

Essay 1 - due in Ses #6 (3 pages)

Choose one of the following and write a 3 page essay in which you do your best to use **specific** words and scenes from Austen's *Northanger Abbey* to **convince** your readers of your **thesis**. Try your best to distinguish between plot summary and argument, to captivate your reader's interest in your opening and concluding paragraphs, and to strive toward a clear logical arrangement of paragraphs. Read out loud. Give your essay a thoughtful title, double space throughout, number your pages, and proofread very carefully.

Finally, do not feel obliged to answer each and every question I pose. The questions are designed to help you clarify your thoughts, not to trap you into a rigid format.

1. By the time you sit down to write this essay, we will have devoted quite a lot of class discussion to the idea of the *Bildungsroman*--or, as it is often translated, the novel of education, development, or formation. *Northanger Abbey* is very obviously in this novelistic tradition. By comparing the Catherine Morland we meet at the novel's outset with the Catherine Morland of the final chapters, come up with your own definition of the *Bildungsroman*. [Note: Rather than applying a definition **to** the novel, draw your definition **from** the specifics of this particular novel.] [Second note: *Bildungsroman* is a German noun and as such it is both italicized and capitalized. Its plural, by the way, is *Bildungsromane*.]

2. On the back cover of the Penguin edition of *Northanger Abbey* we read that Catherine Morland "learns how to tell the difference between books and real life." Compare an early scene in which she confuses the two with a later one in which she clearly distinguishes between them. Then ask yourself **why**, in her famous "Defense of the Novel" (I.5), Austen described the genre as "only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language" (chapter 5).

3.

"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 idea have you been admitting?" (172)

Many readers of *Northanger Abbey* assume that Austen is speaking through Henry Tilney, especially in the passage quoted above. **Why**, though, do readers assume that she is less ironic with Tilney than she is with her other characters? **How** does she suggest that he reads both Gothic novels and the world in which he lives too literally?

4.

"I cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible." (118)

Think about Isabella Thorpe's excessive use of language, Mrs. Allen's parrot-like use of language, John Thorpe's hyperbolic use of language, and--most of all--Henry Tilney and Catherine's bantering dialogue throughout *Northanger Abbey*. Then ask yourself **why**, at the novel's end, Catherine and Henry are entirely unable to speak. **Why** does the chapter that brings Henry to Fullerton completely lack the dialogue that earlier in the novel characterized the scenes between the two? **What** might Austen be suggesting about language, deception, and sincerity?