

Claudia L. Johnson
Reading *Northanger Abbey*
Rosenbach Library Virtual Course
February 5, 12, 19, 16
6:00-7:30

Northanger Abbey is a thoroughly charming and fun book. Though often considered the lightweight, the little sister of Austen's five other novels, *Northanger Abbey* is also Austen's most ambitious work, where she celebrates novels as the place where the "greatest powers of the mind are displayed . . . in the best-chosen language." A cheeky claim for an unpublished novelist, no? Our class will examine Austen's simple-seeming language carefully. Having been told that "A woman, especially if she have the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can," we will consider the knowledge this novel conceals beneath its sunny un-Gothic surface. We will, in short, read *Northanger Abbey* as a Gothic novel - "light and bright and sparkling," to be sure, but Gothic at the same time.

We will read this novel closely, often aloud, to appreciate the depth of Austen's humor and the dizzying, dazzling twists of her irony as her heroine blunders her way to a wisdom no one (but ourselves) suspects. Ideally you will have read the novel before we meet.

Texts:

Any reliable text would do. I recommend Oxford World Classic or Norton or Penguin. Our readings will progress in chronological order. I will hand out supplementary readings in class.

Class Schedule:

Class I: Gothic Backgrounds -- Austenian irony - Bath as a Gothic?

Class II: The Mysteries of *Northanger Abbey* - General Tilney and Gothic Villainy

Class III: Gothic critique

Class IV: Gothic Affirmation

Optional Reading:

Janet Todd, ed., *Jane Austen in Context* (2020)

Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite, *30 Great Myths About Jane Austen* (2020)

Cheryl A. Wilson and Maria H. Frawley eds, *Routledge Companion to Jane Austen* (2021)