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“She could not repent her resistance”: *Northanger Abbey* and the #MeToo Movement

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<1>Jane Austen’s immediate family depicted her as a paragon of domesticity, of family duty, and of conservative stability—a woman comfortable with her era’s status quo. But 21st-century readers are increasingly likely to find Austen taking arms against oppressive patriarchy.<1> In the past four years, academics, op-ed writers, and bloggers all have claimed her as an ally of the #MeToo movement. In October 2016, just two weeks after *The Washington Post* had made public the Access Hollywood tapes (wherein candidate Donald Trump bragged about sexually assaulting women), Celia Easton, speaking at the annual meeting of the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA), argued that the novel *Emma* illustrates the dynamics of rape culture: in that novel, the inebriated Rev. Mr. Elton thrusts himself upon the frightened heroine at night in a closed carriage (Easton).<2> In late October of 2017, Kay McSpadden, who teaches high school in York, South Carolina, contributed an op-ed to *The Charlotte Observer* which argued that Austen’s work—in particular *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*—often concerned sexual harassment (McSpadden). Two months later, Emily Midorikawa and Emma Claire Sweeney, writing in *The Washington Post*, argued that Austen’s choices of who should receive complimentary copies of her 1816 novel *Emma*—she had one sent to the “licentious” Prince Regent but two to fellow women writers—illustrated how Jane Austen is “A Role Model for the #MeToo generation.” Midorikawa and Sweeney hear in Austen’s “voice a gift of resistance to all who read of this struggle today and dare to say, ‘Me Too’” (Midorikawa and Sweeney). In the same month, M. D. Aeschliman, writing in the *National Review*, presented Austen and her contemporary Madame de Staël “as pioneering witnesses and rebels against systematic injustices that still afflict many women throughout the world” (Aeschliman). Then, in January of 2018, Paula Marantz Cohen, a professor at Drexel University, wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*, analyzing the sexual dynamics in Mr. Collins’ proposal to Elizabeth and observing, “If you’re struggling to make sense of the sexual-harassment issues swirling around us, you could do worse than read Jane Austen” (Cohen). At about the same time, the blogosphere took up the refrain, as exemplified by Deborah Lee Luskin, who in “Jane Austen Said #MeToo” deftly analyzed Austen’s own experience of keeping unwanted male advances “at bay”: in a letter of 1801, Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra about the awkward experience of being, against her will, “shut up in the drawing-room with Mr. Holder” (Luskin)—an apt and ominous name for someone who demands unwanted attention and exerts unwanted pressure.

<2>I do not disagree with these commentators, but they have mostly referenced single scenes or events, each taken as paradigmatic of Austen’s resistance against assertive masculinity. In this essay, I propose a systematic adoption of the terms and concepts associated with the #MeToo movement and offer an extended application to a single novel, *Northanger Abbey*. I see Jane Austen and the #MeToo movement embracing each other: the social movement provides the

conceptual tools which allow us to read Austen more astutely; at the same time, Austen affirms the validity of those concepts for societies which maintain gender inequities. Such an analysis, I propose, transforms *Northanger Abbey* from a youthful *jeu d'esprit* into a cautionary tale set in a threatening world. The novel's heroine, Catherine Morland's—and Jane Austen's—resistance to this world were always present in *Northanger Abbey*. But sometimes readers need new terms and new social movements to reveal just how dystopian and unsettling a novel has always been.

<3>In one sense, the contemporary #MeToo-inflected analysis of Austen—including this essay—was adumbrated by a remarkable volume which appeared at the end of the 19th century: Rosina Filippi's *Duologues and Scenes from the Novels of Jane Austen, arranged and adapted for Drawing-Room Performance* (1895).<3> At first sight, Filippi's *Duologues* appear ideologically neutral: Filippi takes scenes from Austen's novels, recasts them as abridged plays and provides brief introductory material, offering passages to acquaint young women (most of Filippi's speakers are female) with the work of a celebrated novelist and with the rudiments of dramatic and oral interpretation. However, Filippi's seeming neutrality belies the collection's pedagogical purposes: taken as a whole, the duologues gradually sensitize actors and viewers to gender power inequities. The first duologue, "Literary Tastes" (3-13), drawn from *Northanger Abbey*, mostly focuses on Isabella Thorpe's and Catherine Morland's discussion of gothic novels, but the second duologue, "The Settlement Question" (17-30), drawn from the same novel, alerts audiences and actors to women's economic inequality through a discussion of Isabella's dependence on her fiancé James Morland's inheritance. The level of drama—and of gender commentary and female resistance—increases throughout the collection, with the final two duologues triumphantly celebrating female independence: both "The Proposal of Mr. Collins" (103-121) and "Lady Catherine's Visit" (125-139) depict outspoken females who at last succeed in vanquishing their ideological foes. For the most part, Filippi draws her *Duologues* from Austen's original texts. But in the final Duologue—Elizabeth's famous confrontation with Lady Catherine in the Wilderness at Longbourn—Filippi imports commentary and lines from earlier sections of *Pride and Prejudice*, just to insure that readers and performers understand this duologue's ideological intent. In Filippi's introduction to the Lady Catherine-Elizabeth combat, Filippi cites a line Elizabeth had spoken about herself back in the Rosings section of the novel: "There is a stubbornness about me that can never bear to be frightened at the will of others" (126). Then, in the stage directions that Filippi provides for this scene, she tells us that "Elizabeth's courage did not fail her," another line from Elizabeth's visit to Rosings (125). This line insures that readers and actors understand Elizabeth as a feisty rebel against Lady Catherine, who functions as the feared enforcer of aristocratic power, determined to maintain outdated social arrangements. Through highlighting women's resistance, Filippi is a fitting forerunner to contemporary, #MeToo-inflected understandings of Austen.

<4>In the remainder of this essay, I reaffirm and expand the insights of Filippi and contemporary op-eds, essays, and blogs by applying 21st-century terminology—the language often used by our students in the classroom—to *Northanger Abbey*. In using contemporary terms and concepts such as "mansplaining," "rape culture," and "gaslighting," I am not being naively presentist, denying "the alterity of the past" (Coombs and Coriale 87). Rather, I knowingly adopt what David Sweeney Coombs and Daniele Coriale have recently called "strategic presentism," that is, thinking "of the past as something other than an object of knowledge that is sealed off, separated from the present by the onrush of sequential time" (87). This essay asserts the importance of looking at a work as a whole, not at just a few incidents: if we were to find mansplaining or

gaslighting only in single scenes of a text, such behaviors might seem like minor, isolated annoyances. But when we read a whole text (or an author's corpus) and note these behaviors' high volume and close proximity, it is clear that the author intends them to signal danger. When we read Austen's work with the insights of the #MeToo movement in mind, we realize how her fiction systematically dramatizes the dangers—both physical and psychological—of growing up female in a patriarchal society.

<5>In the experience of many contemporary women and of many characters in *Northanger Abbey*, men communicate misinformation in order to impress, destabilize, or manipulate their (female) audience. This misinformation can take three forms, not perhaps always distinguishable from each other: braggadocio, intended to impress females; deliberate untruth (which I, adopting strategic presentism, have decided to call fake news); and gaslighting, or lying so insidiously and repeatedly as to make the person lied to doubt her/his self-worth and even sanity.<4> These last two terms—borrowed from political discourse and popular psychology—might at first seem irrelevant to #MeToo, but (as we will see) both fake news and gaslighting undermine female agency and self-confidence, in effect making women more susceptible to malign influence and ultimately undermining women's accounts of sexual assault and misconduct. In the next paragraphs, I examine in turn each of these varieties of misinformation. In doing so, I have three goals. First, I intend to articulate and exemplify a reading practice emerging from #MeToo discourse; second, I wish to illustrate a new mode of pedagogy, removing the obfuscating and distancing gauze of alterity and nostalgia often found in Austen studies, and offering a model for bringing presentist methodologies of reading into the classroom; third, I will show how willful misinformation underpins the operation of rape culture.

Willful Misinformation

<6>In *Northanger Abbey*, men exaggerate to impress women. While past readers may have normalized such behavior as typical of courtship and romance plots, #MeToo forces us to acknowledge the ways that such behavior potentially disempowers and manipulates women. John Thorpe, the novel's most notorious self-promoter, begins by trumpeting his mastery of two male signifiers: speed and modes of transportation. In every comment, he substantially exaggerates and misinforms, although readers now—particularly the students in our classrooms—may not recognize the extent of his exaggeration without careful historical contextualization. During Thorpe's first meeting with Catherine, he exaggerates about his trip from Tetbury to Bath, asserting that his sense of distance trumps “the authority of road-books, innkeepers and milestones” (39; I.7).<5> He brags about his horses, telling Catherine that his horse is “an animal made for speed,” incapable of traveling “less than ten miles per hour” (40). He misstates or misremembers his hour of departure from Tetbury so that his trip can seem to have transpired at record pace (40). He brags about his new gig (40-1), which he tells Catherine cost him only 50 guineas (£52.10)—a price which was not, by the way, a particularly good bargain. According to William Felton's *Treatise of Carriages* (1795), a new gig cost only £36.3 and a new model with all possible luxury appointments (brass moldings, dashing leather, and painted decorations) cost £54.1.6 (Felton 2: 132-33); curricles (more expensive than gigs) could be had for 10 guineas less (Heather, “Reading the Regency”). Thorpe does not just brag about horseflesh, speed, and carriages: in the same scene, he tells Catherine that he had read Lewis's *The Monk* in a single day (43). This would have been a remarkable feat, for the first edition, in three volumes, extended for exactly 750 pages (Lewis). Thorpe later brags about how much he and his friends drink during a single evening—“upon an average we cleared about five pints a

head” (60; I.9)—and about the quality of his alcohol: “*Mine* is famous good stuff to be sure” (60). He also trumpets the wide variety of his social acquaintance: “There are few people much about town that I do not know,” he tells Catherine (95; I.12).

<7>John Thorpe is not the novel’s only braggart: General Tilney is only a more refined show-off, broadcasting that his country house Northanger Abbey boasts new wings, the newest stoves (165; II.5) and china (179; II.7), the most advantageous situation (180), a kitchen replete with “every modern invention” (189; II.8), the best-stocked kitchen garden, and, in the General’s words, “a village of hot-houses,” producing a minimum of one hundred pineapples per year (182). Such braggadocio is intended to transform women—in this case, a marriageable young woman presumed to be of good fortune—into passive admirers, helpless and manipulable witnesses to male possession, power, and achievement. In scenes such as these, Austen dramatizes a gender spectacle which Virginia Woolf, a century later, analyzes in *A Room of One’s Own*: women, Woolf writes, are often a “necessity” to men, offering a magnifying looking glass, feminine spectators flattering males by reflecting a man “at least twice the size he really is” (28).

<8>Often in both real life and in *Northanger Abbey*, lying extends beyond exaggerated truth to the realm of the fictional, justifying the use of the popular but fraught term, fake news, or as German philosopher Axel Gelfert defines it, “deliberate presentation of . . . false or misleading claims as news” (84).<6> Fake news is always “misleading *by design*” (108), and it succeeds largely because its creators understand what Gelfert has called its “*systemic dimension*” (109). In other words, the manufacturers of fake news understand how its content operates within the audience’s ideological system; the purveyors understand how the information or “news” will affect and “infect” the person who hears (or sees) it. It is abundantly clear that John Thorpe has mastered this variety of skilled and manipulative miscommunication. When he wishes to impress—and monopolize—Catherine, for example, he completely fabricates a description of Blaize Castle, which functions as “news” for the gothic-mad Catherine. In reality, Blaize was a medium-sized, pseudo-gothic garden folly, containing only one small room; it was barely thirty years old, having been constructed in 1766. But Thorpe invents an alternate identity for the place: in his account, Blaize is truly medieval, “The finest place in England—. . . The oldest in the kingdom,” with “dozens” of rooms that can be explored by the tourist in search of the Gothic (83; I.11). Thorpe’s fakery insidiously takes advantage of the Castle’s “*systemic dimension*.” He knows that such a “doctored” travel description will appeal to Catherine’s naïve infatuation with Gothic literature. Thorpe’s fake news admirably succeeds: it is Catherine who “clicks”<7> for more, asking him if Blaize is “like what one reads of,” if it contains “towers and long galleries,” (83) asking if she may “go up every staircase, and into every suite of rooms” (84). Thorpe’s well-crafted fakery has caught his prey.

<9>Given Thorpe’s success with his Blaize Castle ploy, is it any wonder that he again uses blatant misinformation, this time to lure Catherine into his much-vaunted gig? Later in the Blaize Castle scene, he fabricates a story to discredit and undermine the Tilneys, who have arranged a walk with Catherine. Thorpe reports that the Tilneys have not waited for Catherine: “I saw them [in a carriage] as we turned into Broad-street . . .” (83). Then he reiterates his claim: “I saw [Henry Tilney] at that moment turn up the Lansdown Road,—driving a smart-looking girl” (84). Thorpe next embellishes his narrative with plausible detail, carefully chosen to enhance his own credibility as observer: in Thorpe’s account, the putative Henry Tilney drives what Thorpe calls

“pretty cattle”; Thorpe “heard Tilney hallooing to a man who was just passing by on horseback, that they were going as far as Wick Rocks” (84). What is particularly sinister about Thorpe’s *modus operandi* here is his understanding of how such a fabrication will appeal to Catherine’s social insecurity. He instinctively knows that if he can make Catherine doubt the Tilneys’ word, he will reduce her social capital, her sense of independence as a member of the community of visitors to Bath, and her connection with the Tilneys; as a result of his misinformation, she will be more manipulable, more subject to his power—and physically present in his gig: having her there will give him more control over her body. Again, as in the Blaize Castle ploy, Austen shows him succeeding in isolating and demoralizing Catherine: she sadly says, “I suppose they thought it would be too dirty for a walk” (84) and to herself reflects, “To feel herself slighted by them was very painful” (85). Thorpe’s fake news has reduced Catherine to a state of sad self-doubt—and to dependence upon the pleasure which he alone can provide: using free indirect discourse, Austen shows us Catherine anticipating “the delight of exploring an edifice like Udolpho” (85).<8>

<10>Another species of misinformation to which Catherine is vulnerable is “gaslighting,” a series of fabrications during which the practitioner prevaricates so repeatedly and confidently as to make the victim doubt her/his perception and even sanity. As Paige L. Sweet has recently argued, gaslighting is “rooted in social inequalities, including gender” (851); it damages “victims’ sense of reality, autonomy, mobility, identity and social supports” (852). The scene we have just analyzed can be interpreted as an example of gaslighting, as Thorpe’s confidence increases Catherine’s sense of insecurity—and her dependence upon him. But this is not the novel’s first instance of gaslighting. Thorpe first gaslighted Catherine at a ball, attempting to convince her that she and he were already engaged to dance. Once again, as in the Tilney episode, he uses gaslighting to wrest her body and her attentions away from another man. As in subsequent episodes, he accompanies his misinformation with detailed recollections that are completely fabricated:

Scarcely had they [Catherine and Henry Tilney] worked themselves into [the line of couples waiting to join the country dance, when Catherine’s] attention was claimed by John Thorpe, who stood behind her. “Heyday, Miss Morland!” said he, “what is the meaning of this?—I thought you and I were to dance together.”

“I wonder you should think so, for you never asked me.”

“That is a good one, by Jove!—I asked you as soon as I came into the room, and I was just going to ask you again, but when I turned round, you were gone!—this is a cursed shabby trick! . . . Yes; I remember, I asked you while you were waiting in the lobby for your cloak.” (73; I.10)

If read alone, this scene could merely suggest Thorpe’s comic boorishness—but in light of the patterns of prevarication we have analyzed, his gaslighting becomes a more sinister ideology of masculine control. Such behaviors, such carefully-laid plans, lie on a spectrum with sexual assault and might even be considered “grooming” the victim.

<11>Thorpe feels that it is his right and responsibility to explain the world to Catherine—a tendency that we might now identify as mansplaining. We have already noted how he feels it is his social function to make his views known on stereotypically masculine subjects: physical

distance, maps, horses, carriages, and prime tourist sites. But he also assumes that Catherine will interest herself in his views on novels (*Tom Jones* and *The Monk* are the only two worth reading; Burney's *Camilla* is "unnatural stuff" [43; I.7]) and on female beauty: early in their acquaintance, he provides "a short decisive sentence of praise or condemnation on the face of every woman they met" (42; I.7). Catherine has been acculturated to accept masculine opinions: as Austen's narrator tells us, Catherine listened and agreed "as long as she could, with all the civility and deference of the youthful female mind, fearful of hazarding an opinion of its own in opposition to that of a self-assured man" (42). Sadly, Thorpe is not the only male character who believes that it is his right to pronounce final judgement: as is often noted, the hero Henry Tilney thinks that he has the right to issue definitive rulings on language use, current events, the value of novel reading, the importance of history, and the aesthetics of the picturesque (107-116; I.14). Though the young, naïve Catherine might need the guidance and influence which Henry offers, his mansplaining operates like Thorpe's. And, in a critically-debated sequence later in the novel, Henry's mansplaining takes on a more ominous, controlling tone.

<12>I am speaking of the scene (and its long aftermath) when Henry learns that Catherine suspects his father, General Tilney, of having made his late mother unhappy and even of hastening or causing her death—in short, of having been a Gothic villain. In his response to Catherine's suspicions, Henry mansplains, invoking English history and institutions in order to censor Catherine's speculation, control her exploration of the family mansion—and stifle questions about domestic history and possible domestic abuse:

Dear Miss Morland, [he tells Catherine in real or pretended indignation] consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consider 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 . . .? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?" (203; II.9)

Four generations of readers, ever since the time of C. S. Lewis's influential "A Note on Jane Austen" (1954), have been urged to read this scene as the turning point of the novel, as the moment when Catherine gives up her interest in the Gothic, and when, according to Lewis, the innocent Catherine awakens from disillusionment (25-7). It is true that, after this impassioned speech from Henry, Austen's narrator tells us, Catherine "thoroughly opened her eyes to the extravagance of her late fancies" (204; II.10). However, these words are decidedly not definitive commentary from a heterodiegetic narrator stepping in from outside the novel to reveal authorial truth about a situation. Rather, this passage is focalized through Catherine, who is at this moment cowed by submissiveness engendered by knowing that she has disappointed a rich and powerful male and a potential suitor. She is scolded and disciplined by him, making her run away crying "tears of shame" (203). This scene must not be interpreted separately from the novel's broader atmosphere of gendered violence: the narrator, much later in the novel, tells us that Catherine's suspicions of General Tilney had been, in the main, correct: Catherine had "heard enough to feel, that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character or magnified his cruelty" (256; II.15).

<13>Considering the patterns of misinformation and mansplaining we have been tracing, we must interpret Catherine's "epiphany" (she "thoroughly opened her eyes") in this scene, not as

Catherine's palinode to the Gothic, but rather as Austen's clear-eyed acknowledgement of the effective power of what we now identify as mansplaining to shame women and to stifle investigations, particularly when the subject of said investigations is "respectable." We have already seen how patriarchal structures have created in Catherine "all the civility and deference of the youthful female mind, fearful of hazarding an opinion of its own in opposition to that of a self-assured man" (42; I.7). In the aftermath to Henry's impassioned speech, Catherine struggles in vain against the strong social forces and patriarchal ideologies that urge silence and compliance. At times she might escape their power, as when she breaks the physical hold of Isabella Thorpe or when she refuses to corroborate Thorpe's lies about having secured her as a dance partner. But sometimes—as here—the forces against Catherine are so strong that she can only bow her head in ideological servitude. This moment—when Henry stops Catherine's physical exploration of the house and prohibits her ideological questions about the methods and history of patriarchy—is a very sad moment indeed; Austen's inclusion of it raises substantial questions about actual domestic cruelty and about the lengths to which patriarchy will go in order to control women's bodies, movement, and minds.

Rape Culture: Community Complicity and Spectacles of Male Power

<14>John Thorpe could not gaslight, could not so successfully create fake news, without assistance, both active and tacit, from his community; if rape culture is the harnessing of multiple individuals to maintain the patriarchal status quo of male as sexual aggressor and female as passive victim, we can see evidence of its operation in *Northanger Abbey*. In several scenes of the novel, the social group that condones and enforces Thorpe's masculine manipulative power consists of two powerful forces in Catherine's world: her best friend Isabella Thorpe, representing the power of the heroine's peer group, and her own brother James Morland, representing the power of her family. It is undoubtedly Thorpe's sister Isabella who, behind the scenes, has revealed Catherine's fascinations with the Gothic and with the Tilneys, thus allowing Thorpe the information he requires to exploit and manipulate Catherine's vulnerabilities. But Isabella does not just exert power behind the scenes. In Book I, chapter 13, she and her community also work more directly and even physically, as when Thorpe, Isabella, and Catherine's brother James work to convince Catherine to (again) break an engagement with the Tilneys and accompany John Thorpe to Clifton. In this scene, Austen uses free indirect discourse to relate the episode from Catherine's point of view and thus replicate Catherine's feeling of receiving inexorable, escalating demands of friends and family; the cumulative effect is suffocating. First, Isabella, in urging her brother's plan, wheedles and simpers: "Isabella became only more and more urgent; calling on her in the most affectionate manner, addressing her by the most endearing names. She was sure her dearest, sweetest Catherine would not seriously refuse such a trifling request to a friend who loved her so dearly" (98). When this insinuating technique fails, Isabella becomes direct and confrontational: "She reproached [Catherine] with having more affection for Miss Tilney, though she had known her so little a while" (98). When this fails, Isabella next tries tears: she, "in the meanwhile, had applied her handkerchief to her eyes" (99). Then Catherine's brother James joins in the attack, significantly escalating the pressure upon Catherine—and, of course, manifesting pressure from a different group, the heroine's patriarchal family rather than just her peer group. Austen alerts readers to her awareness that James's actions represent an important addition to the forces raised against Catherine: "This," the narrator tells us, "was the first time of her brother's openly siding against her" (99). Finally, in a passage of extraordinary power, Catherine's community suffocatingly

surrounds her, imprisoning and impinging on her body: Isabella and James are “walking in a most uncomfortable manner” (99); Isabella’s “arm was still linked” with Catherine’s (100). Here, Austen’s use of free indirect discourse communicates Catherine’s confusion and panic, as community comes together to threaten her bodily freedom and agency.

<15>In a patriarchal culture, men announce their control and entitlement through staging spectacles of male power intended to intimidate their (often female) witnesses. John Thorpe loves staging such spectacles of command, many of them involving harsh treatment of horses. Researchers have demonstrated how physical abusers’ treatment of animals often advertises how they treat family members and prospective intimate partners, a theme addressed in several essays in this special issue.<9> Though John Thorpe sometimes intends to be ingratiating, his gestures often convey another message: commanding power. At several times in the text, Austen uses Thorpe’s command of horses to convey his aggressive control: on setting off for their first ride, he tells Catherine, “You will not be frightened, Miss Morland. . . if my horse should dance about a little at first setting off. He will, most likely, give a plunge or two . . . but he will soon know his master” (43; I.9). At first sight such a comment seems unnecessary and even random. But Thorpe’s preamble to this speech reveals the true rhetoric of such spectacles: he intends that Catherine *should* be frightened; he *wants* to make her uneasy, and he wants her, like his horse, to know who is master of the situation. His denial of the horse’s consent and free will dramatizes how he would like to treat Catherine. Austen repeats these same dynamics later in the same chapter: when Catherine demands to be set down from Thorpe’s gig, he “only lashed his horse into a brisker trot” (85; I.11). When Catherine then tells him that she cannot “go on”—this is the second time she withdraws consent—he responds with a sinister spectacle: “Mr. Thorpe only laughed, smacked his whip, encouraged his horse, made odd noises, and drove on; and Catherine, angry and vexed as she was, having no power of getting away, was obliged to give up the point and submit” (86). The display of male power reduces the woman to passive but resentful submission. Understanding the purpose of such spectacles makes us attentive to other, seemingly more benign moments of gratuitous drama and violence. Take, for example, the moment when Thorpe bursts into the Allens’ lodgings, commanding that Catherine accompany him to Blaize Castle (82). He “threw open the door” and, without explanation, issues orders in almost military fashion: “Make haste! Make haste! . . . put on your hat this moment—there is no time to be lost—we are going to Bristol” (82). In scenes like this, we witness not undergraduate high spirits and youthful impulsiveness but rather a calculated, revealing spectacle of the male aggression and power that underpin rape culture.

<16>One of #MeToo’s most important contributions to contemporary discourse about sexual violence is complicating the notion of consent and insisting upon the necessity of listening to the various ways victims and potential victims withhold consent. Building on Richardson’s *Clarissa* and other eighteenth-century novels, *Northanger Abbey* enacts the drama of women saying “No”—and of not being heeded. Multiple scenes in the novel replicate this drama, but I choose to analyze that in which Thorpe uses Blaize Castle to entice Catherine. In this scene, the heroine says “No” at least four times. Catherine’s first denial is delicate, containing discourse about practicality and a vague reference to a previous social commitment: “To Bristol!” Catherine says. “Is not that a great way off?—But, however, I cannot go with you to-day, because I am engaged; I expect some friends every moment” (82; I.11). In her next denial, Catherine escalates the tone by repeating “cannot” three times and by providing information about her previous social commitment: “I should like to see it [Blaize Castle, but] I cannot—I cannot go.” She

repeats: “I cannot go [because] I expect Miss Tilney and her brother to call on me to take a country walk” (83). Even though she plans to deny Thorpe’s request, she cushions her refusal by acknowledging the appeal of Thorpe’s invitation—she apologizes for saying no: “I should like to see” Blaize Castle, she says. Then, after Thorpe has lured her into his gig—and thus established bodily control over her—Catherine’s tone expresses panic, indicated by short, imperative phrases: “‘Stop, stop, Mr. Thorpe,’ she impatiently cried; ‘it is Miss Tilney; it is indeed.—How could you tell me they were gone?—Stop, stop, I will get out this moment and go to them’” (85). Here, Catherine expresses her anger (“How could you tell me . . .?”) and envisions escape, even if escape might be the melodramatic spectacle of a disheveled girl running panicked through the streets of Bath. But Thorpe’s control is unabated and Catherine understands her nearly-complete powerlessness. Her next denial begins in subservience but then rises in volume toward resistance: “in another moment she was herself whisked into the Market-place. Still, however, and during the length of another street, she entreated him to stop . . . ‘Pray, pray stop, Mr. Thorpe.—I cannot go on.—I will not go on.—I must go back to Miss Tilney’” (85-6). This cleverly constructed scene demonstrates a pattern of escalating refusals accompanied by ever-increasing denials of agency—operating as they might in a sexual assault scenario.

<17> While past readers may have overlooked such scenes as merely evidence of Thorpe’s boorishness, or as typical courtship behavior, #MeToo provides a lens for us to read the scenes differently and to interpret them as evidence of gendered violence. As readers of women’s fiction have come to expect, Thorpe and his community ignore each denial: at first, Catherine’s resistance “was of course vehemently talked down as no reason at all” (82; I.11). Then, when he has Catherine in his gig, Thorpe meets Catherine’s denials with a spectacle of violence and derision: as we have seen, “Mr. Thorpe only laughed [and] smacked his whip” (86). This entire sequence—what I like to call Catherine’s first kidnapping—resonates with twenty-first-century readers and simultaneously recalls kidnapping scenes in eighteenth-century English fiction: multiple scenes in Richardson’s *Clarissa* as well as Sir Clement Willoughby’s attempted abduction of Frances Burney’s heroine Evelina.

<18>Two chapters later, Austen carries the violence against Catherine one step further. Thorpe works to seize not just her body but also her power to speak on her own behalf; he attempts to stifle and then control her voice. He suddenly announces a jaunt to Clifton. Once again, Catherine repeatedly withholds consent: “She had that moment settled with Miss Tilney to take their proposed walk to-morrow; it was quite determined, and she would not, upon any account, retract” (97; I.13). Upon hearing this refusal, Thorpe goes to the Tilneys’ lodgings and lies in Catherine’s name, saying that she had “recollected a prior engagement of going to Clifton” (100). Here, in another form of gendered violence, Thorpe attempts to take away Catherine’s voice and volition; he wants to transform her into a puppet uttering the words of a manipulator.

<19>Significantly, the assaults that Catherine has hitherto experienced—the braggadocio, fake news, gaslighting, spectacles of male power, community pressure, and attempted seizure of her voice—seem here to have had a pedagogical effect, strengthening her resolve. After Thorpe attempts to speak on her behalf, Catherine effects a decisive objection: “‘Let me go, Mr. Thorpe; Isabella, do not hold me.’ . . . Away walked Catherine in great agitation, as fast as the crowd would permit her, fearful of being pursued, yet determined to persevere. As she walked, she

reflected on what had passed. It was painful to her to disappoint and displease them, particularly to displease her brother; but she could not repent her resistance” (101-2; I.13). Fighting against a “crowd” which offers physical restraint and the psychological restraint imposed by her peers, Catherine makes her escape.

<20>It would be tempting to read Catherine’s escape here as evidence that she has “learned” how to keep herself safe in a world of dangerous misinformation and gendered violence. We rejoice in Catherine’s momentary victory, but as the beginning of the final sentence demonstrates, her community still exerts mental power over her: she still feels pained “to disappoint and displace them” (101-2; I.13). Despite Catherine’s resolve, the patriarchal and tribal forces have not completely relinquished their power—she has been socialized to be nice and submissive. This reminds us that Catherine’s success rate in countering misinformation has been spotty. And, as we have seen, she had confidently dismissed Thorpe’s claim that he had arranged to dance with her: “I wonder you should think [you had asked for my hand in this dance], for you never asked me” (73; I.10) had been her confident rejoinder. But in later scenes, she believes his fake news about Blaize Castle and the Tilneys. Austen does not suggest an inevitable upward trajectory. Instead, the lesson she teaches is eternal vigilance against ever-evolving threats.

Conclusion

<21>Despite *Northanger Abbey*’s unsettling qualities, many past readers have taken a dismissive tone toward the scenes and patterns we have been examining. For example, in his 1952 study *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, Marvin Mudrick writes that Catherine has a “lightweight mind,” that the heroine “finds no iniquity in Bath” (40, 46). Mudrick continues: John Thorpe may be “unwelcome,” “but there is nothing sinister about him” (46). Mudrick concludes, “We can never believe . . . that Catherine or her troubles are of much moment . . . Catherine is never allowed to display a sensitivity that might engage our sympathy” (52-3). Mudrick’s words recall all-too-frequent responses to #MeToo complaints. Though the accusers of Bill Cosby and Harvey Weinstein have been credited, the accusers of Brock Turner and Brett Kavanaugh have been greeted with the patronizing dismissal which one finds in Mudrick. In contemporary cases, as in *Northanger Abbey*, willful misinformation and minimization sustain rape culture.

<22>Fortunately, many Austenians now reject such dismissive commentary about *Northanger*’s gendered power relations. We realize how the powerful can make the powerless feel; we know how a dominant culture can terrorize subaltern groups<10>—and contemporary readers comprehend Catherine’s genuine confusion, her fear of having her volition taken away. We now know that, at her most terrorized moments, Catherine is in immediate danger, recalling nothing so much as a Gothic heroine or hero: she recalls Jonathan Harker finding himself imprisoned in Dracula’s castle, being gazed upon longingly by the thirsty Count; she reminds us of the second Mrs. de Winter in Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, who knows that her new house is full of secrets and that she will very likely set a foot wrong; she is Wendy Torrance in Stephen King’s *The Shining*, who realizes that she is imprisoned in the Overlook Hotel with a madman who just happens to be someone she knows well. Late in the novel we learn that both John Thorpe and General Tilney have gotten hold of some “fake news” that Catherine is an heiress; both want her supposed fortune; even Isabella Thorpe is in on the plot.<11> The main reason why General

Tilney encourages his children to be so ingratiating to our heroine is that he is hoping his family can gobble up her money; in an unsettling sense, the Tilneys' invitation to Northanger is merely a polite, more socially-acceptable form of kidnapping than that practiced clumsily by John Thorpe. At the very moment when Catherine escapes *from* the Thorpes' power in Book I, Chapter 13, when she runs to the Tilneys' lodgings, she is in fact running *into* danger—like a hero or heroine in many a thriller.<12> The novel's hero, the Rev. Henry Tilney, despite all his charms, defends his controlling father and, as we have seen, limits Catherine's physical exploration of Northanger Abbey and preempts her legitimate investigation of the family's history of gendered violence.

<23>Austen's point is that fear and danger are to be found not only in a crumbling medieval castle in Medieval Italy but also in the here and now, in Bath and in the English country house, in the moments in which women find themselves resisting male power and aggression and an enabling rape culture. *Northanger Abbey* is far from a light and comforting novel which laughs at danger. Reading the novel in the age of #MeToo reveals that, despite its occasional lighthearted tone, it is a cautionary tale in which many characters behave very badly indeed and in which the world turns threatening, even Gothic. Catherine's—and Jane Austen's—resistance to this world were always there, in the pages of *Northanger*'s text. But sometimes it takes new terms and new social movements to reveal just how dystopian and unsettling a novel has always been.

Notes

(1) See Henry Austen's "Biographical Notice" (published along with the first edition of *Northanger Abbey* in 1818) and James Edward Austen-Leigh's *Memoir of Jane Austen* (1869 and 1871). For an account of the Austen family's role in shaping Jane Austen's image, see Sutherland.

(2) The *Washington Post* published accounts of the Access Hollywood tapes on October 8, 2016 (Fahrenthold), and Easton presented her talk on October 21, 2016.

(3) Devoney Looser draws attention to Filippi (also known as Mrs. Dowson) and her *Duologues* in her *The Making of Jane Austen* (2017). Looser also notes how, early in the last century, Jane Austen was a favorite of suffragettes, who carried her image on a banner created in 1908 for a women's suffrage procession (98).

(4) The modern term "gaslighting" derives from *Gaslight*, a play and a 1944 film. In the film, Charles Boyer plays with the mind of Ingrid Bergman; through lying, through making her doubt her perceptions and memory, he tries to convince her that she is insane. The word achieved renewed currency in 2016 when it was used in a political editorial in *Teen Vogue*; see Duca.

(5) References from *Northanger Abbey* are taken from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*, ed. Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye. I will provide page number, then volume and chapter number.

(6) Axel Gelfert's carefully-reasoned essay has informed my understanding of the ways by which external forces can dominate and even terrorize an individual's consciousness.

(7) My verb is drawn from the modern term "clickbait."

(8) Free indirect discourse (*discours indirect libre*), the narrative technique of Austen's maturity, is a form of third-person omniscient narration that captures words and phrases from various characters' spoken conversation and interior monologues. In the passage discussed here, Austen uses this method of narration to show how deep is Catherine's disappointment. In a passage I discuss later, Austen spends several sentences focalizing the thoughts and experiences of Catherine, using free indirect discourse to convey Catherine's increasing claustrophobia.

(9) See Bright, et al. In this issue, see essays by Cox, Thierauf, and Wojciechowski.

(10) See hooks for an account of the ways in which powerful groups terrorize the less powerful.

(11) Janine Barchas's "Mapping *Northanger Abbey*" has revealed the intricate nature of the financial plotting in the novel.

(12) John Buchan's classic 1915 thriller *The Thirty-Nine Steps*—and every subsequent thriller—have contained many such moments.

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