

Reading Clearly: Jane Austen's Heroines' Ability to Read

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The novels *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma*, written by Jane Austen in the early 19th century, both have heroines' who are handicapped in their ability to read other people. Austen communicates to her readers the nature of her dissimilar heroines through their reading capabilities or lack thereof. Jane Austen demands careful attention to detail by the readers in her novels. The fact that her heroines are readers themselves allows for a survey of how the young women presented in both books reveal themselves through the development of their reading proficiency. What message is Jane Austen presenting as she implies the importance of knowledge and deductive reasoning skills on the part of her heroines'? I will use close reading as well as the literary analysis of secondary sources in order to explain what has led me to an understanding of Jane Austen's work and the importance of reading within her texts. Austen displays themes and modalities throughout the two novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma*, which invoke an understanding of the importance of one's reading expertise. A heroine's ability to read novels informs her ability to interpret the actions of others and aid her in finding her ultimate success.

Catherine Golden has steered me in breaking down the application of my thesis to the two works which I read closely. In her work *Images of the Woman Reader in Victorian British and American Fiction* Golden writes,

Before Flaubert and Braddon, Austen offers much discussion of women's reading in her novels reflecting concerns bequeathed to the Victorians. Austen creates a heroine addicted to Gothic romance in Catherine Morland of *Northanger Abbey*(1818), a work which,

[Patrick] Brantlinger argues, “both presents itself as a serious work of literature and participates in the general depreciation of novels and novel-reading” (The Reading Lesson 4). The uncritical reading of romance by Marianne Dashwood of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and Catherine Morland of *Northanger Abbey* leads the protagonist of each novel to make embarrassing faux pas...Fanny Price of *Mansfield Park* is a less lively heroine than Elizabeth Bennet or Catherine Morland...Nonetheless, I would argue that despite these limitations and her lack of eloquence, Fanny succeeds in *Mansfield Park* because she is a skillful reader of books and character.

Here, Golden is explaining that with each novel Austen utilizes her characters’ reading ability to manipulate the novel’s narrative. By doing this Austen embeds the message of reading skills into her works time and time again.

The title of each novel is imperative to one’s in-depth analysis, as the title creates every novel’s first impression. By looking at the literary details of each novel and their literary based themes we can extrapolate Austen’s message in regard to her heroine’s reading skills. The original name which was given to *Northanger Abbey* was *Susan* which at first was the name of the heroine of the novel, later changed to Catherine. *Emma* is also written with a single name as the title. The publisher of *Northanger Abbey* novel’s original manuscript stated that he would not allow the novel to be published under its original name, possibly because he did not want a second eponymous Austen novel. I would argue that this decision could have been made in order to separate the literary traits of *Emma* and *Northanger Abbey*. Austen’s original intent with the title of her posthumous *Northanger Abbey* can be understood to have connected the

novels by way of their titles alone. Austen utilizes the function of titles to illustrate how important close reading and interpretive analysis are to both her readers as well as her characters.

One theme which Austen frequently visits in her novels is that of gothic literature. She utilizes the titles of many works, referencing their plot lines and using their tropes in order to deepen the meaning of her own literature. By turning to the concept of gothic literature we can unravel another level in which these two seemingly unlike novels both in fact carry the importance of a heroines' ability to read and how it can affect her journey. In *Northanger Abbey* the relevance of gothic literature is clear, as Catherine is known to love this genre and finds herself fully absorbing the motifs of these books into her daily life. She foolishly inserts elements which she has read into her own existence. Austen writes,

‘I never look at it,’ said Catherine, as they walked along the side of the river, ‘without thinking of the south of France. ‘You have been abroad then?’ said Henry, a little surprised. ‘Oh! No, I only mean what I have read about. It always puts me in mind of the country that Emily and her father travelled through, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.’

Catherine frequently speaks of her experiences being tinged with the Gothic novels which she loves. In this scene she is explaining that she is reminded of the south of France, a place which she has never been to but has only read about in *Udolfo*, a very prominent Gothic novel.

Catherine's adoption of gothic stories into her own life is detrimental to her success as the novel continues. Her inability to recognize the separation between fact and fiction brings her immaturity to light.

This theme is clear in Catherine Morland's story but its appearance in Emma's narrative at surface level seems more limited. Author Andrew McInnes writes in his work "Labyrinths of Conjecture: The Gothic Elsewhere in Jane Austen's Emma" that *Emma* is actually a parody of a gothic novel which mocks the themes which are found in novels of this genre. Specifically he states that Austen is utilizing Emma's narrative to make fun of the domineering men, inattentive readers and violence which underlies English society. He explains that in addition to *Northanger Abbey*, Austen is expanding her commentary on gothic works by way of *Emma*. McInnes posits that in *Emma* there are numerous mentions of gothic works similar to *Northanger Abbey* but in Austen's work she alters the roles of the heroines. This gives Emma power and strength as opposed to the heroines of the gothic novels mentioned who are known for their frailty and passivity. In both *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma* Austen utilizes the narrative in order to create a commentary on gothic literature and give the reader insight into the underlying importance of her heroine's character traits.

Catherine, as well as Emma, attempt to pursue hobbies but in the end they find that they are unable to proceed past the state of mediocrity. Despite this similarity, the reason that both of these characters cannot persevere is due to largely differing circumstances. This can be seen in *Northanger Abbey* at the beginning of the novel where Austen introduces the reader to Catherine, and details not only her essence but also her habits. Austen writes, "Her mother wished her to learn music; and Catherine was sure she should like it...so, at eight years old she began. She learnt a year, and could not bear it (Austen, NA)." But this was not the only hobby which Catherine abandoned. Austen continues, "Her taste for drawing was not superior; though whenever she could obtain the outside of a letter from her mother or seize upon any other odd piece of paper, she did what she could in that way, by drawing houses and trees, hens and

chickens, all very much like one another (Austen, NA).” In this detail Austen states that not only did Cathrine lose passion for projects, she also lacked skill, resulting in drawings of nondescript animals as her creative outlet. Additionally, we see that Cathrine’s creative ability is limited as well as her literary capability. The novel states, “Writing and accounts she was taught by her father; French by her mother: her proficiency in either was not remarkable (Austen, NA).” Catherine Morland, despite being taught academic subjects in addition to pursuing her creative endeavors is unable to master literary skills as well. Catherine is mediocre at best and does not follow through or work hard to perfect any of her skills.

Emma too lacks the ability to see her work to its end. Emma is described as a smart young woman who has a hand in many areas of life. Due to this she never works on any particular interest to reach her full potential. In one scene Emma is painting and Austen writes,

Emma wished to go to work directly, and therefore produced the portfolio containing her various attempts at portraits, for not one of them had ever been finished... Her many beginnings were displayed. Miniatures, half-lengths, whole-lengths, pencil, crayon, and water-colours had been all tried in turn. She had always wanted to do every thing, and had made more progress both in drawing and music than many might have done with so little labour as she would ever submit to. She played and sang;—and drew in almost every style; but steadiness had always been wanting; and in nothing had she approached the degree of excellence which she

would have been glad to command, and ought not to have failed of.

In this paragraph we can tell that Emma does not see her efforts through. Her lack of ability to complete tasks is what prohibits her from reaching her true potential.

Her portfolio is half full. This reference is not solely speaking about her artistic works but also her portfolio of life. Emma remains on the surface level of society and does not fulfill what ought to be her full capacity by the standards which are usually projected for women of her class in the early 19th century. Emma is disinterested in romantic endeavors and refuses her suitors as she avoids the stereotypical feminine position of the 19th century she is meant to take. By looking at the historical context of this novel we can glean what the typical female stereotype is at this time. Based on these observations in combination with Austen's frequent use of the marriage trope we can understand the ways in which Emma must improve and conform in order to become a successful heroine. Eugene Goodheart in the work *Emma: Jane Austen's Errant Heroine* explains that "In Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style, D. A. Miller asserts "that the realism of her works allows no one like Jane Austen to appear in them. Amid the happy wives and pathetic old maids, there is no successfully unmarried woman; and despite the multitude of girls who seek to acquire 'accomplishments,' not one shows an artistic achievement or even an artistic ambition that surpasses mediocrity." Emma is not meant to live up to her potential and is only to the point of mediocrity similar to Catherine. Austen did not want her heroines' to reflect herself but rather wanted them to be the ideal women during the 19th century. By ensuring that Emma and Catherine are not accomplished in any particular area Austen is making her characters

more realistic as well as enabling them to grow in their reading capabilities and succeed in their romantic lives.

Emma and Catherine both lack reading skills which are necessary in order to be a successful heroine. Jane Austen utilizes this failure in order to imbue her novels with the message of the importance of reading skills. One major difference between Emma and Cathrine as heroines is that Emma may be understood to the reader to be a natural heroine while Catherine is self made. Emma's life was simple as she had all the things she needed given to her. Catherine on the other hand has to work in order to make herself the main character of her story. These seemingly small details have a large impact on the ability of these heroines' to read those around them and inform their actions.

Austen strikes me as asserting through her characters in *Emma* that she intends "to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like." By looking at Emma it can be understood that Austen means that such a character is one who does not go through a metamorphosis to become the main character or heroine. Goodheart continues in his essay, "It is easier to say why a reader may dislike Emma than why her creator likes her" as at first Emma is not a stereotypical likable character. Goodheart states, "Emma is willful, manipulative, an arranger or rather a misarranger of other people's lives. Much of the time she fails to see things clearly and truly, and her self-knowledge is uncertain." And yet Emma is given the opportunity to hold the coveted position as heroine of her story. She is a born heroine from Austen's perspective.

Emma's privileged attitude plays into her inability to read people since she has been raised with immense wealth and lacks the need to properly develop her skills to their fullest potential. Emma is driven to work in the world of others and does not have interest in her

own life as she is comfortable with her life as it is. Because of this easy contentment, Emma does not have the drive which many people who are deprived of such a privileged lifestyle innately have. Austen details this in the first sentence of the novel. She writes,

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.

Austen is explaining that Emma's life is relatively simple. She has had everything handed to her in her life and therefore she has never needed to advance her skills beyond that of mediocrity which was alluded to previously. Austen is showing Emma's laziness from the outset of her novel. This gives a clear marker of the point from which Emma's growth begins. Emma's life, although it seems she lives a lifestyle of privilege, in reality is detrimental to her overall well being. Emma's world needs no alterations and therefore her actions are not charged with ambition to further herself. Because of her lazy attitude Emma lacks the reading abilities which would enable her to succeed. Although she said in the novel to be smart, she is not understood to be high achieving therefore she does not utilize her brains to develop her ability to read. In Goodheart's essay, he continues,

The real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments.

Emma's goals and progress is stunted by her privilege. She is unable to read others to the best of her ability because she never felt she had to. She lacks the motivation to better herself and sharpen her proficiency in reading, which results in her inability to read those around her.

The financial disparity between Catherine and Emma alone, is a predictor of each heroine's reading capabilities and motivation to improve. Emma grew up in a wealthy household where she was not deficient in anything. This left her not in need of any physical or emotional support therefore she lacked the initiative to reach her full potential. Conversely, Cathrine grew up in a home in which affluence was missing. Because of this she did find herself to have the same opportunities and comforts which were afforded to Emma. Due to these circumstances Catherine is forced to self learn her interpersonal reading abilities. Her reading is more elementary than others who were raised and taught how to read these important signals from a young age. By looking at an individual's financial status it becomes easier to understand their level of education as during the early 19th century, many people who were not affluent did not receive the same type of formalized education as many in the higher classes did. Especially when we look at women of this time period, their overall life choices affect their financial status, as the laws of primogeniture restricted them from having their own estates. This stringency created a fairly intense environment especially for those of lower classes. In Bentley G. E. Jr.'s "Genteel Finances in Jane Austen's Novels" a mathematical and financial analysis of Jane Austen novels he explains,

In her novels, it is the business of the daughters of gentlemen to marry—and if possible to marry well. The only sources of income ordinarily available to a

gentlewoman were marriage portions, inheritance, and the estate of her husband

The financial state of a heroine's background largely impacts her eligibility in society. Emma had everything she needed therefore she never felt she needed to be challenged. She was never criticized by anyone and therefore never felt the need to excel beyond her mediocrity. By this understanding it can be extrapolated that Emma's financial situation is an equally, if not more important, detail to her achievement of reading proficiencies. Due to her financial stability she was able to slack in her reading skills.

Catherine Morland is not born into her role as the heroine of her story. She strives for her place at the center of her story as Catherine does not come from privilege. Her lower social class forced her to forge her own heroine status and teach herself how to read. As a woman's role at this time was to marry, financial stability afforded girls of marriageable age to have more suitors vouch for their attention. In addition to this a woman who is financially stable is able to focus on her social and interpersonal reading achievement. They have the time and mental capacity to focus on matters which to others of different stature would seem trivial. Austen writes, "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine. Her situation in life, the character of her father and mother, her own person and disposition, were all equally against her." The story details her unfortunate circumstances, such that she lacked financial stability, which was afforded to Emma, as well as knowledge and looks. As the story proceeds Austen describes,

[F]rom fifteen to seventeen she was in training for a heroine; she read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so

serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives.

Catherine taught herself how to become a heroine by self educating, and reading novels, informing her own ability as a reader. Her financial situation was not one of any remarkable stature, which enabled her to become self taught. Because of her self taught nature she lacked the polish in her reading that many of a higher status may have afforded.

Through literary analysis I have gathered the conclusion that maturity is tied to a heroines' ability to develop her reading skills. Catherine Morland, with the help of constant novel reading, gains maturity as well as literary prowess which informs her reading. In the work "Northanger Abbey and Jane Austen's Conception of the Value of Fiction" by John K. Mathison it is written

A person in such easygoing, happy, undemanding circumstances may easily fail to grow up, becoming less delightful with the passing years, but for a number of reasons, including the reading of good and bad novels, Catherine does grow up. In the growth of Catherine, we see Jane Austen's technique and intention, her theory of the value of novels.

Mathison is asserting that Austen uses the works which Cathrine reads in order to enable her growth as a character. As her literary journey of reading proceeds she steadily gains more important lessons on how to read those around her. By doing this Austen is also developing Cathrine's reading skills which in turn are associated with Cathrine's ability to succeed. Her reading of novels is largely important to her character development and ultimate growth and accomplishment.

By way of close reading I have found that both heroines' are clueless towards others and their emotions which is due to their incompetent reading. This shortcoming does not allow Emma and Catherine to succeed as they cannot discern the proper reactions in order to accomplish their goals. In Emma it is due to the fact that she has falsely convinced herself of the success of her match making efforts for Harriet. This contrasts with Cathrine who is what many classify as a "bad reader" meaning that she simply does not pay attention to nuance and therefore misses the true meaning behind people's actions. This points to a larger narrative difference in these two texts which is that Emma is not aware of her inability to read those around her, while Cathrine knows she is an insufficient reader.

Emma's false confidence is oppositional to Cathrine who understands her limitations to a certain extent. Catherine's inadequacy at reading those around her ultimately becomes a problem which is made clear in the text of *Northanger Abbey*. Catherine comes across difficulties due to her misreading of situations which interfere with her success as a heroine. Furthermore Austen emphasizes the importance of reading skills and how they are affiliated with a heroine's ability to triumph in the face of difficulty. In the scene where Mr. Tilney finds Cathrine snooping around his deceased mother's bedroom. Austen writes,

‘She sent you to look at it, I suppose?’ ‘No.’ ‘It has been your own doing entirely?’ Catherine said nothing. After a short silence, during which he had closely observed her, he added, “As there is nothing in the room in itself to raise curiosity, this must have proceeded from a sentiment of respect for my

mother's character, as described by Eleanor, which does honour to her memory.

This section of text acts as a turning point for Mr. Tilney, as he now recognizes Cathrine's handicap. When he discovers Cathrine snooping around his mother's room in order to find evidence to fulfill her imaginary gothic novel theories. The text states "he had closely observed her" and at that point he begins to become defensive and explain to Cathrine the true virtue of his family. Soon after Mr. Tilney understands Cathrine's inability to separate her novels from reality, he explains to her that these accusations are not simply fun imaginative games but can be detrimental. We can clearly see Cathrine's inability to segregate fiction from reality as a hindrance to her at this point of the novel. Cathrine's reading skills are not refined therefore causing her to come into conflict with General Tilney. This is a prime example of how Austen imbues her novels with the importance of reading and how without them one will not be able to overcome their difficulties.

Emma too lacks reading skills which limit her capability as a heroine. Jane Austen's clear premise that ties one's ability to read those around them with the success they find. In Emma's efforts to meddle in Harriet's romantic relationships, discusses her opinions on her friend's marital choices to Mr. Knightly. Austen writes,

Mr. Martin is a very respectable young man, but I cannot admit him to be Harriet's equal; and am rather surprized indeed that he should have ventured to address her. By your account, he does seem to have had some scruples. It is a pity that they were ever got over.

Emma refuses to acknowledge that Harriet is of much lower socioeconomic status which affects her choice for marriage. By way of her ignorance it can be perceived that Emma is incapable of recognizing the reality in this situation. She thinks that Harriet is the equal of Mr. Elton and therefore Mr. Martin is beneath her. Emma is projecting her own attributes onto Harriet and sees her as her prodigy. Additionally, she cannot fathom that Harriet may in fact have feelings for Mr. Martin, as they grew up together and he is a man who is within her social class. Emma's blatant disregard for these basic facts illustrate her oblivious nature and inability to read people and circumstances.

Following the scene which was analyzed previously, Catherine's own recognition of her childishness led her to become embarrassed by her actions, and inform the reader of her cognitive understanding and movement towards change which can be seen at the end of the novel. Austen writes, "they had reached the end of the gallery, and with tears of shame she ran off to her own room." Here, we see that Cathrine is aware of her detriment in separating the act of real people around her from the dramatic acts of characters in novels. Her embarrassment shows that she is able to see that she must make an effort to read the actions of others with a different lens. She may no longer simply look at objects presume they hold treasure, but rather must utilize her practicality to insert herself into the real world.

Catherine's inability to read people outside of the lens of gothic novels is severely impaired at the beginning of the book. She does not understand that the worlds of her novelistic stories are not the ones which she presides in. This causes a detriment to Cathrine throughout the novel, but the turning point is when Mr. Tilney recognizes Cathrine's actions and explains to her the detrimental effects they can have. Following this point in the novel Cathrine makes a clear effort to attempt to read people within a realm of reality.

In order to make the reading skills of her heroine's more clear Austen utilizes the reading skills of their love interests in order to demonstrate what proper reading looks like. In *Emma* Mr. Knightly, frequently recognizes Emma's flaws and gives her constructive criticism. He is able to see when she misreads scenarios and attempts to explain to her why she is incorrect. But due to Emma's ego and unwarranted confidence in her abilities she frequently dismisses him. Mr. Knightly attempts to explain to Emma how she has misread Harriet and Mr. Elton's marriage prospects. Austen writes,

“Depend upon it, Elton will not do. Elton is a very good sort of man, and a very respectable vicar of Highbury, but not at all likely to make an imprudent match. He knows the value of a good income as well as anybody. Elton may talk sentimentally, but he will act rationally. He is as well acquainted with his own claims, as you can be with Harriet's. He knows that he is a very handsome young man, and a great favourite wherever he goes; and from his general way of talking in unreserved moments, when there are only men present, I am convinced that he does not mean to throw himself away. I have heard him speak with great animation of a large family of young ladies that his sisters are intimate with, who have all twenty thousand pounds apiece.”

Here, we can see Austen's creation of a good reader; Knightly systematically breaks down to Emma the context clues which illustrate that she is wrong about her intentions for Harriet. He explains that Mr. Elton is not likely to choose to marry Harriet as she is of no social

standing and lacks financial stability. Mr. Elton has many women who are lining up to marry him, and although Harriet has many attributes she does not measure up to the women who Elton is more bound to choose. Despite Knightly's correct reading of the situation to Emma, her ego takes over and she does not listen to his interpretation. Austen writes,

Emma remained in a state of vexation too; but there was more indistinctness in the causes of her's, than in his. She did not always feel so absolutely satisfied with herself, so entirely convinced that her opinions were right and her adversary's wrong, as Mr. Knightley.

Emma's attitude towards criticism is negative as she has never encountered it previously. She is not used to her authority being challenged and therefore does not know how to respond. Instead of recognizing her faults she digs her heels in and acts stubbornly. Emma's ego gets in the way of her ability to progress and become a better reader.

In both novel's Austen utilizes the heroine's love interest to challenge the reading skills of the main character. The difference between these novels is that in Cathrine's situation she quickly utilizes the challenge as constructive criticism, while Emma is dismissive of Mr. Knightley's critique. This discrepancy in reaction points to an even larger difference between the novels. Due to the fact that the upbringing of these women and their circumstances are so fundamentally different, their attitudes towards their confidence in their reading skills are not the same. Emma has a false sense of security and assurance in her abilities, while Cathrine, understands that she may be flawed and can grow to improve her reading.

Jane Austen is widely admired for her literary works for a multitude of reasons but one in particular is her expert use of grammatical structures in order to imbed deeper messages into the text of her works. She handles these advanced literary techniques in order to hit home her agenda about the importance of reading. In the work "Jane Austen's English" by K. C. Phillipps Austen's literary prowess and how she utilizes it is explained,

And on the other hand Emma, in her attempts to dissuade Harriet from confining herself to the "society of the illiterate and vulgar" by marrying into the Martin family, is somewhat disconcerted to find that a letter from Robert Martin is free from grammar mistakes: "There were not merely no grammatical errors, but as a composition it would not have disgraced a gentleman"

Here is an example of how a character with good reading skills would have recognized Mr. Martin's grammatical excellence and took it as a sign that he is to be considered a proper husband. But due to Emma's inability to recognize context clues she does not identify this attribute of Mr. Martin therefore led Harriet away from him. In Austen's novels, literary and reading skills illustrate one's ability for success and reason which can be seen here as Emma's final success in setting up Harriet is unable to come to fruition as she did not pay attention to context clues.

By way of Austen's infiltration of this theme throughout, even the smallest details of her novels illustrate the importance of reading. We see a similar attitude in *Northanger Abbey*, Elaine

Bander, in her work “Books Universally Read and Admired: Mrs. Smith in *Northanger Abbey*” states,

As the narrator's sarcastic intrusions make clear, these three dialogues about novels are comically intended to reveal the characters through the way that they speak about books... In the world of *Northanger Abbey*, we are what we read, or at any rate, we are what we say we read.

Austen implements the theme of novels into *Northanger Abbey* in order to exhibit that novels themselves are what serve as symbols for good judgment. A character who is a good reader is one who has proper judgment, as they can read the interpersonal skills of other individuals.

In *Northanger Abbey* we see Cathrine self teaching herself how to do this. Her growth as a heroine allows us to recognize that she is gaining more complex reading abilities as the novel progresses. Bander also explains later in her work, “of course, reading is a theme in every Austen novel--perhaps the theme if we take "reading" as a metaphor for perception and judgment.” She is explaining that this is a metaphor which Austen uses countless times throughout her work and is not only isolated to *Northanger Abbey*. A character’s ability to read in Austen’s novels allows them to gain success and illustrates their good judgment and interpersonal skills.

In *Emma* as well as *Northanger Abbey* Austen presents her heroine’s lack of proper reading skills. She utilizes complex narratives in each respective novel in order to differentiate and make it clear how distinct circumstances affect each of these heroine’s differently. In *Emma* Austen creates a narrative married to Emma Woodhouse and her thoughts, while in *Northanger Abbey* Austen’s

narrative has a distrust of Cathrine Morland's narrative. This is the narrative choice of Austen, which enables the reader to agree or disagree with the confidence of the heroine in their own skills.

From the moment that *Northanger Abbey* begins, it is clear that the narrator has a negative opinion of Cathrine. Austen writes, "She never could learn or understand anything before she was taught; and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid." It can clearly be seen that the narrator from the first page of the novel holds a negativity towards Cathrine's point of view. The narrator thinks of Cathrine as lacking reading skills and therefore mistrusts her point of view as the novel progresses. In comparison, in *Emma* the narrator has a favorable view of Emma even when she is incorrect. The narrator is constantly mentioning the good work Emma has done, and putting her into a good light. Because of this we become fond of Emma and also her narrative. Austen writes,

Emma was very compassionate; and the distresses of the poor were as sure of relief from her personal attention and kindness, her counsel and her patience, as from her purse. She understood their ways, could allow for their ignorance and their temptations, had no romantic expectations of extraordinary virtue from those for whom education had done so little; entered into their troubles with ready sympathy, and always gave her assistance with as much intelligence as good-will.

Here, we are once again reminded of Emma's good nature. We are told to think of her in a positive light and recognize her actions as virtuous. But directly following this assertion we see Emma meddling in the relationship of Mr. Elton and Harriet. Austen writes, "Anxious to separate herself

from them as far as she could, she soon afterwards took possession of a narrow footpath, a little raised on one side of the lane, leaving them together in the main road.” We have just been told of Emma’s goodness, and now we see her acting in the absence of proper reading skills, but due to the fact that we know she is a good character, we can forgive this and still think of her in a positive light.

H. Porter Abbott in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, explains that narratives can come from many different perspectives even within one novel alone. This is called free indirect discourse. This term is defined as when a text can shift from one voice to the next while filtering the text through the narrator's point of view. Typically it is done from the narrator’s voice to the voice of a character. Austen is known for her use of complex narrative free indirect discourse in her later works, most notably *Emma*. Despite that, hints of this technique can be found in every one of her novels and this strategy is used to execute Austen’s message in *Northanger Abbey* as well as *Emma*. Narelle Shaw writes in her work “Free Indirect Speech and Jane Austen's 1816 Revision of *Northanger Abbey*” explaining, “Free indirect speech is skillfully and extensively integrated in the mature novels, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*. In this context, the frequency with which Jane Austen wields the device in *Northanger Abbey*, indeed, the pattern of its occurrence, is significant.” Narratology is an author’s explicit use of text and language to precisely convey the message of their work. Austen utilizes both free indirect discourse throughout her works but she additionally uses indirect discourse which states that the grammatical structure of the sentence implies a different meaning than the character themselves express. Austen accomplishes manipulation of her narrator in order to get her point across about the importance of reading, by way of indirect discourse. Austen writes in *Northanger Abbey*,

Catherine, by whom this meeting was wholly unexpected, received her brother with the liveliest pleasure; and he, being of a very amiable disposition, and sincerely attached to her, gave every proof on his side of equal satisfaction, which he could have leisure to do, while the bright eyes of Miss Thorpe were incessantly challenging his notice; and to her his devoirs were speedily paid, with a mixture of joy and embarrassment which might have informed Catherine, had she been more expert in the development of other people's feelings, and less simply engrossed by her own, that her brother thought her friend quite as pretty as she could do herself.

Here, the narrator is explicitly telling the reader that Catherine has insufficient reading skills. The indirect discourse can be seen as both the point of view of the narrator as well as Catherine can be discerned. We can see the distrust which the narrator places in the eyes of the reader onto Catherine. The words "which might have informed Catherine, had she been more expert in the development of other people's feelings, and less simply engrossed by her own," illustrate the narrator's point of view of Catherine's reading skills. We can see how Catherine is placed in a negative light, as her reading skills are not polished. This attitude is continuous throughout *Northanger Abbey* which enables the reader to underestimate Catherine, until we see her accept the criticism of her love interest and improve her reading skills.

Another way in which Austen achieves a complex discourse between her narrator and heroine in *Northanger Abbey* is by way of inverted commas. This is one way for the reader to

recognize different voices as well as the distinct thoughts while going through the text. Narelle Shaw continues in the work "Free Indirect Speech and Jane Austen's 1816 Revision of *Northanger Abbey*",

Jane Austen's use of inverted commas to designate such a passage clarifies her conscious election of the stylistic form in preference to indirect speech and what Graham Hough defines as "coloured narrative." Using these criteria, Jane Austen's novels, viewed according to chronology of publication, display an escalating use of free indirect speech-sporadic experimentation in the early work leading to a habitual reliance upon the versatile narrative device after 1818.

This technique is most definitely used by Austen in order to illustrate Catherine's absence of reading skills. When Catherine comes to the abbey for the first time with General Tilney, she cannot separate the truth from her fiction novels, resulting in her inability to recognize interpersonal signals and read the situations around her. In this scene Austen uses inverted commas to bring the voice of the narrator into the scene and illustrate Catherine's flaws. Austen writes,

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 that 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; and most heartily did she rejoice in the happier circumstances attending her entrance within walls so solemn! *She* had nothing to dread from midnight assassins or drunken gallants. Henry had certainly been only in jest in what he had told her that morning.

By way of creating parenthetical pockets of narrative within largely introspective moments Austen enables the reader to recognize the absurdity of Catherine's thoughts in this scene. The narrator is able to make this clear when we read the words "which such buildings had witnessed" as this statement is parenthetical and does not seem to be coming from the perspective of Catherine. This sentence reads as an almost facetious statement, reminding us that Catherine's mind is full of nonsensical gothic tropes which are not likely to happen in reality. Austen wants to make it clear that Catherine does not have the proper reading abilities to recognize that the abbey is not part of a gothic novel where a murder may occur. This blatant misunderstanding of General Tilney and inability to recognize facetious tone from reality illustrates Catherine's reading skill deficiency.

This manipulation of the narrative in both of these novels illustrates the heroine's deficiency in reading skills and importance of reading. In "A Scientific Justification for Literature: Jane Austen's Free Indirect Style as Ethical Tool" by Angus Fletcher and Mike Benveniste it is explained "Oatley has argued that Jane Austen's free-indirect style offers a 'cue to the reader to imagine himself or herself into the minds' of Austen's characters, fostering 'better abilities in empathy and theory of mind'" Thus explaining to the reader that they are in the shoes of the heroine and activating an underlying empathy for the character's of the novels. It seems that Austen does this in order to illustrate different outcomes if one is not careful to

work on their reading abilities. In order to recognize this we must compare the close reading of Emma to that of Catherine. *Emma* as a novel is iconic for its sophisticated use of narrative and therefore by turning our attention to this work we will be able to better understand Austen's tactics. For example, Emma does not take her constructive criticism well while Cathrine does, which ultimately affects their overall outcomes. But, Austen does not allow the reader to recognize this until later in the novel. Fletcher and Benveniste end their article stating,

Our reading of Emma suggests that FID is not (as Oatley) a means to enter into the minds of others, but a tool for checking selves. That is, it suggests that the function of FID is not epistemological but behavioral, and that its origins lie not in a universal humanism, but in a particular cultural version of skepticism.

By reading *Emma*, they have come to the conclusion that Austen is attempting to use her narrative in order to check in on her reader. Rather than bring us into the minds of the characters Austen is bringing the characters into our minds and simultaneously get her message of reading skills across.

We see the culmination of all of Austen's efforts at the end of her novels. The classic marriage trope novel, for which Austen is acclaimed, is what solves the overarching problems that have stretched throughout the novel. "Can This Marriage Be Saved: Jane Austen Makes Sense of an Ending" by Karen Newman details just this idea as the typical understanding of this type of plot. She explains that "as in much women's fiction, the end, the reward, of women's apprentice-ship to life is marriage..." In all of Austen's works we see that as soon as the heroine overcomes her challenge she comes to the resolve of

marriage. By close reading I have seen this in both *Emma* and *Northanger Abbey*. Newman even goes on to state that the marriage plot which Austen uses in her novels is usually explained in one of two ways. The first way is to understand that Austen's work is being written in the realities of the early nineteenth century. The second way is

[Austen] reads marriage as a metaphor for self-knowledge, the overcoming of egoism and the mark of psychic development: in Austen's *Emma*, for example, marriage "is most significant as a social ritual which ratifies a transformation in Emma herself . . . [just as] the union of Jane Eyre and Rochester . . . takes its meaning from the heroine's own psychic growth."

We can recognize that Emma has overcome her inability to read others. She worked through her aversion to accepting criticism and in particular, especially marrying a man who offers her said criticism, illustrates immense character development. Because of this change she is ultimately improving her reading skills which led her to the success of marriage.

In *Northanger Abbey* the same correlation, of gaining of reading skills and in turn romantic success, can be found. As Catherine matures and gains her more complex and nuanced reading skills her relationship with General Tilney thrives and results in marriage.

Waldo S. Glock communicates almost this exact interpretation in his work "Catherine Morland's Gothic Delusions: A Defense of 'Northanger Abbey.'" He writes,

The theme of growth into knowledge and wisdom develops by way of contrasting layers of successive experiences, each contrasting variation on the theme affording a sense of balance and security to

Jane Austen's novelistic world. The basic contrast is that between "the common feelings of common life" and "the refined susceptibilities, the tender emotions" that are characteristic of a heroine in romantic and sentimental fiction...

In this commentary Austen's agenda is clear. When her heroine undergoes a development of knowledge and an increasing grasp of intellectual reading capabilities Austen invokes the marriage trope and enables the heroine's romance to flourish. Austen is creating a reciprocal relationship between the heroines' reading mastery and success, which in all of Austen's novels is unequivocally tied to the marriage plot of the novel.

Even Austen's use of the marriage plot and the resolution of marriage for each of her heroines' can be seen through the schema of reading and knowledge acquisition. When Austen states in her novels that the heroine has come to "resolve to marriage" she is suggesting that the heroine had significant other choices. This implies that this such heroine had the ability to weigh multiple options and come to a "resolute" conclusion in which she actively chooses the institution of marriage. We can understand that Austen uses the marriage trope and the language specifically of "resolution of marriage" in order to subliminally illustrate her heroines' choice towards marriage. This literary decision of Austen's part is one of significant prowess as many would simply assume that she writes novels for women about women, but in reality she writes about one's ability to use their critical thinking deductive reasoning skills in order to live their life consciously.

Resolving the Institution of Marriage in Eighteenth-Century Courtship Novels by Heidi Giles writes, "Austen's heroines 'reconcile' themselves to marriage but attempt to 'dissolve' the cultural singularity of that institution; they 'determine' to marry but

simultaneously maintain a certain degree of ‘disintegration,’ of unique self or identity, within that marriage.” The precision of language in even the smallest and seemingly most obvious portion of the novel illustrates Austen’s deep integration of close reading into every aspect of *Northanger Abbey* as well as *Emma*.

Through my in depth analysis and close reading of *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma* I had discerned a connection between the reading abilities of Jane Austen’s heroines’ and their success. I have found that Austen does this in numerous ways which ingrain this message into almost every aspect of these texts. Comparison of these dissimilar heroines’ brings to light their unlikely parallels and uncovers the ways in which they both need to improve their reading. The complexities afforded to each of the texts is vast and therefore Austen embedded this message, of the importance of reading skills, into every single aspect of this novel from grammatical choices to narrative. The ending of each of Austen’s novels correlate the acquisition of knowledge and overall development of the heroine to romantic success. Austen utilizes her literary mastery in order to precisely illustrate that this was an active choice for the heroines’ as they now have the proper skills to choose effectively.

In my close reading and literary analysis of both novels *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma* by Jane Austen, as well as the evaluation of secondary sources, I have been able to draw the understanding that a heroine’s romantic success is predicated on her deductive reasoning as well as her interpersonal reading capabilities. Once a heroine attains these proper skills she will find her final success. Following my research and analysis of these two novels I would ask if this theory can also be applied to Austen’s other heroine’s? Are reading skills as imperative in Austen’s other novels, where the heroine is not stereotypically a bad reader, such as Elizabeth Bennet. Or when the heroine is much more

uncomfortable in her surroundings such as Fanny Price. Do the reading skills of these heroines' affect their eventual outcomes?

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