

Starring Parody in Satirical Pieces of the Romantic and Victorian Periods

The Romantic Period, from the years 1780-1837, had many prominent authors, genres, and unique styles of art, some of the most sensational features being exemplified in the writings of Jane Austen, who was a Romantic writer during this period that emphasized emotion and imagination, with a specific taste for Gothic writing and parodying popular styles. Linda Hutcheon, an emeritus professor of comparative English literature from the University of Toronto, claims that “parody is a work that imitates aspects of an ironic critical difference; there has to be repetition and differences to recognize that it’s a parody of something”. Jane Austen took the Gothic concept and satirized the prevailing attitudes and fashions since Gothic literature tended to be unrealistic with its supernaturalism and horror, as seen in many works of this time. Austen believed that a proper subject should be true life and therefore focused her novels on domestic situations. In her first written and last published novel, “Northanger Abbey”, she uses Gothic parody to act against a cliché and tired formula of events trying to appeal to realism. By doing so she objects gothic literature; she respects realism and targets realistic parodies. In this Bildungsroman, a novel of growth and education, her parody is complex because Austen makes fun of early nineteenth century England, its trites, and its ambivalent dependence of parodies. Austen keeps her work respectable toward the protagonist, Catherine Morland, who assimilates her maturity and coming of age as she moves from a state of innocence to one of greater experience. This transition of innocence to experience is a very prominent theme in literature of

the Romantics, and it inevitably symbolized the movement's advancement into the Victorian period from 1837-1901, which also had many acclaimed authors. One of the most well-known Victorians worldwide is Lewis Carroll, whose name is often remembered for his twisted fantasy "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". This novel gives voice to children's resistance to strictures of the adult world, it allows for a vicarious, imaginative escape, and presents the world from a child's perspective. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, his nom de plume Lewis Carroll, was an Anglican at Oxford, a lecturer of logic and mathematics who loved children but never had any of his own. Alice Liddell, daughter to the Dean at Oxford, was Carroll's inspiration for the protagonist. He took her and her two other sisters for a boat ride along the River Thames where he first narrated this story to them, later writing it down, eventually creating his renowned work of art. Wonderland was influenced by a place where everyone is 'mad', portraying the Victorian period as absurd and unnecessary. The eccentric characters he created with nonsense verses fabricate a story alluding to the repression of Victorian females and the pressure from the aggressive and godless societies of Victorian Oxford. Parody, as a dominating literary device, plays an important role in *Northanger Abbey (1805)* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865)* through their important and relevant period settings, their satirical characterization of the respective protagonists, and narrative structure as works of fantasy.

The foremost important parodic argument lies in the Gothic and Victorian setting each author satirizes. Early Gothic novels typically have foreign, medieval settings. Jane Austen however relocates Gothic scenes to her present-day England and parodies these emblematic

contexts such as a mock abduction, the discovery of an ‘old’ and ‘haunted’ castle, and the more humourless social commentary about the role of women and their status in society. Preeminently, Catherine Morland becomes a figure for gothic fiction; finding herself taken by the gothic novels that she has read and expecting to find the themes from the books. John Thorpe “abducts” Catherine and takes her to Blaize Castle. Here Jane Austen is laughing at the imagination there is in gothic novels; abduction seems to be trivial and castles are another stereotypical gothic element. This is a prime example of comic deflation; the castle wasn’t the oldest castle in England, it was an architectural folly, a building that is supposed to look older than it already is. The castle was actually made during the novel’s setting to look old, mysterious, and full of adventurous excitement, which is the perfect gothic setting for a heroine to fall for. Ultimately, the protagonist endures the Romantic sexist traits that were the norm during this time. Eleanor tells Catherine how little power she has in her house against the rules and decisions made by her father when Catherine is kicked out because of her social status. An additional instance coming from the mouth of a man; “Man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal; that in both, it is an engagement between man and woman, formed for the advantage of each; and that when once entered into, they belong exclusively to each other till the moment of its dissolution” (Austen 49). Henry jokingly compares dance and matrimony as the only two situations where women have the power of refusal. There is always some truth in jokes, personal truth that derives from opinion. This illustrates the mindset people had in the 1800s, portrayed in Gothic literature where a damsel in distress, a female with no useful abilities, needs to be rescued

by a knight in shining armor being a well-dressed man who has the strength, power and social status to make a difference for himself and his woman. This is the very point Austen is parodying and satirizing in her novel by using her figurine to bring about these concepts. Similarly, Lewis Carroll takes an approach against the Victorians' repressive attitudes toward children through corporeal punishment and approaches to education. He targets Victorian social practices and beliefs, the middle class' "virtues": duty, obedience, self-control, industry, property, and respect for social rules and hierarchies such as taking tea. He satirizes the upper class and the monarchy. Despite this being a highly sophisticated setting, his main target readers are children in general, especially young females, which is surmised to why he created Alice as the protagonist, because "Wonderland is a place where one wonders" (Carroll X). A couple of erroneous instances throughout this book are when the duchess is feeding a baby in the kitchens, as opposed to the proper place in the living room or in the nursery, hidden away. Besides, the kitchens are only a place for servants and cooks. The tea party scene is parodying the absurd level of niceties that one must caution themselves with before speaking or acting. Alice is careful with her societal posture, yet everything she says and does seems to be the opposite. Her social anxieties are expressed on behalf of all children in the Victorian era. She comments on her hosts' behaviour and to answer her plea they simply ask "why not", to which Alice is incapable of finding a logical answer; "'Take more tea,' the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly. 'I've had nothing yet,' replied Alice in an offended tone. 'So I ca'n't take more.' 'You mean you ca'n't take less,' replies the Hatter" (65). This quote exemplifies the ridiculousness in which English manners

were accustomed, much like the farcical monotonicity of late eighteenth century societal beliefs held against feminism as shown in Jane Austen's novel. While the authors' parodies are different, targeting separate periods and people, they each satirize their own society as the way they view it.

Subsequent to the period, the characterization of the protagonists and the caricature they inflict on the way humans recognize certain conventional ideas through satire helps one understand their meaning to a fuller extent. Austen loved Gothic literature; we know this from all her letters, she simply and comically satirizes the concepts to create a new story her readers can laugh about with her. She doesn't reject Gothic literature, she brings to her readers' attention that there are certain patterns that are laughable. This makes her a Horatian writer; using a gentle, amused satire characterized by the use of casual and conventional language, genial and tolerant criticism of human foibles, moderation in writing and moral censure, use of humble, paternalistic persona, and the optimistic belief that reform is possible, as Horace himself has categorized. Differentiating from Carroll's novel, *Northanger Abbey's* plotline develops the positive procedure of the protagonist's self-evolution as the morals in question help Catherine grow when she becomes more aware of her follies. This piece of fiction can also be seen as an element of Menippean satire, a novel that is made distinctive by attacking attitudes rather than a specific individual. The ingénue, Catherine's gothic-fuelled expectations are repeatedly met with disappointment, exemplified as comic deflation, the denotation of menippean satire. Isabella

becomes this adventurous figure for her, and she ends up learning how to be a more critical reader of books and people: “such a strain of shallow artifice could not impose even upon Catherine. [The letter’s] inconsistencies, contradictions, and falsehood, struck her from the very first. She was ashamed of Isabella, and ashamed of having ever loved her” (154). Throughout the novel, Catherine is constantly manipulated and used by Isabella for her own interests and purposes of marrying a wealthy man to heighten her social status. Our ingénue stops being so innocent and finally discovers Isabella for who she really is; a hypocritical, conniving vixen. In relation, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland is also an exemplar of Menippean satire with its use of an ingénue and grotesque quality for the use of irony. Alice plays the ingénue; an innocent, naïve traveller to the upside-down world, which is characterized by its loose mixture of genres, styles, and voices. She undergoes grotesque moments persistently throughout the story; her body is continuously being morphed as she looks for her ‘original’ body shape always at the most inconvenient of times. The Chesire Cat is also ironically used through his grotesque revulsion of carnival laughter; the way his teeth are formed and his grinning creates an eerie aspect for the one animal Alice cherishes the most. These menippean forms are all part of the fantastical, upside-down world Lewis Carroll created to question and criticize the English Victorian era.

Essentially, the narrative structure in both novels plays an important role in the way each author depicts parody in their congruent narrative types and through their individual fantasy types. They’re narrated in third-person in limited omniscient, keeping the reader at a distance and

limiting our understanding to only what the author wants us to perceive from the protagonists. Northanger Abbey displays a auxiliary to its narrative that Alice's Adventures in Wonderland doesn't; the novel exhibits free-indirect response; a kind of narration that merges from the first-person with third-person point of view, "Isabella was very sure that he must be a charming young man; and was equally sure that he must have been delighted with her dear Catherine, and would therefore shortly return. She liked him the better for being a clergyman, 'for she must confess herself very partial to the profession;' and something like a sigh escaped her as she said it" (Austen 18). Although the above is written in third person, the underlined words are Isabella's; her manner of speech is charming and conveys how she expresses herself in a false sense of 'charm'. Austen's form of narration presents her ulterior motive; she likes the clergyman, but she wishes to use Catherine and her family because of her own financial interests of marrying Catherine's brother James. She uses the clergyman to see how wealthy the Morland's are. The method presents a way for the reader to identify the point of view of the character, but still hear it through her perspective with an ironic distance between them. Farah Mendelsohn claimed in her three rhetorical fantasy fiction types that an 'intrusive fantasy' is when fantastic elements intrude into a world that is otherwise realistic and a 'portal fantasy' is a work of fiction in which a character leaves her familiar surroundings and passes through a portal into an unknown place; this portal can be a gateway, doorway, or in our more relevant case, a rabbit hole. The primary world is like our own, the secondary world is the fantastic location that is juxtaposed with the 'real' world in a work of fantasy; often being a satirical, upside-down

version. The fantastical elements that are part of gothic literature include horror and supernaturalism in a world that is like our own; Catherine's growing up entails learning to read books and people more critically. Here the intrusive fantasy from her reading of gothic novels is prohibiting her from being analytical to realistic decisions. In contrast, Alice is found bored, hot, and tired sitting along the Thames riverbank in Victorian-era England with her sister who is well immersed in her book. Her mixed, uncomfortable emotions when she sees the white rabbit running around with a pocketwatch, clad in English period wear, and speaking a language Alice understands, is Carroll's subtle way of telling us that she has fallen asleep. In dreams, things don't work as they're supposed to, and we generally accept all the implausible occurrences just as Alice does. "She ran across the field after [the white rabbit], and was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge. In another moment Alice went after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again" (Carroll 10). This is a typified portal fantasy with a mixture of indirect parody through narrative; a voyage to an upside-down world with multiple satiric targets. This story also exhibits literary nonsense; writers of literary nonsense depict absurd and fantastical predicaments and creatures. Neologisms and puns are features of nonsense writing, which defy rational understanding and challenge conventions of traditional storytelling with its own internal logic, this is what separates nonsense fantasies like Carroll's from pure gibberish.

Austen uses conventions of Gothic fiction, but she tells her gothic story with greater narrative economy; she doesn't have messy convoluted thoughts. She rewrites Gothic tropes of the beautiful and talented persecuted heroine, the tyrannical Gothic villain, the heroine's abduction scene, and the haunted castle setting in a realistic register. Catherine casts General Tilney as the social tyrant; as he kicks her out of the abbey because he discovers that her family is not as well off as he thought. In the letter from Isabella to Catherine, she tells Catherine that her mother misunderstood her, even though she left James for another more wealthy prospect. Our protagonist recognizes the deceit in this character; Isabella's letter struck her with inconsistencies; this alludes to an inconsistent Gothic novel because of themes like learning to be more worldly learning to understand human nature better. Here, Austen is demonstrating the Wollstonecraftian concept: a woman should be more rational. Mary Wollstonecraft was a pioneering feminist that promoted education for women and made an impassioned bid for female rationality. Austen rewards her ingénue by completing one more gothic cliché; marriage as the end of the novel, this is what completes Catherine's coming of age, as well as her development of a greater rationale than what she read in Anne Radcliffe's novels. Lewis Carroll uses all Menippean qualities of satire to be invective to Victorian social cues. Irony, parody, grotesqueness, and other literary devices are implemented by him in the most abstract and creative of ways. In chapter three of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice keeps talking about her cat "Dinah" to all the little canaries and mice without thinking about how they probably feel intimidated and scared when told she's a magnificent hunter. The irony of this is

that “Dinah” sounds like the spoken word ‘dinner’, used as an epithet for all the small animals that this cat has for dinner. Nearing the end of the novel, Carroll introduces one more device for satire; “‘I never knew so much about whiting before.’ ‘Do you know why it’s called a whiting?’ ‘It does the boots and shoes,’ the gryphon replied very solemnly” (Carroll 91). His narration constantly uses opposite words to give contrasting meanings; he installs the use of antiphrasis words to help develop his upside-down world in order to fully satirize the English society. These two parodied texts can either satirize the target or employ a vehicle of satire, and both personas of Alice and Catherine are guided by the respective authors through the way in which they grow up and ‘come of age’.

Works Cited

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