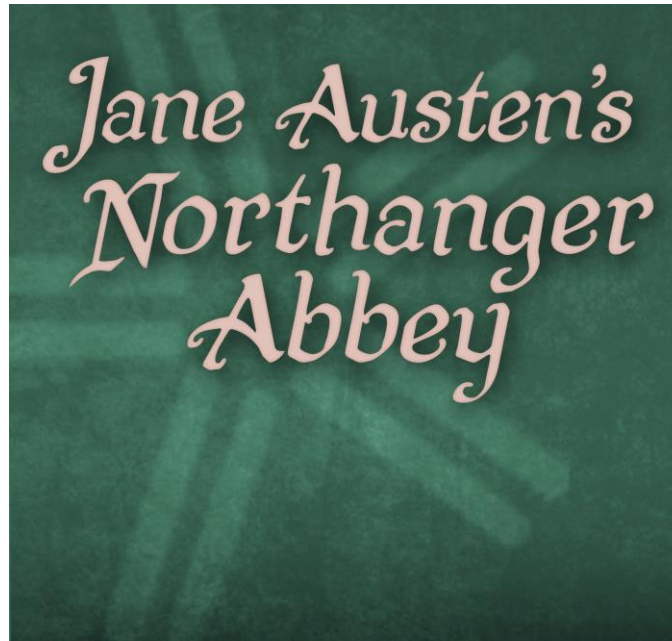


Sacramento Theatre Company

Study Guide



Northanger Abbey

A New Adaptation by Carissa Meager
Based on the novel by Jane Austen

Study Guide Materials Compiled by Anna Miles

Sacramento Theatre Company

Mission Statement

The Sacramento Theatre Company (STC) strives to be the leader in integrating professional theatre with theatre arts education. STC produces engaging professional theatre, provides exceptional theatre training, and uses theatre as a tool for educational engagement.

Our History

The theatre was originally formed as the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre in 1942, an ad hoc troupe formed to entertain locally-stationed troops during World War II. On October 18, 1949, the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre acquired a space of its own with the opening of the Eaglet Theatre, named in honor of the Eagle, a Gold Rush-era theatre built largely of canvas that had stood on the city's riverfront in the 1850s. The Eaglet Theatre eventually became the Main Stage of the not-for-profit Sacramento Theatre Company, which evolved from a community theatre to professional theatre company in the 1980s. Now producing shows in three performance spaces, it is the oldest theatre company in Sacramento.

After five decades of use, the Main Stage was renovated as part of the H Street Theatre Complex Project. Features now include an expanded and modernized lobby and a Cabaret Stage for special performances. The facility also added expanded dressing rooms, laundry capabilities, and other equipment allowing the transformation of these performance spaces, used nine months of the year by STC, into backstage and administration places for three months each summer to be used by California Musical Theatre for Music Circus.

Sacramento Theatre Company can accommodate 292 patrons in the proscenium-style auditorium of its Main Stage, while the Pollock Stage offers a more intimate experience with only 87 seats in a black box-style theatre. Both provide good acoustics and sight-lines. This professional, Equity theatre presents seven professional productions per season with a reputation for excellent stage adaptations of classic literature. Three annual productions in the Cabaret Stage, which seats 100, round out the experience with high-quality Broadway musical revues.

The Young Professionals Conservatory, a training program for young theatre artists, was founded in 2003. The program, as well as the entire STC School of the Arts, is directed by Michele Hillen-Noufer.

For further information about the Sacramento Theatre Company please visit us online:

<http://www.sactheatre.org>

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Study Guide Materials Compiled by Anna Miles

About the Playwright: *Northanger Abbey*

Carissa Meagher

Carissa Meagher is a playwright, actor, director and theatre instructor. She first fell in love with the theatre while growing up in Sacramento. Carissa attended Natomas Charter Performing and Fine Arts Academy, studying ballet, acting, and playwriting. During her senior year of high school she co-wrote and produced a full length play titled *Circus*, which had a successful run at California Stage in downtown Sacramento. Her first solo-written full-length play, *Encountering Light*, debuted professionally in Capital Stage's Playwrights' Revolution (2010) as their first featured play by a teen playwright. Carissa then graduated from University of North Carolina School of the Arts with her BFA in Acting. After spending some time working professionally in theatre and film, she moved to Ireland, where she holds dual citizenship, earning her MFA in Playwriting from Ireland's RADA affiliate school, The Lir Academy. There she received training and master classes from Graham Whybrow (Royal Court Theatre), Marina Carr, Conor McPherson, Gavin Kostick, David Ireland and many more. Her thesis play *California* was featured in Dublin's Fringe Festival (2016). Since moving back to Sacramento, Carissa has been blessed with many opportunities to perform at theaters such as Capital Stage, Ovation Stage, Big Idea Theatre and Sacramento Theatre Company (STC). Most recently, she was featured in STC's productions of *Macbeth*, *Steel Magnolias*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Carissa considers Sacramento Theatre Company a theatrical "home" and is thrilled to be collaborating here as a playwright.

About the Author: *Northanger Abbey*

Jane Austen

BY MARLO M. IHLER

Renowned English novelist Jane Austen is revered worldwide for her literary genius, social commentary, and satirical wit. Ironically, she never enjoyed public acknowledgement during her lifetime, as she used a pseudonym when she wrote. Today her works are read, studied, performed, translated, and admired by millions of people.

Austen was born on December 16, 1775, at Steventon Rectory in Hampshire, England. She was the seventh of eight children born to an Oxford-educated clergyman and his wife, George and Cassandra Austen. Her father also farmed and taught school in their home. Thus, Jane began her education at home and was surrounded by literature from her father's extensive library at an early age. Education and creativity were highly valued and encouraged growing up. At age eight, she and her sister Cassandra were sent to boarding school for more formal education. However, after near-death bouts of typhus and because of financial constraints, the sisters returned home.

By age twelve, Jane began writing stories and poems, a collection now referred to as the *Juvenilia*. It didn't take long for her to realize she wanted to become a professional writer. By age nineteen she had written her first mature work, a novella entitled *Lady Susan* written in epistolary form (as a series of letters). It was preserved by her family and was later published after her death (www.jasna.org/info/about_austen.html, accessed Dec. 18, 2013).

Jane was very close with her family, especially her father and older sister. Her family served as her audience, as she read to them her manuscripts. They enjoyed a story called *Elinor and Marianne*, which was the beginning of what would later become *Sense and Sensibility*. Around the same time she also began *Pride and Prejudice*, (originally called *First Impressions*) as well as *Susan* that would be published as *Northanger Abbey* after her death.

Also in her early twenties, in the era when marrying well was the only way a woman might improve her situation, she met and fell in love with a wealthy gentleman named Tom LeFroy. According to record, this is the only time Jane admitted to being in love, documented in letters to her sister. However, because she had nothing to offer to the match financially, Tom yielded to family pressure and left town, never to be seen by Jane again. This heart-wrenching experience greatly influenced her writing and her life: she never got married ("Jane Austen," *The Biography Channel website*, <http://www.biography.com/people/jane-austen-9192819>, accessed Dec 18, 2013).

At age twenty-six, she moved with her parents and sister to Bath, England. Only a few short years later, her father died, and the three women moved around until they were able to settle in Chawton, in a cottage provided by Jane's brother Edward, near his estate. This began a period of prolific writing for Jane. In 1811, at age thirty-six, she published *Sense and Sensibility*. *Pride and Prejudice* followed in 1813, *Mansfield Park* in 1814, and *Emma* in 1815. All were published anonymously.

By age forty-one, Jane's health was beginning to deteriorate. She continued to write and edit older works as best she could. She even began a new novel called *The Brothers* (published after her death as *Sandition*). It was believed she suffered from Addison's disease, which ended her life on July 18, 1817 Winchester, Hampshire, England.

Following her death, Jane's brother, Henry, published *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*, and revealed to the public it was Jane who authored all of her novels (www.jasna.org/info/about_austen.html, accessed Dec 18, 2013). Since then, Jane's popularity and prominence have only continued to grow, as she has become known as one of the greatest writers in the English language.

Synopsis: *Northanger Abbey*

The play begins with Jane and Henry Austen, waiting in a transitional theater space. Henry brings Jane her published novels, and encourages her to revisit her first novel, *Northanger Abbey*. She begins to tell the story, which begins as such:

Previously rambunctious tomboy Catherine Morland grows up wildly enacting the gothic novels she loves so much with her younger siblings; but when she turns seventeen, her parents decide to send her away from their quiet country home in Fullerton to the bustling social scene in Bath. Catherine joins their neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Allen, and Mrs. Allen determines to help Catherine continue on her journey to becoming a charming young lady, and maybe, if they're lucky, to secure a husband as well.

After a dreary start to her trip, the excitement picks up when Catherine finally meets Henry Tilney, a quick-witted young man prone to teasing. Henry quickly entrances Mrs. Allen with his knowledge of fabric and Catherine with his charming banter. Catherine continues on her social streak and meets John and Isabella Thorpe the next day. Catherine is put off by John's tedious and relentless bragging about his various material possessions, but she bonds with Isabella over their mutual love for the horror novel *Udolpho*. Catherine is delighted to have a new friend, and is further delighted to find that both Isabella and John are acquainted with her brother, James. James turns up soon after, and flirts noticeably with Isabella.

Catherine comes upon Henry Tilney once again at a ball- this time he is accompanied by his sister, Eleanor, and his father, General Tilney. Catherine grows to like Eleanor immediately, and they quickly make plans to walk together the next day. Catherine does not manage to speak to the General, but is surprised to see John Thorpe talking to the General as if they were old friends.

The next morning, Catherine is met with devastating rain, delaying and possibly cancelling her planned walk with the Tilneys. However, as soon as the weather clears up, she looks forward to them coming as planned. Before the Tilneys can make it to Catherine, John, Isabella and James arrive and coax Catherine to join them on a trip to see a real castle. While her imaginative sensibilities make turning down the chance to see a real castle rather difficult, Catherine determines to keep her date with the Tilneys; John, however, convinces her that they had already left in another direction, with another girl, without intent to call on Catherine. Reluctantly, Catherine joins her friends, only to pass the Tilneys on their way to see Catherine after all.

Furious at John and full of guilt, Catherine is happy to see the Tilneys again the next day at the theater. She explains and apologizes about the previous day's misunderstanding, and a date is set for the three of them to take their walk the following day. Isabella then invites Catherine to another outing, once more at the same time as Catherine's planned walk with the Tilneys. Catherine stays firm and insists on keeping her engagement with the Tilneys, until John goes behind her back and tells the Tilneys that Catherine is no longer available. Catherine runs after the Tilneys to once more set the record straight. She succeeds, and they finally embark upon their walk the next day.

Later, Isabella surprises Catherine by confessing that she loves James, Catherine's brother, and that the two are engaged; a letter arrives, confirming Mr. Morland's approval of the match, but promising the couple only 400 pounds a year, which instantly concerns Isabella. Soon Isabella makes her exit and Catherine is accosted by John, who hints at a marriage proposal- Catherine doesn't take the bait, and John leaves, rejected. It is then that they meet Captain Tilney, Henry's brother- Catherine is shocked and dismayed that Isabella is so openly flirtatious with Captain Tilney, despite professing to be deeply in love with James.

As her friendship with Eleanor and attachment to Henry grow, Catherine secures an invitation to their estate, Northanger Abbey. The large, dark abbey mimics the settings of Catherine's favorite novels; this, combined with the knowledge of the late Mrs. Tilney's sudden death as well as General Tilney's gruff demeanor and his refusal to interact with anything that reminds him of his wife's death, causes Catherine's wild imagination to run away with her. She forms the fancy that General Tilney must have murdered his own wife; she insinuates as much to Henry, who convinces her that she is incorrect, leaving Catherine embarrassed at her childish desire to turn real life into the fantasy of her fiction.

When Catherine is dismissed suddenly by General Tilney, she assumes it must be because he found out about her assumption, and she is devastated- once back home with her parents, she refuses to play the Gothic acting games with her siblings that once delighted her so. But she soon receives a call from Henry Tilney, who explains to Catherine that John Thorpe, angry at being slighted, told

General Tilney about Catherine's small fortune- thus, fearing an unsuitable match for his son, did he send her away. However, Henry tells Catherine that he was able to change his father's mind, and proposes marriage upon her eighteenth birthday, which Catherine happily accepts.

Having finished her story, Jane makes peace with her life and her accomplishments, and joins her brother in passing on to their next journey.

Characters: *Northanger Abbey*

Jane Austen- The author and narrator of the story.

Henry Austen- Jane's brother, who brings her the story to be read.

Catherine Morland- an eager and trusting 17-year-old girl from the country, who's obsessed with Gothic novels and embarking on her first big adventure away from home.

James Morland- Catherine's humble and genuine older brother, a student at Oxford who is quick to fall in love with Isabelle.

Mr. and Mrs. Morland- Catherine and James' parents, who are well-meaning, but somewhat baffled on how to manage their unorthodox daughter.

Mr. and Mrs. Allen- neighbors and close friends to the Morlands; they offer to bring Catherine with them on their journey to Bath. Mrs. Allen is a somewhat shallow woman, with a passion for shopping and a determination to find Catherine a husband.

General Tilney- a retired general, the stern and stoic father of Henry and Eleanor. He seems to harbor some kind of pain related to his past, and while at first he is greatly admiring of Catherine, his seemingly erratic behavior baffles the protagonist.

Henry Tilney- a 26-year-old bachelor, and extremely well-educated, well-read, and well-spoken young man with a quick wit, and a penchant for playfully pushing the buttons of his female companions. He can veer toward an air of self-importance and elitism, but is charmed by Catherine's unaffected rapport.

Eleanor Tilney- Henry's kind younger sister, who develops a genuine and real friendship with Catherine.

Isabella Thorpe- In her appearances, a delightfully fun female companion for Catherine, who shares in the love of Gothic literature. However, she reveals herself to be ultimately conniving and manipulative.

John Thorpe- Isabella's conceited brother, who develops feelings for Catherine, with dubious motivations and with even more dubious results.

Captain Tilney- Henry's handsome brother, who flirts shamelessly with Isabella.

Excerpts from "Jane Austen"

BY RYAN D. PAUL

Jane Austen began her work at the young age of nineteen and after a childhood surrounded by the great works of English literature. Austen's brother stated: "her reading started very early," and he thought it difficult to say "at what age she was not intimately acquainted with the merits and defects of the best essays and novels in the English language" (Rachel Lerman, "The Sense and Sensibility of Jane Austen," *Jane Austen Society of North America*, <http://www.jasna.org>). Jane, the sixth of seven children born to a country rector and his wife, often enjoyed familial readings of Shakespeare in the evenings. Her mother took great delight in writing poetic verse to celebrate joyous occasions. Jane proved very devoted to her family throughout her life and these themes of generational connectivity are present in her works.

Jane Austen, according to many accounts lived a life of practicality. She proved extremely thoughtful and caring where her family was concerned. Upon the devastation caused by her father's death, Jane sent many cherished mementos to her brother in an effort to abate his grief...she concerned herself with the welfare of her family and took it upon herself to look after them in their times of need.

According to Austen's biographer, Claire Tomalin, Jane had some, albeit few, instances in which the flighty, fluttery personality of many of her younger heroines rose to the foreground. These rare occurrences provided Austen comfort in the gloomy times that beset her. At the age of twenty, Austen attended a ball where she met a young Irishman by the name of Tom Lefroy. Jane enjoyed dancing and flirting with him the entire evening. That night, Austen wrote to her sister to imagine "everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together" (Lerman). After four weeks of dances, dinners, and visits, Jane and Tom would part ways with Jane writing to her sister, "At length the day is come on which I am to flirt my last with Tom Lefroy, and when you receive this it will be over. My tears flow as I write at the melancholy idea" (Laura Boyle, "Who Was the Real Tom Lefroy," *The Jane Austen Centre*, <http://www.janeausten.co.uk/who-was-the-real-tom-lefroy/>). It is a scene, right out of a Jane Austen novel.

Austen herself acknowledged that the themes she chose to write about were not as broad and sweeping as many of her contemporaries. She described them to her niece as "human nature in the midland counties." "Three or four families in a country village is the very thing to work on." In a letter to her brother, Austen described her work as "the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush, as to produce little effect, after much labour" (Ros Ballaster, "Introduction"). However, this is exactly why Austen remains relevant today. While her writing is rich in intelligence and humor, it is her vast and deep knowledge of human nature that compels us to read on. We see some of ourselves and our neighbors in her characters. She is writing our story. We meet these people every day: the manipulative and over affectionate, the unscrupulous and charming, the impulsive and thoughtful, the lovers of gossip and the keepers of secrets. Austen scholar Ros Ballaster argues that "while the great events and philosophical movements of history play themselves

out around us, it is our own nature and actions, and the nature and actions of the people around us, that most influence our lives” (Ballaster). This is what Austen excelled at writing about and this is why we as readers connect with her work.

Austen died at forty-two on July 18, 1817. During her life she jealously guarded her privacy, and after her death, her family destroyed or censored most of her letters. Her identity as an author was known to her family and a few close friends but she deliberately avoided the popularity that could have been hers. Critic Ronald Blythe argues that “literature, not the literary life, was always her intention” (<http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/p/pride-and-prejudice/jane-austen-biography>). Austen protected her identity as jealously as Bruce Wayne protects Batman. Austen is a rare literary superhero. The December following Austen’s death, her brother Henry revealed to the world her role as author. Almost thirty years later historian Thomas Macaulay stated that Austen as a writer has, “approached nearest to the manner of the great master, Shakespeare” (Ballaster).

The narrative structure, the characters which compel us to be involved, the powerful connections Austen creates between us as readers and those we are reading about all prod us onward. Austen builds a framework for our lives. She provides a structure for all aspects of our human nature to inhabit. Sir Walter Scott said of Austen, “That young lady has a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with.”

Gothic Fiction: An Overview

BY ANNA MILES

Gothic fiction is a term used to refer to works that lie within the larger, more general "Gothic horror" genre, which are specifically literary in nature. The genre combines horror, death, suspense, and romance, and often contains supernatural elements- ghosts are a particularly popular Gothic subject. Its origin is commonly drawn back to the 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto*, by English author Horace Walpole- in fact, this novel's second edition adds the subtitle, "A Gothic Story". The style continued to be developed in the years to come by Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, William Thomas Beckford and Matthew Lewis. The genre gets its name from Medieval gothic architecture, in which many gothic stories are set. Gothic fiction employs several characteristic elements to simultaneously delight and terrify its readers, such as:

The "Mysterious Imagination"

Gothic literature relies upon it's reader suspending their disbelief, and entering into an experience of wild and wonderful imagination- and because of this, the genre also encourages and exploits the capabilities of the human imagination. It uses our ability to fill in the blanks of a story, to believe that there might always be something "beyond that which is immediately in front of us," to instill a kind of personal terror that each individual reader could only create for themselves.

The Macabre

The Gothic uses familiar morbid imagery of death, decay, darkness, and secrecy to thrill fans of the genre, but it borrows these elements from much older works of literature, which were popularized by the Graveyard Poets of the 18th century.

An Emotional Aesthetic

Most Gothic novels use their characters and plotlines as larger metaphors for an emotional experience- in Edwardian and Victorian times, emotional displays and expressions were frowned upon, so authors and readers alike transformed that tension into the creation and consumption of ghost stories and violent mysteries. For example, in one of the most well-known examples of gothic literature, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (note: *Jane Eyre* came after *Northanger Abbey* - it was published in 1847 while *Northanger* was published in 1817 - and thus wouldn't have influenced Austen or Catherine), Bertha, the "mad woman in the attic" is often interpreted to be a symbol for Jane's own suppressed self confidence and creativity- she is Jane's wild side, Jane's animalistic emotional side full of rage at having been lonely and mistreated all her life, the side that she's not allowed to show to the world; hence, why she must keep it locked up in her own metaphorical version of an internal hidden attic.

What is "Satire"?

BY ANNA MILES

Merriam-Webster defines the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues. In other words, any piece of satiric art, media, or literature ridicules familiar genres and cultural touchstones with the intention of engaging in social or political criticism. You may recognize satire in contemporary pop culture- some examples include shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, which are satires of the way we receive and internalize news, current events, and politics.

Now, given that the definition of satire includes the word "humor," and that these modern examples can be considered explicitly comedic, it might surprise you to learn that *Northanger Abbey* is itself a satire. While there are many moments of humor and light-hearted charm sprinkled throughout the story, it might not meet our contemporary expectations for what is "laugh out loud" funny. But beneath its exploration of its themes of trust, communication, and imagination, *Northanger Abbey* uses its charming anti-heroine Catherine and her overzealous obsession with gothic literature and romance to satirize both the gothic genre itself and the ways in which the genre is consumed by its readers. In fact, the differences between the drawing-room humor of Austen's novel and, by extension, Meagher's play and the irreverent jokes of *The Daily Show* are also what makes these works similar to each other: a good satire exploits the shared cultural icons, images, and history, as well as the sense of humor, of the time and place in which it is made. Satire, while also intended to make its audience laugh, first and foremost aims to provide some kind of larger commentary.

In Austen's novel, while the author encourages her readers and her characters to enjoy the reading of novels and fiction which at the time were considered more "low brow" forms of reading than, say, history, she also satirizes and comments on the dangers of blurring the lines between reality and fiction. Catherine Morland could be considered the Edwardian equivalent of a "super fan"- she allows her obsession to carry her away, causing her to make assumptions which harm the people she cares about.

Meanwhile, parody, satire's not-so-distant cousin, comments on and ridicules a genre in and of itself, and on how we, as the audience, consume a well-known genre. A parody takes what is familiar and subverts it- it uses an audience's expectations and flips them on their head, so that the audience sees not only the parodied genre in a new way, but also themselves and the way they receive information. In this way, *Northanger Abbey* could also be considered a parody: it appears to structure itself as a gothic novel, and then surprises both the protagonist and the audience with its reversal to reveal that the events of the story are not unfolding as a dramatic fiction after all. *Northanger Abbey* exploits our perceptions of the gothic genre to incite discussions about "low brow" vs "high brow" entertainment just enough to call attention to the genre's absurdities while simultaneously critiquing

the ways in which we place value judgments upon popular forms of entertainment and celebrating the things we love about those forms.

So, now that you know more about satire and parody- what exactly do you think *Northanger Abbey* has to say about the gothic genre and the way we consume it?

Centuries of Superfandom

BY ANNA MILES

A definition of a good story reads as “one the teller cares about, has been touched by, and feels a keen desire to share.” When a teller finds a story, she studies it and adds herself to it, morphing it to make it her own, to allow the world to see the story and the characters and the universal truth through her eyes. This is the beauty of storytelling, and the basis for the human folklore tradition.

The modern phenomenon of “fan fiction” - that is, a type of fiction written by fans of in which the writer uses preexisting and established characters, settings, and/or other intellectual properties from an original creator as a basis for their writing (definition courtesy of Wikipedia) - is largely ridiculed, and generally regarded as void of any real literary merit. However, fan fiction as a concept and in successful practice could be said to represent the digital age continuation of the human folklore tradition, in which listeners feel moved by others’ stories and, feeling compelled to retell them, shape these stories to make them their own.

Our modern interpretation of “fan fiction” is largely shaped by our narrow understanding of the term- we view the phenomenon as an internet-exclusive activity, invented alongside the rise of mass communication and mass internet culture. But, in fact, it’s only the name “fan fiction” that’s new; the phenomenon has existed since humans were able to share stories.

As discussed in “What is Satire,” Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* could easily be considered a kind of “superfan” of gothic literature, and her playacting with her siblings considered a performance-based version of Edwardian-era fan fiction. Historic examples of antique fan fic exist as well: after author Samuel Richardson published his wildly popular 1740 novel *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, several men and women of all ages wrote and shared their own versions and extensions of the story. Some of these extensions were even published, including a French imitation of the novel by Robert-Martin Lesuire and a parody novel by Henry Fielding, aptly titled “*Shamela*,” which was released only one year after the publication of the original *Pamela*.

Hmmm....if that satirical novel could be considered a fan fiction, could it even be said that Jane Austen herself wrote a kind of gothic fan fiction with *Northanger Abbey* itself?

But I digress- across human history, people have turned popular and well loved stories into their own narratives. Today’s modern iteration of fan fiction is simply an example of the storytelling form changing alongside rapidly developing technology: most of us have grown up alongside social media and social networking sites- our generation carries on the natural human tradition of storytelling in the cultural arena we are most familiar and comfortable with, adapting the forms and mediums of storytelling to accommodate these new forms of communication. San Diego State University professor Louise Ellen Stein discusses the rise of “fannish storytelling” through new

media and technology, stating that the emerging new narrative forms “draw on generic structures within popular media and culture in general” and thus that “as fan cultures and fan creative texts evolve online, the histories and traditions of fan fiction intersect with broader cultural discourses” (Stein, “This Dratted Thing”: *Fannish Storytelling through New Media*, 186-87). Media scholar Henry Jenkins links the impulse to create fan fiction with the desire to use storytelling as a means of preserving cultural tradition and claims that the “process of circulation and retelling improved the fit between story and culture, making these stories central to the way a people thought of themselves...Contemporary web culture is the traditional folk process working at lightning speed on a global scale.”

Homer wrote epic poems based on established and well-known stories. Milton retold and interpreted a tale from the Bible in his masterpiece *Paradise Lost*. Shakespeare’s most famous plays borrowed plots and characters from earlier texts. Henry Fielding rewrote *Pamela*, and Catherine Moorland acted out her favorite plots from Gothic literature. “Fan fiction” has been around since the dawn of time, before the internet made fan communities possible, before copyright laws made the preservation and the personal embodiment of story illegal. We use stories to discover and understand who we are, to explain the human experience, to deal with common themes and feelings in a creative and moving way. Just as Austen defends the merit of so-perceived “low brow” novels in *Northanger Abbey*, so do I now defend the merit of fan retellings of beloved cultural material in preserving and celebrating the larger human condition. The rise of fan fiction is not a new social construct but the reinvention of a timeless social tradition: the tradition of cultural preservation and self-expression through storytelling.

On the Adaptation of Austen:

An Exclusive Interview with Playwright Carissa Meagher

1. How long have you been writing plays for/how did you first get into writing plays?

a. I was on stage, as an actor, from a very young age and certainly tried my hand at writing short plays as a child. However, it was in high school when I really discovered my love for the art. My regular acting class did not fit into my school schedule, so I landed in a playwriting class instead, much to my chagrin. The teacher, Karen Pollard, had an incredible skill in inspiring deep and vulnerable pieces for the stage from her young students. An assignment from that class became my first full length play, which earned me my first professional staged reading, and the rest is history! The love for it stuck with me through drama school and eventually inspired me to get my MFA in Playwriting from the Lir Academy at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland.

2. What inspired you to choose this specific Jane Austen novel to adapt?

a. Jane Austen is, obviously, known for romantic novels full of keen observational humor and sharp wit. *Northanger Abbey* is no exception in this regard, but it also comes with the added element of being satirical in nature, specifically in regards to Gothic Novels. This combination really attracted me as a reader and a writer. I found myself absorbed in the budding romance of the books protagonist, Catherine Morland and her new suitor Henry Tilney, while also curious about the darkness to be found at *Northanger Abbey*— only to find myself suddenly cracking up at Austen’s commentary on it all. It was, indeed, her first written, though her last published, and as such it is often seen as her “youngest” novel—but also her funniest. I have spoken to many Austen fans who have told me *Northanger*, despite some of her other novels being more skillfully written, is their favorite because Catherine Morland is the most similar to Jane Austen herself when she was young—-a young lady, obsessed with novels, who dreams of becoming a heroine, much like the ones in her books.

3. For those not as familiar with the story, can you give us a brief overview of what to expect?

a. *Northanger Abbey* follows the story of Catherine Morland, an unlikely heroine. The reader sees her go from a wild and free spirited kid, who much prefers rolling down hills and playing cricket to learning the piano, to an intelligent young lady, ready for a life in society. With a great affinity for gothic novels, Miss Morland approaches situations with a skewed sense of reality, and is constantly aware of the terrors that could be lurking around every corner. This tendency leads to trouble when Miss Morland is invited for a stay at *Northanger Abbey*, the dark and mysterious home of the Tilney

family. Miss Morland, meanwhile, is falling further in love with the youngest son of the family, Mr. Henry Tilney, causing great trouble when she grows suspicious of his father and the dark history the house may hold.

4. Can you explain some of the similarities and differences between the novel, and your adaptation that audiences can expect to see?

a. My adaptation stays true to the story of Catherine Morland, her entrance into society and the subsequent events that lead her to her great adventure in Northanger Abbey. However, Jane Austen herself is also a character in my play, commenting on the situations Miss Morland finds herself in and offering, often comical, narration and insight into the mind of a gothic novel fanatic. When I read the novel, I felt Austen was reaching through the text and speaking directly to me, at times, whispering her opinions of these people directly in my ear. I wanted to find a way of capturing that feeling onstage, and of highlighting Austen's own experience as an avid, imaginative reader which is mirrored in Miss Catherine Morland. As such, in my version, Jane Austen finds herself a player in her story, playing the part of Catherine Morland in the telling of Northanger Abbey, while still remaining the narrator and creator of the novel.

5. What do you hope audiences take away from this production?

a. I hope audiences walk away from this production with a greater appreciation for Jane Austen and her breadth of work in varying styles. Northanger Abbey is not necessarily her most well known novel and I think it offers this darker side of Austen that people don't immediately associate with her. Also, the story is ultimately uplifting and offers us a great reminder to lift our heads from our books (or our phones, the news, computers) and really connect with the world around us, without immediately supposing the worst in others or ourselves.

Activity: Write your Satirical Fan Fiction!

To further explore the idea of "satire," try writing one for yourself! Write your own fan fiction by picking a movie, book, comic book, play, or TV show and writing a short story using those characters and settings- but remember, since it's a satire, make sure you pick something you want to critique, and use your story to make that criticism.

Study Guide Questions: *Northanger Abbey*

From the Jane Austen Society of North America, <http://www.jasna.org/>

1. What evidence is there that this was Austen's first novel? If you've read any of her other novels, how does the structure, characterization, and complexity of plot of *Northanger Abbey* compare with these later, mature novels?
2. *Northanger Abbey* parodies the gothic novel, an immensely popular genre at the time Austen wrote the first draft. At the same time, *Northanger Abbey* includes a spirited defense of the novel in general. Discuss Austen's viewpoint and critique of the form of writing she has chosen to pursue.
3. Discuss the ways in which Austen parodies gothic novels, including Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

Study Guide Questions: Engage With the Play

By Anna Miles

Take charge of your theatre-going experience and make it your own by asking yourself questions before, during, and after watching a play.

Questions to ask before the play:

If you **HAVE** read the play:

How did you envision the set, or the visual world of the play, while reading?

How did you imagine the characters looked while reading the play?

What themes did you notice repeating throughout the play?

What images jumped out at you while reading the play?

How would you describe the central theme of the play in one sentence?

If you **HAVEN'T** read the play:

Do you know anything about the play? If so, what do you know?

In General:

When you think about "theatre," what impressions come to mind? What does "theatre" mean to you?

What do you expect your experience to be when you watch a play? Do you expect to be bored? Excited? Engaged? Curious? Angry? Tired?

Questions to ask after the play:

If you **READ THE PLAY BEFORE SEEING IT:**

How did the production set differ from what you had imagined while reading the play? How was it similar? How did these changes affect your understanding of the story?

Did the characters look different from how you envisioned them looking while reading the play? Did they sound different? Act differently? How did these changes affect your understanding and opinion of each character? How did these changes affect your understanding of the overall story?

How did the themes and images you noticed while reading translate to performance? Did the same themes and images jump out at you? Did you notice new ones?

Did this particular production seem to have the same central theme, or a different central theme from the one you discovered while reading? What elements of the staging, acting, or design helped convey the theme?

Did they play gain or lose anything in performance? Did you enjoy reading it more, or watching it?

If you **DIDN'T READ THE PLAY BEFORE SEEING IT:**

How did the play live up to your expectations? Did it turn out the way you thought it would? Was your knowledge of the play correct?

Were you able to follow the story?

Which part of the story did you most respond to? What themes and images jumped out at you?

Which character did you most relate to? Why?

In General:

How did this production change or confirm your original impressions of "theatre"?

How did your experience watching the play differ from how you expected it would go?

In your own words, how would you summarize the plot of the play? How is the plot different from the story, or the thematic implications, in the play?

Did you feel the story was relevant to your life? How and why?

Did you feel the story said something about our society, or about the world at large? If so, what?

Do you feel this story is an important one to tell and keep telling? How and why?

What kind of stories do you most respond to?

California State Standards

Giving students the chance to experience live theater at the Sacramento Theatre Company not only gives them the chance to enrich their understanding of literature, humanity, and the world, but also includes the added benefit of fulfilling several of California's State Standards for Education, including:

California Arts Standards in Theater:

RESPONDING—Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists reflect to understand the impact of drama processes and theatre experiences.

Essential Question: How do theatre artists comprehend the essence of drama processes and theatre experiences?

Process Component: Reflect

PK.TH:Re7	K.TH:Re7	1.TH:Re7	2.TH:Re7	3.TH:Re7	4.TH:Re7	5.TH:Re7
With prompting and supports, recall an emotional response in dramatic play or a guided drama experience .	With prompting and supports, express an emotional response to characters in dramatic play or a guided drama experience .	Recall choices made in a guided drama experience .	Recognize when artistic choices are made in a guided drama experience .	Understand and discuss why artistic choices are made in a drama/theatre work.	Identify artistic choices made in a drama/theatre work through participation and observation.	Explain personal reactions to artistic choices made in a drama/theatre work through participation and observation.

6.TH:Re7	7.TH:Re7	8.TH:Re7	Prof.TH:Re7	Acc.TH:Re7	Adv.TH:Re7
Describe and record personal reactions to artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.	Compare recorded personal and peer reactions to artistic choices in a drama/ theatre work.	Apply appropriate criteria to the evaluation of artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.	Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices.	Demonstrate an understanding of multiple interpretations of artistic criteria and how each might be used to influence future artistic choices of a drama/theatre work.	Use historical and cultural context to structure and justify personal responses to a drama/theatre work.

RESPONDING—Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists’ interpretations of drama/theatre work are influenced by personal experiences, culture, and aesthetics.

Essential Question: How can the same work of art communicate different messages to different people?

Process Component: Interpret

PK.TH:Re8	K.TH:Re8	1.TH:Re8	2.TH:Re8	3.TH:Re8	4.TH:Re8	5.TH:Re8
a. With prompting and supports, explore preferences in dramatic play , guided drama experience or age-appropriate theatre performance.	a. With prompting and supports, identify preferences in dramatic play , a guided drama experience or age-appropriate theatre performance.	a. Explain preferences and emotions in a guided drama experience or age-appropriate theatre performance.	a. Explain how personal preferences and emotions affect an observer’s response in a guided drama experience or age-appropriate theatre performance.	a. Consider multiple personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.	a. Compare and contrast multiple personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.	a. Justify responses based on personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.

<p>b. With prompting and supports, name and describe characters in dramatic play or a guided drama experience.</p>	<p>b. With prompting and supports, name and describe settings in dramatic play or a guided drama experience.</p>	<p>b. Identify causes of character actions in a guided drama experience.</p>	<p>b. Identify causes and consequences of character actions in a guided drama experience.</p>	<p>b. Consider multiple ways to develop a character using physical characteristics and prop or costume design choices that reflect cultural perspectives in drama/theatre work.</p>	<p>b. Compare and contrast the qualities of characters in a drama/theatre work through physical characteristics and prop or costume design choices that reflect cultural contexts.</p>	<p>b. Explain responses to characters based on cultural contexts when participating in or observing drama/theatre work.</p>
<p>c. With prompting and supports describe how personal emotions and choices compare to the emotions and choices of characters in dramatic play or a guided drama experience.</p>	<p>c. With prompting and supports describe how personal emotions and choices compare to the emotions and choices of characters in dramatic play or a guided drama experience.</p>	<p>c. Explain or use text and pictures to describe how personal emotions and choices compare to the emotions and choices of characters in a guided drama experience.</p>	<p>c. Explain or use text and pictures to describe how others' emotions and choices may compare to the emotions and choices of characters in a guided drama experience.</p>	<p>c. Examine how connections are made between oneself and a character's emotions in drama/theatre work.</p>	<p>c. Identify and discuss physiological changes connected to emotions in drama/ theatre work.</p>	<p>c. Investigate the effects of emotions on posture, gesture, breathing, and vocal intonation in a drama/theatre work.</p>

RESPONDING—Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists apply criteria to understand, explore, and assess drama and theatre work.

Essential Question: How do analysis and synthesis impact the theatre artist’s process and audience’s perspectives?

Process Component: Evaluate

PK.TH:Re9	K.TH:Re9	1.TH:Re9	2.TH:Re9	3.TH:Re9	4.TH:Re9	5.TH:Re9
a. With prompting and supports, discuss and make decisions about dramatic play or a guided drama experience .	a. With prompting and supports, discuss and make decisions with others in dramatic play or a guided drama experience .	a. Build on others’ ideas in a guided drama experience .	a. Collaborate on a scene in a guided drama experience .	a. Understand how and why groups evaluate drama/theatre work.	a. Develop and implement a plan to evaluate drama/theatre work.	a. Develop multiple criteria to evaluate drama/theatre work.
n/a	n/a	b. Compare and contrast the experiences of characters in a guided drama experience .	b. Describe how characters respond to challenges in a guided drama experience .	b. Evaluate and analyze problems and situations in a drama/theatre work from an audience perspective.	b. Analyze and evaluate characters’ choices in a drama/theatre work from an audience perspective.	b. Analyze and evaluate a character’s circumstances in a drama/theatre work from an audience perspective.
n/a	n/a	c. Identify props and costumes that might be used in a guided drama experience .	c. Use a prop or costume in a guided drama experience to describe characters, settings, or events.	c. Consider and analyze technical theatre elements from multiple drama/theatre works.	c. Explore how technical theatre elements may support a theme or idea in a drama/theatre work.	c. Assess how technical theatre elements represent the theme of a drama/theatre work.

California Reading Standards in Literature:

Standards in Integration of Knowledge and Ideas for grades 6-12: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Grade 6 students: Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they “see” and “hear” when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.

Grade 7 students: Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g., lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film).

Grade 8 students: Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.

Grade 9-10 students: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.

Grade 11-12 students: Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. **(Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)**

Theatre Etiquette

- Arrive at the theater on time.
- Visit the restroom before the performance begins.
- Turn off your cell phone. Do not speak on the phone or text during the performance.
- Pay attention to announcements that are made prior to the show about the rules of the theater you are attending and the location of the fire exits.
- Don't speak during the performance unless you are encouraged by the performers to participate.
- Remember that the Overture (introductory music) in musical theater is part of the performance, so be quiet when it begins.
- Do not take pictures during the performance. It can be very distracting to the actors and can cause a mishap. It can also be a violation of an actor's contract.
- Remain in your seat for the entire performance. If you must leave, exit during intermission. In an emergency, wait for an appropriate break in the show. It is rude to get up in the middle of a quiet moment.
- Do not eat or drink in the theater.
- Do not put your feet up on the seats or balcony and do not kick the seat in front of you.
- Don't put or throw anything on the stage.
- Do laugh when the performance is funny.
- Do applaud when it is appropriate during the performance.
- Do applaud when the performance is over... this tells the performers and crew that you appreciate their work.
- Stand and applaud if you really thought the show was great (a standing ovation).
- Do not whistle, stomp your feet, or scream out to the performers except for a Bravo or Brava.

Additional Resources

Northanger Abbey by Jane Austen, Full Text via Project Gutenberg

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/121/121-h/121-h.htm>

The Jane Austen Society of North America

<http://www.jasna.org/>

Gothic Literature Study Guide

<https://americanliterature.com/gothic-literature-study-guide>

JaneAusten.org

<https://www.janeausten.org/>

Penguin Random House Reading Guide for Northanger Abbey

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/302057/northanger-abbey-by-jane-austen/9780451530844/readers-guide/>