying Mary” Austen subtly reveals additional aspects of her character. In showing that once Edmund was no longer an option Fanny's qualms about Henry would be eventually overcome, Austen reveals that her motivations as a character, while largely rooted in moral matters, are also the result of her emotions. By the same token, Austen reveals that Mary Crawford is a much more complicated character than just the superficial London socialite, as she is capable of overcoming relinquishing her social sphere in favor of marrying Edmund. In this light, through the conceptualization of paths not taken Austen achieves further complexity in her characters. Ultimately, in doing so Austen presents yet another way in which the novel triumphs over the theater.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen further cautions readers about the dangers of applying fiction to real life. Through the experiences of her protagonist Catherine Morland, Austen shows that Gothic fiction cannot be a substitute for actual experience. She also demonstrates that the incidents one reads about in Gothic novels should not be applied to life. At many points during the novel, Catherine's misappropriates Gothic novels to real situations. For example, when Catherine is walking along the river with Henry and Eleanor Tilney to Bath's Beechan Hill, she says "'I never look at it...without thinking of the south of France" (249). When Henry is surprised at her statement and asks her "You have been abroad then?" Catherine responds with "Oh! No, I only mean what I have read about. It always puts me in mind of the country that Emily and her father travelled through, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*" (249). In revealing that she views what she has read in fiction as analogous to what she actually experiences in her life, Catherine demonstrates extreme naivety as a character. Because Gothic novels are the source of her ignorance, Austen therefore depicts the genre as a harmful force.

In a similar way as the Bertrams act out the roles in *Lovers' Vows* in *Mansfield Park*, Catherine has a desire to act out the Gothic experiences she reads about in her novels. In the absence of any opportunity to act out a Gothic play, for example, she attempts to recreate these experiences in her own life, by for example resisting seeing the river against Beechan Cliff for what it is really is. Catherine's desire to live out a Gothic adventure in her own life as demonstrated through such experiences both compromises her intelligence and rakes her emotions. For example, the prospect of seeing a real Gothic castle causes Catherine to abandon her engagement with the Tilneys and embark on the improper scheme of riding in open carriages with her brother, Isabella, and John Thorpe.

Before the possibility of seeing a real castle on their journey to Bristol is mentioned, Catherine is adamantly against accompanying her friends on the scheme. Even though Isabella, John, and her brother “vehemently [talk] down” her excuse for not accompanying them as “no reason at all,” Catherine initially insists “I cannot go with you today, because I am engaged; I expect some friends every moment” (189). After John Thorpe raises the possibility of seeing Blaize Castle, however, Catherine’s interests are piqued, and she begins to consider abandoning the Tilneys to see the castle:

"Blaize Castle!" cried Catherine. "What is that'?"

"The finest place in England—worth going fifty miles at any time to see."

"What, is it really a castle, an old castle?"

"The oldest in the kingdom."

"But is it like what one reads of?"

"Exactly—the very same."

"But now really—are there towers and long galleries?"

"By dozens."

"Then I should like to see it." (191)

The mention of Blaize Castle is ultimately what motivates Catherine to embark on the questionable outing. It is true that she only agrees to go when John lies to Catherine, assuring her that the Tilneys have already forsaken their engagement when he tells her that “for, as we turned into Broad Street, I saw them...the man you danced with last night...driving a smart-looking girl” (192). However, as Catherine had no desire to go to Bristol before John mentioned the castle, Catherine’s desire to live out a Gothic fantasy causes her to give up the walk with the Tilneys. Moreover, as they are just beginning to leave town, Catherine thinks the “delight of

exploring an edifice like Udolpho, as her fancy represented Blaize Castle to be, was such a counterpoise of good as might console her for almost anything” (196). Here, Catherine’s comparison of Blaize Castle to Udolpho further shows that the castle, which symbolizes the Gothic genre, is the reason for her thoughtless conduct.

Catherine’s decision to go to Bristol is unfortunately damaging to her. After returning home from the scheme, she feels “disturbed and out of spirits” (204). In addition, that night she goes to bed “to a pillow strewed with thorns and wet with tears” (206), showing that she is deeply depressed as a result of the intrigue. Another harmful consequence of the journey is that in abandoning the Tilneys for Blaize Castle, she has risked losing their good opinion and friendship. Catherine tells Mrs. Allen that “I shall not be easy till I have explained everything [to the Tilneys]” (207); she is very distressed by this prospect. Furthermore, by riding around in an open carriage relatively unsupervised with her brother and the Thorpes, Catherine has risked her own good reputation. As Mr. Allen tells her later on, “these schemes are not at all the thing. Young men and women driving about the country in open carriages! Now and then it is very well; but going to inns and public places together! It is not right” (208) Thus, even though the carriage barely made it outside of Bath at all, by taking part in venture, Catherine has compromised her name and character. In this passage, it is also interesting to note that by taking part in a potentially scandalous scheme, Catherine is taking the risk of becoming a Gothic femme fatale figure. The fact that she takes this chance thus demonstrates another way in which the Gothic damages Catherine in the novel.

Catherine’s problematic desire to live out the Gothic is again demonstrated by her eagerness at the prospect of a stay at Northanger Abbey. After being asked to be the Tilneys’ guest, Catherine muses that

she was to be their chosen visitor, she was to be for weeks under the same roof with the person whose society she mostly prized—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—and castles and abbeys made usually the charm of those reveries which his image did not fill. (332)

Here, Catherine's thoughts reveal that she views the prospect of living in the Gothic abbey as being just as important as living in close proximity to her close friends. To some extent, her excitement over the Gothic even trumps her affection for Henry; after all, Catherine feels that "castles and abbeys made usually the charm of those reveries which his image did not fill" (332), indicating that she feels Gothic artifices are more appealing than Henry. Of course, equating mere objects to a real person, especially one as important as Henry Tilney, seems only naturally detrimental to any character. Obviously, Henry is not only a real, living soul, but also one that Catherine regards as a close friend and love interest. Thus, the fact that she naively thinks of him on the same level as Gothic architecture is ominous.

Catherine's desire to experience the Gothic in *Northanger Abbey* is ultimately damaging to her. Her obsession with living out a Gothic adventure while visiting Northanger causes her to suspect General Tilney of having cruelly imprisoned, or even having murdered, his late wife. Almost as soon as she enters Northanger Abbey and learns anything about the deceased Mrs. Tilney, Catherine unnecessarily begins to suspect the General of some sort of foul play:

The general certainly had been an unkind husband. He did not love her walk: could he therefore have loved her? And besides, handsome as he was, there was a something in the turn of his features which spoke his not having behaved well to her... Here was another proof. A portrait—very like—of a departed wife, not valued by the husband! He must

have been dreadfully cruel to her! Catherine attempted no longer to hide from herself the nature of the feelings which, in spite of all his attentions, he had previously excited; and what had been terror and dislike before, was now absolute aversion. Yes, aversion! His cruelty to such a charming woman made him odious to her. She had often read of such characters, characters which Mr. Allen had been used to call unnatural and overdrawn; but here was proof positive of the contrary. (440)

Here, Catherine takes a few simple facts about the Tilney family out of context, ridiculously assuming that the General's walking preferences and interior decorating decisions render him an unfit husband. The fact that she draws absurd conclusions from harmless statements illustrates that Catherine is desperate to find a Gothic mystery in the abbey as soon as she arrives.

Furthermore, the fact that Catherine equates the General to the "overdrawn" characters she reads about in Gothic novels indicates that she mistakenly believes that experiences she reads about in them are realistic.

Catherine continues to suspect the General of treachery to an increasingly greater extent during her stay at the abbey. She is suspicious of the General's every move, conceiving even routine actions to be part of some sort of treachery. For example, Catherine is especially skeptical of the General doing business into the night:

There must be some deeper cause: something was to be done which could be done only while the household slept; and the probability that Mrs. Tilney yet lived, shut up for causes unknown, and receiving from the pitiless hands of her husband a nightly supply of coarse food, was the conclusion which necessarily followed. (459)

Here, Catherine's reasoning is nonsensical, as she has virtually no supporting evidence for her conclusion about the General. Her thinking demonstrates her desperation to live out a Gothic

fantasy, as she casts the General in the role of Gothic villain and skews any observation about him to fit this role. Furthermore, to support her presumption of the General as depraved,

Catherine draws upon what she has read:

She could remember dozens who had persevered in every possible vice, going on from crime to crime, murdering whomsoever they chose, without any feeling of humanity or remorse; till a violent death or a religious retirement closed their black career...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. (466)

In the end, the Gothic fantasy Catherine invents at Northanger is damaging to her. When Henry exposes the fallacy of Catherine's imaginings, he makes her appear foolish, backward, and cruel:

If I understand you rightly, you had formed a surmise of such horror as I have hardly words to—Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you...Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?" (486)

Henry's harsh words have a painful effect on Catherine and cause her a great deal of pain and distress. Indeed, she is so distraught that she can barely contain her emotions, and "with tears of shame she ran off to her own room" (486). In addition, while in her room "Most bitterly did she cry" (486). She realizes "her folly, which now seemed even criminal, was all exposed to [Henry], and he must despise her forever...She hated herself more than she could express" (486).

Furthermore, Catherine recognizes that her suspicions about the General are deeply rooted in the

expectations she has formed from reading Gothic fiction. After all, she realizes that “Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe’s works...it was not in them perhaps that human nature...was to be looked for” (490).

At the same time, there is a genuinely comedic side to Catherine’s preoccupation with the Gothic in *Northanger Abbey*. For example, the Gothic elements of the novel serve to educate Catherine and help her mature. It is certainly true that the misapplication of Gothic fiction to her own life and desire to live out a Gothic fantasy in *Northanger* hurts Catherine. At the same time though, her misuse of the Gothic teaches her a great deal about real life and human nature. For example, when Henry shatters Catherine’s hypothesis about the General, she learns that what she reads about in Gothic novels cannot be applied to actual situations. She learns then, that the intrigue and mystery of the genre are a far cry from her real life in late eighteenth-century England. She also eventually realizes that people cannot necessarily be cast into fiction. Still, the Gothic even does in some ways help Catherine’s relationship with Tilney. After all, Catherine’s naiveté and ignorance about real life matters, including her mistaking the Gothic for actual experiences, makes her more attractive to Tilney. Austen states that Catherine “was heartily ashamed of her ignorance. A misplaced shame... Catherine did not know...that a good-looking girl, with an affectionate heart and a very ignorant mind, cannot fail of attracting a clever young man” (263).

More significantly, Catherine’s Gothic imaginings also help her correctly discover General Tilney to be an uncompassionate, socially motivated man. After all, near the end of the novel, Austen states “Catherine, at any rate, heard enough to feel that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty” (318). Here, readers may be tempted to take Austen’s comment with a

grain of salt. True, it seems difficult to equate the imprisonment or murder of one's wife with social pretensions and cruelty towards a young woman. Nevertheless, Austen's point is that the Gothic helps Catherine discover that General Tilney does not have a morally sound nor admirable character. The fact that the Gothic helps lead her to the conclusion that the General is neither trustworthy nor sympathetic thus complicates the idea of the Gothic as a damaging force in the novel.

Furthermore, the Gothic pervades Catherine's world in many ways that she has difficulty recognizing. For example, Catherine finds herself to be part of a Gothic plot in the novel. Out of all of the characters in *Northanger Abbey*, John and Isabella Thorpe most closely resemble conventional Gothic villains pitted against the heroine Catherine Morland and her brother James. In *The Handbook of the Gothic*, Avril Horner sets the criteria for Gothic villains and heroes. She states that the Gothic heroine is pursued by a...villain figure. She may suffer imprisonment and cruelty at the hands of her pursuer; above all, she is a potential victim of his desire" (180). John Thorpe embodies these characteristics of the Gothic villain against Catherine as the Gothic heroine. After all, he desires her as a partner, yet also displays cruelty towards her by defaming her in the eyes of General Tilney. Also, although the Gothic typically portrays a female heroine pitted against a male villain, gender roles can sometimes be reversed or construed;¹⁶ thus, the relationship between Isabella Thorpe and James Morland follows the same pattern as the relationship between John and Catherine, or even friendship between Isabella and Catherine.

The Thorpes desire the Morlands as potential spouses, yet there is also malice in the way the Thorpes treat the Morlands. In the case of Isabella and James, Isabella's cruelty is exemplified by the mercenary attitude she takes towards James as a potential partner. For

¹⁶ For example, Horner states that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* "unsettles conventional categories of active masculinity and femininity...offering female vampires who haunt the dreams of Jonathan Harker at one extreme" (180).

example, Isabella takes measures to make James Morland fall in love with her not because she has any real attachment to him, but rather because she sees a partnership with the Morland family as a way to advance in society. Her lack of regard for James is evidenced by the fact that when presented with the opportunity to move even higher up in society by an alliance with Mr. Tilney's brother, she abandons him and rescinds her engagement.

The Gothic insistence on the distance between appearance and reality is especially crucial to the novel. As James recounts, "Her duplicity hurts me more than all; till the very last, if I reasoned with her, she declared herself as much attached to me as ever, and laughed at my fears" (497). Thus, Isabella exposes herself as selfish and spiteful. The fact that she pretends to still be interested in James even while she is actively pursuing Captain Tilney proves that she is imprisoning him, keeping him in reserve as a secondary option should matters with the Captain fail. In addition, Catherine's remarks about Isabella following the incident show that she is certainly also exploited by her as John's sister. Concerning Isabella, Catherine states that "I never was so deceived in anyone's character in my life before" (508) and "My own disappointment and loss in her is very great" (508). In other words, because Isabella deceived Catherine by pretending to love her brother and be her friend, she also imprisoned Catherine by keeping her as an option for a sister-in-law. The idea that Isabella confines Catherine thus further emphasizes the idea of her as a cruel character.

Moreover, John Thorpe is an even worse Gothic villain than his sister. Thorpe first harms Catherine by coercing her to accompany him on the journey to Blaize Castle. In Gothic novels, villains often jail heroines in buildings like castles; thus, the fact that John entices Catherine with the image of Blaize Castle and virtually forces her to accompany him on the trip furthers the idea

of John as a Gothic villain who traps her in a conventional setting.¹⁷ In accordance with his role as a villain, John deftly sugarcoats the castle in his description to entice Catherine to go with him, claiming that it is “The finest place in England—worth going fifty miles at any time to see... The oldest [castle] in the kingdom” (190). He also lies to Catherine about her friends cancelling her previous plans, telling Catherine that “for, as we turned into Broad Street, I saw [the Tilneys]” (190). Ultimately, Catherine’s interest in Blaize Castle and belief that the Tilneys have cancelled her engagement are her reasons for going on the excursion with the Thorpes. Thus, because John uses these motivations to persuade Catherine to accompany him, he is at fault for the harmful consequences Catherine experiences as a result of the journey.

Thorpe’s most malicious act occurs as he lies to General Tilney about Catherine’s station: Thorpe, most happy to be on speaking terms with a man of General Tilney's importance...and being...pretty well resolved upon marrying Catherine himself, his vanity induced him to represent the family as yet more wealthy than his vanity and avarice had made him believe them... by doubling what he chose to think the amount of Mr. Morland's preferment, trebling his private fortune, bestowing a rich aunt, and sinking half the children...For Catherine...he had yet something more in reserve, and the ten or fifteen thousand pounds which her father could give her would be a pretty addition to Mr. Allen's estate. (613)

Thorpe grossly exaggerates Catherine’s fortune and circumstance in society, and in doing so, he makes certain that Catherine will eventually disappoint the General when he discovers the truth about her and her family. He also demonstrates similar mercenary behavior as his sister; because he believes that he will soon wed Catherine, his motivation for telling the General lies about the

¹⁷ For example, as Manfred does to Isabella in *The Castle of Otranto*.

Morlands is to boost his own importance. Furthermore, later in the novel, Thorpe deliberately sabotages Catherine by again lying to the General, only this time making her situation much less desirable than it actually is:

[Thorpe,] irritated by Catherine's refusal... hastened to contradict all that he had said before to the advantage of the Morlands—confessed himself to have been totally mistaken in his opinion of their circumstances and character, misled by the rhodomontade of his friend to believe his father a man of substance and credit... They were, in fact, a necessitous family; numerous, too, almost beyond example; by no means respected in their own neighbourhood, as he had lately had particular opportunities of discovering; aiming at a style of life which their fortune could not warrant; seeking to better themselves by wealthy connections; a forward, bragging, scheming race. (316-7)

Here, John engages in a cruel, vengeful scheme by deliberately defaming Catherine and her family. His spiteful sabotage belongs in Gothic fiction; again, John effectively imprisons Catherine by his statement. Following his speech, the General forces Catherine to go home: “[he] needed no more. Enraged with almost everybody in the world but himself, he set out the next day for the abbey” (617). Compared to the company of her friends at Bath and Northanger, Catherine’s relative isolation in her home is akin to that of a prison. In addition, after gaining his knowledge from Thorpe, the General prohibits Eleanor from contacting Catherine and will not consent to a marriage between her and Henry. Thus, Thorpe again imprisons Catherine by blocking her from further developing her relationship with the Tilneys.

John’s words also harm Catherine; his speech leads General Tilney to turn Catherine out of the house at the first possible opportunity without money or accompaniment, subjecting her to a long and dangerous journey. The General’s behavior towards Catherine is also clearly an

affront, and in the mind of the Morlands “when the whole was unfolded, [it] was an insult not to be overlooked, nor, for the first half hour, to be easily pardoned” (582). In this context, Thorpe’s slander of Catherine clearly damages her, as well as the Morland family as a whole. Thus, his libel of Catherine reinforces his identity as a despotic character.

Ultimately, the fact that the Gothic genre causes so many problems for Catherine in the novel upholds the realistic domestic novel as being superior to the Gothic. In the end, Catherine must abandon her Gothic fantasies in order to mature and pursue her real life through her relationship with Tilney. Throughout much of the novel her preoccupation with Gothic genre often hinders her relationship with the Tilneys. Similarly, the Gothic imaginings which cause her to suspect the General of murdering his wife cause Henry Tilney to become angry with Catherine. Furthermore, matters of domesticity usurp Catherine’s fantasies and desire to live out a Gothic adventure; at the end of the novel, after all, the matters of most concern to Catherine are financial and social ones, rather than, for example, finding an ancient castle or living in an abbey that must behold some deep dark secret. Catherine’s relationship with Tilney also depends upon finances and the General approving her social situation; for Catherine’s parents “[the General’s] consent was all that they wished for. They were no more inclined than entitled to demand his money. Of a very considerable fortune, his son was, by marriage settlements, eventually secure” (Ch. 31). Questions of social standing and money are also what ultimately enable Henry and Catherine to marry, since the “influence of the viscount and viscountess on her brother’s behalf” (Ch. 31) and Catherine’s three thousand pound inheritance entice the General to consent to their union.

Moreover, at the end of the novel the idea of an imperfect, realistic romance also replaces the overall idealistic ending that one might expect in less realistic types of novels. Prior to his proposal, Austen reveals:

Henry was now sincerely attached to [Catherine], though...I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought. 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. (606)

By choosing to represent a realistic romance over the fairytale one, Austen thus subtly asserts the power of the realistic novel over the Gothic novel. Even though their relationship began in a less than ideal, unromantic fashion, Austen still defines Catherine and Henry's union as "perfect happiness" (631). It is true that Austen's description can seem sarcastic or paradoxical. At the same time, by calling their imperfect union the ideal marriage, Austen asserts that fiction which reflects real life situations is superior to fantasy. In doing so, she upholds her own brand of novel over the less realistic forms of the genre.

In depicting the Gothic novel as such a harmful force in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen clearly maintains that the realistic novel is a much better medium of fiction. Along with her general denouncement of the genre though, the fact that she must still include Gothic plots and characters in her own novel shows that she cannot completely discredit the significance of the Gothic to life and literature. Like the genre of the theater presented in *Mansfield Park*, the Gothic is somewhat of a sensational genre and is much further removed from life than realistic fiction. Similar to the theater, the types of characters presented in the Gothic are more likely to

be exaggerated and type-cast. The heroine and the villain, for example, are completely defined by their role within the text and rarely transcend the boundaries of their basic character.¹⁸ The same is true of the Gothic characters in Austen's *Northanger Abbey*; after all, considering their malicious, mercenary, slanderous behavior towards Catherine and James Morland, it is difficult to see the Thorpes as anything but villains.

However, within the realistic novel, Austen offers a glimpse into these characters' lives that one would be much less likely to find so directly in a Gothic text. In giving her account of the Thorpe family, Austen states:

Mrs. Thorpe was a widow, and not a very rich one; she was a good-humoured, well-meaning woman, and a very indulgent mother... This brief account of the family is intended to supersede the necessity of a long and minute detail from Mrs. Thorpe herself, of her past adventures and sufferings, which might otherwise be expected to occupy the three or four following chapters; in which the worthlessness of lords and attorneys might be set forth, and conversations, which had passed twenty years before, be minutely repeated. (54)

In this passage, Austen makes a few very important points about the nature of the villain in a realistic novel. The first thing she does to distinguish her novel from a Gothic novel is to instill sympathy for the Thorpes in her readers, somewhat complicating the idea of them as purely evil characters. By stating that their family is not very wealthy and that the Thorpes had been used to living indulgently, Austen gives an explanation, if an inadequate one, for John and Isabella's conduct. Surely, many people used to living in indulgence would seek to maintain their habits through the necessary means, by for example acquiring new wealth through marriage. Thus, even though the

¹⁸In the case of *The Castle of Otranto*, Manfred is depicted as being as close as possible to a purely evil character, whereas Isabella is seen as a pure, innocent, and righteous woman.

Thorpes treat the Morlands with cruelty, the fact that they have been raised on a lifestyle beyond their means and instilled with grand principles by their mother helps readers to understand their behavior. Austen also gives the Thorpes an additional motivation for their conduct in mentioning that Mrs. Thorpe and her family had been subjected to a certain amount of suffering at the hands of lords and attorneys. By including this detail, Austen suggests that the Thorpes may desire revenge on their social betters. Thus, because the Morlands are wealthier than the Thorpes, they may be included in the faction of society against which the Thorpe family would wish vengeance. In addition, it is important to note that Austen admits she only gives a very short account of the Thorpes, and that the rest of their story would take up several whole chapters in her narrative. In doing so, she admits that in the course of the novel, readers only receive a glimpse of who the Thorpes truly are, and what positive attributes they might have. Thus, Austen asserts that while Isabella and John Thorpe truly seem to be cruel people with many characteristics of Gothic villains, they are still intricate individuals who are just as richly complex as the rest of humankind.

Ultimately, Austen includes the theater and Gothic in her fiction in order to put the genres in context. Throughout *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*, Austen illustrates the flaws in these genres and in numerous instances demonstrates how the realistic novel is a better medium for fiction. After all, in *Mansfield Park*, the theater is frequently depicted as a damaging force that causes many of the novel's main characters to lapse in judgment and even descend into ruin. For example, Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford participation's in *Lovers' Vows* contributes to their downfalls in the novel. Not only does the pair engage in a flirtation that leads to an affair during the production, but Maria and Henry also take on harmful theatrical roles in their lives. Henry often acts instead of being authentic in real life situations that Fanny is unable to trust him

even when his intentions are truly genuine. In addition, Maria assimilates to the identity of a fallen woman after performing the role of Agatha Friberg. Similarly, in *Northanger Abbey*, the Gothic genre is harmful to the novel's heroine. Catherine's misapplication of Gothic fiction to her own life often causes her to appear naïve and foolish. Furthermore, during the novel Catherine becomes involved in a damaging Gothic plot, in which the villain John Thorpe defames her character in order to serve his own self-interest.

At the same time, Austen cannot completely dismiss the theater and the Gothic in her own writing; besides alluding to works by other authors, after all, she creates characters with many characteristic attributes of these genres. In *Mansfield Park*, Henry Crawford is the rake character typical of Restoration drama, whereas his sister is something of a stock character in her existence as a superficial London socialite. In addition, in *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine has many characteristics of a typical Gothic heroine, and the Thorpes are very similar to traditional Gothic villains. However, the main flaw Austen alludes to in both the Gothic and theater is that they are overly sensational mediums. Due to the very nature of these genres, they do not have the fully developed, authentic characters of realistic fiction. What makes these lifelike characters so compelling is that by reading about them, sharing their struggles, and watching them mature, readers can develop an intimate relationship with them. Thus, such characters render the realistic novel a wholly absorbing and captivating form of literature and have help made the novel become as incredibly popular and successful as it has been for the past few centuries.

In including the Gothic and theater in her genres Austen therefore acknowledges the importance of the genres even while championing her own brand of fiction over the theater and the Gothic. Thus, Austen in essence puts the theater and the Gothic in their proper place, recognizing that they important mediums, but ones that are unsuccessful in portraying deep,

complicated, life-like characters and situations. As a result, she conscientiously carves out a space for herself and other realistic novelists within the canon, putting into motion the very ideas which have made the novel one of the most beloved, highly wrought, and important literary forms.

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