



Chapter IV

The Publishing History of Northanger Abbey

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จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

"This little work was finished in the year 1803 and intended for immediate publication. It was disposed of to a bookseller, it was even advertised, and why the business proceeded no farther, the author has never been able to learn. That any bookseller should think it worth while to purchase what he did not think it worth while to publish seems extraordinary. But with this neither the author nor the public have any other concern than as some observation is necessary upon those parts of the work which thirteen years have made comparatively obsolete. The public are entreated to bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, book and opinions have undergone considerable changes."

So runs the "Advertisement by the Authoress to Northanger Abbey." The publishing history of the novel, at which it hints, is both interesting and instructive.

The book was drafted in 1798, under the title Susan; it was revised, and in 1803 completed. It was then offered to a publisher called Crosby, who bought it for £10. The novel was announced as 'in the press,' but it never appeared. Thirteen years later one of Jane Austen's brothers bought the manuscript back from Crosby for the sum paid in the first case. In July 1817 Jane Austen died, and early the next year Northanger Abbey, as it was then entitled, appeared posthumously along with her last completed novel, Persuasion.

'That any book seller should think it worth while to purchase what he did not think it worth while to publish seems extraordinary.' But after all publishers are human, and it can happen that one of them buys a manuscript in a moment of enthusiasm, then has second thoughts as to its

commercial value, and decides to cut his losses by not publishing the work. And in the case of Crosby and Northanger Abbey there were special circumstances. However Crosby himself may have admired its humour, its satirical treatment of currently popular fiction would hardly be well received. Or, if well received, it would hardly benefit Crosby, whose firm published many examples of that popular fiction. As Michael Sadleir says "He had a healthy list of Gothic Romances and it was surely cheaper to let his impulsive purchase lie than, for the sake of ten pounds, to damage the other titles on his list."

These titles all appear in Crosby's lists and were published by 1818 :

Arville Castle,

Montford Castle,

The Mysterious Count, or Montville Castle,

The Mysterious Penitent, or The Norman Chateau,

The Spirit of the Castle,

The Benevolent Monk, or The Castle of Otalla

Brougham Castle,

Castle Nicobier,

The Castles of Marsange and Nujer,

The Castle of Tariffa,

Eversfield Abbey,

The Secrets of the Castle.

When Crosby was approached by the authoress's brother in 1816, the re-sale of the unused manuscript for ten pounds seemed obviously to his advantage. Presumably he did not realize that it was the work of someone who had become famous during the intervening years. And presumably no one drew

his attention to the fact.

Thus the manuscript went to the publisher Murray (who had brought out Emma) and it appeared together with Persuasion in 1818 as the work of an established (and now dead) author. Moreover, the satire, which in 1803 would have run counter to public taste, was now very acceptable. Indeed, the very thorough parody, The Heroine, or the Adventures of Cherubina,¹ had appeared five years previously.

Though the satirical relevance of Northanger Abbey was blunted by the delay in its publication, ~~—~~when it was first drafted in 1798, practically no satirical treatment of the 'Horror' School had been carried out, ~~—~~that delay clearly increased its commercial value to the publisher.

In brief, the publishing history of Northanger Abbey is a neat illustration of the time-lag between creative intelligence and popular taste. Jane Austen's novel was about its age but also some twenty years ahead of its age.

1. See Appendix.