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"Motionless Wonder": Contemplating Gothic Sublimity in /Northanger Abbey/*

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In recent decades, many critics have placed Austen's novels in fruitful dialogue with the work of her Romantic contemporaries.[1] This new direction in Austen studies challenges the earlier view of Austen as a wry rationalist raising an arch eyebrow at the excesses of Romantic aesthetics. One key concept for Romantic aesthetics is the sublime, defined most dramatically by Edmund Burke as an experience of terrified awe triggered by intimations of divine mystery and power. In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757, revised 1759), Burke presents the sublime experience as one of humility; for Burke it involves recognition of one's finitude and imperfection in contrast to divine omnipotence. There is a similar recognition of human fallibility in Austen's *Northanger Abbey* when Catherine Morland finds herself "humbled to the dust" (173) as a result of her soaring imagination. Austen penned the first draft of *Northanger Abbey*, simply titled *Susan*, in the 1790s, a time when women writers were experimenting with and modifying the ideas of Burke, as Romanticists Jacqueline Labbe and Anne Janowitz have shown in studies of the poets Charlotte Smith and Anna Laetitia Barbauld.[2] This essay will examine Austen in the company of her Romantic contemporaries, as a novelist who articulated the sublime experience in her own words, and deployed it to her own literary ends.

In *Northanger Abbey* Jane Austen does satirize excessive aspects of the gothic sublime arising from Burke's *Enquiry*, but she also reveals her astute awareness of an expanded definition of sublimity operating within the works of her female contemporaries. This more flexible and dynamic aesthetic was labeled "the contemplative sublime" by early nineteenth-century abolitionist and theorist Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck (whose ideas will be discussed below), and it arose from the writing of Joanna Baillie and Ann Radcliffe, among others. Gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe provides glimpses of contemplative sublimity as she repeatedly represents experiences of reverential wonder within her third novel, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791). Jane Austen was cognizant of this Radcliffean aesthetic, referring to *The Romance of the Forest* in *Emma* (1815) and to *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) in the gothic parody *Northanger Abbey* (1818). Radcliffe's construction of contemplative sublimity enabled Austen, in *Northanger Abbey* specifically, both to temper the excesses of the Burkean sublime, through playful Horatian satire, and to envision the possibilities of a more awakening aesthetic. Building on Edmund Burke's definition of the sublime as an experience of terror followed by tranquility—a fear of personal harm or death followed by the realization that one is actually safe—both Radcliffe and Austen acknowledge the reality of death within their narratives through shared moments of communal, contemplative peace. For their protagonists Adeline de Montalt and Catherine Morland, these experiences of contemplative sublimity, within both *The Romance of the Forest* and *Northanger Abbey*, generate a mournful social consciousness that supports enduring bonds of friendship.

[Picture here] Tintern Abbey, from William Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye* (1782). Courtesy of the Huntington Library.

In *Northanger Abbey* Catherine Morland's experiences echo those of Adeline de Montalt, the heroine of Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*. The isolated Adeline moves through experiences of Burkean terror and horror, in the ruined Abbey of St. Clair and then in the lecherous Marquis de

Montalt's pleasure villa, before discovering shared, restorative moments of contemplative sublimity in the Alps. In her introduction to the Broadview edition of *Northanger Abbey*, Claire Grogan rightly argues, "Although the heroine Catherine is preoccupied by her reading of Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, any reader well versed in the Gothic quickly perceives that Austen borrows more liberally from Radcliffe's . . . *Romance of the Forest*" (18). What Grogan does not refer to explicitly is Austen's borrowing from Radcliffean definitions of sublimity.

In volume one of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's narrator describes Catherine's first impressions of Bath in terms that parallel Adeline's first impressions of the Alps in *The Romance of the Forest*. Adeline loves to walk alone in the mountains: "She frequently took a volume of Shakespear [sic] or Milton, and, having gained some wild eminence, would seat herself beneath the pines, whose low murmurs soothed her heart, and conspired with the visions of the poet to lull her to forgetfulness of grief" (261). From this prospect, the sight of "the sun sinking amid a crimson glow" (261) fills Adeline with "still rapture" (261). Radcliffe's own journal entry for October 9, 1811, similarly refers to a sunset over the sea as "benevolent, sublime—powerful, yet silent in its power—progressive, and certain in its end, steadfast and full of a sublime repose; the scene itself spoke of its CREATOR" (qtd. in Talfourd lxxxii).

In *The Romance of the Forest* Radcliffe illustrates possibilities for shared experiences of such "sublime repose" when the pastor La Luc takes Adeline on a journey to the Glacier of Montanvert. After travelling for hours they see a ruined castle, and the narrator remarks that "the edifice invited curiosity and the shades repose" (264). As they sit near the ruin, Adeline exclaims, "those stupendous mountains, the gloomy grandeur of these woods, together with that monument of faded glory on which the hand of time is so emphatically impressed, diffuse a sacred enthusiasm over the mind, and awaken sensations truly sublime" (264). When the group climbs even higher, to the foot of the glacier itself, La Luc states, "the view of these objects . . . lift[s] the soul to their Great Author, and we contemplate with a feeling almost too vast for humanity—the sublimity of his nature in the grandeur of his works" (265).

Contrary to Radcliffe's more reverential depiction of "sublime repose" in terms of natural theology, in *Northanger Abbey* Jane Austen initially inflects the idea of mountaintop serenity with humor. A parodic effect of deliberate bathos is created when the narrator applies the elevated diction of natural sublimity to the geography of a Bath ballroom. Judith Wilt, in *Ghosts of the Gothic*, notes that "Austen begins the Bath chapters with a satiric reference" (138) to gothic danger, but Wilt does not connect the idea of Radcliffean danger to its original roots in the Burkean sublime. Burke claims that sublime terror depends on "everything sudden and unexpected, [wherein] we are apt to start; that is, we have a perception of danger" (83). One source of such danger for Burke is the view downwards from a geographical height or prospect. He writes, "we are more struck by looking down from a precipice than, at looking up at an object of equal height" (72), inviting the reader to imagine the breathtaking view from atop a high mountain cliff. In her recent study of landscape aesthetics in Austen, Barbara Britton Wenner suggests that, "the choice of Bath for the setting of *Northanger Abbey* works well for a landscape of prospects" (43), referring to the natural, outdoor landscapes of both Beechen Cliff and Clifton. Building on Wenner's observation regarding prospects in *Northanger Abbey*, this article will connect Austen's narrative description of prospect views to the Radcliffean concept of "sublime repose" and examine Austen's satirical application of mountaintop language to a view /indoors/, at the top of a Bath ballroom, a height aligning geographical and marital "prospects."

Austen deploys strong language of sublimity when Catherine first enters the Bath ballroom. Catherine is filled with "utter amazement" (21) at the multitude of guests, for example, thus echoing La Luc's claim in *The Romance of the Forest* that we become "lost in astonishment and awe" (275) when contemplating the multitude of the stars. In imitation of La Luc and Adeline's ascent to a sublime glacier, Catherine and her chaperone Mrs. Allen climb with "unwearied diligence" to a high prospect point at the top of the ballroom, from which Catherine can gaze with "a comprehensive view of all the company beneath her, and all of the dangers of her late passage through them" (21). Here Catherine ironically

echoes the actions of Radcliffe's heroine Adeline, who escapes the clutches of the Marquis de Montalt to brave difficulty and fatigue and finally enjoy the serenity of alpine eminences. In a parodic parallel, Austen's heroine Catherine escapes the confining boredom of Fullerton to climb to the height of a Bath ballroom and "enjoy the repose of the eminence" (21) she has gained.

Through descriptions of Catherine's aesthetic repose, delight, and wonder, Austen engages with eighteenth-century discourse regarding the sublime. Intellectual historian Philip Fisher distinguishes philosophical enquiries prompted by wonder and curiosity from religious beliefs triggered by experiences of sublime terror,[3] but eighteenth-century essayists combined the two. In 1701, John Dennis, for example, defined sublime poetry as that which expresses enthusiastic, or spiritual, passions of terror, joy, and wonder. In his *Philosophical Enquiry* Burke combines philosophy and religion, wonder and terror, when, in his additional 1759 section on "Power," he cites Psalm 139:14—"I am fearfully and *wonderfully* made" (KJV, my italics)—as an example of sublimity. Wonder, like astonishment, is tied to sublimity through the concept of surprise, and in Austen's narrative the young, inexperienced Catherine is full of wonder during her time at Bath. This capacity for wonder in Catherine will get her into trouble later in the novel, but her openness to new perceptions is also a gift. Jocelyn Harris argues that Catherine's "humility, and eager readiness to learn are propitious" (14). Her humility and wonder cause her to see the sublime in the everyday, a propensity that has both disadvantages *and* advantages.

The gender-inclusive, contemplative sublime of wonder found in late eighteenth-century women's writing shares parallels with the early work of Immanuel Kant. Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1763) creates a gender inclusivity lacking in Burke's singular masculine category. It does so by presenting the "quiet wonder" (47) of the "noble sublime" (48) as one of three types of sublimity, allowing for greater multiplicity and flexibility within and between his aesthetic categories. Furthermore, Kant finds the noble sublime, in distinction from the terrible sublime and splendid sublime, not in solitude but in social bonds: "Friendship has mainly the character of the sublime, but love between the sexes, that of the beautiful. Yet tenderness and deep esteem give the latter a certain sublimity" (52).

Political philosopher Susan Meld Shell emphasizes the keen female audience of Kant's *Observations* from the moment of the text's initial publication, arguing that "his work was as likely to be found in 'the dressing rooms of ladies' as in the 'studies of the learned'" (457). Shell makes her most trenchant claims for the nascent feminist potential of the *Observations* when she considers the reciprocity of the sublime and the beautiful in Kantian aesthetics and the transcendence of gender categories in Kantian ethics:

> As we move from the aesthetic to the moral, however, this reciprocal relation between beauty and sublimity (or natural and spiritual life) becomes peculiarly "entangled," for virtue alone is truly noble, that is, both sublime and moral in the highest sense. . . . And yet, ethical qualities that are beautiful (such as sympathy and complaisance) "harmonize" with virtue by promoting the same end, and may thus be regarded as noble, as it were, by "adoption" (*adoptirt*). (457)

Despite her interest in Kantian virtue as a category transcending binaries of (masculine) sublimity and (feminine) beauty, Shell ultimately concludes that for Kant "women's beauty courts sublimity only by verging on the monstrous" (466). This conclusion partly results from her inattention to Kant's reflections on the sublime sympathetic virtue of female friendship.

In a section entitled "Of the Distinction of the Beautiful and the Sublime in the Interrelations of the Two Sexes," Kant goes so far as to assert that it is possible for a woman to have a "sublime disposition" and that "persons of this temperament also have a heart for friendship, which in a woman can never be valued highly enough" (86). Early feminist thinker Mary Wollstonecraft knew the works of Kant and builds on his argument: "Friendship is a serious affection: the most sublime of all affections, because it is founded on principle, and cemented by time" (5: 142). For late eighteenth-century women writers such as Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, and Austen, then, friendship can bring about the quiet wonder of sublime repose through its lasting stability.

The diction of *Northanger Abbey* reveals Jane Austen's awareness of conceptual links between contemplative sublimity, still wonder, and social consciousness within late eighteenth-century philosophical discourse. Austen initially parodies the language of wonder, however, by applying it first not to the noble ideal of sublime friendship but instead to the worldly, social dynamics of courtship in Bath. The narrator introduces the concept of wonder with a series of negative statements, informing us that as Catherine moved about the ballroom in Bath, "she was now seen by many young men who had not been near her before. Not one, however, started with rapturous wonder on beholding her, no whisper of eager inquiry ran round the room, nor was she once called a divinity by any body" (23). Later on, when Catherine hears of Isabella Thorpe's engagement to her brother, the narrator uses the word "wonder" comically again, remarking, "Never had Catherine listened to any thing so full of interest, wonder, and joy" (117). This depiction of Catherine's wonder at an engagement resonates with the comic sublimity at the end of *Sense and Sensibility* as Edward Ferrars is "half stupefied between the wonder, the horror, and the joy" (365) of his deliverance from marriage to Lucy Steele. In *Northanger Abbey*, while Catherine is still at Bath, her experience of wonder is mixed with joy but, unlike Edward Ferrars's, does not yet verge on horror; that stage will not come until after her arrival at the gothic edifice from which the novel takes its title, Northanger Abbey itself.

The idea of vastness or infinity formed the bridge from sublime landscapes to sublime architecture in late eighteenth-century British aesthetics. Just as gazing at the stars causes one to contemplate the infinite expanse of the universe, so, Burke argues, some buildings convey what he termed the "artificial infinite." Burke explains:

> Let us set before our eyes a colonnade of uniform pillars set in a right line; let us take our stand, in such a manner that the eye may shoot along this colonnade. . . . [T]he rays from the first round pillar will cause in the eye a vibration of that species; an image of the pillar itself. The pillar immediately succeeding increases it; that which follows renews and enforces the impression; each in its order as it succeeds, until the eye long exercised in one particular way cannot lose that object immediately; and being violently roused by this continued agitation, it presents the mind with a grand and sublime conception. (141)

Playwright Joanna Baillie applied the idea of artificial vastness to the stage in 1812, writing that "I am certain that by a judicious use of light and scenery, an artificial magnitude may be given to a stage of moderate size that would, to the eye, as far as distance in perspective is concerned, have an effect almost equal to any thing that can be produced on a larger stage" (378). In *The Romance of the Forest*, Radcliffe, like Baillie, uses a description of lighting to create a sublime effect indoors. When Adeline first approaches the ruined Abbey of St. Clair at night, the servant Peter strikes a flame so that they may enter with lighted sticks in their hands:

> The partial gleams thrown across the fabric seemed to make its desolation more solemn, while the obscurity of the greater part of the pile heightened its sublimity, and led fancy on to scenes of horror. Adeline, who had remained in silence now uttered an exclamation of mingled admiration and fear. A kind of pleasing dread thrilled her bosom and filled her soul. (19)

Chloe Chard argues that not only does this passage allude to the Burkean idea of obscurity as a source of fear but also to the way that sublimity is "produced by dramatic contrasts between light and shade" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 372 n.18), a decidedly Baillian idea.

Like Joanna Baillie, Jane Austen was concerned that the avid readers of ghost stories might let their imaginations become carried away to the point of confusing Gothic flights of fancy with modern, prosaic reality.[4] The works of Baillie and Austen register a general societal concern over the distorting effects of women's readerly interest in tales of romance. This cultural anxiety has a long history reflected in even earlier novels, such as Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752). Like Lennox's comic heroine Arabella, Austen's bumbling heroine Catherine at times misinterprets the real world due to her obsession with romantic adventure tales. Catherine reads gothic novels and then travels to Northanger Abbey, a medieval convent that has been converted into the private home of her friends the Tilneys, and begins to imagine herself entrapped in a world of mysterious plots and subterfuge. Through free indirect discourse, Austen captures Catherine's enthusiasm for the potential mysteries of Gothic architecture: "Northanger Abbey!—These were thrilling words, and wound up Catherine's feelings to the highest point of extasy" (140). One of Austen's favorite moralists, Samuel Johnson, defined "ecstasy," with caution, as "excessive joy; rapture"; "enthusiasm; excessive elevation of mind"; and finally as "madness; distraction." The influence of Johnson on Austen is clear: Catherine's ecstatic rapture over the gothic is certainly excessive and does lead her into irrational errors of judgment.

After Catherine has listened to Henry Tilney's teasing narrative of a young lady's gothic adventures within Northanger Abbey, she expects, with "solemn awe" (161) to see "massy walls . . . , rising" towards the sky. Austen invites readers to imagine a structure like that named in William Wordsworth's "Lines Written a few Miles above Tintern Abbey" (1798). Even before its appearance in the title of Wordsworth's lyrical ballad, Tintern Abbey drew widespread public attention. As Deborah Kennedy notes, "Since the dissolution of Roman Catholic monasteries in Britain in the 1530s, this Cistercian Abbey, like so many others, 'mouldered quietly away,' until the late eighteenth-century taste for gothic ruins brought frequent visitors" (79). Tintern Abbey was also depicted by artists; an engraving of the ruin serves as the frontispiece for *A Walk through Wales, in August 1797, by the Revd. Richard Warner of Bath*. Austen acknowledges the ruin's aesthetic appeal in *Mansfield Park*, where Fanny Price has a transparency of Tintern Abbey in the window of the east room.

[Picture inserted here]"Tintern Abbey, Monmouthshire" by Thomas Girtin, from Warner's *A Walk Through Wales* (1798). Courtesy of the Huntington Library.

Rather than sublimity, when Catherine first sees the prosaic, modernized home of the Tilneys, essentially a highly renovated abbey, Austen creates an effect of bathos. Catherine is disappointed by the actual building's tidy regularity, pragmatic dimensions, and "low" aspect. Determined, however, to find romance and mystery in the abbey, she turns to its furniture and becomes transfixed with "motionless wonder" (163) while gazing on "'[a]n immense heavy chest'" (163), which holds no mystery but only "a white cotton counterpane, properly folded, reposing at one end" (164). Austen foreshadows Catherine's next flight of fancy when she begins to note the "spaciousness" (166) or vastness of the rooms inside the abbey. It is now night, and Catherine hears the sounds of a thunderstorm, an allusion to Burke's statement that "the noise of raging storms . . . awakes a great and aweful sensation in the mind" (82). In *The Romance of the Forest* Radcliffe also uses this idea, introducing her villain, the Marquis de Montalt, "one stormy night" (85) at the Abbey of St. Clair when "nothing was to be seen through the darkness of night—nothing heard but the howlings of the storm" (91). Austen plays with this construction of a "raging storm" as her narrator observes,

> it blew and rained violently. Catherine, as she crossed the hall, listened to the tempest with sensations of awe; and, when she heard it rage round a corner of the

> ancient building and close with sudden fury a distant door, felt for the first time she was really in an Abbey.—Yes, these were characteristic sounds;—they brought to her recollection a countless variety of dreadful situations and horrid scenes, which such buildings had witnessed, and such storms ushered in. (166-67)

Catherine's eye is then "struck by the appearance of a high, old-fashioned black cabinet" (168), and she moves from awe to paralysis, at first filled with "breathless wonder" (168), but then, after she accidentally snuffs out her own candle, becoming "motionless with horror" (170), stuck in a more visceral fear.

Ann Radcliffe herself questioned the value of such frozen horror. In her "Essay on the Supernatural in Poetry" (first written in 1802/03),[5] Radcliffe has her character Mr. W— state:

> They must be men of very cold imaginations . . . with whom certainty is more terrible than surmise. Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul and *awakens* the faculties to a high degree of *life*; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one. (149)

Radcliffe is very gracious with Burke here, as he does in fact conflate horror and terror when he describes the apprehension of sublimity as "a state of much sobriety, impressed with a sense of awe, in a sort of tranquility shadowed with horror" (34) and later refers to "a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquility tinged with terror; which as it belongs to self-preservation is one of the strongest of all passions. Its object is the sublime" (136). It is very difficult to separate horror from terror in Burke's vocabulary. Radcliffe, on the other hand, in *The Romance of the Forest*, has her character Adeline move away from self-preservational horror, through awed terror, towards the contemplative sublimity of the Alps.

In both *The Romance of the Forest* and *Northanger Abbey* a contemplative sublime of mournful social consciousness arises when characters share their grief in a space tinged with the memory of a lost loved one. In *The Romance of the Forest* we are told that "early in youth La Luc lost a wife" and that "calamity taught him to feel with peculiar sympathy the distresses of others" (245). He seeks recovery in solitude, and that solitude paradoxically contributes to his increased social consciousness. "Often he retired to the deep solitude of the mountains, and amid their solemn and tremendous scenery would brood over the remembrance of times past, and resign himself to the luxury of grief" (246). Upon his return, "his manners were more than usually benevolent" (246) as he reaches out in service to the community of Lelencourt. When Adeline joins La Luc on the trip to the glacier, she notices a tear in his eye as he looks at his daughter Clara, who no doubt resembles her late mother after whom she is named. La Luc next takes his friend M. Verneuil on a walk through the mountains to an urn that bears the inscription "To the Memory of Clara La Luc, this urn is erected on the spot which she loved, in testimony of the affections of a husband" (274). When Verneuil feels awkward at his intrusion, La Luc reassures him: "You will consider it as a mark of my esteem that I have brought you to this spot. It is never prophaned by the presence of the unfeeling" (274).

Likewise, in *Northanger Abbey*, Eleanor Tilney takes Catherine to a spot marked by the memory of her mother. The narrator describes this space as a "narrow winding path through a thick grove of old Scotch firs" (179). Catherine is "struck by its gloomy aspect" (179), which causes her "to talk with easy gaiety of the delightful melancholy which such a grove inspired" (179). Though the inappropriateness of Catherine's "easy gaiety" is satirized, in the midst of a generally comic and ironic novel Austen treats Eleanor's grief with sympathy. Claire Grogan dismisses Eleanor too quickly, arguing that "she exhibits little independent thought or action . . . [and] is very much a puppet in the patriarchal system" (22); however, Eleanor's steadfast loyalty to walking in a spot that preserves her mother's memory has decidedly matriarchal overtones. Furthermore, Eleanor's loyal friendship with Catherine sets her apart from the false Isabella. The sincere and reciprocal friendship between Eleanor and Catherine in

Northanger Abbey takes Radcliffean repose to a new level. Unlike Radcliffe, Austen is able to envision a true friendship of equity and respect between two women. As Claudia Johnson has observed, this level of female friendship is never fully envisioned by Radcliffe in *The Romance of the Forest*.[6] Radcliffe reserves this type of friendship for relationships between men, such as La Luc and Verneuil, who discuss theology and philosophy in mountainous settings. Eleanor Tilney's strong friendship with Catherine is doubly remarkable due to its basis in philosophical discussions of landscape aesthetics. Their relationship begins with Eleanor's inclusion of Catherine in the walk to Beechen Cliff, continues with Eleanor's attention to the beauty of hyacinths, which comforts Catherine after her fearful night in the abbey, and culminates with Eleanor's shared memories of her mother during their walk through the fir grove, a shared experience of contemplative sublimity.

Early in the narrative, Eleanor Tilney's reading of essayists like David Hume suggests her disposition toward philosophical contemplation. In his essay "On the Standard of Taste" Hume suggests that aesthetic perceptions can shift according to a spectator's age and experience, and Eleanor's reflections on the grove of old Scotch firs support this theory. Eleanor responds to Catherine's enthusiasm by stating, "'I am particularly fond of this spot. . . . It was my mother's favourite walk. . . . I used to walk here so often with her! . . . though I never loved it then, as I have loved it since. At that time indeed I used to wonder at her choice. But her memory endears it now" (179). The mention of Eleanor's late mother combines with the gloominess of the grove to increase the somber quality of the spot and causes Catherine to comment on the affliction that Mrs. Tilney's death must have been to the family. This intimate interaction is sensitively depicted in the 2007 television adaptation of *Northanger Abbey*.

[17 second video inserted here]

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This version depicts the grove as more refreshingly green than "gloomy," but the stately height of the trees, extending up beyond the top of the screen, lends the scene an aspect of sublimity. The shift from a panoramic landscape view to a close-up shot of Catherine and Eleanor reflects the increasing intimacy between the two friends. Austen does move again to satirize Catherine's unbridled imagination, which causes her to view General Tilney as a gothic villain who may have caused his wife's death, but this satire does not detract from Austen's straightforward depiction of a daughter sharing her deep grief over the loss of her mother. The reader senses that Eleanor shows Catherine this spot because she is growing closer to Catherine, becoming freer to share her vulnerability, loss, and loneliness with her friend. Kant argues that those sensitive to "quiet wonder" will see "the lonely moon" and experience "high feelings of friendship, of disdain for the world, of eternity" (47). In the gloomy fir grove Catherine's friendship with Eleanor matures as the reference to Mrs. Tilney points both young women towards the reality of death and the concept of eternity.

The sublime repose of this moment not only draws on the aesthetics of Radcliffe, and perhaps Kant, but also comes very close to early nineteenth-century theorist Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck's idea of "contemplative sublimity" as articulated in her *Theory on the Classification of Beauty and Deformity* (1815).[7] Schimmelpenninck was born Mary Anne Galton, the eldest child of Samuel Galton, a Birmingham Quaker. Her father was also a member of the Lunar Society, a scientific intellectual network that included William Herschel and James Watt. Though she left the Quakers to become a Methodist and then a Moravian, moving away from her Birmingham roots, Schimmelpenninck's emphasis on the serenity of the contemplative sublime is in harmony with Quaker spiritual values, and her penchant for precise categorization reflects the world of scientific discourse within which she was raised. Like Radcliffe, Schimmelpenninck draws a clear distinction between the deformity of the "horrible" and the beauty of the "terrible," but she then also adds three more categories of beauty: the contemplative sublime, the sentimental, and the sprightly. She argues that a picturesque landscape will take on the characteristics of contemplative sublimity—such as dignity and veneration—when associated with suffering or loss in the past. While defining the contemplative sublime, Schimmelpenninck evokes that

"which defies all human curiosity," such as "ideas of . . . time, eternity, space, death" (26), thoughts of which are prompted by "the religious gloom of an oaken grove, or the aisles of a Gothic cathedral" (256).

In Austen's *Northanger Abbey* both the gloomy grove of Scotch firs and the actual Gothic abbey itself fit Schimmelpenninck's definition of contemplative sublimity. When Catherine first views the abbey from the outside, in the daytime, she is

> struck . . . , beyond her expectation, by the grandeur of the Abbey, as she saw it for the first time from the lawn. The whole building enclosed a large court; and two sides of the quadrangle, rich in Gothic ornaments, stood forward for admiration. The remainder was shut off by knolls of old trees, or luxuriant plantations, and the steep woody hills rising behind to give it shelter, were beautiful even in the leafless month of March. Catherine had seen nothing to compare with it; and her feelings of delight were so strong, that without waiting for any better authority, she boldly burst forth in wonder and praise. (177-78)

Though she has satirized gothic horror and parodied gothic romance, Austen grants Catherine a degree of correct judgment regarding the aesthetics of Gothic architecture. After all, according to Henry Austen's "Biographical Notice," Austen was "enamoured of Gilpin on the picturesque" (*NA* 7), and the Rev. William Gilpin was enamoured of medieval abbeys, as illustrated by his own artistic tributes to Tintern Abbey.

[Picture inserted here] Tintern Abbey, from William Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye* (1782). Courtesy of the Huntington Library.

As well as echoing Gilpin's landscape aesthetics—by setting her abbey amidst woody hills, sloping lawns, and old trees—Austen also follows the taste of Bluestocking Elizabeth Carter. On discovering that her young friend Henrietta Pultney was travelling "across the Tweed" into Scotland, Carter wrote to her, "I hope you will visit every Monument of Antiquity in your way & give me a full Description of what you see—A pretty Comission to a young Lady who is travelling over Hill & Dale to a race Ball, to write descriptions of the old Gothic Abbies & ruined Cathedrals" (165). In this letter, Carter almost pleads with Henrietta Pultney to pull her attention away from the excitement of balls just long enough to notice the contemplative sublimity of a Gothic abbey.

Within Austen's parody of the gothic novel, with all its satire of Burkean horror, there is a strong encouragement of readers caught in the hubbub of Bath-like distractions to find quiet moments of sublime repose, whether in a shady grove of old trees or in the stillness of a Gothic cathedral. For Austen, as for Carter, Radcliffe, and Schimmelpenninck, the sharing of such quiet wonder in contemplative sublimity can form social bonds upon which true, lasting friendships may be built. In Austen's narrative, Catherine's affective ties with Henry Tilney, as well as with his sister Eleanor, are developed alongside her maturing discernment of sublimity, until she is caught up in a different kind of wonder, "wrapt in the contemplation of her own unutterable happiness" (243) as she moves towards the sociable "extasies" (243) of the novel's conclusion.

Notes

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1. Some early twenty-first century examples of work in this area include Clara Tuite's *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon* (2002), William Deresiewicz's *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets* (2004), and Barbara Britton Wenner's *Prospect and Refuge in the Landscape of Jane Austen* (2006).

2. Jacqueline Labbe's *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, Poetry, and the Culture of Gender* (2003) considers Smith's use of the term "sublime" in her long, narrative poems *The Emigrants* and *Beachy Head*; Anne Janowitz's article "Response: Chandler's 'Vehicular' Hypothesis at Work" (2008) carefully analyzes the dynamic of exalted expansion and subsequent acknowledgment of finitude in Barbauld's poem "A Summer Evening's Meditation."

3. See Fisher's analysis of Cartesian wonder and curiosity (48).

4. Baillie's tragedy *Orra* (1812) centers around a heroine who, after being trapped in a medieval castle by the villain, actually becomes insane and loses her ability to distinguish between her gothic hallucinations of spirits and the friends and family physically present around her. Austen, of course, presents a comic rather than a tragic version of such a cautionary tale against the dangers of gothic fancy, but there are still strong parallels between the two texts. See also Baillie's poem "An Address to the Night: A Fearful Mind" (1790).

5. Radcliffe wrote this essay as the introduction to her posthumously published novel *Gaston de Blondville, or the Court of Henry III;* in his memoir attached to the novel, upon its eventual publication in 1826, Thomas Talfourd records Radcliffe's completion of *Gaston* in the winter of 1802 (89). In his excellent critical biography *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (1999), Rictor Norton argues that parts of the "Essay" "were written *long after* 1802/03 . . . sometime between 1812 and 1815" (195). Norton's alternate dates still place the genesis of Radcliffe's ideas in the time period leading up to *Northanger Abbey's* own eventual publication.

6. In *Equivocal Beings*, Claudia Johnson argues that in *The Romance of the Forest* "sociable affections" (88) only exist between members of the opposite sex. La Luc's friendship with Verneuil troubles Johnson's claim. Radcliffe does allow for strong social affections within a friendship between two men. She also describes her heroine Adeline spending time with La Luc's daughter Clara; but Johnson is right in pointing out that their friendship lacks depth and a degree of equality.

7. Jacqueline Labbe suggests that Schimmelpenninck's contemplative sublime "appears to be a version of Kant" (*Romantic Visualities* 50). Schimmelpenninck's reflections on the contemplative sublime do overlap with Kant's early thoughts on the noble sublime, within which, as we have seen, Kant includes the sublimity of female friendship. Schimmelpenninck, however, adds the idea of dauntless action to the quiet wonder, peace, and friendship of Kant's noble sublime. She constructs the feminine fortitude key to such action not as an individual stoicism but as a dauntlessness that arises from the bonds of mournful, spiritual, community similar to those depicted in *The Romance of the Forest* and *Northanger Abbey*.

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