



Northanger Abbey, French
Fiction, and the Affecting
History of the Duchess of C***

GILLIAN DOW

Gillian Dow is Chawton Lecturer at the University of Southampton, and Chawton House Library. Her research focuses on women writers and translation in the Romantic Period. *Women Readers in Europe: Readers, Writers, Salonnières, 1750-1900*, an edited collection of essays, is forthcoming in February 2011 in the journal *Women's Writing*.

Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for. Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they might give a faithful delineation; and Italy, Switzerland, and the South of France might be as fruitful in horrors as they were there represented. Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country, and even of that, if hard pressed, would have yielded the northern and western extremities. (205)

WITH THESE WORDS, towards the end of *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen's ironic narrator situates the heroine, Catherine Morland, firmly in the midland counties of England, unable to comment on the "extremities" of her own country, let alone the "horrors" of the Continent. Like her heroine and her narrator, Jane Austen frequently claims a restricted field for herself—the two inches of ivory on which she paints with so fine a brush is perhaps the most paraphrased and quoted line from her letters (16 December 1816). In terms of her reading, Austen famously points out that she is "a Woman, who . . . knows only her Mother-tongue & has read very little in that" (11 December 1815). Careful

readers of both Austen's novels and her letters know, however, not to trust her when she is at her most self-deprecating.

In her fiction, Jane Austen does not have the geographical range of Ann Radcliffe: although Austen's juvenilia contains characters who both travel and claim the most exotic of ancestries, the six novels published during and immediately after her lifetime narrow their focus to the southern counties of England that the author was most familiar with. Her satirical "Plan of a Novel, according to hints from various quarters," which, as Kathryn Sutherland writes, "clearly dates from the period of Austen's correspondence with James Stanier Clarke," gives short shrift to families in novels who are "no sooner settled in one Country of Europe than they are necessitated to quit it & retire to another." In life, Austen was certainly less well travelled than Maria Edgeworth: this popular novelist made two lengthy trips to both France and Switzerland in the early nineteenth century. In terms of her reading, however, Austen was like her contemporaries: she had access to, and was well aware of, European novels, including gothic novels. Austen uses this knowledge to great effect in *Northanger Abbey* when she depends on her reader's own familiarity with plot devices and stock characterization to achieve comic effects.

Recent monographs by Mary Waldron and Anthony Mandal have done valuable work in situating Austen's writing within the context of the publishing market of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but neither pays sustained attention to the popularity of translations in the period. In a similar vein, the editors of the recent Cambridge edition of Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, Barbara Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye, agree that "the parodic aspect of her text is likewise a true reflection of her readings in contemporary fiction" (xxxii), but all the examples they give are from novels in English, and indeed they claim that "*Northanger Abbey* belongs squarely in the tradition of the English novel established in the middle of the eighteenth century by Richardson and Fielding" (xxxiii). I want to suggest that Austen's adventures in contemporary fiction were broader than most critics have admitted and that she was responding to some themes that were imported into England from the French sentimental and gothic novel. April Alliston is one of few commentators to have argued that Austen "began her career as a novelist by expressly situating herself within a literary correspondence among French and English women authors that grew through the appropriation of both discursive and social elements of *préciosité* by late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English novelists" (32). In *Northanger Abbey*, dramatic portraits of French, Italian, and Swiss society spark Catherine Morland's imagination, no matter

how decidedly she may chose to reject them at the end of the novel. Continental fiction was never far from Austen's own mind, and it served as a creative stimulus for her own fiction, even if she, like her heroine, ultimately rejected both its form and style. I aim briefly to situate Austen's work within the context of the French novel and its reception in Britain. In doing so, I wish to bring an earlier female practitioner of the gothic out from behind Ann Radcliffe's shadow, for Radcliffe was not the only gothic writer Austen chose to parody in *Northanger Abbey*, and Catherine's visit to General Tilney's seat is not simply an imaginative sojourn in Radcliffe-land.



It was impossible for a voracious reader and admirer of novels such as Jane Austen to be unaware of the continental tradition of prose fiction in Britain. Throughout the eighteenth century, French novels were translated rapidly into English, often in the year or so after publication of the original French text. A British reader like Austen did not need to read French to have access to a variety of important French novels, and she did not even need to read translations of French fiction to be aware of the importance of the French romance since references filtered down into native productions. Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701), the author of popular romances such as *Clélie* (1654-60), was just one writer who was read with enthusiasm in the Britain of the early eighteenth century and whose works were referred to in many English novels. The quixotic heroine Lady Arabella, from Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), has read far too many of Scudéry's romances "not in the original French, but very bad translations" (7), and Lady Arabella herself is said to be one of the quixotic models for Austen's heroine in *Northanger Abbey*: Austen certainly admired Lennox's novel, which she read several times.

Much scholarly work on the eighteenth-century rise of the novel in the past decade has emphasized not separate traditions but rather cross-channel exchanges, in an attempt to remap the development of the genre in this crucial period. In one of the most recent interventions in this debate, Mary Helen McMurrin has argued that in the beginning of the eighteenth century in particular, "novels did not simply move from the source to target language, and one nation to another, but dangled between languages and cultures" (2). This situation was changing during Austen's own lifetime. A fear of the damaging nature of French fiction became increasingly expressed in the pages of literary magazines and periodicals. In hostile reviews that dismissed sentimental and

extravagant French prose, critics frequently claimed that even the dexterous hand of an English translator could not make these foreign texts “safe” for a British reader. During the period in which Jane Austen was putting the finishing touches to “Susan,” and later, as she composed and redrafted all of her major novels, the English novel was held by the critics to be far superior to its continental equivalent. We can see several joking references to the contemporary climate and anti-French sentiment in *Northanger Abbey*, not least when John Thorpe refers derogatively to the great Frances Burney as “that woman they make such a fuss about, she who married the French emigrant” (43). Post Revolutionary Terror, it is perhaps unsurprising that Frenchness—of people and of texts—should be seen as problematic.

Despite this, some French authors did gain popularity in Britain at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and throughout the Regency period. The sentimental novels of Sophie Cottin (1770-1807) saw a considerable vogue in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Germaine de Staël’s *Corrine ou l’Italie* (1807) was a pan-European success, and one that Austen herself advised an acquaintance to read. Just behind the German August Lafontaine in the list of prolific novelists of the period is Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis (1746-1830), with seventeen novels published between 1800 and 1829. Genlis had been an active writer since the late 1770s, writing many popular and influential works on education and for children, all of which were read in Britain. One of Genlis’s earlier tales in particular is a source for *Northanger Abbey*, and it is to an account of this text, “The Duchess of C***,” that I shall now turn.



The tale of the Italian Duchess of C*** appears as an interpolated story at the very heart of Genlis’s 1782 best-selling French epistolary and educational novel *Adèle et Théodore*, a novel that was published in English as *Adelaide and Theodore* in 1783, having been rapidly translated by “some Ladies.” It is entitled “The History of the Dutchess of C***, written by herself,” and it appears as an insert to the French Baroness D’Almane’s travel-journal, giving an account of the Almane family’s time in Italy. We know from the heroine’s comments at the end of *Emma* that Jane Austen was familiar with *Adelaide and Theodore*, and that she assumed her readers would be so too.¹ In an article focusing on *Emma*’s gothic sources, Susan Allen Ford writes of the centrality of Genlis’s Duchess of C***, and the gothic heroine more generally, to *Emma*’s

and Harriet's development. In *Northanger Abbey*, "The Duchess of C***" provides inspiration for Austen, by fuelling Catherine Morland's imagination and leading her to misread past events at Northanger Abbey. The comic effect of Catherine's flights of fancy must have been enhanced for Austen's first readers, familiar themselves with Genlis's tale in a way that the twenty-first century reader is not.

"The Duchess of C***" is a vivid account of the misfortunes of the Duchess, and the "deplorable history" (267) of her fate at the hands of the Duke of C***, her cruel husband. The plot is relatively straightforward. One English edition of the tale, published without the original author's name (or indeed any indication that it was a translation) rejoices in the following descriptive title page: *The Affecting History of the Duchess of C*** Who Was Confined Nine Years in a Horrid Dungeon, Under Ground, Where Light Never Entered, a Straw Bed being her only resting Place, and bread and water her only support, conveyed by means of a turning-box, by her Inhuman Husband; whom she saw but once during her long Imprisonment, though suffering by Hunger, Thirst, and Cold, the most severe Hardships, But Fortunately she was at last discovered, and released from the Dungeon, By her Parents.* It also contains the wonderful frontispiece illustration reproduced here, a moving depiction of the Duchess's child being taken from her before her imprisonment.

The title gives the salient elements of the plot: further particulars are that the Duchess, born in Rome and "sole heiress of an immense fortune, and of one of the most illustrious families in Italy" (268), falls in love with the Count de Belmire, from a Neapolitan family, whose own father, the Marquis de Belmire, has been ruined and exiled by his cruel brother the Duke of C***. Belmire hopes to ask for the Duchess's hand in marriage, and an agreement is reached between them. Belmire leaves the country, and before he can return, the Duke of C*** comes to Rome, falls in love with the Duchess on sight, asks her parents' approval of the match, and is granted it. The Duchess leaves Rome for Naples with her new husband, desperately unhappy but submitting to her parents' will. She gives birth to a daughter, and the day after this daughter is weaned, she is forced to depart from Naples to one of the Duke of C***'s estates twelve leagues away. It transpires that the Duke has discovered a series of letters that the Duchess has written to a confidante, in which she speaks of her "invincible aversion" (273) to the Duke, and of her love for another. Since the lover (Belmire) is not named in the letters, the Duke offers a choice: "sacrifice your lover to my resentment; tell me his name, or renounce for ever light, liberty, and the world" (281). The Duchess refuses to name Belmire, and



The Duchess of C—

*The Duke of C*** taking the Duchess's daughter away, before the Duchess is imprisoned (date unknown). © Chawton House Library.*

she is therefore imprisoned in the dungeon of the castle: her death is announced to her family, her daughter is removed to her grandparents in Rome, and the Duchess herself remains for nine full years in her subterranean prison, until she is rescued by none other than Belmire himself.

With a publication date of 1782, “The Duchess of C****” is one of the earliest female-authored and feminocentric gothic tales in Europe. The main period of popularity of the gothic romance was later, roughly from 1790 to 1820, as the editors of the Cambridge University Press edition of *Northanger Abbey* point out, and many critics have viewed the vogue as a partial response to the horrors of the French Revolution, thus placing it firmly post-1789, or rather, after the events of the Reign of Terror in 1793-94. Genlis’s tale addresses themes that were to become common in the female-authored gothic novel in particular, and especially in what critics have identified as the “female gothic,” narratives that, as Anne Williams has pointed out, are “organized around the female perspective which necessarily views the male as ‘other’” (141). In these works of female gothic (which are not necessarily female-authored), the heroine is the innocent victim of abuse at the hands of a male authority figure. She is represented as without agency to influence and direct her own fate, a passive and frequently pitiful figure. The Duchess of C****’s account of her departure from Naples and her arrival in the Duke’s isolated castle gives an excellent example of the petrified silence in which the heroine of female gothic is often to be found:

My daughter was with me; I took her in my arms; and without uttering a word followed the Duke. . . . [W]hen we arrived at the castle, we crossed a draw-bridge; the rattling of the chains made me shudder; at this moment I looked at the Duke. What is the matter with you, said he? The ancient appearance of this castle seems to surprise you. What! do you think you are entering a prison! He uttered these words with a forced and malicious smile, and I observed his eyes sparkling with an inhuman joy, which shocked me.—Wishing to conceal my terror, I leant my head on my daughter’s, and could not restrain my tears. (272)

In *Northanger Abbey*, Henry Tilney’s laughing account of Catherine’s imminent arrival at a place “just like what one reads about” (161), with his references to “Dorothy the ancient housekeeper,” “gloomy passages,” broken lutes, ponderous chests, “a large, old fashioned cabinet of ebony and gold” (161-63), and the combined effects of these on the imagined gothic heroine, Catherine herself, owes its effect to the popularity of accounts of heroines of



The Dutchess C . . . Deliverance, by Pietro Bettelini after John Francis Rigaud (London, 1787). © Trustees of the British Museum.

the female gothic such as the Duchess of C***. And although Catherine, “recollecting herself,” professes to be “not at all afraid” (164) that the events Tilney has envisioned will indeed come to pass, a mere sentence later sees her expecting “with solemn awe” to see Northanger Abbey’s “massy walls of grey stone, rising amidst a grove of ancient oaks, with the last beams of the sun playing in beautiful splendour on its high gothic windows” (164). The arrivals of heroines before her in isolated abbeys and castles have left their indelible mark on Catherine’s consciousness.

The omnipresence of these gothic heroines in the literary marketplace of the early nineteenth century can be traced through the publication history of “The Duchess of C***,” which in itself provides evidence of a growing taste for “affecting histories” of this nature. It is to the English editions and translations of Genlis’s *Adelaide and Theodore* that we must look for Austen’s and her British readers’ presumed knowledge of the text. These were numerous: four

full editions of *Adelaide and Theodore* were published within Austen's lifetime, in 1783, 1784, 1788, and 1796. Perhaps more important, the novel was the most popular single work in British magazines in the period, with two rival translations being serialized in the 1780s: the *Universal Magazine* (June 1782–December 1786) and the *Lady's Magazine* (May 1785–April 1789). The inset tale of the Duchess of C*** was a particular success. It appeared in an anthology entitled *The Beauties of Genlis* in 1787, and as separate novella publication well into the nineteenth century. The *Universal* translation of the tale was reprinted in the *New Magazine of Choice Pieces* in 1810. In the *Lady's*, there were two translations, since "Female Fortitude, or the History of the Duchess of C —, written by Herself" was serialized between January and July 1786. Robert Mayo points out that

"Adela and Theodore" was being serialised in the *Lady's* (1785–9), when "Female Fortitude" began its seven-month's run, but the interpolated history was still several years in the future. Since "Female Fortitude" was an unacknowledged translation of Mme. de Genlis's story, the editor of the *Lady's* was probably unaware of the duplication. (493)

This bibliographical information clearly demonstrates that "The Duchess of C***" was a ubiquitous text in the 1780s, and that this popularity continued right into the late 1790s and early 1800s, when Austen was writing and revising "Susan." Austen might have encountered the Duchess's story in serial form in several magazines or in one of four printed editions, and she certainly had access to the first French edition in her brother's library in Godmersham Park, Kent. She may even have read the tale at Mrs. Latournelle's school in Reading in 1785 or 1786: Mary Martha Butt was a pupil at the school from 1791 and remembered reading, in 1792–93, "the history of the Duchesse de C with a delight which I shall never again feel in reading any narrative of the kind" (140), thus demonstrating that young girls in particular were attracted to this gothic tale.² Catherine Morland's and Isabella Thorpe's enthusiastic reading of gothic novels in Bath becomes particularly compelling when we can link it to the actual reading practices of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century girls.

We are just beginning to recognize how important Genlis's writing was to her British female contemporaries: as the most prolific female novelist of her age, she is both a model for emulation and a popular object of satire and criticism. Judith Clark Schaneman has recently argued that Genlis's *Adelaide and Theodore* and "The Duchess of C***" had a profound influence on

Radcliffe's 1791 *The Romance of the Forest*: there are also strong parallels to the fate of Genlis's Duchess in Radcliffe's 1790 novel, *A Sicilian Romance*, which sees the character Mazzini imprisoning his first wife in an abandoned wing of his castle for fifteen years, having faked her funeral. *A Sicilian Romance* has been seen by several of Austen's editors (including Claire Grogan, editor of the Broadview edition of *Northanger Abbey*) as the main source text for some of Catherine's imaginings, and Radcliffe has been seen as the main object of Austen's satire. "The Duchess of C***," however, pre-dates Radcliffe's *Sicilian Romance* by eight years, and it has even closer parallels with *Northanger Abbey*. It is likely that as well as the clear and acknowledged influence of Radcliffe, Austen also wished to allude to Genlis, and in so doing, to satirize both the French author and her Italian Duchess.

From Catherine's first suspicion that General Tilney is reluctant to let Catherine see the dead Mrs. Tilney's rooms, the stage is set for a direct comparison with the Duchess of C***. Mrs. Tilney has been "dead these nine years" (192), the exact length of time of the Duchess of C***'s incarceration. Catherine immediately starts to believe that, like the Italian Duchess, Mrs. Tilney is only presumed dead. When General Tilney says he will not retire, since he has "many pamphlets to finish" (193), Catherine is unconvinced that these "pamphlets" are the real reason for his wish for isolation from the rest of the party:

There must be some deeper cause: something was to be done which could be done only while the household slept; and the probability that Mrs. Tilney yet lived, shut up for causes unknown, and receiving from the pitiless hands of her husband a nightly supply of coarse food, was the conclusion which necessarily followed. (193)

Catherine's imagination here is inspired by the Duke of C***'s treatment of his wife. After giving the Duchess a sleeping potion that persuades the domestic servants in the castle that she is dead, the Duke threatens her with incarceration: "Here, said he, is your future nourishment; you will find it every day in the wheel you see opposite to you; I shall bring it to you myself; I shall put it in this wheel, and I shall never re-enter this horrid dungeon" (282). The necessity for secrecy of course means that none but the Duke of C*** can ensure that his Duchess is fed, and that he thus remains in total control. It is only when the Duke becomes ill and is unable to feed the Duchess that the secret comes out: he tells his nephew Belmore that he has imprisoned "a guilty woman, and one who deserved death" (291), thus setting in motion the chain of events that leads to the Duchess's rescue.

Catherine projects the same requirements for secrecy onto General Tilney. Not even when she sees a monument to Mrs. Tilney in the family pew in church, can Catherine's conviction that the General is guilty of locking up his wife and fabricating her death be swayed: "Catherine had read too much not to be perfectly aware of the ease with which a waxen figure might be introduced, and a supposititious funeral carried on" (196). Here, too, we see a link to the story of the Duchess of C***—in particular, the Duke's actions in giving a false account of his wife's death, eventually erecting a large tomb to her memory, and turning the castle itself into a memorial. In the Duchess's account of her husband's "dreadful precautions,"

he told me he had a wax figure made, pale and livid, which he should put in my bed; and that, under a pretence of fulfilling an act of piety, he should bury it himself, with the assistance of the old woman, who would be a spectator and witness of this action, without his being obliged to place any confidence in her. (281)

As all careful readers of Ann Radcliffe know, and all careful editors of *Northanger Abbey* point out, a wax figure plays a part in her 1794 *Mysteries of Udolpho* (hidden behind the black veil that so intrigues Catherine and Isabella). The direct link in this part of Austen's narrative to a "waxen figure" and a "supposititious funeral" as a key part of the suspected incarceration of Mrs. Tilney has closer parallels with Genlis's account of the Duchess of C***. Although Catherine believes General Tilney to have "the air and attitude of a Montoni" (192)—the gothic villain in the *Mysteries of Udolpho*—, the actions she believes him guilty of are the exact actions of a Duke of C***.

The gothic horror of Genlis's tale may have been increased for readers when they read Genlis's note that the Duchess of C***'s plight was based on truth: "The nine years of confinement in a cavern where the sun never penetrated, the pretended death of the Dutchess, the manner in which she lived and received nourishment, her deliverance; all these particulars are exactly true" (267). Forty years later, in the third volume of her memoirs, Genlis identifies the Duchess of C*** as a real Italian Duchess whom Genlis met during a trip to Italy, and whose father gave Genlis his daughter's story:

The Prince of Palestrina, was father of the Duchess of Cerifalco, who passed nine years in a subterranean cave—an astonishing history, which I have related in *Adèle et Théodore*. . . . Though she was but forty-six years old, she looked sixty-six. . . . [H]er head and eyes were inclined towards the ground, and from time to time she had attacks of shuddering. (35)



The Dutchess of C giving her daughter to Count Belmire, by *Gaetano Testolini* after *John Francis Rigaud*. London (1790). © Trustees of the British Museum.

As Mary S. Trouille points out in the introduction to her recent translation of the *Histoire de la duchesse de C****, Cerifalco is “a misspelling of Girifalco,” and “the Duchess of Girifalco’s story was widely known in eighteenth-century Italy and was chronicled by several nineteenth-century Italian historians” (1).³ Genlis seems to have met the Duchess in 1776, and the events related in her story must have taken place in the late 1740s and 1750s. Trouille gives further details of the Duchess of Girifalco’s life and relationships: she was considered to be guilty of adultery by some, although in her account of the tale, Genlis takes great pains to insist that she is innocent.

Genlis’s Duchess is a devout, pious woman, a chaste wife and mother. When, at the end of the tale, she insists that her beloved Belmire marries her daughter, her sacrifice is complete:

It was to that too faithful lover, that dearest friend, my deliverer, to whom I offered my daughter. I give her to you, said I to him; she is yours. She loves you; she is fifteen, the age I was the first time you

saw me; she will recall all that I was then, both by her figure and her sentiments. Fate gives you back to-day what it has formerly deprived you of. As I was not born to make you happy, nothing but seeing you happy with my daughter can give me consolation. (295)

The conclusion of Genlis's "The Duchess of C****" emphasizes maternal sacrifice and religious consolation, both themes to which Genlis returned frequently in her novels of the early nineteenth century.

Does it matter for the purpose of Jane Austen's use of the tale whether or not the Duchess of C**** really existed, whether or not the tale was "true"? The gothic novel or tale certainly gains an extra frisson and affective power when the reader can be persuaded that the events related within are real, and many popular tales in this genre in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, to the collective dismay of critics and reviewers! These critics were concerned that the reading of such tales would lead to women readers (and it is nearly always women readers) whose imaginations would prompt them to see danger where there was none, or romance where none existed.

For the British reader, it was far easier to be convinced of horrors in exotic, and crucially Catholic, lands than in Enlightened and Protestant Britain. Linda Colley is just one historian who has pointed out that the British had been taught to fear France as the "Catholic Other" since the Reformation. Austen uses this fear in *Northanger Abbey*. It is constructive to remind ourselves of Henry Tilney's frequently-quoted words when he discovers that Catherine has been imagining a dreadful fate for his late mother:

"Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you—Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? 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 neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?" (203)

Henry Tilney sees British superiority over the Continent in the matter of the law of the land. The implication is, naturally, that although women like the

Duchess of C*** may have existed in Italy, her existence was simply impossible in England, and a Mrs. Tilney had a safety afforded to her that her continental counterparts did not enjoy. But the laws of the land were changing across Europe. In *Wife-Abuse in Eighteenth-Century France*, Mary Trouille uses a wide variety of evidence—from conduct books, to law and medical treatises, to fiction (including a reading of Genlis’s “The Duchess of C***”)—to examine spousal abuse in a crucial, transitional period. “It is hardly a coincidence,” Trouille points out, “that fictional tales of sequestered wives and spousal abuse abound in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries at a time when the laws and customs concerning marriage and parental authority had become the subject of intense debate” (243). We can read *Northanger Abbey* as a text that engages with this debate, since both spousal abuse and parental authority are key gothic tropes that Austen both satirizes and engages with to inform her own plot.



As we saw at the beginning of this essay, Catherine Morland ultimately rejects the idea that “human nature” can be found in the depictions she has read of the Alps or the Pyrenees, and she consoles herself that “in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence even of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age” (205). She does, however, see first-hand abuse of parental authority. The cruelty with which General Tilney treats both Catherine, on her dismissal from *Northanger*, and his own daughter Eleanor—charged with dispatching her friend against her will, and at a moment’s notice—demonstrates that an English general holds just as much authority within his own abbey as an Italian duke does in his castle. Both these characters act tyrannically, and both the gothic heroine and the anti-gothic heroines suffer accordingly. Catherine has no lasting ill-effects from her hasty removal from *Northanger*, but Austen’s readers are clearly shown, through the eyes of Catherine’s own loving parents, that General Tilney “acted neither honourably nor feelingly—neither as a gentleman nor as a parent” (242). Catherine is unlike most heroines of gothic tales in having both parents still alive and concerned with her health and happiness.

Her friend Eleanor Tilney is not so fortunate. Catherine Morland feels the pain of her friend’s loss of her own mother acutely, and Eleanor herself represents the death of her mother when she was only thirteen as a “great and increasing”

(184) affliction, and one that she could not recognize when it occurred nine years previously. “A mother would have been always present. A mother would have been a constant friend; her influence would have been beyond all other;” Eleanor tells Catherine when they reenact Mrs. Tilney’s favorite walk (185). In representing her isolation and indeed her loneliness—with two elder brothers, and no sister, Eleanor is “often solitary” (184)—Eleanor Tilney is more like a typical gothic heroine than Catherine herself. The absence of the mother frequently puts the gothic heroine in a vulnerable position: without this “constant friend,” Eleanor is at the mercy of her father’s whims, like many a gothic heroine before her.

In a suggestive article on a possible source for Catherine Morland’s imagining before her visit to Northanger that she might encounter “some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun” (144), Sheila Graham-Smith identifies only one nun “who is both injured and ill-fated, and who leaves behind some memento” (199). This is Sister St. Anna, who appears in T. J. Horsely Curties’s *Ancient Records, or The Abbey of St. Oswythe*, a novel that first appeared in 1801. But there is an older injured and ill-fated nun in Genlis’s *Adelaide and Theodore*, whose story is told, like the Duchess of C***’s tale, alongside the main narrative. Cecilia d’Aimeri, the youngest of four children, lost her mother when she was four years old, and was educated in a convent. Cecilia’s “inhuman father” (53)—who, like General Tilney, does not have his actions tempered by a wife’s benevolent influence—insists that his youngest daughter take the veil. A series of letters between Cecilia and her sister (written from the abbey in which Cecilia has taken her vows) is given within the main narrative in *Adelaide and Theodore*. The Chevalier de Murville, Cecilia’s beloved, receives a lock of Cecilia’s hair as both relic and memento of a seventeen-year-old girl who is lost to him and banished to the convent forever.

This connection does not deny the possible intertextual links between *Northanger Abbey* and *Ancient Records*, but it does serve as a reminder that Austen’s potential sources are multiple and myriad, and that what is most interesting in locating them is to show how Austen uses them.⁴ Making Eleanor a motherless girl enforces parallels with many gothic heroines. Like Genlis’s Cecilia, the beautiful nun who is “too gentle and too timid to oppose the will of a father so absolute” (52), Eleanor Tilney is forced to obey her father, despite her agonies of conscience and her conviction that it is quite wrong to send her friend away with little notice and with no servant to accompany her. Like the heroines of the female gothic, in the absence of her mother, and with a father whose “temper is not happy” (233), Eleanor is but “nominal mistress” of the

house she lives in, and her “real power is nothing” (232). Obedience to parents (in particular, fathers) is the lot of both the sentimental and the gothic heroine.

Once again, we can usefully return to Genlis, who continually stresses the importance of obedience to parents, and in particular that the mother should serve as a young woman’s guide and confidante throughout her life. We have already seen that the Duchess of C*** chooses a marriage partner for her daughter, who, although she is consulted, does not have much to say in the matter. In *Adelaide and Theodore*, at the end of the Duchess of C***’s account of her story, the Baroness d’Almane helps her children to see the “moral” of the tale: “[O]ur conversation turned perpetually on the beautiful and affecting Dutchess. We observed that all her misfortunes arose solely from her want of confidence in her mother; and that without the aid of religion her cavern had been her grave, or would have rendered her stupid and senseless” (296). That the Duchess of C*** may have avoided her fate of marriage to the psychopathic Duke had she only confided in her mother that she loved Belmire is a particularly harsh lesson to draw from this version of a true story of spousal abuse, but it is not an untypical one in French fiction of the 1780s and 1790s.

Mary Wollstonecraft and Austen herself were just two English authors who found Genlis’s insistence on “BLIND submission” to parental authority problematic, as Wollstonecraft puts it in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).⁵ In her “Plan of a Novel,” Austen’s impatience with the suggestion of Mrs. Pearse of Chilton Lodge that a good heroine must always follow parental advice in matters of the heart is turned into this amusing summary of a potential plot: “Wherever she goes, somebody falls in love with her, & she receives repeated offers of Marriage—which she always refers wholly to her Father, exceedingly angry that he sh^d not be first applied to” (*Later Manuscripts* 228).

Austen has a lighter touch in her own fiction. With Eleanor Tilney’s marriage and “her removal from all the evils of such a home as Northanger had been made by Henry’s banishment, to the home of her choice and the man of her choice” (260), the reader of *Northanger Abbey* does indeed gain “general satisfaction,” not least because the heroine’s freedom to choose her own marriage partner is a recent development both in European history and in the history of European fiction. Where the French and Italian Adelaides, Duchesses of C***s, and Cecilians owe their parents obedience in everything, Catherine and Eleanor are both permitted the happiness of a companionate English marriage. When Austen’s narrator smiles that she leaves it to the reader to decide

“whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience” (261), we may see yet another rejection of the French sentimental and gothic novel. In the conclusion to *Northanger Abbey*, we are reminded both that the best novels may not need “morals” and that Austen makes excellent use of her sources, native and foreign.

NOTES

1. I have pointed out in an essay with Katie Halsey that a copy of the first French edition appeared in the Godmersham Library catalogue of 1818 and that Austen recommended Genlis’s companion volume *Les Veillées du Château* as suitable reading for her niece. In a convincing article, Susan Allen Ford documents the uses Austen makes of *Adelaide and Theodore* in *Emma*, showing the English author’s dexterity in adapting Genlis’s educational romance to her own ends, and seeing Austen as providing in the conclusion to her 1815 work “yet another comic undercutting of *Adelaide and Theodore*’s utopian fulfilment” (“Romance, Pedagogy, and Power” 185).
2. Mary Martha Butt later became Mrs. Sherwood, famous for her writings for children, especially *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818). Deirdre Le Faye kindly brought this reference to her reading to my attention, and T. A. B. Corley allowed me to read his article prior to publication.
3. I am grateful to Mary S. Trouille for sharing her introduction with me prior to publication, and for many productive exchanges about both Genlis and “The Duchess of C***” in recent years.
4. Janine Barchas, for example, in her essay “The Real Bluebeard of Bath: A Historical Model for *Northanger Abbey*” in this issue, suggests that a real historical figure, the wife-killer Sir Walter Hungerford, may have been a model for Catherine’s imagined General Tilney.
5. I have written of Wollstonecraft’s response to Genlis in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and of Austen’s letter to her niece Caroline Austen about reading Genlis’s *Tales of the Castle* in “The British Reception of Madame de Genlis’s Writings for Children.”

WORKS CITED

- Alliston, April. *Virtue's Faults: Correspondences in Eighteenth-Century British and French Women's Fiction*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996.
- Austen, Jane. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*. Gen. Ed. Janet Todd. Cambridge: CUP, 2005-08.
- _____. *Jane Austen's Letters*. Ed. Deirdre Le Faye. 3rd ed. Oxford: OUP, 1997.
- Colley, Linda. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1992.
- Corley, T. A. B. "Mrs Sherwood's Secrets: Jane Austen's Boarding-school at Reading in the 1790s." *Jane Austen Society Report* (2009): 136-42.
- Dow, Gillian. "The British Reception of Madame de Genlis's Writings for Children: Tales and Plays of Instruction and Delight." *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (2006): 367-81.
- Dow, Gillian, and Katie Halsey. "Jane Austen's Reading: The Chawton Years." *Persuasions On-Line* 30.2 (2010).
- Ford, Susan Allen. "How to Read and Why: Emma's Gothic Mirrors." *Persuasions* 25 (2003): 110-20.
- _____. "Romance, Pedagogy, and Power: Jane Austen Re-writes Madame de Genlis." *Persuasions* 21 (2001): 172-87.
- Genlis, Stephanie-Felicite de. *Adelaide and Theodore*. Ed. Gillian Dow. London: Pickering, 2007.
- _____. *Memoirs of the Countess of Genlis, Illustrative of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. Written by Herself*. Vol. 3. London: Colburn, 1825.
- Graham-Smith, Sheila. "The Awful Memorials of an Injured and Ill-Fated Nun: The Source of Catherine Morland's Gothic Fantasy." *Persuasions* 31 (2009): 199-208.
- Grogan, Claire, ed. *Northanger Abbey*. Peterborough: Broadview, 2002.
- Lennox, Charlotte. *The Female Quixote or The Adventures of Arabella*. Ed. Sandra Shulman. London: Pandora, 1986.
- Mandal, Anthony. *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007.
- Mayo, Robert. *The English Novel in the Magazines 1740-1815*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1962.
- McMurrin, Mary Helen. *The Spread of Novels: Translation and Prose Fiction in the Eighteenth Century*. Princeton: PUP, 2009.
- Schaneman, J. C. "Rewriting *Adèle et Théodore*: Intertextual Connections Between Madame de Genlis and Ann Radcliffe." *Comparative Literature Studies* 38 (2001): 31-45.
- Sutherland, Kathryn, ed. *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts: A Digital Edition*. 2010. <http://www.janeausten.ac.uk>.
- Trouille, Mary Seidman, trans. *Histoire de la Duchesse de C****. London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2010.
- _____. *Wife-Abuse in Eighteenth-Century France*. Oxford: SVEC, 2009.
- Waldron, Mary. *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*. Cambridge: CUP, 1999.
- Williams, Anne. *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. Chicago: UCP, 1995.