



## *Northanger Abbey* Week 3 Lesson Plans:

### **Introductions (10 minutes):**

*Ask the participants to share one aspect of the novel's ending that they found either satisfying or dissatisfying.*

### **Unreliable Information (20 minutes):**

*Provide Context:*

The difficulty of getting reliable information about people and situations is demonstrated throughout the novel.

- For example, John Thorpe's lies to General Tilney regarding Catherine.

### Discussion Questions:

- How does the circulation of unreliable information impact the progression of the story?
- What do you think would have been different if everyone were honest and reliable?
- How does unreliable information impact the development of individual characters?
- How can untrustworthy narration be interpreted as a Gothic theme?
- How does unreliable information relate to the deceptive nature of the political situation at the time?

## Austen and the Gothic (20 minutes):

### *Transition:*

The tone and setting of Volume II differ dramatically from the tone and setting of Volume I. Suddenly, the Gothic, a genre Austen has parodied throughout the novel, becomes a driving force of the plot.

### *Provide Context:*

Display the website content on the Gothic revival and Gothic novels, which is under the “Volume II” tab. Use this content to give brief background information on Gothic literature and its tropes.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen consistently references Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. There are various passages in *Northanger Abbey* that demonstrate how Austen borrowed from Radcliffe.

*Display the Austen and Radcliffe passages on the “Volume II” website page.*

For example, on page 137 of *Northanger Abbey*, the narrator says, “Catherine’s blood ran cold with the horrid suggestions which naturally sprang from these words. Could it be possible? —Could Henry’s father? —And yet how many were the examples to justify even the blackest suspicions! —And when she saw him in the evening, while she worked with her friend, slowly pacing the drawing-room for an hour together in silent thoughtfulness, with downcast eyes and contracted brow, she felt secure from all possibility of wronging him. It was the air and attitude of a Montoni!” [137]. In this passage, Catherine references Montoni, the villain from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Montoni accuses his wife, Madam Montoni, of poisoning his cup, and Madam Montoni’s niece comes to her defense, leading Montoni to lock the two women in a room: on page 296 of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the narrator says, “As he shut the door, Emily heard him turn the lock and take out the key; so that Madame Montoni and herself were now prisoners; and she saw that his designs became more and more terrible” [296].

### Discussion Questions:

- Based on these two passages, how is Austen similar to or different from Radcliffe?
- Is Austen purely satirizing the Gothic genre here or does she see a grain of truth in Catherine's fantasies about General Tilney?

### **Henry Tilney's Patriotism and the "Impossibility" of the English Gothic (15 minutes):**

*Transition/Provide Context:*

When Catherine begins to imagine General Tilney as a Gothic villain, Henry rebukes with a patriotic speech.

*Ask for a volunteer to read the passage on page 145 beginning with "If I understand you rightly . . ." and ending with "what ideas have you been admitting?"*

Discussion Questions:

- Wrapped up in Henry's patriotism is the idea that to be English is to be incapable of evil. But at the same time, Catherine imagines that General Tilney, an Englishman, has committed a horrible crime. In light of the General's character, is Henry's patriotism naive?
- As discussed last week, Henry Tilney boasts about owning and recognizing "true Indian muslin," which may suggest that he has imperial inclinations. Here, however, Henry is deeply invested in presenting himself as English. Are these types of patriotism and imperialism at odds, or do they come together in Henry in a way that makes sense?