

# Gothic Infections

## *Henry Tilney and Storytelling as Therapy*

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*This article proposes, a reading of Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey (1818) as a case study for discussing infectious literature, storytelling as therapy and the interconnectedness of Gothic methodologies and medical humanities. Northanger Abbey was written in a period when women's reading habits was a contested topic, so I will provide a quick historical overview of the period and the problematic Gothic novel, which Northanger Abbey satirizes. Where previous research has focused on Catherine Morland, the protagonist and 'misreader' in this Gothic satire, this article will focus on Austen's feminized hero, Henry Tilney, and read him in the role of a mesmeric healer. His goal is to cure Catherine of her obsession with Gothic novels, in order for her to fulfil the feminine ideal of the time. The mesmeric method is to produce a crisis in the patient, however, I will show how Henry's plan fails and he inadvertently produces a crisis in himself, and forces him to realize the extent of his own 'reading illness'. He is 'infected' by the masculine literary canon, which in his mind entails literary superiority over Catherine and his sister Eleanor.*

*Storytelling as therapy is a term that connects literature and trauma into a method of organizing experience. My analysis will focus on a selection of dialogue between the main characters and Henry's monologues, to highlight where Austen's hero is compelled to take narrative control as a way to control his own trauma; his troubled relationship with his father and the death of his mother.*

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that reading literature makes us better persons. At least, that is the grounding principle of the medical humanities field (Evans & Finlay: 2001), and its sub-category literature and medicine (Bernhardsson: 2010), in encouraging interest in books about illness, grief, loss, coping and death. Embedded within these texts, lie codes of transference from which the reader gains empathy, knowledge, sympathy, recognition, not to mention understanding. While the premise seems utopian, arguably novels using illness as a theme, rather than a subject, can help readers understand how we interact and engage with each other, encourage healthy, sustainable habits, and how we can treat each other better.

To explore this thought, I will do a reading of Jane Austen's 1818 novel, *Northanger Abbey*, which focuses on the experienced reader and storyteller, Henry Tilney. I propose a reading of the novel where the Gothic and the medical work together to highlight gendered practices of incarceration, pathologising and narrative as therapy (Cavallaro: 2002). This article reads Henry Tilney as a type of mesmeric healer who wants to heal Catherine of her unhealthy obsession with Gothic novels. His method, however, unveils the dark side of the society he accolades. As he creates the narrative of his and Catherine's story, he uncovers the dark narrative he, in emulating his father, propagates to avoid dealing with his own trauma, namely the death of his mother.

Pathographies are personal, subjective narratives of illness; illness narratives as a more open term includes perspectives like the next-of-kin, a friend, a parent, a medical practitioner etc. I am not arguing, that *Northanger Abbey* is an illness narrative or a pathography, but the novel arguably problematizes gendered practices of dealing with various illnesses. My contribution is to examine *Northanger Abbey* in light of the historical discourse of infectious literature, to offer an alternative to more traditional readings of the novel as a mere satire of the Gothic genre. While there are other examples of trauma and illness in literature, opening up for other readings of Austen's *juvenilia* in the context of literature and medicine (Bernhardsson: 2010; Evans & Finlay: 2001) will ultimately benefit both Austen-research, Gothic research and medical humanities as a field.

## Gothic Health and Illness

*Northanger Abbey*, along with *Persuasion*, were Jane Austen's last published novels, as part of a single volume published in November 1817<sup>1</sup>. The former, however, was

originally ready for publication in 1803 (Irvine: 2005, 40-41). *Northanger Abbey* is the story of Catherine Morland and the Tilney family who live in a converted abbey. Catherine is obsessed with Gothic novels, and therefore suspects that Northanger is the site of murder and secrets. Despite her misreading, the novel concludes with Catherine and Henry Tilney marriage. The novel is predominantly known as a parody of Gothic pioneer Ann Radcliffe's novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Radcliffe had brought respectability to the heavily criticized genre by adding a moral ending to counterbalance the supernatural elements associated with Gothic narratives. Nevertheless, the Gothic novel was not considered 'proper' fiction, and the content of Austen's novel situated itself in direct opposition to the ruling notion of 'high' literature, a notion that tried to exclude the *novel* as a literary genre (Michael: 1982, 206).

Why were Gothic novels considered inappropriate literature beyond its lack of educational principles or adherence to the laws of nature and physics? I would echo Anne Williams and say that this fear of the Gothic is actually the fear of the all-powerful "*female. All Gothic trappings – ruins, graves, dark enclosures, madness, even the sublime – signify the presence of this 'other'*" (Williams: 1995, xi). The moon's mythical ability to turn men into werewolves, the darkness to birth monsters, is a power associated with the feminine in most Western traditions, and the moon's cycle reflects in women's menstrual cycles. In other words, the Gothic might be fraught with symbols of femininity and thereby become mouthpieces for the female experience under a patriarchal rule. Furthermore, the genre was considered dangerous, because of its increasing, almost infectious, popularity. The Gothic novel gained popularity in England alongside the scientific advancements of the Enlightenment. To quickly summarize the tropes and components of the Gothic narrative:

*"[A] Gothic tale usually takes place (at least some of the time) in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space – be it a castle, a foreign palace, an abbey, a vast prison, a subterranean crypt, a graveyard, a primeval frontier or island. . . . Within this space, or a combination of such spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise."* (Hogle in O'Malley: 2011, 82)

Using *Northanger Abbey* as a case study carries with it certain risks; it stands, as mentioned, as *the* emblematic Gothic parody. Other research has focused on the novel's antagonist, General Tilney (Williams: 1998), the archetypal patriarch. Hen-

ry Tilney's role has been hailed either as Austen's feminine hero (Eddleman: 2010), or as the true villain of the novel (Gilbert & Gubar: 1979). It is beyond the scope of this article to give a full account of the novel's reception and criticism, but my contribution will be to re-examine the character of Henry Tilney in terms of readership, infectious literature and masculinity.

First, a quick abstraction of the etiological understanding of illness in 18<sup>th</sup>- early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The understanding of how illness spread in the late 18<sup>th</sup> -century to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was influenced by the work of Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) and his thesis on animal magnetism.

*“(1) A subtle physical fluid fills the universe and forms a connecting medium between man, the earth, and the heavenly bodies, and also between man and man. (2) Disease originates from the unequal distribution of this fluid in the human body; recovery is achieved when the equilibrium is restored. (3) With the help of certain techniques, this fluid can be channelled, stored, and conveyed to other persons. (4) In this manner, ‘crises’ can be provoked in patients and diseases cured.”* (Ellenberger: 1970, 62)

While Mesmer's work is primarily associated with the placebo effect (Helman, 2004: 50-51), it is as much part of the historic makeup of *Northanger Abbey* as the reverberations of the French revolution was. The idea that a person could influence another to the point where one could cure disease is borderline supernatural, and fits snugly in the Gothic domain, even if the effects produced really stems from the charisma of the healer. Henry Tilney is continuously described as a charming character, most of all in Catherine's opinion. As time progresses, Henry realizes that Catherine's obsession with Gothic novels are detrimental to her status and prospects as a wife, as they encourage a more adventurous and unfeminine ideal. Like the charismatic healer he is, Henry must produce a 'crisis' to cure her and ensure her status as an angel in the house, rather than the madwoman in the attic (Gilbert & Gubar: 1979). However, his plan backfires. I contend that in trying to heal Catherine of her Gothic infection, Henry inadvertently enables himself to deal with his own troubled past, and more importantly, his present.

## Dark Narratives

Much like the modern pathography (Frank: 2013; Hunsaker Hawkins: 1993), one goal of the Gothic is to provide a voice for those who have been silenced, by either societal, familial, physical or mental causes. Female-centric narratives share a unique position in this regard. Many of the tropes that characterize the Gothic novel are metaphorically comparable to life in incarceration, be it in a whalebone-corset or behind the iron bars of a prison or a mental institution. The haunted castles, mysterious apparitions, isolation, a threatening masculine presence might seem obvious allegories to the social constrictions that governed the gendered relations of Regency society. One factor that remains steadfast throughout was health or rather 'ill health'. It is interesting to note, that some of the most respected and well-read female authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> -, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries produced such narratives as to shed light on the lack of understanding for female ailments, and the horror of the medicalization of women, body and mind (Charlotte Brontë *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charlotte Perkins Gilman *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (1966).

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic* demonstrated how patriarchal socialization negatively affected women's mental and physical health. "*To be trained in renunciation is...to be trained to ill health*" (1979: 54), that is to say, to be born female was to be institutionalized from day one, simply moving from one patriarch to another. Young girls were trained to be sickly, frail, self-deprecating, self-less (literally without self), still, and pretty. A 'healthy' woman was unnatural and did not comply with the contemporary mythology that portrayed women as angelic beings, too pure for earthly life. Poor health was a sign of delicate breeding, "*to be ladylike is to be lifeless*" (Woolsen quoted in Dijkstra, 1986: 27). Becoming ill was not merely a by-product of the patriarchy; it was the goal (Gilbert & Gubar: 1979, 54). I argue that medical humanities and the Gothic share a literary purpose in this respect, since "*Gothic representations are not realistic: they represent highly subjective [sic], the fraught experience of crisis*" (Wasson & de Borba: 2018).

Freud's concept of the *unheimlich* is a key concept in the Gothic. The *unheimlich*, if literally understood as 'not home', or 'unhomelike', begets a, sometimes uncomfortable, understanding of the home as a permutable place; it can transform and defamiliarize a space that should exude safety and warmth. 'Home' can be a house but it is ultimately the people that truly make a 'home'. That leads me to the

notion of family in the Gothic, as well as the (lack of) rights of women in Gothic homes, and in England at large.

*"In the unremittingly economic Female Gothic, the Gothic is shown to reside in the everyday in the form of women's commodification... Notably, the traditional Gothic dynamic is subverted in this more modern of Gothic fictions [Northanger Abbey], as the sins of the materialistic father are not visited upon his son."*  
(Davison: 2010, 163-164)

'The sins of the father are revisited upon his son' is the credo of the Gothic. Catherine's infamous misreading of the Gothic genre highlights the fragile domestic position of women like Henry's mother. Her sudden death erased her from every public area of the house and her children rarely speak of her, except in hushed tones away from their borderline tyrannical father. It is with these conditions in mind that Henry was brought up; after the death of his mother, he could escape into a profession, the clergy and his brother to the military (and other extra-curricular activities). His sister Eleanor, however, had to remain at the abbey, almost as if she were to return to its monastic roots. Unable to marry the man she loves, she remains under her father's strict regime. The focus of this article is not Eleanor's story, but Henry's, because I want to give an alternative reading to Gilbert and Gubar's rather narrow understanding of his character, which my dual approach, medical humanities and the Gothic, enables me to do.

Austen has imbued Henry's ancestral home, Northanger Abbey, with certain qualities reminiscent of a hospital/asylum or a prison, e.g. meals are served at specific times, Catherine's and Eleanor's days are regulated, as well as their activities and freedom of movement. The novel essentially makes the young women (and man) living in the Abbey either a patient or a prisoner, governed by General Tilney. The abbey is, therefore, a source of patriarchal contamination which entails that the general is 'patient zero'. He is the main representative of the pathologizing patriarchy that seeks to 'infect' Catherine. However, Catherine's infatuation with Gothic novels proves to be her and Henry's salvation

Catherine's introduction to the Abbey is through Henry. Having established that he is the more experienced reader, he thinks he is able to control the narrative and thus agitates her imagination with a tall tale of what will befall her when they enter his ancestral home:

*"[Are] you prepared to encounter all the horrors what a building such as 'what one reads about' may produce? [...] Will not your mind misgive you, when you find yourself in this gloomy chamber [...] How fearfully will you examine the furniture in your apartment!"* (Austen: 1818, 161-162).

He goes on, describing an old malignant housekeeper, a locked cabinet, a broken tapestry and a torn manuscript relating the fate of "*wretched Matilda*" (Austen: 1818, 164), all trademark staples of a Gothic narrative<sup>2</sup>. Henry is stoking Catherine's imagination to induce the necessary crisis to expel her unhealthy obsession with Gothic novels. However, Catherine suspects the General of having either killed or imprisoned his wife. Her suspicions result, not in a violent altercation but a rational (albeit heated) dissemination of facts by Henry (Austen: 1881, 202-203), a scene we shall return to in detail shortly.

## Storytelling as Therapy

As mentioned, the General runs his household with military precision. He is zealously renovating and modernizing the abbey, which separates him further from his son. The General's profession is to order people; Henry's is to guide them. He is like his father in many ways but more like his sister in others. Where his father taught him to control, his sister taught him to nurture and this is just as important a lesson, as we will see in the next section, the "*mental asylum closely approximates the female rather than the male experience within the family.*" (Chesler: 2005, 95)

Most scholars agree, that Henry serves as an educator, a mentor for Catherine<sup>3</sup>. Within medical humanities, Martyn Evans emphasises the importance of education rather than training (2003: 383), which is interesting, as Catherine considers herself as a 'heroine in training'(Austen: 1881, 7). I read Henry as a 'the healer' who sets out to cure Catherine of her unhealthy obsession with Gothic narratives. The meeting between patient and doctor is always an interpretive activity, a hermeneutical challenge (Bernhardsson: 2010, 50), which I think is as true of how Catherine and Henry interact. Through conversation, their opinions, personalities and experiences (or lack thereof) highlight their characters and their epistemological differences. This leads to a perpetual renegotiation of each character's equilibrium; in other words, in search of equality, or at least as much as an 18<sup>th</sup>-century couple could be equal.



Henry Tilney is an apt conversationalist, he talks with “*fluency and spirit*” (Austen: 1818, 17) on the night he is introduced to Catherine Morland in Bath. Having chatted amiably and freely for a while, he suddenly changes the subject and instructs Catherine in the ‘correct’ manner of discussion, i.e. he is re-writing their previous conversation into a less genuine, but socially preferred manner of conversing:

*“I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath; whether you were ever here before; whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert, and how you like the place altogether. I have been very negligent—but are you now at leisure to satisfy me in these particulars? If you are I will begin directly.”* (Austen: 1881, 17-18)

More often than not, his arguments about style and proper aesthetic thought are derived from the masculine canon of conduct, through the discourse of 18<sup>th</sup>-century essayists such as Joseph Addison, Samuel Johnson and Samuel Richardson. He can balance his interaction with a predominantly female literary canon with “*the discourse of the Johnsonian essay*” (sic Irvine: 2005, 44). As an experienced reader, and as an experienced man in society, Henry puts Catherine at a strong disadvantage. Robert P. Irvine argues, that the male essayists mentioned above have as much power over Henry’s world-view as Radcliffe has over Catherine’s (2005, 44) but I would argue; that being a well-read man does not have the same connotations as being a well-read woman. The narrator frequently mentions, that Catherine is well-read, “*provided that nothing like useful knowledge could be gained from [books,] that they were all story and no reflection*” (Austen: 1881, 7). I will however build upon Irvine’s next point, that Henry uses Johnsonian *discourse*, as a

*“linguistic version of the patriarchal power of the General: a way of controlling women, not physically by locking them up or removing them from a house, but by controlling their language, telling them what they may and may not say”* (Irvine: 2005, 44-45).

Irvine points to Henry’s speech patterns as “*natural*” (Irvine: 2005, 46), as in, he is using speech and narration to confirm both his and Catherine’s status as belonging to a privileged social group and this language is a result of the masculine canon of polite society. In other words, Henry uses language and by extension to alter the narrative that his sister, and Catherine, originally use about their own



condition. He displays his mastery of the language, and of the Gothic genre, to exert control, and to dominate the conversation, like in this scene:

*"...I myself have read hundreds and hundreds. Do not imagine that you can cope with me in a knowledge of Julias and Louisas. If we proceed to particulars, and engage in the never-ceasing inquiry of 'Have you read this?' and 'Have you read that?' I shall soon leave you [far] behind me...Consider how many years I have had the start of you." (Austen: 1818, 108)*

Catherine then turns to Eleanor and tells her of something horrid that is about to emerge in London. She refers to the publishing of a new novel "*in three duodecimo volumes, two hundred and seventy-six pages in each, with a frontispiece to the first, of two tombstones and a lantern*" (Austen: 1818, 114), but Eleanor thinks she is talking about a riot. Henry intervenes: "*shall I make you understand each other, or leave you to puzzle out an explanation as you can? No—I will be noble. I will prove myself a man...*" (my italics, *ibid*). He is raising himself as a benevolent arbiter and the most well-read of the three he must, therefore, be the most capable person to reinstate reason and logic where before there was chaos and confusion. What the Gothic symbolizes, is chaos, loss of control and subjugation of free will, as history is bound to repeat itself (sins of the father, etc).

*"All illness and unhappiness generate their own very special types of tale. This is because telling a story is one of the most basic human ways of organizing experience – and of shaping suffering into a form, in order to give it meaning"<sup>4</sup> (Cecil Helman qtd in Cavallaro: 2002, 125).*

I argue, that this is what Henry is doing; he shapes his ideas and world views on the male, 'rational' canon of literature that occludes female experience and fanciful tales.

When Catherine tries to bring the conversation back to a level she can engage on, Henry picks on her use of the word 'nice' and reroutes the conversation once again. Eleanor reproaches her brother:

*"...he is treating you exactly as he does his sister. He is forever finding fault with me, for some incorrectness of language, and now he is taking the same liberty with you. 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"* (Austen: 1818, 109).

Note that Eleanor says "overpowered" by these male writers. The right sort of knowledge will then enable you to overpower and overthrow and one might argue that Eleanor is chastising her brother for employing the same domination techniques as their father:

*"-Well, Eleanor, may I congratulate you on being successful in your application to your fair friend?  
- I was just beginning to make the request, sir, as you came in.  
- Well, proceed by all means. I know how much your heart is in it. My daughter, Miss Morland," he continued without leaving his daughter time to speak..."* (Austen: 1818, 110)

This passage echoes William's opening statement (1995, xi), the fears of the 18<sup>th</sup> century concerning the effects of female novel-reading, results in a fear of female autonomy and authorship, not just in terms of literature, but in personal narration. Her father will not let her speak and now Henry is attempting to do the same. Interestingly, Henry does not speak further in the conclusion of the chapter as Eleanor (and the narrator) cuts him off, "*We shall get nothing more serious from him now*" (Austen: 1818, 115).

This need to control the conversation, at least, to stand at its helm, indicates a deeper need for control, which can stem from a trauma of some unresolved helplessness in the past. It is a natural response to the death of a loved one as one cannot prevent the inevitable, nor retake what Death has claimed. I propose that Henry's way of dealing with the conditions of his patriarchal society is to take the narrative control throughout the novel. However, as he mocks his sister for fearing for their brother's safety he goes into excruciating detail. I consider this attention to detail to be representative of Henry's infatuation with the Gothic, and his ability to spin a tale to his advantage, namely to subconsciously deal with his present, but also his past. Cavallaro in her book *The Gothic Vision* (2002) reworks Freud's understanding of storytelling as a therapeutic measure (Cavallaro: 2002, 123-125) and outlines some ways in which storytelling and narrating creates space and

opportunity to articulate both “*personal and communal apprehensions of darkness*” (Cavallaro: 2002, 125). Henry’s family may not be as dark and convoluted as most Gothic archetypes, but one can be certain of one thing; most children will copy their parents’ behaviour. Perhaps Henry’s heroic flaw is not realizing how close he has come to do just that.

## Producing a Crisis

Henry reveals, that the cause for his mother’s death was an illness from which his mother had suffered previously. Asked if his father was truly affected by this traumatic event, he falters, “*He loved her, I am persuaded, as well as it was possible for him to – We have not all, you know, the same tenderness of disposition –*” (Austen: 1818, 202-203). He clearly is at a loss for words; not only must he defend the character of a man on whose good graces he depends but also a man with whom he already has a strained relationship. After Mrs Tilney died, her presence, her portrait, the very mention of her name is occluded from their surroundings. One might infer, that her death was mourned privately and subdued, the repercussions of which are yet unprocessed.

When Henry learns of Catherine’s suspicions about his father, he succinctly deconstructs her inference that his father is a Montoni-like character<sup>5</sup>, on all counts. Kidnappings, incarceration and torture surely cannot occur in England, the powerhouse of the British Empire, this bastion of culture, education, printing culture and neighbourly gossip. Henry displays his ignorance in this area as Catherine does; these things *did* happen and some of them were sanctioned by law. Husbands could technically ‘kidnap’ and commit their wives to mental asylums, few to no questions asked, in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century. The strongest literary examples of this are *Jane Eyre* (Brontë: 1847) and *A Whisper in the Dark* (Alcott: 1889), where we find women unfairly committed to incarceration, one familial, the other institutional.

However, as much as Henry would like to criticize Catherine’s understanding of patriarchal abuse of women, he is erroneous in his assertion that England is above such practices.

*“Remember that we are English, that we are Christians...Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighbour-*

*hood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?"* (Austen: 1818, 203)

Here, I would argue, that Henry's argument relies too much upon the understanding that the upper classes all acted benevolently towards those less fortunate. Daniel Defoe back in 1687 had seen the disgusting abuse of people who were put in asylums, oftentimes for simply exerting contemporary inappropriate behaviour, and called it "*the height of Barbarity and Injustice in a Christian Country*" (my italics, Fadul: 2014, 67; Szasz: 2007).

Essentially, what Henry is saying, is that the tenets of the Enlightenment and print culture have rendered the horrors of the Gothic harmless. The power of Radcliffe's Gothic aristocrats to kidnap, murder, exploit and terrorize have diminished, if not evaporated in the light of a new age of progress. The General is a tyrannical patriarch in many respects and Henry, tellingly, skirts this issue. Instead, his focus remains on Catherine and *what she has let herself believe* about herself and the world. I argue, that Henry's agitation is not just concerning Catherine's accusations of his father's cruelty but at the *ideas* that the language of sentimentality and horror, the language of female subjugation and patriarchal abuse, allows Catherine to give voice to the madwoman in the attic. As we have seen, no one would question any and all punishment or subjugation of the women in his family. Perhaps he also baulks at the insinuation that the sins of the father will be repeated in Henry. The moment is therefore crucial in Catherine's and Henry's character-development.

After the crisis has been induced in Catherine, all thoughts of romance are over, and arguably Henry's character is more attuned to hers. She is in need of comfort, which Henry happily provides, and all their conditions improve when the general leaves the abbey:

*"The happiness with which their time now passed, every employment voluntary, every laugh indulged, every meal a scene of ease and good humour, walking where they liked and when they liked, their hours, pleasures and fatigues at their own command, made her thoroughly sensible of the restraint which the general's presence had imposed, and most thankfully feel their present release from it."* (Austen: 1818, 227)

The General's regime was clearly not the cure for Catherine's 'illness' and, I argue, that this becomes clear to Henry as well as both Catherine and Eleanor are empowered by the General's absence. Notably, Henry's manner of talking changes, or rather, the way he is narrated changes. After the General expels Catherine from the abbey for the crime of being less rich than he had thought her to be, Henry travels to Catherine's home to ask for her hand. He has broken with his father, and now talks "*without sense of connection*" (Austen: 1818, 253) and any other dialogue on his part is recounted by the narrator, not by Henry himself. He is no longer trying to control the story, neither his nor Catherine's. In trying to 'cure' Catherine using patriarchal techniques their dialogue affected real change within him.

## Concluding remarks

This article has read Henry Tilney as a mesmeric healer who is out to cure his patient, Catherine, using literary tropes. His method is an amalgam of the style of his father, who has turned his 'home' into a semblance of an institution or a prison and the style of the male literary canon by Johnson and Blair. Catherine is certain that Mrs Tilney is kept prisoner by the General, and while her theory is far from watertight, I would argue that she is only mistaken in terms of *who* is kept prisoner; Eleanor Tilney. Henry, by virtue of his gender, has a longer leash. If we agree, that the preferred mode of femininity was to be ill/sick, fainting, shopping or playing delicate music to please in familial circumstances, then Catherine's active outdoorsy youth is a strike against her. She is *healthy*; in itself an indicator of abnormal femininity in her time. Henry picks up on this and exudes a certain magnetism that Catherine finds irresistible (Austen: 1818, 134). In order to make Catherine into a suitable bride/woman she must conform to patriarchal, or perhaps more accurately, cultural (i.e. masculine) understandings of the female being. Henry's goal, in the tradition of mesmerism, must create a crisis in Catherine's body that will expel the disease, only then could they be united. Catherine likes Gothic novels; so therefore, he will spin a Gothic tale, to drive her, sweating and spasmodic into "healthy" reading habits. However, as his control of the narrative was upset by Catherine's 'illness', he inadvertently produced a crisis in himself, thereby becoming a 'patient'. This is a fortuitous outcome, as it will enable him to distance himself from people who represent values like subjugation, blind obedience and misogynistic practices and truly embody Austen's hero.

The Gothic novel, as *Northanger Abbey* neatly demonstrates, is not meant to be read as an exposé of the darker side of the human psyche. It is a satire, an hyperbole and a perversion of relationships, gender roles and sexuality. I would argue, that Henry as an experienced reader knows this but perhaps forgot that the point of satire was in part to criticize contemporary society. The Gothic definitely critiques many facets of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century practices which engendered an eschewed understanding of 'natural' and 'unnatural'. I posit that Austen's hero decided that he would not follow in his father's footsteps but set out on a path of his own, guiding and letting himself be guided.

## Notes

- 1 The dating of this novel is not straightforward, see Irvine (2005, 40). As mentioned, it was published posthumously in December 1817, but the cover page states 1818 as its publishing date.
- 2 The mention of the manuscript is a quintessential Gothic trope, as it harkens back to the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (Walpole, 1764), which was published as an 'uncovered manuscript'.
- 3 This essay explains this very well: [http://ou.edu/expo/brainstorm/\\_jcr\\_content/content-par/download\\_38/file.res/Garbarino-Power%20Patriarchy%20Henry%20Tilney.pdf](http://ou.edu/expo/brainstorm/_jcr_content/content-par/download_38/file.res/Garbarino-Power%20Patriarchy%20Henry%20Tilney.pdf)
- 4 Cavallaro quotes Cecil Helman (1992), *The Body of Frankenstein*, New York: Norton.
- 5 The villain from Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*.

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