

Jane Austen  
and  
The Popular Fiction of Her Time



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## Introduction

Though the main purpose of this thesis is to examine Jane Austen's novel, Northanger Abbey, in relationship to the popular fiction of her time, I shall also be dealing with several associated subjects.

The first part of the thesis deals with the nature, growth and significance of what is usually termed the Gothic Romance and attempts to show this literary **form** as one manifestation of the new Romanticism which swept across Europe in the last decades of the nineteenth century. This movement is lightly traced from the first signs of reaction against The Age of Reason, through the poetry of the transition (with special reference to the "Churchyard School",) to the appearance and **achievement** of the second generation of Romantic Poets. These considerations occupy the first two chapters.

In the third chapter a detail<sup>ed</sup> account is given of two typical Gothic romances. Firstly, the 'grandfather' of the genre, the historically important work by Horace Walpole: The Castle of Otranto. Then the most celebrated example of the genre, and the one with the greatest literary value: Mrs. Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho. Extensive quotation from the texts is used to exhibit the techniques of the production of horror and also, in the case of Mrs. Radcliffe, the depiction of grand natural scenery which links her more respectably with the great Romantic Poets.

The second part of the thesis centres on Northanger Abbey. A short account of the publishing history of the book, along with a feasible explanation of the long delay

between its completion and its publication, is followed by an account of the book's plot - element. The last chapter then singles out and comments on the instances of parody and satire which Jane Austen directs against the "Horrid Mystery" school of fiction.

A first appendix lists Gothic Novels, including many not mentioned in the text, and a second appendix gives a catalogue with occasional comments of other parodies of Gothic fiction.



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