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The Dialogic Mode in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*: The Manorial Gothic Meets a Subversive Novel of Manners

ABSTRACT
The paper proposes to read the dialogue of two generic traditions: the novel of manners and gothic fiction in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. The generic dialogue in *Northanger Abbey* constitutes a particularly interesting case, as it appears at the very inception of the manorial tradition in fiction and thus bears a strong modelling function. The paper argues that *Northanger Abbey* represents a subversive version of the novel of manners, which contextualizes and substantiates the transgressive character of the gothic.
Keywords: manorial literature, novel of manners, gothic fiction, dialogue.

The greatness of artists, Barbara Hardy writes in *A Reading of Jane Austen*, lies in their ability to transform their chosen genre, to move the history of generic forms in a new direction (1979, p. 11). Hardy's early reappraisal of Austen focuses on her contribution to the development of the modern novel; it demonstrates the ways the writer harmonized two earlier traditions and created a „unified sense of character and society" by combining „the internal and the external approaches to character" (1979, p. 11) in a new form. While Austen's contribution to the creation of the modern novel has by now been well established, her importance for the manorial tradition in fiction needs to be studied in more depth. The writer had a fundamental role in the transition of the country house tradition in literature from poetry to prose, from the seventeenth-century country-house poem to the modern novel. The range of themes, plots and motifs found in her works created a corpus on which much of the manorial tradition in fiction has been founded. Yet, the impact of this diversity has yet to be fully understood, particularly in the context of the evolution of manorial genres.

The majority of Austen's novels belong to the genre of the novel of manners and it is in this form that the writer contributed the most to manorial literature.

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Her use of the gothic is much more restricted, practically limited to just one novel, *Northanger Abbey.* And yet, the novel's importance for the development of the tradition is crucial, as it testifies to the writer's experimenting with a different language than the one she developed in her novels of manners. If Austen is the founding mother of the country-house novel, mediating between the seventeenth-century country-house poem and later fiction, the two generic paths she explored, even if in unequal proportion, are equally important and need to be seen in relation to each other and to the whole tradition.[1]

The two book studies that discuss Austen's contribution to the development of the manorial literary tradition, Malcolm Kelsall's *The Great Good Place: The Country House and English Literature* (1993) and Alistair's Duckworth's *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (1994), belong to the traditional trend in the writer's research and offer a conservative reading of *Northanger Abbey*. Both critics find the gothic elements in the novel unconvincing and subsidiary to its realistic mode. Focusing on the country-house ideal, they question the relevance of Catherine's suspicions and claim the superiority of Henry Tilney's common-sense perspective.

When the new wave of research reclaimed Austen for the feminist critique and showed a more subversive tone of her writing, *Northanger Abbey* was also read in a new way. The gothic mode was no longer seen as a mere parody of earlier novels but as the locus of the ideological debate and an important educational tool in the development of the main protagonist. Critics no longer saw Catherine as a „deluded female Quixote who mistakes life for a romance until she is properly corrected and humbled by the hero" (Gerster, 2000, p. 123) but came to emphasize her correct judgement and the importance of gothic fiction in teaching her about contemporary forms of patriarchal violence. As Claudia Johnson (1988) rightly argues:

> Gothic novels teach the deferent and self-deprecating Catherine to do what no one and nothing else does: to distrust paternal figures and to feel that her power of refusal is continuously under siege. […] Further, gothic novels teach Catherine about distrust and concealment, about cruel secrets hidden beneath formidable and imposing structures (pp. 39-40).

Recent years have brought a new, fruitful phase in Austen's research that aims at going beyond the binary vision of the writer as either deeply conservative or

[1] The paper is the first part of a larger study into the importance of *Northanger Abbey* for the development of the gothic tradition in manorial literature. The focus here is on the dialogue between the novel of manners and gothic fiction. The subsequent papers will analyse the metafictional character of the gothic convention and its relation with the seventeenth-century country-house poem and the representation of the gothic country house in the novel and its film adaptations.

staunchly feminist. In such readings, the logic of "both/and" replaces that of "either/or" (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 49) and the dialogue of contradicting voices rather than a unified interpretation is put centre stage.[2] In the dialogic readings of Austen, *Northanger Abbey* occupies a special place, as the novel has always been seen to incorporate two contrasting traditions, the realistic mode of the social novel in the first, Bath section and the parodic mode of the gothic in the second, Northanger part.

As James R. Keller convincingly demonstrates, the tension between the two parts of the novel and their different generic conventions has been at the centre of the criticism of the book.[3] The purported lack of aesthetic unity is the principal reason why *Northanger Abbey* is often described as a problem novel, one that demonstrates enough merit "to warrant the attention and delight of readers and critics for nearly two centuries, but nevertheless possessing flaws that cannot remain unnoticed by the discerning reader familiar with her later, more polished works" (Keller, 2000, p. 131). And yet, Keller rightly argues, it is not clear why Austen scholars are so "addicted to resolution and closure" and why a realistic novel needs to possess "an imaginary unity" (Keller, 2000, p. 141). The dialogic trend in Austen's research clearly rectifies the need to look for aesthetic unity and acknowledges that divergent voices are in fact, as Mikhail Bakhtin argued, a natural element of the novelistic form.

The paper proposes to read the novel's dialogic mode in the context of the manorial generic tradition.[4] As I demonstrated in more depth elsewhere, the realistic thrust of the novel of manners and the fantastic mode of gothic fiction are the two generic conventions that have been most formative in the development of the country house tradition in fiction (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 2015). Rooted in contrastingly different formal and ideological premises, the two genres construct very different visions of the manorial order. While the former is naturally aligned with country-house idealisations, the latter is more suited for manorial critique.

The novel of manners belongs to the realm of realistic fiction; its interest lies in the everyday life of a particular social group or class. Focusing on the relation between the individual and society, the genre examines the impact of "social customs, conventions, traditions, mores, and habits" (*Women's Studies,* 1990, pp. 205-206) on individual people and communities. The genre examines "the moral and ethical underpinnings of a small group of characters" in a restricted setting

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[2] A good analysis of the dialogic mode in *Northanger Abbey* in the context of the development of the main protagonist is offered by Carole Gerster (2000). The dialogic character of the novel's parody is discussed by Tara Ghoshal Wallace (1988). See also Barbara K. Seeber (2000).

[3] Keller's bibliographic study offers a succinct and informative summary of the debate (2000).

[4] I am here drawing upon and extending Claudia Johnson's thesis that in *Northanger Abbey* Austen domesticates the gothic "and in the process brings it into complete conjunction with the novel of manners" (1988, p. 35).

and tends to offer "traditional plot patterns [and] conventional, even stereotypical, characterisations" (Weld, 1992, p. 9). The story often centres on individuals' introduction into society, their education into social norms and habits; the themes concern courtship and husband-hunting (Bowers, 2010, p. 107). Focusing on the daily life of the community, the novel of manners tends to concentrate on the domestic sphere; it is not interested in the extreme but in the predictable and the familiar.

What is particularly important for the manorial tradition is the fact that in the novel of manners, the "world is made stable by the general acceptance of social standards and of class distinctions" (Reddy, 2010, p. 69). Shared codes of social manners, habits and traditions function as a way of maintaining the stability of the given community. Human behaviour is examined with an eye to establishing the norm and "the common body of belief" (Weld, 1992, p. 8), which are seen as guarantees of the social order. The self "is interpreted through the community's understanding what is right and proper" (Brothers and Bowers 2010: 4) and shared habits, manners and codes make up for "a system of behavior that restrains force and turns aggression into wit or some other gamelike form of combat" (Price, 1975, p. 267).[5]

In contrast to the realistic paradigm of the novel of manners, the natural element of the gothic convention is fantasy and the fantastic. Rather than exploring the centre of the social world, the gothic moves into the periphery, spatially, thematically and morally.

> While the novel of manners avoids exaggeration and extravagance, choosing the conventional and the stereotypically familiar, the gothic is defined by excess and transgression. It portrays characters that violate the moral, sexual or religious norms, forces that undermine human comprehension and the belief in human reason; events that exceed the limits of probability and test the boundaries of realistic representation. (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 2015, p. 93)

If the novel of manners is set at the centre of the community and searches for a stable set of norms, the gothic convention explores isolated, peripheral places, extreme situations and transgressive behaviour. Situating its characters "and readers at the limits of normal worlds and mores" (Botting, 1996, p. 13), both physically and metaphorically, it explores the areas into which the polite novel of manners would not venture, as probing them "too deeply would be to risk tearing the social fabric" (Punter, 1980, p. 198). While the former locates the country house at the fulcrum of the social world and at the centre of a given community, gothic houses are inhabited by social outcasts, villains and their victims.

[5] For the analysis of the ethical and moral underpinnings of the novel of manners and their implications for the country house ideal, see Terentowicz-Fotyga (2015, pp. 31-35).

In terms of the manorial tradition, the clash of the two contrasting generic conventions in *Northanger Abbey* constitutes a particularly interesting case, as it sets the two genres that normally structure different texts in a creative dialogue within one novel. The fact that this generic dialogue appears at the very inception of the manorial tradition in fiction means that the text bears a particularly strong modelling function, it constructs a generic variant that will shape in important ways the development of manorial literature.[6]

In *Northanger Abbey,* Austen clearly experimented with form and tried to find the right language to write critically about the English country house. The history of the novel's creation and publication is in this context particularly meaningful. Even though it was Austen's first novel, it remained unpublished until after the author's death. The writer kept revising the text and its posthumous publication suggests that she was never fully satisfied with the result, that she might not have found a satisfactory language to represent the dark side of the manorial order.[7] In terms of Austen's vision of the country-house, it is quite revealing that Northanger Abbey came before Pemberley, General Tilney before Fitzwilliam Darcy, in other words, the critique of the country house started to crystallize before its idealizations, which the writer is most remembered for.

Northanger Abbey tells the story of a young woman's entrance into the world and her education into social norms and customs. Though in contrast with Austen's most popular novels, the action is not set in a rural community centred around a country house, but takes place first in Bath, where Catherine Morland travels from her home village of Fullerton, and then in a gothic country house, Northanger Abbey, the novel, nevertheless, portrays a small community of several families. Characteristically for the novel of manners, the first part of the novel employs a realistic mode to portray the everyday life of a particular social group observed in a restricted setting. Structured by the theme of courtship and husband-hunting, it spotlights the language of social mores, manners and habits and their impact on the development of the main protagonist. The life of the community is put centre stage and the focus on the young girl's entry into the world allows Austen to examine with a fresh eye the functioning of social codes and habits.

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[6] What makes *Northanger Abbey* even more interesting is the fact that the dialogue of the two genres is inscribed in a metafictional form. *Northanger Abbey* is an early example of fiction about fiction, a narrative that probes into the nature of reality and fictionality, which has important consequences for the development of the country-house tradition. The analysis of the metafictional aspect of the gothic convention and its implication for the evolution of manorial literature goes beyond the scope of the paper and will be discussed in a separate work.

[7] As Keller (2000) explains, "The novel's original composition has been accurately dated to 1798–1799, and it is speculated that revisions continued periodically over the next two decades: 1803, 1809 and 1816. The publication of the novel in 1818 was five months after Austen's death in 1817" (p. 131).

New to the Bath society and to a larger world as such, Catherine is a convenient focalizer to examine critically the language of social mores and manners. The first pages of the novel portray the main heroine as naïve and inexperienced, her parents as incapable of preparing her for the complexity of the social world. Catherine, we are told, could not "learn or understand anything before she was taught, and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid" (Austen, 2000, p. 3), her mind was "as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is" (p. 6); Catherine's mother knows so little of the complex world that her advice fails to prepare her daughter for what is to come. And while the parodic tone and metafictional play in the opening pages of the novel sets the "moderation and composure" (p. 7) of common life against the over-active imagination characterising the romantic mode of fiction, the development of the novel puts them *both* to test and ultimately demonstrates that violence and transgression belong not only to gothic fictional worlds but define the daily life of the civilized community.

When discussing the parodic mode of *Northanger Abbey,* critics tend to concentrate on Austen's treatment of the gothic convention and emphasize the clash between the social realism in the first and the parodic gothic in the second parts of the novel. And yet, a closer look at the representation of social codes and rituals demonstrates that Austen's deployment of the mores and manners theme is far from unproblematic.[8] In fact, I want to argue that *Northanger Abbey* represents a subversive, or to use James Kincaid's (2010) term, a "slippery version" of the novel of manners (p. 95), which does not clash but resonates with the gothic convention. Rather than establishing a realistic portrayal of a small community with a stable set of norms, the novel offers a comic portrayal of a dysfunctional system, which has a lot in common with the transgressions imagined and happening in the second part of the novel. The mores and manners theme in *Northanger Abbey* does not serve as a contrast to Catherine's over-excitable imagination, the familiar and the everyday do not cancel but substantiate the transgressive mode of the gothic. Austen's representation of social codes and manners as an artificial and oppressive system undermines the main principles of the novel of manners and in effect prepares the ground for the reappraisal of the gothic convention.[9] In this sense, the two genres do not clash but work together to expose the power relations behind the patriarchal and manorial orders.

In "Anthony Trollope and the Unmannerly Novel," James Kincaid (2010) offers an inspiring insight into the nature of the novel of manners. He argues

[8] For a good analysis of Austen's social vision and the artistic form of her novels, see Monaghan, David. *Jane Austen: Structure and Social Vision*.

[9] The present paper is greatly indebted to reappraisals of the gothic. The most relevant for the present argument are Levine (1975), Glock (1978), Wilt (1980) and Johnson (1988).

that despite the surface politeness, the character of the genre is quite menacing. Beneath "its bland descriptive surface" there is "a fierce guard assigned to police the borders" (p. 88) because the social reality that the genre aims to portray has a great deal to protect (p. 87). By assumption, the novel of manners needs to take "a large system of moral and social codings" (p. 90) for granted. These codes tend to be seen as natural and instinctive, existing, as if, beyond time and underlined by the common understanding, "unstated but complete" (p. 93). The novel of manners rewards

> those with good manners – and often even […] those whose manners are not so good; but it will not tolerate those who raise questions about the very basis for a particular system of manners […] [those who] expose the rules for what they are – artificial, often ridiculous means for maintaining an ideology. (Kincaid, 2010, p. 87)

And yet, Kincaid argues, every novel of manners is at a risk of becoming unmannerly, of turning into a subversive, "slippery version" (p. 95) of the genre that attacks the premises on which it is based. Rather than representing the system of social codes as "the appearance of nature," such an "unmannerly" novel of manners will "blow the whistle on it" (p. 88). It will expose the artificial situatedness of the seemingly natural system of social codes and "of the interested power motives that uphold it. Manners can operate efficiently only when they are not seen as manners, not, in fact, seen at all" (p. 89). As soon as they are "revealed as a system […] tied to values, historical situation, the protection of position and power" (pp. 89-90), the genre, rather than portraying the stability of a given community and its common body of belief, begins to "raise questions about the values, the behavior, the manners not only of the individual but also of the culture as a whole" (p. 96).

Northanger Abbey represents such a subversive version of the novel of manners. The story purports to present Catherine's entrance into the world and her gradual education into social norms and customs. Yet, the series of events that befall the young heroine, first in Bath and then in Northanger Abbey, do not locate her in an enclosed and well-functioning community into which she gradually accommodates and in which she learns to function. To the contrary, step by step the novel exposes a vulnerable and unstable nature of social relations and an artificial and oppressive character of social codes and manners.

What is interesting, the artificial character of social codes is highlighted in one of the first scenes set in Bath, when Catherine meets Henry Tilney for the first time. To Catherine's surprise at his exalted reactions to her words, he responds with a tongue-in-cheek comment that this is precisely what social conventions expect of him and concludes that he "must give one smirk, and then we may be rational again" (Austen, 2000, p. 12). Henry's words about marriage function in a similar way. He describes marriage as a contract, in which "man has the

advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal; […] he is to purvey, and she is to smile" (pp. 47-48). Of course, the meta-critical position adopted by Henry does not mean that he is outside society's coercive structures. As many critics demonstrated, he is not in opposition but in harmony with other paternal bullies, his "disparaging banter, not the less corrosive for being entirely in the normal course of things" (Johnson, 1988, p. 37).[10] Yet, by speaking ironically about social codes and manners, he exposes them as an artificial and contingent system and in effect opens up a space for their criticism. Observed in an ironic way, mores and customs no longer appear natural and unquestionable but come to be seen as a menacing system aimed at keeping the relations of power intact.[11]

While Henry is happy to blow the whistle on the artificial and unnatural character of social codes and manners, Isabella Thorpe and her brother are the ones that never question the system, yet abuse it to their own benefit. Isabella is the epitome of artificiality and insincerity and Austen repeatedly contrasts her words and behaviour. In the Bath scenes, the reader is meant to observe critically her overblown reactions and false declarations that the naïve Catherine still tends to take at face value. But the development of the plot in the second part of the novel finally makes Catherine realize the scale of Isabella's hypocrisy. When she jilts James as soon as a better candidate appears and then tries to win him back once her attempt to secure Captain Tilney falls through, Catherine receives an important lesson in the shallowness and hypocrisy of people and the uselessness of social conventions.

The motif of failure of the social community to defend the powerless and properly educate young girls concentrates on the character of Mrs Allen. While Catherine's parents are portrayed as too simple and straightforward to prepare the girl for the complexities of the world, Mrs Allen is just as poorly equipped to introduce her into society. In a comic portrayal of Mrs Allen, Austen puts social codes and manners to test. Introducing the character, the narrator observes

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[10] Claudia Johnson (1988) suggests that the reunion of Catherine and Henry could only be possible if he learnt that the lessons of gothic fiction apply just as well to the "midland countries of England" and the seemingly polite, civilized English society (pp. 37-41). Gerster (2000) also writes about the significant evolution of Henry's thinking about gender roles under the influence of Catherine (pp. 118-119). For a different interpretation of Henry's role in Catherine's education, see, for example, Howard S. Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue* (Chapter 4: *Northanger Abbey:* Parody, Pedagogy, and the Play of Feeling) (1962).

[11] In this sense, Henry's words resonate with the comments of the narrator, who often provides such a distancing position for the reader. For example, contrasting Catherine and Miss Tilney with other members of the Bath community, the narrator writes: "and though in all probability not an observation was made, nor an expression used by either which had not been made and used some thousands of times before, under that roof, in every Bath season, yet the merit of their being spoken with simplicity and truth, and without personal conceit, might be something uncommon" (Austen, 2000, p. 44).

humorously that her only qualification to "introduce a young lady into public" (Austen, 2000, p. 8) is her passion for clothes. She precedes these words with a comment that

> the reader may be able to judge, in what manner her actions will hereafter tend to promote the general distress of the work, and how she will, probably, contribute to reduce poor Catherine to all the desperate wretchedness of which a last volume is capable. (p. 7)

Although the readers do not yet fully understand the significance of the narrator's comment, they are encouraged to evaluate the character in a negative way.

As Catherine's socialization proceeds, Mrs Allen's failures accumulate. Upon arrival in Bath, it turns out that the social circle she wanted to introduce Catherine to takes long to materialize. They spend their time parading "up and down for an hour, looking at everybody and speaking to no one" (p. 11) and although, the narrator writes, "[t]he wish of a numerous acquaintance in Bath was still uppermost with Mrs Allen, and she repeated it after every fresh proof, which every morning brought, of her knowing nobody at all" (p. 11), they have "no party to join, no acquaintance to claim, no gentleman to assist them" (p. 9). The contrast between the promised socialization and the reality of the Bath season is emphasized by a comic repetition of the word wish, which punctuates Chapter Two:

> I wish you could get a partner […] I wish we had a large acquaintance here. […] I wish we had *any*. […] I wish they were here now. […] I wish I did. I wish I had a large acquaintance with all my heart, and then I should get you a partner. – I should be so glad to have you dance. […] I wish she had been able to dance, […] I wish we could get a partner for her. (pp. 9-10)

When the company finally appears, Mrs Allen's social circle proves hardly appropriate, as the acquaintance with Isabella and John Thorpe poses a number of risks, against which Mrs Allen fails to protect the young girl. This is well-observable in the series of scenes constructed around the trips the Thorpes organize. When Catherine seeks Mrs Allen's assistance to avoid joining the party, the latter either remains "placidly indifferen[t]" (p. 37) or fails to understand the subtle codes Catherine uses to elicit her help. Mrs Allen, the narrator comments, "not being at all in the habit of conveying any expression herself by a look, was not aware of its being ever intended by anybody else" (p. 37). It is only after the trip to Blaize Castle takes place, after Catherine is lied to, bullied and abducted, that Mrs Allen deems such expeditions inappropriate:

> '[…] 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; and I wonder Mrs Thorpe should allow it. […]'
> 'Dear madam,' cried Catherine,' then why did you not tell me so before? I am sure if I had

> known it to be improper, I would not have gone with Mr Thorpe at all, but I always hoped you would tell me, if you thought I was doing something wrong.' (p. 66)

If Henry's hurtful banter teaches Catherine about the contingent character of social norms, Isabella's empty words and overblown manner about the falsity of language and the shallowness of human relations and Mrs Allen about the ineffectiveness of the community, the lessons learnt from John Thorpe's behaviour are more radical. Thorpe is an emotional and physical bully; in his company, Catherine is not only denied reason and judgement and the right to decide for herself; she is lied to and lied about; she is manipulated emotionally and socially and when she resists, she is abducted and forced to comply with his will. The figure of John Thorpe locates masculine violence and brutality firmly at the heart of the social world. Well before General Tilney appears on the scene as an embodiment of the gothic villain, the theme of transgression, excess and violence seeps into the polite form of the novel of manners.

> The moral and physical coercion of powerless females which figures so predominantly in gothic fiction is here transposed to the daytime world of drawing room manners, where it can be shown for the everyday occurrence it is, but no less 'strange' for all that. (Johnson, 1988, p. 37)

Austen creates a number of links between John Thorpe and General Tilney. Both stand for masculine cruelty and violence, both resort to physical violence and emotional bullying. Both have an ulterior matrimonial motive in courting Catherine, rooted in their conviction about the alleged prospects of the girl. What is more, Thorpe is the one that vouches for the General when talking to Catherine, describing him as "a fine old fellow, […] a gentleman-like, good sort of fellow as ever lived" (Austen, 2000, p. 60); from Thorpe General Tilney learns about Catherine's wealth. In both subplots, the acts of transgression and violence are linked to gothic buildings. Thorpe's abduction of Catherine takes place during the trip to Blaize Castle; from Tilney's gothic country house she is expelled as soon as her prospects prove false. Her suspicions about the fate of General Tilney's wife centre on the gothic architecture of the Abbey and although his wrongdoing is partly imaginary, her opinion of him ultimately proves well-justified.

If General Tilney and not John Thorpe tends to be described as a gothic villain, it is because he is portrayed in the gothic surroundings, as a paternal figure ruling over his gothic country house and thus reminiscent of the rogue aristocrats in earlier gothic fiction. But his villainy is not greater than that of John Thorpe and the number of parallels and similarities between the two characters suggests thematic continuity between the two parts of the book. Examples of masculine power and violence towards women are not limited to the second part of the novel but subsume the representation of social reality in the whole narrative.

The experience of the oppressive social system which the gothic convention brings to light and accentuates does not clash with but develops from the portrayal of society in the mores and manners section. Gothic fiction uses a different language to understand and represent the relations of power than the one deployed in the polite novel of manners, but in *Northanger Abbey* the transgressions imagined and happening in the Abbey are contextualized and substantiated by the failures of the social codes and rituals portrayed in the first part of the novel. In fact, one might argue that the gothic mode is initiated only after the safety promised by the novel of manners is compromised. The fantastic mode of gothic excess takes over the text once the true character of the social world is exposed, once the stability of social codes is put into question and undermined.

Claudia Johnson (1988) is right to argue that in *Northanger Abbey* Austen domesticates the gothic "and in the process brings it into complete conjunction with the novel of manners" (p. 35). But the novel of manners that the gothic convention resonates with is *unmannerly*, as it subverts the most cherished premises of the genre. In the first part of the novel, Austen demonstrates that social codes, manners and rituals are not an innocent, instinctive realm which an individual seamlessly and naturally grows into. To the contrary, she uses the theme of a young girl's entry into the world to expose social mores and manners "for what they are – artificial, often ridiculous means for maintaining an ideology" (Kincaid, 2010, p. 87). Catherine's process of socialization amounts largely to discovering the abuses and the power play behind social codes and habits. Under the cloak of sociability, the young girl is manipulated and bullied, she is lied to and lied about, she is cajoled, threatened and denied the right to decide for herself. In *Northanger Abbey,* words prove either misleading or blatantly untrue, behaviour is either insincere or openly violent. Rather than portraying a community united by "the common body of belief" (Weld, 1992, p. 8), a world "made stable by the general acceptance of social standards and of class distinctions" (Reddy, 2010, p. 69), Austen exposes the artificial and dysfunctional character of social codes and manners and reveals the relations of power hidden behind daily norms and customs.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen brings together the two generic traditions that will define the development of manorial tradition in fiction, the novel of manners and gothic fiction and constructs a complex dialogue of their different languages and iconographies. But the truly innovative character of the novel consists in its subversive tone. The novel "contains within itself a critique of all the forms it takes" (Wallace, 1988, p. 271). She begins to develop the new generic form of the novel of manners that will be perfected in her most popular books and at the same time installs at the heart of the genre a subversive tone that undermines its most cherished assumptions. She parodies gothic fiction but at the same time reappraises its implications by bringing it into a fruitful dialogue with the unmannerly mode of the novel of manners.

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