The Education of Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*

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*Northanger Abbey*, the first novel of Jane Austen, was finished under the title of *Susan* in 1803 and sold to the publisher Crosby. Unfortunately, it was in 1817 after Jane Austen’s death when this book was published by Jane’s brother Henry.

*Northanger Abbey* is a burlesque of the Gothic novels, which were very popular between the late 18th century and the early 19th century. This novel is also about a young woman’s education. Catherine Morland has read many Gothic romances, especially *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe. She devotes herself almost entirely to reading *Udolpho* and distorts her vision of the world. Her excessive reading causes the confusion between the fiction and the reality.

Catherine is set up as an anti-heroine. She doesn’t have any characteristics of novel-heroines: she is not an orphan; she is not beautiful nor clever; she is not given any talent of music or drawing. Catherine is a very innocent, country girl and makes her debut at the ball in Bath. For the first time in her life, she meets different types of the people she has never known before. They are Isabella and John Thorp, and General Tilney. They are selfish and vain characters who overvalue the importance of money and social status. Catherine does not catch the true meanings of their words at first. However, with a closer relationship with the Thorps and the Tilneys she learns to know the difference between what they say and what they mean. Catherine perceives John’s lies and Isabella’s selfishness and deceit, not only because she has a strong sense of social morality but because she is guided by Henry Tilney to a better reading of others’ words. “The first stage of her linguistic education is social; she learns that people do not always say what they mean.” (Mooneyham 5)

Catherine is invited to Northanger Abbey, the house of the Tilneys, by General Tilney. Her excessive imagination of the Gothic romances conjures up a villain who has murdered his wife. Catherine believes the General to be a murderer like Montoni of *Udolpho*. Her illusion is totally shattered by Henry Tilney. He expressly points out her stupidity to believe a secret murder in such a modern world. She is awakened out of her illusion by Henry’s accusation against her. “The second stage is literary; she learns that books are no measure of the real world.”