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Chapter 4

Jane Austen's refinement of the intradiegetic novel reader in *Northanger Abbey*: a study in Ricoeurian hermeneutics of recuperation

Monika Class

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) marks a crucial intervention in the literary history of the novel reader inside the novel. I will use the term 'intradiegetic novel reader' for this trope, since 'intradiegetic' signifies that the novel reader is a fictional character inside the narrated world (diegesis) who distinguishes herself through her relation to novels. Austen composed the narrative in *Northanger Abbey* to register text–reader interactions constantly in a manner that exemplifies the metafictional demands that the heterodiegetic narrator, whose disembodied voice resides neither in the narrated world nor in the real world, makes in Chapter 5 in the central passage on novels and novel readers:

Yes, novels; – for – I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding – joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. Alas! if the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? I cannot approve of it. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body.¹

This passage contains Austen's most ambitious defence of the novel. Novelists, the narrator claims, should endorse novel reading in their works by constructing a positive image of intradiegetic novel readers rather than degrading them. The narratorial intervention disapproves of the typical eighteenth-century trope according to which the heroine of a novel encounters novels only by accident and loathes them. Conversely, this genre convention tends to relegate intradiegetic novel readers to the margins of the plot. In the exceptional case that the main protagonist enjoys novel reading, her taste is shown to need reform or, even worse, her addiction to need cure. Austen's extradiegetic comment, then, contains an important piece of novel theory, since it identifies that eighteenth-century novels paradoxically deprecate themselves as a literary genre inside the diegesis.

On the one hand, the passage suggests that the intradiegetic novel reader is a major trope through which Austen's forbears cultivate the generic self-deprecation of the novel in English. Austen criticises novelists for conjuring up the negative side-effects of novel reading as part of their rhetorical strategy to enhance the social acceptability of this young, ostensibly inferior genre.² On the other hand, the interjection anticipates postmodern developments according to which successive generations of novelists and readers have erased the boundary between novel-driven fantasy and real life.³ The assertive phrase 'Yes, novels' mutes the otherwise common apostrophe to 'the reader' found in traditional eighteenth-century novels, leaving instead 'the dialogic trace of a tacit interlocution between author and reader'.⁴ The breathless exclamations followed by questions and an appeal written in the first-person plural mark the climax of the metafictional interruption of the narrated sociability revolving around Catherine Morland and her friend Isabella Thorpe, who on rainy days 'shut themselves up, to read novels together'.⁵ Austen's impatience with the lack of respectability for the novel shines through the narratorial voice and contrasts sharply with the otherwise characteristic restraint of her disembodied narratorial voice.⁶ The last two sentences defiantly collapse novelists, narrators, fictional characters and novel readers into an ailing body that their unnamed 'greatest enemies' has harmed.

Novel readers inside the narrated world are, this chapter argues, a foundational trope in the diachronic development of the realist novel in English.⁷ Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* can be seen as a game-changer for the intradiegetic novel reader, since Austen achieved a composition that ambivalently elevates the genre both on the level of the story, in which the two novel readers – Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney – feature as the heroic love match, and on the level of narrative discourse,

which cues readers to mock and empathise with Catherine. In so doing, *Northanger Abbey* remodels the quixotic inflection of the early realist novel in English.⁸ To gain literary acceptance, eighteenth-century novelists honed 'the mimetic powers' of the genre to render representations life-like.⁹ Influential advocates like James Beattie and Clara Reeve defended the novel as an instrument of moral edification, plausibility and modernisation, opposing it to the old romance.¹⁰ For Beattie, ancient romance of chivalry is just a container for extravagant excess, wild fabulation and unfounded invention. I should note that the eponymous knight of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1605–15) is a, if not *the*, prototypical intradiegetic novel reader. According to Beattie, however, Cervantes's novel is an attempt to end the 'frantick demeanour [sic]' of the 'Old Romance'.¹¹ Beattie describes Don Quixote's story as the romance-induced descent into madness and thus as a warning that reading romances leads to the corruption of moral and mental health. This one-sided interpretation plays an influential role in the variations of the intradiegetic novel reader in the long eighteenth century, as it associates the trope with the ridicule, naivety, inexperience, gullibility and feminised inferiority of both novel and romance readers.

This claim raises the question of how Austen refined the signification of intradiegetic novel readers and what the effect of this refinement was and still is, apart from the well-known endorsement of the young, disregarded genre called 'the novel'.¹² To answer, the present chapter compares the novel readers inside *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and above all *Northanger Abbey* (1818) with those in Tobias Smollett's *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748) and in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) within the framework of hermeneutical phenomenology. Scholarly interest in hermeneutical phenomenology has been on the rise. Ricoeur's monumental *Time and Narrative* (1984–8) is regarded as one of the foundational theories within the burgeoning field of post-classical narratology.¹³ Besides that, his name has gained traction in Anglo-American literary studies as part of the debate on postcritique.¹⁴ The present chapter contributes to the debate on the uses of literature as well as affect in literary criticism. It is informed by the premise of reparative reading proposed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and especially her contention that Austen scholarship should not focus on the girl (reader) being taught a lesson.¹⁵ However, contrary to postcritique, I propose that Ricoeur's theory is not part of the problem, but rather part of the solution. The field of postcritique associates his name exclusively with the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' – a term which loosely refers to Ricoeur's analysis of Freud, Marx and Nietzsche in *Freud and Philosophy*.¹⁶ The proponents of postcritique have disregarded the other side of Ricoeur's hermeneutics,

which I call the hermeneutics of recuperation.¹⁷ Put simply, the goal of the hermeneutics of suspicion is to expose fiction's servility to ideologies and hidden epistemic violence. The suspicious hermeneut is said to unmask novels as cheap entertainment and novel readers as a gullible mass. Conversely, the goal of the hermeneutics of recuperation is the study of the evocation of reading experiences in general and, more specifically, the transformation of self through the narrative mediation of the other.¹⁸ In other words, the hermeneutics of suspicion disenchant, exposing readerly delusion, while the hermeneutics of recuperation studies the visceral effects of reading experiences that precede or underpin acts of interpretation.

Northanger Abbey's Catherine Morland illustrates an important aspect of the hermeneutics of recuperation: she embodies the visceral novel reader who attaches to fictional characters, thereby transgressing the boundaries of fiction and reality by applying the fiction to herself as she inhabits the world outside the book. The fictional character is prefigured by certain progressive aspects of Austen's upbringing: the family's reading habits. Contrary to the dominant taste of the time, the Austen family endorsed novel reading. Jane Austen's letter of December 1798 to her sister Cassandra asserts the virtues of the new literary genre by mocking the customary hypocrisy surrounding secular lending collections, which tended to disguise the fact that novels were one of their main attractions:¹⁹

I have received a very civil note from Mrs Martin requesting my name as a Subscriber to her Library . . . – As an inducement to subscribe Mrs Martin tells us that her Collection is not to consist only of Novels, but of every kind of Literature &c &c—She might have spared this pretension to our family, who are great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so; – but it was necessary I suppose to the self-consequence of half her Subscribers.²⁰

The letter mocks the acquaintance, Mrs Martin, because of her misplaced need to validate her circulating library by distancing it from novels. Austen's sarcasm targets the dominant societal norm of the period that downgraded novels to a guilty pleasure. The Austen family, by contrast, considered themselves 'great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so'. The excerpt gives us a glimpse of the literary underpinnings of Austen's complex novel-reading character in *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland. This chapter contends that the protagonist can be seen as the author's most sustained effort at fictionalising the enthusiasm for novels that the Austen family nurtured.

To unfold the subtleties of Austen's intradiegetic novel readers, I will draw on the work of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Emphasising the coproduction of meaning by the reader and the text, Ricoeur conceives of mimesis as a dynamic process that is divided into three interconnected parts. The first stage, mimesis₁, captures how novels are prefigured by dominant norms in the real world. This stage is called prefiguration.²¹ The second stage, mimesis₂, encompasses how narrative configures texts through devices such as plot, tropes and narrative perspective. This stage is called configuration. Mimesis₃ connotes the transformative process of reading, since it pertains to the ways in which real-life readers enact their reading in the real world. Ricoeur's triple mimesis has the conceptual advantage of comprising the narrated world inside the book and the lived world outside it. Triple mimesis thus offers a versatile model to gauge the relation of intradiegetic and real-life novel readers. Moreover, it does much to rehabilitate certain modes that blur the boundary between fiction and reality during and after the act of reading.

Focusing on the transition from mimesis₂ to mimesis₃, from narrative composition to reception, my contention is that the intradiegetic novel reader operates as a cue for novelistic self-evaluation in terms of genre as well as an implicit instruction in terms of reading behaviour. In the case of *Northanger Abbey*, the expressive devices point real-life readers to the positive re-evaluation of visceral engagement with novels and, concomitantly, the elevation of the novel to the category of high literature.

Austen's foil: the novel-induced corruption inside *Roderick Random* and *The Female Quixote*

The variable figurations of the intradiegetic novel reader provided and still provide real-life readers with clues about how to monitor their reading behaviour, depending on the intradiegetic novel reader's fate. Historically speaking, *Northanger Abbey* marks a highly influential departure from the typical mid-eighteenth-century intradiegetic novel reader, who is exemplified in *The Adventures of Roderick Random* and *The Female Quixote*. In their respective books, Smollett and Lennox present characters who show that novels cause moral and physical harm, and that engagement with the novel requires above all reform, distance and renunciation. Smollett's picaresque novel first appeared in two volumes in 1748. This first-person narrative relates the adventures of Rory, an impoverished young nobleman from the Scottish Highlands. Notably, the intradiegetic novel reader is a feature on the margins of the story. The

main plot tells us how it comes about that Rory relocates to London, first working as a navy surgeon and then living as a fortune hunter, until he is reunited with his father and marries his beloved Narcissa, an English aristocrat. It is significant that neither Rory nor his love object is interested in novels, since this implies a more sophisticated taste. Rather, Smollett casts Narcissa's maid Nancy Williams in the role of the reformed romance reader. Miss Williams, who personifies the impressionable woman novel reader, serves as a warning against the moral contamination brought on by devouring too many romances, which the novel, through the maid's story, ranks as titillating trash.

Smollett interweaves this subplot of the reformed fallen woman with the trope of the intradiegetic novel reader. Chapter 22 contains an analepsis, which narrates Miss Williams's (first-person) confession, entitled 'The History of Miss Williams': the once-beloved daughter of a wealthy merchant degrades into a woman of the town.²² Miss Williams's confession suggests that the projection of the world of the novel into her actual world is the primary reason for which she fell prey to the false promises of a noble suitor, eloping with him, becoming pregnant and eventually suffering a miscarriage. This figuration suggests that reading novels is dangerous because it arouses female sexual desire, increases credulity and weakens women's health to such an extent that it affects their fertility. Smollett's intradiegetic novel reader relegates novels to inferior print productions and warns readers, particularly women, against modelling their own behaviour on the form. Additionally, the figure of Miss Williams incorporates the proto-hysteric views that we find in the medical self-help texts written by the Swiss physician Samuel Auguste Tissot and the English physician Thomas Beddoes.²³ Both physicians condemned novel reading above all other forms of reading, pointing to the act as the cause of female nervous disease and the root of women's incapacity to engage in wholesome pursuits. Mirroring the medical discourse, Smollett integrated Miss Williams's story as an implicit moralist disclaimer and a means to increase the respectability of his novelistic production.²⁴

Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote, or The Adventures of Arabella* was published in 1752. The novel focuses on a young heiress, Arabella, whose sheltered life in a remote country estate is shaped by her singular interest in romance novels. Indeed, Arabella's most prominent character trait is her absorption into the world of badly translated seventeenth-century French romances. Unlike Miss Williams in Smollett's publication, Arabella is the novel's heroine. The value of novels is more ambivalent than in *Roderick Random*, where Miss Williams's experience with novels is unequivocally negative. For Lennox's heroine, the romances she reads actually help her to protect her virtue throughout the story. Arabella's

romance-induced eloquence, for instance, astonishes and demands the respect of other fictional characters in the narrated world.²⁵ Nevertheless, early in the novel, the heterodiegetic narrator pathologises Arabella's novel-induced imagination. He describes the young woman, for instance, as someone who is 'always prepossessed with the same fantastic Ideas'.²⁶

Like Cervantes's Don Quixote, Arabella interprets the world through the lens of the romances she has read, modelling her ideas and behaviours on the heroines she encounters therein. This leads to a series of unfortunate incidents. For example, Arabella mistakes a young gardener for a disguised nobleman with designs upon her, when his real objective is to steal fish from the estate. She also suspects her uncle, the father of her devout suitor Glanville, of harbouring an incestuous passion for her. What is more, she rushes to rescue a cross-dressed prostitute from her rowdy companions in Vauxhall Gardens, imagining her to be a disguised noblewoman about to be raped. This sequence of events culminates in her near-fatal illness, which she contracts as the consequence of an ill-judged jump into the river to escape imaginary ravishers. The narrative concludes with the heroine's consent to marry the long-suffering Glanville after Arabella renounces her passion for novels. Despite the ambiguity associated with the perusal of novels, the final chapters thus tip the weight towards the condemnation of romance novels. In the penultimate chapter, headed 'Being in the Author's Opinion, the best Chapter in this History',²⁷ the doctor heals Arabella from her addiction through the application of rigorous logic. Proceeding in a manner resembling a philosophical dialogue in the Platonic tradition, he debunks the reputation of novels by inferring: 'First, That these Histories . . . are Fictions. / Next, That they are absurd. / And Lastly, That they are Criminal.'²⁸ Reinforced by the chapter heading, this judgement is an indicator to real-life readers that they should reconsider the literary genre at hand and carefully avoid any application of prose fiction to the real world. If Lennox's configuration of her eponymous archetype, the female Quixote, validates novel reading to some degree, it does so *ex negativo*: only the implicit discouragement from immersion justifies the perusal of romance.

Austen's early intradiegetic novels readers: *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*

Like Smollett and Lennox, Austen portrayed the dangers of romance in her first two published novels. However, her composition does not suggest that romantic fiction is to be blamed for elopements and feminine disgrace. Both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* feature

female characters who are too easily impressed by rakish charms. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Miss Williams bears Willoughby an illegitimate child, and, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Lydia Bennet and Miss Darcy (nearly) elope with Wickham. Conversely, neither heroine, Elinor Dashwood nor Elizabeth Bennet, distinguishes herself as a novel reader or a literary connoisseur. When called a 'great reader, [who] has no pleasure in anything else', Elizabeth objects 'I am not a great reader.'²⁹ She apparently prefers country walks and balls to sedentary perusals. Reading only absorbs her when the letter comes from Mr Darcy which reveals Wickham's dishonesty. Like Elizabeth, Elinor attributes little importance to her love object's literary qualifications, nor does she particularly value novels. Elinor regards 'simple and elegant prose',³⁰ such as novels, merely as a more suitable choice for a poor performer like Edward, for whom William Cowper's impassioned verse proves too demanding to be read aloud adequately. Elinor's sister, Marianne, makes a tragic mistake by considering literature a litmus test for potential husbands. Wickham passes all reading tests from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to Sir Walter Scott with flying colours, and yet he turns out to be a spineless fortune hunter and a rake.

Even so, the intolerance for novels serves as the target for the narrator's satire in *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen sets up Mr Collins as the most undesirable suitor and humourless hypocrite of the novel by showcasing his protest against novels. The clergyman declines the invitation to read a chapter from a novel belonging to a 'circulating library' and offers instead 'Fordyce's Sermons' for entertainment to the Bennet household.³¹ The ironic passage pokes fun at Mr Collins, lampooning him as the dull, 'monotonous' voice of conduct literature exemplified by James Fordyce's *Sermons for Young Women* (1765).³² Fordyce's well-known *Sermons* warned against the moral danger posed by novels and circulating libraries for girls and young women.³³ Collins's outright rejection of novels, then, serves as a cue for the character's undesirability. However, a lively interest in novels alone remains an ambivalent character trait in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*.³⁴ By comparison, novel-reading features more prominently in *Northanger Abbey* and is associated more closely with character development.

Austen's playful endorsement of the visceral novel reader in *Northanger Abbey*

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen unapologetically placed Catherine Morland, the inexperienced novel reader, at the centre of her plot. Combining Gothic romance with feminine *Bildungsroman*, *Northanger Abbey* interweaves

the visceral reception modes of the former with the disciplining elements of the latter. In so doing, the novel opposes the convention of the corrupted intradiegetic novel reader. In *Northanger Abbey*, novels do not lead to moral and physical damage. On the contrary, they might even help prepare you for adult life and help you find your love match. At the time of its first publication in 1818, the novel thus counteracted anxieties about the corruption of human consciousness through novel-reading by showing how the heroine benefits from reading novels and is united with her love object, Henry Tilney, despite her conflation of the fictional and real worlds. Crucially, Catherine's indulgence in Gothic novels induces in her a warranted suspicion of General Tilney, the personification of hegemonic masculinity. Such insight can be seen as an endorsement of visceral novel-reading experiences, including the application of fiction to real life.³⁵

Austen's novel delineates how it comes about that a perfectly ordinary seventeen-year-old country girl, Catherine, ends up happily married and thus socially accepted despite unwittingly eschewing the strict eighteenth-century novel-reading protocol by stubbornly perceiving the world around her through the lens of such Gothic novels as Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791).³⁶ Scholars disagree about whether Catherine renounces her passion for novels eventually, perhaps in part because of the novel's conclusion, in which the narrator poses a rhetorical question: Does the story advocate parental tyranny or reward filial disobedience? It is the latter that brings about their marriage, not filial obedience. Crucially, Catherine learns this distrust of the tyrannical father, General Tilney, from Ann Radcliffe's novels. In Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*, for instance, the heroine Adeline is threatened by the corrupt uncle, Montalt, who, she also discovers, has murdered her father, and whom she helps to bring to justice. Real-life readers of *Northanger Abbey* are cued to see through Catherine's eyes as she sees through those of Adeline. While the narrator of Austen's novel remains covert through much of the narrative, the interspersed overt narration blends experienced, distant, disembodied observation with the inexperienced, involved and embodied life of the heroic novel reader. By virtue of this narrative technique, Catherine Morland becomes the main focalising instance of the novel. It is her perspective, her perceptions and her feelings through which the narrated world sometimes discloses itself to real-life readers. The narrative, then, invites real-life readers to empathise with an inexperienced heroine as she draws on Gothic novels to navigate the patriarchal codes of courtship to somewhat disobedient effect.

From the novel's outset, the heterodiegetic narrator clarifies Catherine's position as an intradiegetic novel reader who applies fiction to life. The

narrator describes Catherine's novel-reading habits in detail: '[F]rom fifteen to seventeen she was in training for a heroine; she read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives'.³⁷ Chapter 5 focuses on Catherine's singular interest in novels written by women, but the first two chapters describe her practice of memorising quotations taken from poetry written by men. Lines of verse supply Catherine with a stock of elegant phrases that she has taken from Alexander Pope's 'Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady' (1717), Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751), James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730) and William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and *Twelfth Night*. These memorised excerpts indicate Catherine's early application of literature to life and point to her progressive upbringing as a middle-class girl from the country. In the absence of girls' formal education in the long eighteenth century, the representation of Catherine's stock of verse tapped into then-emergent practices of equipping girls with memorised phrases to apply to their social life on the level of mimesis.³⁸ These representations subverted the dominant norms of womanhood and thus the prefiguration of *Northanger Abbey*.³⁹ After all, as Benedict and Le Faye assert, 'until well into the nineteenth century . . . any form of intellect in girls' was regarded with 'deep-rooted' prejudice.⁴⁰ This prejudice is the target of the narrator's cynical commentary: 'A Woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing any thing, should conceal it as well as she can.'⁴¹ Tellingly, however, none of the memorised phrases informs Catherine's action over the course of the novel. Instead, novels are the primary reading material that shape her character and induce her actions. Catherine frankly confesses that she is a novice reader while on a walk with Henry Tilney. She casually remarks that she does 'not much like any other' sort of reading than novels, that Gothic romances such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* are her favourite; she also declares that 'poetry and plays, and things of that sort' are tolerable and that she does 'not dislike travels'.⁴² Catherine does not memorise any of the novels, but she immerses herself so fully in them that they become part of an embodied repertoire, which she in turn enacts in the world around her. Her behaviour, then, instantiates 'the operation of refiguration' insofar as she incorporates into her selfhood the novel she has read in the hope of increasing 'the prior readability' of the world outside of books.⁴³

Henry Tilney is often cast as the lover-mentor who reforms, educates and ultimately disciplines the girl reader.⁴⁴ However, this interpretation overlooks that he is as enthralled by *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as Catherine is. He asserts his visceral reading experience of Radcliffe's Gothic romance in a flirtatious conversation with the heroine. So transported

was he into the world of Gothic castles while reading the novel aloud to his sister that he could not wait for her return when she was called away, rather proceeding without her, reading silently, and pacing up and down the 'Hermitage-walk' at his family abbey:

Here was I, in my eagerness to get on, refusing to wait only five minutes for my sister; breaking the promise I had made of reading it aloud, and keeping her in suspense at a most interesting part, by running away with the volume, which, you are to observe, was her own, particularly her own. I am proud when I reflect on it, and I think it must establish me in your good opinion.⁴⁵

Catherine and Henry bond over their mutual pleasure in novel-reading, which extends to their full absorption into the narrated world. The dialogue does much to establish them as the heroic love match of this feminine *Bildungsroman*. Yet Austen cued real-life readers to filter the narrated events through Catherine's novel-inflected consciousness.

Indeed, it is Catherine's consciousness that *Northanger Abbey* renders 'more completely than other characters',⁴⁶ Austen deploys free indirect speech to encourage real-life readers to imagine Catherine's novel-induced imaginings. A prime example of Catherine's enactment of Gothic novels in her ordinary surroundings occurs when, immersed in Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*, she wrongly suspects General Tilney of murdering Mrs Tilney. We, as first-time readers of *Northanger Abbey*, are kept in suspense because the episode is focalised through Catherine's limited consciousness. This episode lampoons Catherine's novel-induced behaviour since it recounts how the girl cannot resist opening the ebony cabinet in her bedroom; upon unlocking it, she finds, much to her delightful terror, 'the precious manuscript' that she has expected to find based on her perusal of *The Romance of the Forest*.⁴⁷ Catherine's body displays typically visceral effects: her 'heart beat quick', her 'cheek flushed', 'her heart fluttered, her knees trembled, and her cheeks grew pale'.⁴⁸ The configuration of Catherine's immediate embodied response to the manuscript left, and leaves, room for interpretation. Upon first perusal, it cues real-life readers to believe in the impending revelation of murder. Like Radcliffe, Austen postponed the disenchanting cue intentionally to keep readers in suspense. Only in the following chapter does Catherine realise that she has mistaken a laundry bill for a written testimony of murder.⁴⁹ The mundane bill pokes fun at Catherine's gullibility.

As mentioned, Austen hinges the narrative composition of this episode primarily on Catherine's consciousness, with the result that all the events at *Northanger Abbey* are interpreted through Catherine's experience of reading Radcliffe's Gothic romances. Yet Austen refrains from

further cues of mockery and deploys instead a high degree of refined ambiguity. It is free indirect discourse that discloses Catherine's embarrassment to real-life readers: 'Could it be possible, or did not her senses play her false? . . . Could not the adventure of the chest have taught her wisdom? . . . How could she have so imposed on herself?' If readers were or are in any doubt as to whether these reported questions represent Catherine's self-accusation or the narrator's judgement, the subsequent exclamation did and still does much to indicate Catherine's interiority: 'Heaven forbid that Henry Tilney should ever know her folly!'⁵⁰ In this episode, then, Austen ridicules Catherine's misplaced imitation of novels, but reinforces the connection of her heroine's reading and actions respectively. The ambiguity cues readers simultaneously to maintain their distance from and share their feelings with the heroine. According to Ricoeur, such free indirect speech 'constitutes the most complete integration within the narrative fabric of others' thoughts and words'.⁵¹ Expressive devices such as free indirect speech cue real-life readers to see through Catherine's novel-induced perspective even if the narrative still pokes fun at the heroine's visceral reading habits in this instance.

Another episode suggests Catherine's novel-induced recognition of General Tilney's tyrannical behaviour while she resides at *Northanger Abbey*. Driven by her distrust of cruel patriarchs, she continually looks for traces of murder. Similarly, Austen continues her use of free indirect speech to invite real-life readers to see playfully through the heroine's novel-inflected eyes. That said, free indirect speech generally oscillates between the narratorial voice and the character's thought:⁵²

She [Catherine] came to a resolution of making her next attempt on the forbidden door alone. It would be much better in every respect that Eleanor should know nothing of the matter. To involve her in the danger of a second detection . . . could not be the office of a friend. The General's utmost anger could not be to herself what it might be to a daughter; and, besides, she thought the examination itself would be more satisfactory if made without any companion. It would be impossible to explain to Eleanor the suspicions . . . nor could she therefore, in her presence, search for those proofs of the General's cruelty.⁵³

Real-life readers are invited both to empathise with and to judge Catherine's state of mind. First, she considers her options for how best to enter the room of the late Mrs Tilney so as to avoid detection; second, she anticipates General Tilney's anger; and third, she resolves to act alone and to conceal her suspicions of murder from her friend, Eleanor Tilney. While the passage leaves room for satire, the subsequent events redeem Catherine's distrust because the General banishes the young woman

from his home without justification. In doing so, he commits an act of cruelty in several ways: his young guest has not offended him; she is far away from home; and she needs assistance to return to her parents' home, which he refuses to provide. The banishment, then, corroborates Catherine's novel-induced suspicions retrospectively. The interplay of free indirect speech and this peripeteia, which is a crucial part of the emplotment, signals a positive evaluation of the heroine's transformation of self through the novels she has read.⁵⁴

To offset this playful endorsement of the intradiegetic novel reader, Austen pairs Catherine with Isabella Thorpe. The latter closely resembles that of the fallen-woman novel reader. She only devours fashionable Gothic romances and disregards other novels, such as those written by Samuel Richardson, which she dismisses as 'amazing [sic] horrid'.⁵⁵ Not only does the wily Isabella have a list of the latest 'pocket-books' of imitations of Radcliffe's Gothic work, but she also titillates her friend Catherine with such questions as: 'Are not you wild to know [what is behind the black veil in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*]?'⁵⁶ The fashionable, socially ambitious Isabella does much to convey her contagious passion of Gothic novels to Catherine, the new arrival on the Bath ballroom scene. The narrative echoes the misogynistic norms of the Georgian era, insofar as it suggests Isabella's voracious reading to be a reflection of her sexual appetite and insatiable hunger for wealth and social status. Once Isabella becomes aware of Catherine's brother's low income, she loses interest in him despite their engagement. The narrative further insinuates her affair with the libertine Frederick Tilney during James's absence from Bath. Both James and Frederick eventually abandon Isabella, leaving her with the reputation of a fallen woman. Austen thus uses the stereotype of the promiscuous woman romance reader in the mould of Smollett's Nancy Williams to mark Isabella proleptically as the 'vain coquette'.⁵⁷

As an intradiegetic novel reader, Isabella reinforces the common stigmatisation of the woman novel reader. On the one hand, she stands in for the dominant pathologisation of novel reading during the Georgian period.⁵⁸ On the other, Austen's figuration deviates fundamentally from the model of novel-induced corruption of femininity, since *Northanger Abbey* does not support the misogynist stereotype that Gothic novels irrevocably stirred up Isabella's seemingly monstrous desires. On the contrary, Isabella instrumentalises the imitations of Radcliffe's novels to be part of the latest fashion at Bath. She is resourceful and socially ambitious irrespective of novels; what is more, novels neither harm nor corrupt her moral or physical health. Yet at no stage in the narrative does Isabella resemble such a picture of guileless innocence as does Catherine. Revolving around frivolity, Isabella's character conveys the reading lesson, if any,

that literary fashions rarely ever last and that true novel readers should read extensively and know the traditions of the entire genre.⁵⁹ By setting a negative example, even such an ambivalent intradiegetic novel reader as Isabella operates as an implicit reinforcement of the novel as a literary genre. By way of contrast, her superficial appropriation of Gothic romance sheds a positive light on Catherine's inexperienced yet formative engagement with novels.

Conclusion

An interpretation of *Northanger Abbey* based on the hermeneutics of recuperation highlights how Austen's publication belongs to the kind of 'classic novel – from *La Princesse de Clèves* or the eighteenth-century English novel to Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy [that] can be said to have explored the intermediary space of variations, where, through transformations of the character, the identification of the same decreases without disappearing entirely'.⁶⁰ In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen decisively focussed on and re-evaluated the quixotic trope of the intradiegetic novel reader. One of Catherine's invariant character traits is her passion for novels. Paradoxically, this invariance opens her character up to constant transformation. This creative decision allows Austen to harness the paradoxical dynamic of the invariant change and unchanging variation. In so doing, the novelist dares to deviate from the dominant pathologisation of quixotism by integrating novels into a respectable part of character formation. This configuration marks a distinct departure from the denigration of intradiegetic novel readers in early realist novels exemplified by *Roderick Random* and *The Female Quixote*.

Based on *Time and Narrative*, the hermeneutics of recuperation further enhances our understanding of the initial and lasting effects of the intradiegetic novel reader as a cue for any real-life reader, past and present alike. Since the nineteenth century, the view that novels (and modern romances) have the potential to transform personal and communal identities has gradually gained social acceptance and is no longer seen as a threat,⁶¹ as the dominant eighteenth-century tastemaker Samuel Johnson believed.⁶² To historicise the significance of the principal intradiegetic novel reader in *Northanger Abbey*, we can detect a gendered model of novel-induced self-transformation that is part of the protagonist's coming-of-age. Catherine's modest independence while en route from Northanger Abbey in Gloucestershire to her parents' home in Wiltshire instantiates the way Austen's narrative composition opposes the then-dominant norms of female stasis through Catherine's presence as a figure of feminine

character growth. This plot dynamic thus exemplifies intradiegetic refiguration, and in so doing signifies the transformative power of novels. Implicitly theorising the generic virtues of the novel, Austen innovated the intradiegetic novel reader in *Northanger Abbey* to counteract long-eighteenth-century anxieties about the damaging effect of reading novels. In so doing, the novelist composes stylistic cues that continue to guide our reading today towards visceral reading experiences. In this way, *Northanger Abbey* represents a milestone in the development of the early realist novel and a distinct refinement of the intradiegetic novel reader that paves the way for further endorsements of visceral modes of novel reception.⁶³

Notes

1. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. by Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), vol. 1, ch. 5, p. 30. Although general editorial practice in this volume is to place references to frequently quoted books within the text, we have deviated from that practice here because Benedict and Le Faye use Jane Austen's volume and chapter numbers in their one-volume edition, and the length of reference necessitated by the inclusion of the volume number impedes clarity.
2. See William Beatty Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684–1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 224.
3. This refers to Jorge Luis Borges's 'Parable of Cervantes and the Quixote'. See Peter Boxall, *The Prosthetic Imagination: A History of the Novel as Artificial Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 60.
4. Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 93.
5. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. 1, ch. 5, p. 30.
6. D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or, The Secret of Style* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 34.
7. One conceptualisation of this development is 'the rise of the novel' established by Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957).
8. For an overview on eighteenth-century Quixote studies see Amelia Dale, *The Printed Reader: Gender, Quixotism, and Textual Bodies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2019), pp. i–iv.
9. Deidre Lynch, 'Early Gothic Novels and the Belief in Fiction', in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, vol. 2: *English and British Fiction, 1750–1820*, ed. by Peter Garside and Karen O'Brien (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 182–98 (p. 183).
10. Ioan M. Williams, *Novel and Romance 1700–1800: A Documentary Record* (London: Routledge & Paul Kegan, 1970), pp. 319–20. See also Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance and the History of Charoba, Queen of Aegypt* (Colchester: W. Keymer, 1785; repr. New York: Facsimile Text Society, 1930).
11. Beattie quoted by Williams, *Novel and Romance*, p. 320.
12. I use the term 'intradiegetic novel reader' synonymously with 'the novel reader inside the novel'.

13. Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 16; see also *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses*, ed. by Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010).
14. Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015); *Critique and Postcritique*, ed. by Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017). Jonathan Culler, 'Hermeneutics and Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. by Kristin Gjesdal and Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 304–25 (p. 319).
15. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl', *Critical Inquiry*, 17(4) (1991), 818–37 (p. 833). See also Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You', in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, ed. by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 123–51.
16. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. by Denis Savage (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 25–7, 33–5, 53–5, 59–64; Sebastian Gardner, 'Hermeneutics and Psychoanalysis', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. by Kristin Gjesdal and Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 184–210 (pp. 208–9).
17. My term refers broadly to Ricoeur's theory in, among others, the following works: Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, 3 vols (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984–1988); Paul Ricoeur, 'Intellectual Autobiography', in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1995), pp. 3–53; Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
18. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 140; Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3 (1988), p. 247.
19. See David Allan, 'Circulation', *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, vol. 2, pp. 53–72.
20. *Jane Austen's Letters*, 4th edn, ed. by Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), letter 14 (pp. 26–9), p. 27.
21. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (1984), pp. 52–86.
22. Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (Cambridge: Penguin, 1996), p. 188.
23. S. A. Tissot, *The Lady's Physician. A Practical Treatise on the Various Disorders Incident to the Fair Sex* (London: J. Pridden, 1766), p. 17; Thomas Beddoes, *Hygeia: or, Essays Moral and Medical on the Causes Affecting the Personal State of Our Middling and Affluent Classes*, 3 vols (Bristol: R. Phillips, 1802), II, p. 77.
24. For a detailed explanation, see Monika Class, 'The Visceral Novel Reader and Novelized Medicine in Georgian Britain', *Literature and Medicine*, 34 (2016), 341–69 (p. 359).
25. For the ambivalent evaluation of novels in *The Female Quixote* see Deborah Ross, 'Mirror, Mirror: The Didactic Dilemma of *The Female Quixote*', *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 27 (1987), 455–73 (p. 466).
26. Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, ed. by Margaret Dalziel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 21.
27. Lennox, *Female Quixote*, p. 368.
28. Lennox, *Female Quixote*, p. 374.
29. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. by Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 8, pp. 40–1.

30. Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. by Edward Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 3, p. 20.
31. *Pride and Prejudice*, ch. 14, p. 76.
32. *Pride and Prejudice*, ch. 14, p. 76.
33. For a detailed analysis of the role of Fordyce's *Sermons* in Austen's defence of novels, see Katie Halsey, *Jane Austen and her Readers, 1786–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 40–1.
34. For a discussion of the reading heroine in Austen's later novels, *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Persuasion* (1818), see Joe Bray, *The Female Reader in the English Novel* (New York & London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 162–74. See also Alan Richardson, 'Reading Practices', in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. by Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 397–405.
35. This interpretation builds on reading *Northanger Abbey* as an endorsement of Gothic novels rather than a spoof; see Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite, *30 Great Myths About Jane Austen* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), pp. 43–9. See also Bray, who deploys models from cognitive psychology and cognitive poetics to argue that 'Catherine is able to keep one foot in the "real" world of her immediate surroundings, even as she is most immersed in the fictional worlds of her reading' (*Female Reader*, pp. 144–50; quotation, p. 144).
36. For a detailed analysis of this novel see Monika Class, 'Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791)', in *Handbook of the British Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Berndt Katrin and Johns Alessa (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), pp. 417–34.
37. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. 1, ch. 1, p. 7.
38. Merve Emre, *Paraliterary: The Making of Bad Readers in Postwar America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 25.
39. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, pp. 54–64.
40. *Northanger Abbey*, notes, p. 332.
41. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. 1, ch. 14, p. 112.
42. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. 1, ch. 14, p. 109.
43. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, p. 179.
44. For a literature review on Henry Tilney, see Dorothee Birke, *Writing the Reader: Configurations of a Cultural Practice in the English Novel* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), pp. 101–5.
45. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. 1, ch. 14, p. 108.
46. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 297.
47. In Radcliffe's 1791 novel, Adeline discovers a manuscript in the vaults of the ruined Abbey that she eventually recognises to be her biological father's last words before he was killed by his tyrannical brother.
48. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. 2, ch. 6, pp. 173–4.
49. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. 2, ch. 7, p. 176.
50. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. 2, ch. 7, pp. 176–7.
51. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, p. 90.
52. For Ricoeur, such oscillation imitates 'the crowning touch of the "magic" of internal transparency' (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, p. 91).
53. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. 2, ch. 9, p. 198.
54. For an explanation of the notion of emplotment see Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, pp. 64–70.

55. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. 1, ch. 6, p. 35.

56. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. 1, ch. 6, p. 33. Isabella's list contains nine 'Horrid Mysteries', the titles of which refers to actual novels published by Minerva Press. See James Raven, 'Production', in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, vol. 2, pp. 3–28 (p. 19).

57. *Northanger Abbey*, vol. 2, ch. 12, p. 224.

58. The gendered pathologisation of novel reading has been studied by, for instance, James Kennaway, 'Two Kinds of "Literary Poison": Diseases of the Learned and Overstimulating Novels in Georgian Britain', *Literature and Medicine*, 34 (2016), 252–77; Class, 'Visceral Novel Reader', pp. 353–60.

59. As the paratextual commentary explains, this is a salient point in the history of *Northanger Abbey*, since the publication was delayed until the craze for Gothic novels dwindled in the late 1810s and early 1820s.

60. Ricoeur, *Oneself*, p. 148. The argument is compatible with Boxall's claim that Austen created a prototype for the novelistic conversion of 'the disintegration caused by rapid technological transformation into a newly integrated subjecthood, a kind of being that thrives on ontological instability' (*Prosthetic Imagination*, p. 164). Ontological instability does not amount to the full disintegration of character. Conversely, Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity revolves around the instability and opacity of self.

61. Michiko Kakutani, *Ex Libris: 100 Books for Everyone's Bookshelf* (New York: Random House, 2020), p. 14.

62. See *Samuel Johnson: The Yale Edition of Works; the Rambler*, ed. by W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, 22 vols (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1969), III, p. 21.

63. This work was supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG) under the project 'The Visceral Novel Reader: A Cultural History of Embodied Novel Reading in Britain, 1688–1927' (P422574378).

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