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The Coming of Age of a Woman:
Proto-feminism and Female *Bildung* in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*

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Abstract

This thesis examines the influence of the proto-feminist ideas of the Enlightenment on Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, specifically their presence in the coming-of-age journey of the novel's heroine Catherine Morland.

In this thesis, the proto-feminist ideas of the Enlightenment discussed are based on the ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft as presented in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. I focus on Wollstonecraft's emphasis on the importance of reason for the emancipation of women as well as the role of virtue and modesty, but also on the existence of an ambivalent relationship between sense and sentiment. The aim of the thesis is to show that Catherine Morland's coming-of-age journey in *Northanger Abbey* can be understood as a representation of the emancipation of women that Wollstonecraft hopes for, and that the obstacles standing in the way of Catherine's maturation are parallel to the obstacles which, during the Enlightenment, prevented women from claiming reason for themselves. First, I draw upon Wollstonecraft's criticism of sentimental fiction and its hampering effect on women's minds and show that the same idea is present in the narrative of *Northanger Abbey*, in the shape of gothic fiction. Then, I show how Catherine's ability to discern between virtuous and immodest behaviour improves drastically as she starts to exercise her reason, in concurrence with Wollstonecraft's claim that all virtuous thought must stem from reason. I analyse the importance of Catherine's choice of partner and its relationship to the proto-feminist critique of women's inability to express ideas contrary to those of a man. Finally, I dissect the proto-feminist ambivalent relationship between sense and sentiment and connect it to the finale of *Northanger Abbey*. These elements put together all point toward Wollstonecraft and Austen being coextensive, and demonstrate how Austen makes use of Wollstonecraft's ideas to promote the emergence of female *bildung*.

Keywords: Bildungsroman; enlightenment feminism; Jane Austen, Mary Wollstonecraft; proto-feminism

> If the abstract rights of man will bear discussion and explanation, those of women, by a parity of reasoning, will not shrink from the same test.
>
> - Mary Wollstonecraft (1792)

"Jane Austen was born before those bonds which (we are told) protected woman from truth were burst by the Brontës or elaborately untied by George Eliot" writes Gilbert Keith Chesterton (47). In his 1913 overview of the key Victorian novelists, Chesterton seems to attribute the breaking of bonds to female novelists of the Victorian age. However, while it is true that Jane Austen was active before Eliot and the Brontë sisters, it is equally true that she produced her work two decades after Mary Wollstonecraft put forth her famous text *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a work presenting many of the ideas which we associate with proto-feminism. Keeping this in mind, it would be unfair not to consider attributing some bond breaking to Jane Austen. She is, after all, considered to be one of the forerunners in literature written by women (Showalter 74–75).

In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft expresses thoughts about the current relationship between men and women and some key points to bettering this relationship in favour of equality. One of the main arguments that Wollstonecraft presents is that women must claim reason for themselves, and through experience and education cultivate their understanding and rationality. Permeating *Vindication* is the utopian promise of reason and also an analysis of the obstacles that lie in the way of women's claiming reason for themselves. As Wollstonecraft writes, "in some future revolution of time" (148), she wishes for women to become creatures guided by rationality rather than sentimentality, for she holds that only through the use of reason can women become independent (150). Summed up, for women to become equal to men, they must embark on a journey from their current state of emotionality to a future state of rationality and reason.

From Victorian critics to modern ones, the subject of Jane Austen's place in the history of literature has been, and still is, up for debate. Opinions differ regarding the feminist qualities of Austen, some claiming that the woman's novel did not enter a feminist phase until after 1880 (Showalter 29), more than half a century after Austen's death. Others label Austen heroines 'cixous', applying a feminist theory modelled on its namesake Hélène Cixous (Cordón). In this essay, I will refrain from applying more modern feminist models like that of Cixous, focusing instead on Mary Wollstonecraft's 'enlightenment feminism' and its importance for a reading of Jane Austen. More specifically, this essay examines the coming-of-age journey of the main protagonist, Catherine Morland, in Austen's first novel, *Northanger Abbey* (1818), and how it represents a maturation through rationality and reason, very similar to the coming-of-age journey of the female mind that Wollstonecraft presents in *Vindication*. I demonstrate how Jane Austen deploys the concept of coming of age in *Northanger Abbey* in order to echo the proto-feminist idea of women claiming reason for themselves, as presented by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Central to this essay is the term 'enlightenment feminism', which entails several distinct characteristics. This is not a term coined during the time when the ideas we associate with early feminism come to force, but rather by later critics aiming to describe the phenomenon. The term can be encountered in texts by for example Virginia Sapiro (1998, 122) and Nicola Trott (1992, 570), usually in single quotation marks, perhaps to mark a certain scepticism towards the feminist quality of the ideas. Sapiro, for example, does bring up criticism regarding a 'feminism' influenced by the Enlightenment, but she nevertheless maintains the importance of Mary Wollstonecraft's work even if it can appear limited to a more modern feminist interpretation (122–23). While it is certainly possible to criticize whether the proto-feminist ideas of the Enlightenment were truly feminist, the term 'enlightenment feminism' is used here to pinpoint a certain set of ideas regarding women and women writers, presented by Wollstonecraft, during the Enlightenment. Furthermore, Sapiro writes that there may be certain blinkers limiting a feminist reading of "women's political and social history during […] 'the Enlightenment'" (123). I agree with Sapiro, and as such wish to present a reading which does not focus on modern feminism, but rather historicizes the concept of female *bildung*.

These proto-feminist, 'enlightenment feminist' ideas are centred around reason and the acquisition of it, and Wollstonecraft herself has been described by other writers as upholding "a rationalism worthy of the Augustans" (Trott 570). The idea of women claiming reason for themselves is maintained throughout *Vindication*, coupled with the argument that to achieve reason, women must be allowed education in order to cultivate their understandings, just like men are allowed to do so, or there will be no equality between the sexes. In Wollstonecraft's own words, "it is the right use of reason alone which makes us independent of every thing" (150). Central to Wollstonecraft's ideas was also the acquiring of reason not only through institutionalized education but also through personal growth and experience (Sapiro 126), which in itself invites comparison between Wollstonecraft's ideas and the coming-of-age journey in a bildungsroman like *Northanger Abbey*. That reason must be acquired through experience is perhaps most clear in Chapter VI of *Vindication* (144–50), where Wollstonecraft connects women's current inability to exercise reason to the fact that they do not consistently practice it, and that true cultivation of ideas is possible only through actual practice and experience – something that women have thus far been kept from.

However, while reason certainly makes up the main idea of *Vindication*, it is not the only attribute worthy of discussion. Wollstonecraft also maintains that "the perfection of our nature and capability of happiness" stems from "the degree of reason, virtue, and knowledge, that distinguish the individual" (19), recognizing the importance of virtue and knowledge alongside reason. It is important to note, however, that Wollstonecraft sees reason as the basis for both knowledge and virtue, arguing that "from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow" (19). Still, while the concept of reason remains central to this essay, Wollstonecraft devotes several chapters of *Vindication* to the concepts of virtue and modesty. Thus, virtue, its importance to the coming-of-age-journey in *Northanger Abbey*, and its connection to Catherine Morland's acquisition of reason, shall be examined as well.

If the proto-feminist ideas in *Vindication* are centred around reason, it is no surprise that when men stand in the way of women's attempts at acquiring reason they become an obstacle. Indeed, 'enlightenment feminism' can be understood as a backlash aimed at typical Enlightenment texts where fathers might caution their daughters against displaying certain characteristics deemed unpleasing to men. Mary Catherine Moran puts forth this idea in her article "Between the savage and the civil: Dr John

Gregory's natural history of femininity", where she brings up a passage written by Gregory, in which he cautions his daughters against displaying their intellect and good sense to a man lest they provoke his jealousy (Moran 23). This very passage was called out for censure by Wollstonecraft (Moran 23). Indeed, in Chapter V of *Vindication* Wollstonecraft accuses Gregory, among others, of rendering women objects of pity, bordering on contempt (99–143) and as such, men shunning reason in women are to be regarded as problematic for woman's journey towards rationality.

Furthermore, Wollstonecraft has been described as pouring "withering sarcasm on her own sex's implication in sentimental fiction" (Trott 570). If one turns to *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft does critique books written for women, claiming that they raise women to believe that "it is only through their address to excite emotions in men, that pleasure and power are to be obtained" (146). This critique can be applied not only to educational books for women, but also to sentimental fiction, to which Wollstonecraft devotes a section of a chapter (228–32), dissecting the sentimental novel's dangerous effects on the female mind. Sentimental fiction, in *Northanger Abbey* as well as in *Vindication*, represents a major obstacle to Catherine Moreland's coming of age and women's claiming reason respectively. Just as Catherine's mind is hampered by the gothic novel, Wollstonecraft maintains that sentimental novels are preventive of the acquisition of rationality and that the reading of them constitutes a "feminine weakness of character" (228).

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, 'enlightenment feminism' has been described as both "hostile and sympathetic to the cultivation of sentiment" (Trott 570). Tjitske Akkerman and Siep Stuurman (1998) concur, writing that, during the Enlightenment, while "feminist authors emphatically claimed reason for themselves, they also emphatically evoked female values, seeking to find a balance between the sentiments of the heart and the demands of rationality" (15). In this ambivalent relationship between rationality and sentiment, Wollstonecraft fits well, as she maintains that women must not be blamed for the consequence of their lack of education, the consequence being that they have been "[r]endered gay and giddy by the whole tenor of their lives" (148). This lack of rational education, coupled with a reading of sentimental fiction and 'educational' books of conduct aimed at women, results in an upbringing where everything women learn serves to "call forth emotions" (146). While Wollstonecraft expresses that it would be optimal for women to "learn to despise […] sensibility" (148), she does indeed admit the task to be unrealistic, presenting a

conflict between sense and sensibility which is central to my reading of *Northanger Abbey* as well.

Throughout this essay, I will demonstrate how these ideas are central to Catherine's coming-of-age journey in *Northanger Abbey*. While there are undoubtedly more parameters constituting the proto-feminism of the Enlightenment, the ones mentioned above make up the main ideas which allow us to study Catherine Morland's coming of age as parallel to the path of female education envisioned by Wollstonecraft.

The assumption of the existence of 'female values' might at first glance seem contradictory to a feminist reader, but this is not at all the case. On the contrary, a recounting of 'enlightenment feminism' must take into account the importance of the concept of female nature. While in our times the thought of a natural femininity might have been cast aside, the same is not true for the proto-feminism of the enlightenment. Instead, Moran explains that while the 18th century "saw vigorous debate over the nature of female nature, we will scarcely find anyone who did not subscribe to some notion of natural differences between the sexes" (12). Here, Moran points to Wollstonecraft, whom she describes as heavily reliant on the category of 'nature' in *Vindication* (12). While this essay does not in aim to define the essence of female nature, it is important to note that occurrences of 'female values' or assumed and/or enforced differences between the sexes in *Northanger Abbey* do not contradict the notion of 'enlightenment feminism', however much it might contradict our own notion of contemporary feminisms.

In *Vindication,* Wollstonecraft advocates that we must foster reason in women, in order to "cultivate the understanding" and save woman "from the weak dependent state of […] ignorance" (150). It is in this state of ignorance that we first find *Northanger Abbey*'s protagonist, Catherine Morland. At the onset of the novel, Catherine as a child is described as follows: "She never could learn or understand any thing before she was taught; and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid" (*Abbey* 16). As Catherine becomes a teenager, she is described as disliking "books of information" but having no objections to other books "provided that nothing like useful knowledge could be gained from them, provided they were all story and no reflection" (17). Further along, Catherine expresses that she finds history books tiresome and that they all "either vex or weary" (104) her mind. There is a direct connection to Wollstonecraft to be made here, who writes that women, "[u]nable to grasp any thing great, […] find the reading of history a very dry task" (229). The history

book and its likes are, according to Wollstonecraft, superior to the novel in that they "exercise the understanding and regulate the imagination" (229), but since women are unable to grasp the greatness of these books, they will instead turn to the sentimental novel. Thus, Wollstonecraft argues, women in their current, irrational state tend to prefer "stupid novelists" (229), whose works she describes as being sentimental and aiming to cater to the frivolous, female mind. This preference in literature is true for Catherine Morland as well, at least during the first half of *Northanger Abbey*. Catherine is engulfed in gothic novels from the beginning of *Abbey*, and to the question on whether she enjoys sentimental fiction Catherine replies: "To say the truth, I do not much like any other" (104). During the same conversation in which this question is posed, Catherine is described as being "quite lost" (106) regarding several different subjects, contributing to the image of her ignorance. Catherine's ignorance as well as her preference in literature in the first half of *Abbey* are so eerily similar to the ignorant womankind which Wollstonecraft speaks of, who would rather read sentimental novels than history books, that they must be considered coextensive to each other.

If the reading of sentimental fiction stands in the way of women procuring reason, then, for the parallel to hold, the gothic novel in *Abbey* must stand in the way of Catherine's coming-of-age. In order to understand this, it would be wise to consider when, and how, Catherine begins to mature. Towards the end of *Abbey*, at the start of Chapter X, the narrator tells us that "[t]he visions of romance were over. Catherine was completely awakened" (187), suggesting that Catherine is no longer governed by romantic twists of the mind and that she is instead beginning to see reason. This awakening occurs when Catherine has explored Northanger with the intent of uncovering an imagined murder of the previous matron of the abbey, and she is interrupted by Henry Tilney who questions what she has "been judging from" and prompts her to consult her "own sense of the probable" (186). The murder imagined is nothing but a delusion and ultimately untrue, but it is important to understand what fuels Catherine's gothic delusions. While gothic intrusions are a common obstacle in the female *bildungsroman* (Miller), what is especially notable about the delusions in *Abbey* is where these intrusions stem from. One need not look far to find a cause, as it is explicitly stated by the narrator that "nothing could shortly be clearer, than that it had been all a voluntary, self-created delusion" (187–88), which could be "traced to the influence of that sort of reading which she had […] indulged" (188). The most important part of this statement is of course the *sort of reading* of which the narrator

speaks, undoubtedly a reference to the gothic novels that Catherine has thus far devoured, and represented mainly by Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Catherine has previously stated that she could "spend [her] whole life in reading it" (39) and at one instance she is even late to a meeting because she has "gone on with Udolpho" (38), proving her obsession with it. It is the reading of this sentimental fiction that, according to the narrator, allows Catherine's mind to conjure images of mystery and murder that are in no way founded in reason. Because of this, sentimental fiction poses one of the biggest challenges for Catherine to overcome in order to come of age. Waldo. S. Glock has made a similar argument, claiming that the delusions at the abbey are paramount to Catherine's coming of age, because it is when Catherine wakes up from these delusions that she begins to exercise reason in other areas of her life. Glock shows us that it is when Catherine wakes up from the delusions about General Tilney murdering his wife, that she also wakes up from her naïve delusions about her friend Isabella's character. In seeing both the General and Isabella for what they really are, instead of letting her emotions make up her judgement of them, Catherine has taken a step towards reason. This is evident when Catherine receives a letter from Isabella, earlier known as the dearest of friends, whom she now sees in a different light. In reading the letter, Catherine realizes that Isabella is filled with "shallow artifice […] and falsehood" (203) and she states: "I see what she has been about" (204). Most important to note is that Catherine only comes to this realization after she has awakened from her gothic delusions at the abbey, suggesting that it is only after this that she begins to draw on reason, instead of her feelings of amiability toward Isabella. This marks a change in her being driven by sentimentality to her starting to exercise reason.

Now, if we may agree that these gothic delusions are obstacles that Catherine must overcome to see reason and to gain independence, and that they spring mainly from Catherine's obsession with sentimental fiction, then we must arrive at the conclusion that in *Abbey*, sentimental fiction stands in the way of reason. If we recall Wollstonecraft's emphasis on women needing to procure reasonable minds, awakening from sentimental folly, as well as her critique of sentimental fiction and the problem of her own sex's obsession with it (228–32), the parallel to Catherine's coming-of-age journey is clear. The reading of sentimental fiction, represented in *Abbey* by the gothic novel, is the very thing standing in the way of reason, preventing Catherine's insight, just as Wollstonecraft describes sentimental fiction as preventative to women's cultivation of understanding.

Another important point to consider is by what means Wollstonecraft proposes to help women overcome the effects of sentimental fiction. "The best method", writes Wollstonecraft, "that can be adopted to correct a fondness for novels is to ridicule them" (231). Now, ridiculing novels is exactly what Henry Tilney does in *Abbey*, right before Catherine's delusions begin. Before Catherine arrives at the abbey, Henry asks Catherine if she is "prepared to encounter all the horrors" (149) of Northanger, and he continues feeding her stories inspired by the gothic novels that she loves (149–52). Following this, Catherine's delusions begin, and they are explained as being the "striking exemplification of what Henry had foretold" (161). Then, when the visions end, it is Henry who urges her to see reason and "Henry's address, short as it had been" (187), is described as opening Catherine's eyes to the follies of her obsession with the novel. Returning to Wollstonecraft, we find the following:

> […] if a judicious person, with some turn for humour, would read several [novels] to a young girl, and point out […] how foolishly and ridiculously they caricatured human nature, just opinions might be substituted instead of romantic sentiments. (231)

If we let Henry Tilney represent the judicious person, we can recognize that Henry telling Catherine gothic stories of the abbey, and being "amused" (152) while doing so, is quite similar to someone reading sentimental novels with a turn of humour to a young girl. Then, Catherine realizing the "extravagance of her late fancies" (187) marks a young woman's realization of "how foolishly and ridiculously" novels represent reality, indicating that Henry's ridicule of the gothic novel has been successful. Indeed, after awakening from her visions of romance, Catherine makes a promise to herself "of always judging and acting in future with the greatest good sense" (*Abbey* 188–89), and she, just as Wollstonecraft suggests she might, finally begins to substitute just opinion for romantic sentiments.

Catherine's acquisition of reason can also be demonstrated through the evolution of her understanding of virtue through reason. Throughout *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft maintains the importance of virtue and modesty, arguing that they are highly dependent on reason. She writes that women, if they are kept in ignorance, cannot be expected to understand virtue and resist temptation. Woman, "made by her education the slave of sensibility, is required, on the most trying occasions, to resist that sensibility" (156), and the only way in which she can do so is by understanding virtue itself. As such, it is crucial for her coming of age that woman not be governed by

sensibility, but rather understand virtue through reason in order to resist temptation. The connection between virtue and reason is prominent in *Abbey* as well, as Catherine's ability to discern between virtuous and immodest behaviour changes through the course of her introduction to the adult world. Early on in *Abbey*, Catherine takes part in a carriage drive because she is pestered to do so, most notably by Mr. Thorpe (60). Although not realized by Catherine at the time, the prospect of young ladies being driven about by young men is considered a "breach of proprietary" (101), and in the eyes of her guardians, Mr. and Mrs. Allen, Catherine taking part in the drive is an example of an improper relationship between men and women. According to Wollstonecraft, "the causes of female weakness […] branch out of […] want of chastity in men" (172), matching well Catherine's reluctance to go but in the end succumbing to Mr. Thorpe's pestering. That Catherine does agree to go is evidence of her current lack of reason. The absence of reasoning behind Catherine's decision is clear from her later statement that she would never have gone if she "had known it to be improper" (100). Furthermore, even though Catherine declines going on a second carriage-ride with Mr. Thorpe, this is not because she has realized the immodesty of it, but because she feels she would much rather spend time with the Tilneys. In fact, it is not until she is told so by Mr. and Mrs. Allen that Catherine finds the carriage-ride immodest, indicating that she, at this point, does not yet understand virtue herself. This is one telling example of Catherine's inability to reflect upon the virtuousness of her actions, and we are presented with a similar circumstance in another part of *Abbey*.

Before Catherine is taken to Northanger, she meets with Henry's brother, Captain Tilney, a man described as posing no admiration of her of any "dangerous kind" (125). The captain, however, does harbour dangerous admiration for someone else, and Catherine's friend Isabella, who is engaged to marry Catherine's brother, is soon enamoured with Captain Tilney. Despite Catherine being present while Isabella and Captain Tilney flirt with each other, and despite the fact that Catherine realizes that Isabella's "manner had been odd" (139), she is unable to draw the logical conclusion that her friend's intentions might not be altogether honourable. Instead, she insists that Isabella must be "unconsciously encouraging" the Captain, because "[t]o doubt her truth or good intentions was impossible" (139), which makes for a reasoning entirely governed by sentimentality. These two instances both occur before Catherine's awakening at the abbey, and they testify to Catherine's inability to use reason at this point in her journey. Additionally, they make a point of reason's connection to modesty,

since understanding modesty seems impossible for Catherine before she has acquired reason.

However, further along her journey, Catherine's attitude undergoes a change. When Catherine wakes up from her delusions at the abbey, her ignorance of immodesty is no more. Instead, when she receives a letter from Isabella, she is abhorred at the realization that her friend is a "vain coquette" (204) for having acted frivolously outside of her engagement to Catherine's brother, and she reacts with "strong indignation" (204). This time, unlike the indecency of the carriage drive, the immodesty of the situation is realized by Catherine herself, rather than someone else explaining it to her, as was the case with the carriage-ride, suggesting that the ability to understand virtue is indeed founded upon the reason which Catherine has recently acquired.

Additionally, at this part of *Abbey*, Austen deploys a vocabulary very similar to that of Wollstonecraft. The latter writes that when reason lacks and woman is tempted by man into vice, "the dreadful reckoning falls heavily on her own *weak head*" (157, my emphasis). When Austen describes the situation of Isabella and Captain Tilney, with whom Isabella has betrayed Catherine's brother, she has Henry Tilney explain that both parts are guilty of the same vices, but that they have not yet injured the Captain because "the chief difference is" that he has "a *stronger head*" (204, my emphasis). This may seem to imply a contempt for women in Henry Tilney, since he seems to believe that the Captain has a stronger mind than Isabella, but I am not convinced that this is the case. Instead, I propose that Henry's reasoning echoes that of Wollstonecraft, who also expresses that women in their current state are rendered weak by their unfortunate circumstances and that those tempted by unvirtuous men are indeed victims of having a "weak head" (Wollstonecraft 157). Just as Wollstonecraft wishes for women to claim reason, Henry wishes for Catherine to use her head (*Abbey* 186), and just as Wollstonecraft accuses women of having weak heads, Henry draws the conclusion that it is precisely because of her weaker head that Isabella is in trouble but the Captain is not. This makes Henry Tilney, once again, an advocate for the ideas that Wollstonecraft presents in *Vindication*. Further supporting this connection, Glock writes that Henry Tilney "often functions as the author's mouthpiece" (42). If Henry's vocabulary and ideas match those of Wollstonecraft's, and if Henry is a mouthpiece for Austen, this strengthens the notion that the ideas of Wollstonecraft and Austen are also a match.

Other than the aspects mentioned above, what stands in the way of Catherine's coming of age, is a fear of expressing her opinions. As mentioned in the beginning of

this essay, girls being told to hide their ideas and good sense in favour of pleasing a man does not sit well with the proto-feminist ideas of the enlightenment and works advocating this sentiment were called out for censure by Wollstonecraft (Moran 23). Indeed, one need not look far to locate contempt for this notion in *Abbey* as well, as it permeates the relationship between Catherine and Mr. Thorpe. At the onset of *Abbey*, when Catherine first meets Mr. Thorpe, as the latter points out the strengths and flaws of women passing by, Catherine's "female mind" is described by the narrator as "fearful of hazarding an opinion of its own in opposition to that of a self-assured man" (47), presumably because she is afraid that her disagreement might upset Mr. Thorpe. Now, as Wollstonecraft forcefully argues in *Vindication*, a mind which is not from an early age allowed to express and cultivate ideas is a mind that will not grow in either wit or reason (144–50), presenting a problem for the coming of age of womankind as well as the coming of age of *Abbey*'s heroine. Later, during the morning drive, Mr. Thorpe spends most of the time boasting about his equipage and he seems quite content talking *at* Catherine rather than treating her as an equally intelligent, reasonable conversation partner, as he talks almost exclusively about "himself and his own concerns" (64) and "the merits of his own equipage" despite Catherine's "ignorance of the subject" (63) and inability to keep up with him in conversation. This is a telling pattern of the nature of the dynamics between Catherine and Mr. Thorpe. Thorpe does not seem to be bothered by the fact that Catherine shows no signs of rational opinions of her own, seeing as he keeps pursuing her for marriage, and he is seemingly fine with an uneducated partner. This is, perhaps, as Moran alludes to, in order to polish his own ego, because "to prefer awe and distant regard is a form of male vanity" (Moran 24). There are numerous occasions where Mr Thorpe shows signs of this frowned-upon vanity, one of which can be found in a narrative comment about Thorpe's boasting of his equipage during the morning drive, which reads: "To go before, or beyond him was impossible" (63). Now, this could be read in a literal sense and, in that case, mean nothing more than it being impossible to go before or beyond Mr. Thorpe's carriage, but considering his boastfulness, Mr. Thorpe's 'equipage' is much more likely to be a metonymy for Mr. Thorpe himself. Coupled with the fact that Mr. Thorpe's carriage is described as going "by no means alarmingly fast" (62), a literal reading seems quite unlikely. Finally, towards the end of *Abbey*, the narrator confirms that Mr. Thorpe is a man driven by vanity (228), altogether forming quite the unflattering description of Mr. Thorpe's character. If we give that Mr. Thorpe is someone heavily afflicted by male

vanity, that he seems fine with Catherine's displaying no reason or independent thought, and the fact that Catherine is afraid to voice an opinion opposite to his, we end up with a fine contender for a representation of the man of whom Moran speaks, whom fathers might caution their daughters of displaying their good sense to, lest they provoke his jealousy and bruise his ego. Now what is to be thought of such a man? On this, the narrator's description of Thorpe provides us with some insight. Towards the end of the chapter of the morning drive, the narrator draws on Catherine's voice, describing Mr. Thorpe as not "altogether completely agreeable" (65). This idea is ramped up in the final words of the chapter, which read: "Thorpe himself was quite disagreeable" (67), suggesting that a man like this should be of no interest to Catherine.

Naturally, a man who is not a supporter of rationality in women is not a man to whom a woman undergoing a journey towards reason should attach herself, and thus, instead of having Catherine marry Mr. Thorpe, Austen's readers are presented with another option consisting of Henry Tilney. Henry Tilney, we shall see, represents a model of masculinity contrary to the one represented by Thorpe. If Mr. Thorpe represents the man Moran speaks of, to whom women cannot display their good sense, practice their rationality or cultivate their understandings, Henry Tilney represents the opposite and can instead be interpreted as an advocate for women's education, a question we recall as most important to Wollstonecraft's proto-feminist ideas. During Catherine's walk with the Tilneys, the narrator comments that a "woman especially, if she have [*sic*.] the misfortune of knowing any thing, should conceal it as well as she can" (106) and that ignorance and imbecility in a woman is highly desirable to most men. Problematic though it may seem, the comment reads as satire, dripping with sarcasm, which becomes clear in the episode that follows. What happens next is that Catherine is described as unaware of the advantages her ignorance brings her and because of this she asks questions to procure knowledge for herself. Here, Henry Tilney's response is most telling. Henry, unlike Mr. Thorpe, does not seem to prefer an ignorant conversational partner, directly contradicting the narrator's claim that ignorance is becoming in a woman. Henry instead endeavours to educate Catherine and he is described as "[d]elighted with her progress" (107).

Furthermore, Henry Tilney also states that Catherine cannot be expected to be of the same knowledge that he is, emphasizing that he had already started his studies at Oxford while Catherine was still "a good little girl working [her] sampler at home" (103). This comment brings to light the issue of early education and cultivation of ideas

which Wollstonecraft advocates in Chapter VI (144–50), where she is adamant that it is "unreasonable, as well as cruel, to upbraid them [women] with faults that can scarcely be avoided" (146), meaning that women are not to be blamed for the unfortunate circumstances that, at the moment, do not allow them to aptly practice reason. Henry's stance is very similar to Wollstonecraft's in that he does not mock Catherine, knowing that formal education was not available to her, excusing her lack of knowledge to that she was confined to her home, working her sampler, while he was sharpening his mind at Oxford.

Additionally, during Catherine's delusional escapades at Northanger, it is none other than Henry Tilney who acts as the catalyst that urges Catherine to see reason and lay her follies aside. "Consult your own understanding" (186), he beckons, and Catherine's eyes are described as thoroughly opened by Henry's address (187). Thus, Henry not only wishes for Catherine to claim reason, he is also a prominent force in her acquisition of it. Henry's support for reason and knowledge in both sexes goes well with Wollstonecraft, who writes that for virtue to prevail in society, men and women must be independent companions and "the virtues of both sexes" must be "founded on reason" (206), suggesting once more that women and men must be on an equal playing-field, directly contradicting any notion of women suppressing reason and appearing foolish to please the vanity of man.

In summary, a man like Mr. Thorpe, who is content with Catherine acting the fool, is not interested in a wife who is his equal. Therefore, he is not an ideal match for Catherine as a woman on a journey to reason. He is never even considered as a potential husband, which is clear from a conversation between Catherine and Isabella where the former states that she never "wished for any thing of the kind from him [Thorpe]" (137). Once more, the same idea is present in *Vindication*, where Wollstonecraft writes that a "man who can be contented to live with a pretty, useful companion, without a mind," has lost the satisfaction "of being beloved by one who could understand him" (114). A man like Tilney, on the other hand, who is overjoyed by Catherine's educational progress (107), and whom Catherine in the end does marry, doubtlessly makes for a much more suitable companion for a woman on her way to reason. Finally, the fact that the narrator refers to Henry Tilney as "the hero himself" (102) seems to suggest that this man is indeed the yin to our new, rational heroine's yang.

However, while Catherine is required to see reason to come of age, she does retain some of her sentimental nature. This aspect of *Abbey* might at first seem to

disagree with the proto-feminist notion of cultivating understanding, but one must also remember the proposed ambivalence between sense and sensibility (see Trott; Akkerman & Stuurman). Consider the following exchange, where the heroine, who is nearing the end of her coming of age journey, still does not embody a completely rational view of the world.

> Mrs. Morland endeavoured to impress on her daughter's mind the happiness of having such steady well-wishers as Mr. and Mrs. Allen, and the very little consideration which the neglect or unkindness of slight acquaintance like the Tilneys ought to have with her, while she could preserve the good opinion and affection of her earliest friends. There was a great deal of good sense in all this; but there are some situations of the human mind in which good sense has very little power; and Catherine's feelings contradicted almost every position her mother advanced. (Abbey 223)

In this scene, we can see that while the mother's attempt to console Catherine is based on "a great deal of good sense", sensibility has "very little power" on Catherine's mind. The rationality of Catherine's mother's reasoning is further emphasized by the choice of the modal 'ought', a signal of what is *likely* to happen and reasonable to expect. When Catherine's mother thinks of "the very little consideration which the neglect or unkindness of slight acquaintance like the Tilneys ought to have with her", she uses the modal 'ought'. This could be to signal the assumption that it is logically unlikely that Catherine should be so affected by the disregard of the Tilney's, in comparison to the effect of the "affection of her earliest friends", through whom her mother is trying to console her. Despite Catherine's mother's logical conclusion, however, the truth of the matter is quite the opposite. In fact, as has also been noted by Glock, Catherine is completely inconsolable until a couple of pages later, where her love interest Henry shows up and her feelings are reciprocated, going against the presumed notion that in order to grow up Catherine must cast aside sentiment in favour of sense. This seems to suggest, perhaps, that while rationality and sense are paramount to Catherine's coming of age, they will leave the subject utterly unhappy unless a sprinkle of sentiment is added, a point that might seem disagreeable to advocates of proto-feminism.

However, this is not as contradictory as it may seem. While Wollstonecraft does rally for women to claim reason, she also maintains that this is an unrealistically difficult task given that women thus far have not been allowed an arena for cultivating their ideas (144–50). Due to women's current lack of practice in cultivating thoughts and ideas, Wollstonecraft emphasizes that we cannot ridicule them for finding

happiness in something other than logic and reason, since women have thus far not been raised to see reason. Until women are taught to "exercise their understandings," Wollstonecraft allows that they "must find their enjoyments, their happiness, in pleasure" (148). Thus, while Wollstonecraft indeed argues that women must claim reason, she also advocates that women are not to be satirized because they have not yet done so. That Catherine's education and possibility for cultivating ideas have both been scant is evident from her walk with the Tilney siblings, where she, in stark contrast to the Tilneys' well-versed conversation, is described as "heartily ashamed of her ignorance" (106). The lacking quality of Catherine's education is emphasized further by the fact that she at the beginning of *Abbey* shows a great dislike for "books of information" (17), as well as by Henry Tilney, who, as already mentioned, excuses Catherine's lack of knowledge due to the fact that he himself had already started his studies at Oxford while Catherine was still "a good little girl working [her] sampler at home" (103). With Catherine's self-proclaimed ignorance, dislike of educational books and lack of formal education put together, the implication that follows is that Catherine, like most women at the time, has not had an upbringing that would foster a use of reason. Given this, a completely rational Catherine at the end of *Abbey* would not only be unrealistic, but also directly contradict Wollstonecraft's point about women in their currently disadvantaged state being unable to wholeheartedly claim reason for themselves.

These ambivalent ideas regarding sense and sensibility are summarized by Trott, who, as the reader might recall, describes 'enlightenment feminism' as both "hostile and sympathetic to the cultivation of sentiment" (570). Returning once more to the end of *Abbey*, where "Catherine's feelings contradicted almost every position her mother advanced" (223), the connection is clear. If Catherine's feelings represent sentiment and her mother's advance rationality then the contradiction between the two represents the very ambivalence regarding the cultivation of sentiment to which Trott is referring. The narrator's comment, "There was a great deal of good sense in all this; but there are some situations of the human mind in which good sense has very little power" (223), perfectly captures this ambivalence. One may once again look to Wollstonecraft, who indeed expresses that women, in their current position, "[r]endered gay and giddy by the whole tenor of their lives", cannot be blamed if reason has "a lugubrious appearance to them" (148). Thus, that Catherine at the end of *Abbey* is not entirely governed by reason is not contradictory to Wollstonecraft's proto-feminist

ideas. On the contrary, the fact that Catherine must see reason to come of age, while remaining hampered by feelings, makes for a perfect analogy for the changes women must undertake on their journey to reason.

In summary, the female *bildung* in *Northanger Abbey* and the female emancipation argued for in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* clearly follow the same trajectory. Catherine Morland, at the start of her journey, is entirely governed by sentiment, dislikes history books and has a fondness of novels, positing a good example of the state of womankind Wollstonecraft describes in *Vindication*. Catherine is unable to practice reason, and because of this she is also unable to understand, by herself, what is virtuous and what is not. For Catherine to mature, it is paramount that she learns to rely on reason rather than sentiment, just as Wollstonecraft upholds that women must learn to rely on reason in order to become equal to men – but also to become truly virtuous. Wollstonecraft's scathing criticism of sentimental fiction is present in *Northanger Abbey* as well, as is the emphasis on the dangers of women's dislike of history books, or books of information. The fact that Austen even deploys the same vocabulary as Wollstonecraft when explaining the effects of unvirtuous behaviour is another convincing argument for the unanimity of the two. From this, it is clear that the two authors are part of the same cultural environment and that they both contribute to the emerging discourse of female *bildung*. Finally, from the finale of *Northanger Abbey* it is evident that Catherine has indeed taken a step from sensibility to sense, but she is still not entirely free from sentimental influences. While at first glance contradictory to a proto-feminist journey towards reason, the sentimentality that remains in Catherine is both realistic and representative of the problems a woman struggling for independence might face, as presented in *Vindication*. From these examples it is not difficult to see how Austen deploys Wollstonecraft's proto-feminist ideas in order to promote a, at the time, perhaps revolutionary idea about the necessity and conditions of female *bildung*. In the end, the female *bildung* that Austen advocates is sharp and coherent with Wollstonecraft's wish for female emancipation, affirming what Chesterton wrote about Austen in 1913, how "it was precious little of truth that was protected from her" (47).

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