

"CONCEALING THE EXCESS OF HER PLEASURE": A QUEER READING OF
JANE AUSTEN'S *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

By

Josie Anne Blubaugh

A Project Presented to

The Faculty of California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English: Applied English Studies

Committee Membership

Dr. Janet Winston, Committee Chair and Graduate Coordinator

Dr. Natalie Giannini, Committee Member

May 2023

ABSTRACT

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This queer reading of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* uses critical frameworks from queer theory, feminist theory, trans theory, and Black Romanticism to analyze female-female relationships between the characters in the novel as a product of the social norms, conventions, and discourses of Romantic-era Britain. By using literary analysis and close reading, I study the many ways in which *Northanger Abbey* can be read queerly, specifically where gender and sexuality intersect with race and ethnicity.

Though queer readings of this novel have been done in the past, my own analysis focuses on female-female relationships and takes race into consideration when I connect the Romantic-era social discourses with the representation of queerness in the novel. One of the ways in which I make these connections is by finding encoded language in which a female-female relationship is implied but not directly stated. This encoded language was a common way for women-loving women to communicate their sexual desires toward other women to very specific audiences—only those who would understand the code in which they spoke. In my research, I discover, explain, and analyze some of this encoded language within *Northanger Abbey*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank Dr. Janet Winston for her constant guidance through the process of researching for and writing this thesis; without her supporting me and holding me accountable, this project wouldn't have been possible. Also, I'd like to thank Dr. Natalie Giannini for her support, not only in reading my work and helping me improve it, but also for her steadfast moral support. Moreover, I need to thank Professor Kristen Ince for reminding me to *relax*, something I don't think I could have done without her incredible optimism and inspiring positive attitude. Further, I'd like to thank my parents, grandparents, and little brother, Christopher, for their support in all the ways that count. Their constant reminders that they believed in me went a long way and helped me believe in myself. I'd also like to thank my friends from the program, Emily, Fortunato, Kaitlyn, Sprad, Elizabeth, and Natalie, for their kindness and friendship. Additionally, I want to thank Joseph for holding me together when the stress made me feel like falling apart. My appreciation for him goes beyond words. Finally, I'd like to thank my soulmate, Delilah. There'd be no me without you.

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INTRODUCTION

How were the social norms, discourses, and conventions of the British Romantic era surrounding race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity represented in the Romantic novel *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen? More specifically, how were female-female relationships and women who desired other women written in this genre, and how did the race and ethnicity of these characters affect how their sexual behaviors and desires were depicted? These are the questions I have set out to answer in my research. I intend to contribute to current Queer Romantic conversations about what it meant to be a women-loving woman in the Romantic era and what the representation of these women looked like in Romantic era novels.

In this project, I start with a discussion of my positionality, methodologies, and grounding theoretical frameworks. By doing this, I hope to explain my reasoning behind choosing to analyze *Northanger Abbey* using a combination of queer theory, feminist theory, trans theory, and Black Romanticist theory. Next, in the chapter titled "Historical Contexts," I explore the social discourses, contexts, and ideas about sex, gender, race, and ethnicity prevalent in the Romantic era. I've done this as a method of situating the novel within its historical and discursive contexts. By researching and laying out the contexts in which the novel is written, the novel can be analyzed as a reflection of them *and* as an iteration of them.

Following this is my "Literature Review" chapter in which I lay out the contours of the current scholarly conversations surrounding Romantic era literature, Jane Austen's

repertoire, and the novel *Northanger Abbey* itself. This allows me to position my own work within the conversation that is currently occurring in this field while also contextualizing my research and its focus. I hope to be able to add to this conversation with my focus on female-female relationships in *Northanger Abbey* and by insisting on analyzing representations of race and ethnicity within the novel through my analysis of the representations of these relationships and female same-sex desire. Finally, I analyze the novel myself using the information I've gathered from my research into the historical contexts and the current conversation in the field.

Methodology

This project is founded in methods of textual analysis and close reading that are informed by my research into Romantic era norms and discourses surrounding female same-sex desire and relationships and by queer theory. I have chosen a new historical approach¹ to this research so I can connect the historical discursive context of *Northanger Abbey* with its plot, characters, and encoded language. To do this, I have researched the discourses of power and cultural norms during the Romantic era, as well as the cultural products that were being circulated at the times during which *Northanger Abbey* was written and published in order to study the text within its historical and cultural context.

The first stage of my work was spent researching the British Romantic era—its culture, political structures, discourses, and social norms. I drew a great deal of

¹ New historicism is defined in the subsection "New Historicism" within the section "Theoretical Frameworks."

inspiration from historian Susan Lanser who primarily writes about female-female relationships of the Enlightenment. I found a large amount of her research methods to be applicable to the Romantic era, specifically within her analysis of primary sources such as diaries and letters. Along with Lanser, I was inspired by Ashley Tauchert, a literary scholar who used the concept of encoded language to complete a close reading of Mary Wollstonecraft's novel, *Mary, a Fiction*, and Marylynne Diggs, a feminist Romantic scholar who wrote an article analyzing *Ethyl's Love-Life*, a novel written shortly after the Romantic era by Margaret J.M. Sweat. I shaped my own methods of literary analysis and close reading to be similar to theirs.

Before I could move on to my own close reading, however, I needed to do further research into Romantic constructs of sexuality and gender. I've found historian Richard Sha's works on sexuality, gender, class, and medicine in the Romantic era to be a comprehensive overview of how sexuality was conceptualized during the time that started my research into the subject. Through this research, I was able to understand some of the discursive and cultural ideas about sexuality and gender at the time, which allowed me to better understand the work of scholars like Lanser; Terry Castle, a literature professor at Stanford; and Lillian Faderman, a historian of lesbian and LGBTQ+ literature. In their works, I was able to connect the understandings that Romantics had of sexuality and gender with the ways in which these beliefs were represented in literature and in the real lives of Romantic-era women.

Seeing the ways in which sexuality, gender, and class intersected in the Romantic era was important to my initial research question about how social discourses and norms

of the Romantic era shaped the depiction of female-female relationships in the genre of the novel. Through the process of doing this research I have also realized that without taking race and ethnicity into account, I cannot provide a full picture of the historical and cultural context of these novels. This has led me to do further research into Black Romanticism, a field being pioneered by scholars and activists, such as Patricia Matthew, a professor in British literature, and Atesede Makonnen, a historian and author who writes about Blackness in nineteenth century Britain. Reading these essays, chapters, and journal articles has helped me refine my understanding of the ways in which race and ethnicity are integral parts of these conversations. Because of my new understanding, my research questions have become more nuanced, and I have adapted them to take into account the ways in which race and, more specifically, the deracialization of whiteness, are represented intersectionally in Romantic novels such as *Northanger Abbey*.

Going forward with my textual analysis of *Northanger Abbey*, I am determined to use the methods that other scholars in the field use to do their own literary analysis of Romantic novels. Specifically, I modeled my approach after Ashley Tauchert's and Marylynne Diggs' methods. In their work, they locate what Tauchert calls "encoded language," a means through which Romantic authors could signal female-female desire to their readers in a way that only certain readers—those familiar with this encoded language—would understand. My decision to look for encoded language in my close reading of *Northanger Abbey* came from an argument that Tauchert makes in her article in which she says that in Romantic culture, there was a lack of particular discourse surrounding lesbianism and female-female desire. Tauchert says that because of this,

Romantic authors had to signal female-female desire using signifiers borrowed from other discourses, such as nursing, letter writing, and elements of pastoral poetry².

In my own research on *Northanger Abbey*, I have been looking for examples of encoded language that scholars have analyzed in other Romantic works while also keeping an eye out for any other instances of encoded language that didn't match the examples I saw in my research on the topic. It is important to note, however, that some of this encoded language may have been lost to time. Certain cultural and social references in Romantic works have lost their context, meaning that these borrowed signifiers no longer signify an act of encoded language. My work has therefore been limited by this aspect; one cannot claim to find all instances of encoded language in *Northanger Abbey* because it is likely that some of them have fallen out of cultural knowledge. My methods of study are interpretative, and, as such, I have had to make educated claims based on the evidence I have found. It is therefore likely that there are instances of encoded language that I have missed, but I have done my best to bring all of the instances I could find to the forefront.

When I was deciding which novel to analyze in my research, I read multiple Romantic novels to determine which candidates would lend themselves well to a queer reading and a literary analysis based on encoded language. While I was able to find instances of encoded language—and sometimes more blatantly obvious language—in multiple Romantic novels, *Northanger Abbey* stood out to me for its abundance of

² This research is unpacked and explored further in the sections "Encoded Language" and "Analyzing and Queering Romantic Novels."

encoded language and some of the queer readings that other scholars have done on it already, such as Susan C. Greenfield's "'Queer Austen' and *Northanger Abbey*". A great deal of the queer analysis that has already been conducted on the novel focused on the male love interest, Henry Tilney, and the ways in which his character can be read as queer. While this research has contributed to my own, I have noticed that these queer readings trend toward male-male desire. This is in stark contrast to my own experience reading the novel in which I immediately noticed the ways in which a queer reading could be done focusing on the female-female desire in the novel.

In my analysis of the novel, I first focus on the more obvious language that Austen uses to describe the love that Catherine, the protagonist, exhibits for her friends. Comparing the powerful love she feels for her female friends, Eleanor and Isabella, with the relationship and eventual marriage she has with her male friend Henry, helped me identify a subtextual pattern within the novel. Catherine's love for her three friends can be framed as a sort of competition, with each of her female friends being taken out of the running for her romantic love throughout the novel. This showed me that the function of the encoded language (and the more blatantly queer language) in this novel was to show Catherine's development as a character, bringing her through her entrance into upper-middle-class British society and her growth into a married heterosexual woman.

Theoretical Frameworks

Following are descriptions of the theories, approaches, and frameworks I am using to complete a textual analysis on *Northanger Abbey*, as well as how and why I

intend to use them. Each of these frameworks and approaches has been vital to my understanding of the information within my literature review as well as to my ability to complete the textual analysis of the Romantic era novels I have chosen.

Queer theory

At the very basis of my research is queer theory. Queer theory arose as a combination between women's studies and lesbian and gay studies, and, while it does draw heavily from those sources, there are some fundamental differences between these approaches. In a word, queer theory can be summarized as "subversion": a purposeful, intentional choice to subvert societal norms and expectations. In her introduction to the Cambridge Companion to Queer Studies, Siobhan V. Somerville discusses the work that queer theorists do:

Although queer critiques of normativity have often been tethered to sexuality and gender in some way (hetero- or homonormativity), some of the most powerful work in the field argues that queer approaches help us understand normativity in any sense, based on interlocking categories of difference and power, including race, caste, indigeneity, gender, class, nation, and religion. (2)

In this process, queer theory subverts many different normative institutions and structures within a society, notably the social hierarchies and binaries that have been constructed and used oppressively in our society (Marinucci 43). For example, the gender binary—the concept of there being two genders, masculine and feminine—is one such social binary that queer theory actively works to dismantle.

This is one of the primary ways in which queer theory differs from lesbian and gay studies. While queer theory takes interest in the fluidity of sexuality, lesbian and gay studies have focused more on solidifying more stable identities. Markus Thiel, a political scientist who has studied the ways in which queer theory can be applied to international relations, writes,

Queer theory's origins are in LGBT studies...It soon distanced itself from those approaches due to disagreements with the stable identities that LGBT studies suggest. Queer theory emphasises the fluid and humanly performed nature of sexuality—or better, sexualities. It questions socially established norms and dualistic categories. (Introducing Queer Theory)

Because queer theory takes a more subversive and challenging approach to gender and sexuality, many scholars have thought to apply queer theory to other social issues. Michel Foucault's work on the dynamics between power, knowledge, and discourse has been foundational and inspirational for queer theorists, causing the approach to take on a post-structuralist quality that is not typically found within lesbian and gay studies ("Queer Theory and Queer Studies").

Queer theory examines the performative nature of sexuality and gender. Further, it is founded in poststructuralism which "posits that 'truth' is not a fixed concept, but instead constantly changes based on your cultural, political, social, and economic position in the world" (Andrews). This is a key foundation to queer theory; queer theorists therefore examine gender and sexuality through this lens of "truth." One of the scholars most widely credited for their work in queer theory is Judith Butler, whose work has

centered largely around the applications of queer theory on gender. Butler asserts that genders are not fixed categories. Individuals perform the gender roles that are taught to them by society, and the meaning of gender is determined by society. Nasrullah Mambrol, the researcher credited with founding the online literary theory resource *Literariness*, writes, "According to Butler, the meaning of gender depends on the cultural framework within which it is performed, and hence it defies fixities and universalities, because gender is a continuous performance, acquiring new meaning with each repeated performances or citations depending on the context in which it occurs" ("Judith Butler's Concept"). When we break out of binary thoughts about gender and see it as performance, heterosexuality appears much less inevitable.

In my work, I am using queer theory as a framework to approach my textual analysis because of its power in subverting and deconstructing social norms and conventions. Queer theory is useful to me because my work centers on the ways in which authors used their works to subvert the societal expectations, discourses, and norms that were in place during the British Romantic era. In my textual analysis of *Northanger Abbey*, I examine these norms and the subversion of these norms.

While I do intend to use queer theory in this way in my work, I do not intend to apply it directly to the social conventions that existed during the British Romantic era. This project does not serve as a critique of those conventions; instead, it acts as an exploration of the novels that were serving that function during that time. Queer theory is useful for me as a way of examining the acts and works of subversion that were created *during* the Romantic era, not a way for me to retroactively attempt to critique Romantic

society and subvert it myself. Additionally, I do not invoke this theory to assign labels or identities to the characters in *Northanger Abbey*—only to understand the rhetorical moves that Romantic authors were using themselves.

Quare theory. As queer theory became more mainstream within academic conversations about sexuality and gender, many academics and activists began to critique its usefulness and its reinforcement of white supremacist ideals and methodologies. In "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother," E. Patrick Johnson, an activist and professor of African American studies, addresses some of the issues he has found in queer theory as it exists within academic spaces. In the abstract of this article he writes, "Most current formulations of queer theory either ignore the categories of race and class altogether or theorize their effects in discursive rather than material terms" (1). In other words, at the academic level, queer theory does not account for the differences in the lived experiences of queer people of color or of queer individuals of different socioeconomic statuses. The status quo of queer theory accounts only for the experiences of white, upper-class elites, and it often fails to intersect with other racial and socioeconomic identities. Johnson recommends a variation of queer theory that attempts to account for its shortcomings; he calls this "quare" theory, a framework that connects the lived experiences of queer people of color and the theorizing that emerges from these experiences.

Johnson's theorizing is important because of its intersectional approach and its critique of unmarked whiteness in queer theorizing. I focus on the experiences of upper- and middle-class, white women in the Romantic era. This theory remains relevant despite

this fact for two reasons: one, I examine the deracialization of white women within *Northanger Abbey* because it directly coincides with the racialization of people of color during the same time period, and two, race and class both existed intersectionally with sexual behavior and pathology within the time period as well. Because race and class were important aspects of how medical professionals pathologized sexual behavior in the Romantic era, queer theory provides a useful framework for how I can understand these intersections in a way that is more pragmatic than a queer theory framework.

New historicism

A new historicist approach focuses on understanding a literary work within its historical context by examining it alongside the discourses and social contexts in which it was created and received. New historicism posits that a literary work is shaped by these contexts as much as it, in turn, shapes the context. Unlike other approaches—such as formalism—new historicism highlights the importance of contexts *alongside* a literary work rather than focusing solely on the text itself.

New historicism differs from old historicism in that it does not privilege the text over its background. Mambrol writes, "New historicism envisages and practices a mode of study where the literary text and the non-literary context are given 'equal weighting', whereas old historicism considered history as a 'background' of facts to the 'foreground' of literature" (New Historicism's Deviation). In this approach, the old historicist goal of studying texts to create the concept of one true, objective historical narrative is discarded. Instead, new historicists seek to understand and embrace the "inherent fissures" and "discontinuities in the history of ideas" (Mambrol).

As I've said above, however, new historicism is not just limited to the social contexts in which a text was created; new historicists also take into account the contexts in which it is received. They assert not only that the text is influenced by the author but also that the interpretation of the text is influenced by the reader: "New historicism acknowledges not only that a work of literature is influenced by its author's times and circumstances, but that the critic's response to that work is also influenced by his environment, beliefs, and prejudices" ("What is New Historicism"). A new historical approach gives the text's contexts—both at the time of publishing and the time of reception—a weighting that is equal to the text itself.

This approach is useful for my own work because it allows me to examine texts within their sociohistorical contexts, meaning that I can analyze the texts' representations of the Romantic social norms and conventions that shaped their creation. This way, I am not limited to just the content of each text as though it were created in a vacuum, devoid of connection to its contexts. A particularly important aspect of my project—encoded language—relies on my ability to connect the text with its contexts; it would not be possible for me to decode this language if I did not have intertextual connections or sociohistorical contexts.

Trans theory

Trans theory has been important to my work because of the ways in which the Romantics connected gender with sexual behavior. Current trans and queer theory scholarship do not necessarily connect the two the same ways that the Romantics do; gender and sexuality are contemporarily considered related but separate parts of one's

identity. As C  el M. Keegan puts it in "Transgender Studies, or How to Do Things with Trans*" from the book *The Cambridge Companion to Queer Studies*, "foundational work in transgender studies investigated the deeper cultural and scientific constructions of man/woman and male/female on which sexual orientation depends for its recognition" (67). Contemporary trans theorists see the ways in which sexuality and gender are related, but they challenge the assertion that one's gender determines one's sexuality. As explained below in the section "Gender and Sexuality," Romantics considered gender and sexuality as connected and believed that one's physical sexual characteristics determined both their gender *and* their sexuality. Contemporary trans theory has been useful for my project when considering the different discourses that surround gender now as opposed to those from the Romantic era. It has illuminated the ways in which our cultural ideas about sexuality and gender have changed over time. With this knowledge, I have been able to better understand Romantic discourses of gender and sexuality as they contrast with current discourses.

Feminist literary criticism

Narsullah Mambrol explains the purpose of feminist literary criticism in her *Literariness* entry "Feminist Literary Criticism": "It advocates a critique of maledominated [*sic*] language and performs 'resistant' readings of literary texts or histories...it seeks to trace how such power relations in society are reflected, supported, or questioned by literary texts and expression." She also mentions the ways in which critics like Judith Butler have questioned constructions of gender and the portrayal of these constructions in literature. Different movements within feminist literary criticism

have taken different approaches to this work, often examining the intersections of gender with other identity groups such as class, race, and sexuality. These movements have been necessary because not all people are affected by oppression against women and the patriarchy in the same way. For instance, a Black woman experiences different forms and combinations of oppressions than a white woman would. Movements such as lesbian feminist criticism and Black lesbian feminist criticism have emerged to engage with these types of oppression within literature.

It is my belief that the study of the novel is inherently a study of feminist movements because of the Romantic notion that novels are genres that only women read and write. To examine the power dynamics between the elites that determined what culture was "high" culture and the upper- and middle-class women who were interested in the popular culture of the novel is to interrogate gender norms within Romantic society. This work is still relevant to the study of the novel today, even as they have become a normalized, accepted feature of our literary culture.

Additionally, feminist theory has shaped my work because of the feminism that is associated with Romantic women who desired other women. Many of these women, such as the Ladies of Llangollen, worked to create lives for themselves that were independent of men. It is important to remember, however, that the ability of women to live independently was heavily dependent on their class status, and women who belonged to the upper class, such as the Ladies, had more freedom and privilege to do so. Though

these women did not have the term "feminist" to describe themselves³, from a feminist theory perspective, they were taking feminist action in their daily lives.

Black feminist theory. Black feminist theory was created through the labors of Black, female academics who have devoted their lives and their careers to decentralizing the white feminist narrative (a form of activism that continually leaves out, silences, and limits the voices of women who are not cisgender, heterosexual, white, able-bodied, and English-speaking) that has become the default version of feminism taught in universities. Feminist activists have had to fight for decades for every women's studies course, program, and department that has been created so far. There is still a long way to go to make the version of feminism that we see in universities more intersectional and representational of the experiences of all women. Black feminist theory (and other related frameworks and methodologies) is based on ideas about intersectionality and the idea that people should not be silenced because they demand better for *all* women, not just some women. Sherie Randolph, a professor and co-founder of the Black Feminist Think Tank, says, "What Black feminists have been really good about pointing out are how oppressions of racism, sexism, classism, etc., when they meet, and when they're experienced by Black people, how that oppression then changes and becomes something else that causes suffering not just for them but for everyone" (Black Feminist Theory). Here, Randolph points out that Black feminist activism and criticism supports

³ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, term "feminist" was first used in the year 1852, roughly 20 years after the Romantic era ended.

both Black women *and* everybody else by calling out and condemning oppression of any group.

Lesbian feminist criticism. The field of lesbian feminist criticism exists as an offshoot of gay studies. I have chosen to represent it under the umbrella of feminist theory because it exists as a product of feminist activism against the male-dominated focus of gay studies. Anne M. Valk, a professor of American studies who writes for *Encyclopedia Britannica*, defines lesbian feminism as, "a subset of feminism that emerged in the mid-to-late 20th century at the convergence of the women's movement, the gay right's movement, and the sexual revolution...[and it] challenges the perception of heterosexuality and male supremacy as 'normal' and presents alternative ways of thinking about gender and power" (Lesbian Feminism). Valk also explains that lesbian feminism intends to point out heterosexuality as an institution of both misogyny and homophobia. Many Black feminist scholars are also active in lesbian feminist studies, often amalgamating their subject of study into Black feminist lesbian criticism. I have chosen to discuss lesbian feminist criticism because it is a framework in much of the foundational scholarship that exists surrounding female-female desire in the Romantic era. I do intend to use queer theory more often than lesbian feminist criticism within my project, but it is important to recognize the work that lesbian feminist studies scholars have contributed to this field of study. For instance, Lillian Faderman, a key, early scholar in this field, wrote many of her seminal texts before the advent of queer theory. Many of her works, therefore, examine the Romantic era from a lesbian and feminist studies framework.

Black Romanticism

Black Romanticism is a framework that has been vital to my understanding of the Romantic era itself because of Black Romanticist scholars' work to rewrite the narrative of the Romantic era and of periodization in the disciplines of history and English. My research into Black Romanticism has altered the way I think of Romanticism which, in turn, has altered the ways in which I am analyzing *Northanger Abbey*. I aim to interrogate whiteness and deracialization in this novel because of how much race has been pushed aside in Romantic studies: "we often continue to think of race as marginal to Romanticism, rather than central—in part because of the apparent elusiveness of Romantic racial engagement" (Makonnen "Even in" 20). Bringing race to the forefront of Romantic studies means facing the white supremacy that has been embedded in the fields for decades. On the subject of racialization during the Romantic era, Makonnen also says:

If, as the *OED* suggests, the Romantic era gave new definitions to 'blackness,' then perhaps we should consider how blackness, or more broadly, *race*, might newly define the Romantic era. In this consideration, we must seek to comprehend not only the racial othering of people of color but also Romantic whiteness. ("Even in" 18)

Her suggestion that we study whiteness in the Romantic era as a part of our studies of race in the era has impacted my own research, causing me to alter my original research questions to examine how whiteness and same-sex love intersect in Romantic novels. It has also led me to question the lack of people of color in these novels, as well as the characterization that characters of color receive.

Positionality Statement

I've never taken the "traditional" college literature class that you've seen in movies, read about in books, or watched on tv. We all know the type—the ancient professor drones on and on about the academic and intellectual merit of Shakespeare's tragedies or Byron's poems while dozens of students yawn, take notes, or stare lazily out the window, feeling entirely unattached to the course matter at hand. No, all of my literature classes have been steeped in the deeper, more involved work of decolonizing what we in academic spaces have deemed "canonical Literature" (with a capital 'L' to denote its validity and canonicity). Even courses such as Survey of British Literature and Special Topics in Shakespeare were entirely dedicated to understanding not only how white supremacist, settler-colonial, and bigoted ideals have shaped the entire institution of academia, but also how we can—and must—combat them.

I consider myself incredibly fortunate to not only experience classes that aim to decolonize our understandings of canon Literature and of the English discipline, but to also get the chance to consider other forms of literature that deserve their own recognition, not just in special topics courses, but in any general English literature course. My training in questioning the canon and the interpretations of it that have been deemed authoritative has led me to my research questions in this project where I examine gender and sexuality within Romantic era novels and rework the narrative that the racist and heteronormative structures of academia have crafted surrounding race, racialization, and periodization in modern history. It is not enough to identify the spaces that have been

ignored, silenced, covered up, and looked over. That is why I aim to analyze these Romantic works intersectionally and to contribute to the work that is being done to rework the historical narrative into something more complete, holistic, and accurate.

Perhaps one might question the merit and value of studying the Romantic era, a time that has been hailed by white supremacists as a golden era of artistic expression. I have chosen to work with novels that have long been considered a part of canon Literature because it is my belief that we can reshape our ideas about what canon Literature is into something more useful to our necessary work to decolonize the English discipline and its literary canon. Decolonizing the canon would mean representing the experiences of people of all identities, not just white, cisgender men. My own interest in gender and sexuality studies has provided me an entry point into one such way of doing this work, and I intend to combine that interest with this goal of decolonization to make this project intersectional and, therefore, a useful part of the conversation about what should be done with the outdated literary canon. Our current canon is a part of our disciplinary history and cannot simply be ignored or tossed aside; instead, I argue that we must examine it as such—as a part of our history—rather than as the standard for the discipline or as the only works that we bother to teach new academics. We must remember this disgraceful part of our history so we will avoid repeating/mimicking/reinstating another canon created out of these white supremacist and colonial structures that have been intentionally embedded in our academic institutions. And we must remember how we got to where we are today, how far we've come, and how far we have to go. So instead of teaching the canon and replicating the standard that

has existed for so long in our field, we must decenter the canon, deconstruct and decolonize our interpretations of it, and, arguably, create a new canon, one that does not value only the voices of the few. A new canon would be diverse and representative of a large range of human experiences and of many intersecting identities.

The high school I attended served a predominantly white, upper-middle class demographic—myself included—and was (almost) endearingly referred to as the district's top "prep school." It was notorious for its academic rigor, at least in comparison to the other high schools in the district. Like the majority of public schools in the United States, my high school was largely concerned about students' success in English and mathematics; students who tested well in those subjects earned the school an even better reputation than it already had. Despite that, though, I never felt like my English classes were all that useful.

It wasn't until my senior year of high school that I was taught about lenses and frameworks for doing a literary analysis, and it wasn't until then that I realized that I might actually like English. My years before were filled with grammar exercises and precis paragraphs, and I only found interest in reading the stories—those canon short stories, novels and plays—that we were only lucky enough to focus on a couple of times each year. This senior English class was different, though, and I don't think I'll ever forget the assignment that started my journey into studying queer Romanticism. At the time, we were reading and studying the Shakespearean play *Othello* in a way I had never thought to study a literary work before. My teacher started off the unit with a brief history lesson, teaching us about historical context of the play, but also explaining to us the

multiple frameworks through which we were supposed to try to interpret the play. The first two that she brought up made perfect sense to me—postcolonialism, a framework for examining the lasting impact of colonization on the world, and feminism, a framework that interrogates gender inequality—because they seemed topical already from what I understood about the story. But what stood out to me was when she brought up queer theory.

My initial response to using queer theory to analyze this Shakespearean work was confusion. Sure, I had heard the idea of reading "queerly" before in non-academic settings like blog posts and tweets, but I was utterly confused at how we were going to be able to apply that to *Othello* specifically. As she explained it, though, and as she took the time to point out the many instances in the play to which queer theorists typically point when doing a queer reading of *Othello*, it really clicked for me that this was not only an acceptable way to read "bona fide," capital-L Literature; it also held true academic merit. Not only did my teacher *not* shy away from this framework; she also treated it as seriously as she treated the others she introduced, allowing us to choose to write our literary analysis papers using queer theory if we were so inclined. I think that to this day I still have her to thank for my interest in literary analysis and for broadening my view of what "counts" as academically valuable. Reading *Othello*, a play that centers a heterosexual couple within the plot, while using a queer lens to read *against* the heterosexual and heteronormative grain was a formative experience in my academic journey.

So, I've established why I take interest in queer theory and lesbian and gay studies, and even why I'm interested in literary analysis in the first place, so I suppose the next question is: why the Romantic era? It's hard to pinpoint an exact moment when I became interested in the Romantic era. I had learned about it in my high school world history class when it was *briefly* explained as the "intellectual opposite" of the Enlightenment in Western Europe. My teacher explained rationalism and then Romanticism, and then we moved on, only looking back to remember the names and ideas of some of the Enlightenment thinkers for our unit test. I was certainly interested in it then, largely because it sounded so...well, romantic. Of course, we never touched on the Romantic era as a part of England's imperialist mythos and white supremacy, but is that really all that surprising for a history course from an American public high school in a white, middle-class, suburban neighborhood?

I had almost completely forgotten about the Romantic era until a couple of years later when I watched—and subsequently read—Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Having read this novel on my own—novels being one of my favorite genres to read—I had little understanding of the historical context of story, but I was very moved by the characters, the aesthetics, and the narrative. This was another brief introduction to the Romantic era, but one that, to me, felt disconnected because of how little I knew about the discourses and social norms of the era. My final push into the British Romantic era finally came about in an undergraduate course that I took, Survey of British Literature, in which we both learned about the canon narrative and Literature that came out of Britain and worked actively as students to decolonize the narrative that has been told about the

British Empire for centuries. The unit that spoke to me the most was undoubtedly the unit on the Romantic era. We read a collection of short stories, excerpts, diary entries, and poems from each era that we studied, and we also read one full-length novel alongside them. For the Romantic era unit, that novel was *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen, a book that I happened to notice had great potential for being read queerly. I remember tucking away that piece of information into the back of my head for future use, telling myself that I would revisit the queer reading for which (I felt) the novel was begging. That moment of recognition I had while reading that novel was the inspiration for this entire project. Even though queer readings of *Northanger Abbey* have been done before, I knew that there was still more to be said.

When I look back on this collection of experiences, it seems that every moment in my academic (and non-academic) life has somehow added up to this project. Every aspect of my identity positions me in unique ways in relation to this research and my research questions. Taking on this work has felt necessary to me because of how I feel I fit into this conversation on an individual level. Even though this project enters into a decades-long conversation that started before I arrived here and will go on after I depart from here, I feel that I have tucked away a little piece of myself, a specific perspective based on my own positionality and relationship to the topic, into this work and into the conversation.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

The Romantic Era: Crafting a New Narrative

The traditional narrative surrounding the British Romantic era that scholars have been perpetuating and replicating in their studies and research is a flawed one, one built on white supremacy, bigotry, and prejudice. It focuses on the aesthetic and intellectual Romantic movement and names many upper-class, white, male authors, as well as a select few upper-class, white, female authors. This continued focus on only one part of the Romantic era is intentional. The canon created during the Romantic era—which is still in use today—was created by the same people that it represents—upper-class, white, men—in order to subjugate and oppress the Indigenous people that the British Empire were colonizing. Over time, labor in the field of women's studies has been done to add some diversity to the Romantic canon, opening it up to include authors such as Jane Eyre and Ann Radcliffe, but the canon still promotes the perspectives and experiences of upper-class, white, Britons. This is not a narrative that I want to perpetuate.

Black Romanticist groups such as the Bigger 6 Collective are actively working to deconstruct that narrative and replace it with one that does not intentionally disregard the history of people of color during the Romantic era. Their aim is to center the experiences of marginalized communities of the time to create a more accurate historical recollection of events, one that breaks away from the white supremacy and bigotry that are systemically embedded in the traditional retelling of British Romantic-era history. Topics

such as imperialism, slavery, and the Black experience have been researched before but always as a sidenote, always as a special interest and subdivision of Romantic studies. In their book *Romanticism and Colonialism*, Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson, professors and authors in the field of Romantic studies, address the ways in which Romantic studies have been limited by their focus on white Europeans:

In fact the history and politics of the years 1785-1830 were marked not just by the French Revolution, but by the loss of the American colonies, the impeachment of Warren Hastings...the transportation of convicts to Australia, the campaign to abolish the slave-trade, the acquisition of new colonies in the Mediterranean and Africa, the development of Canada and the administration of older colonies in India, Africa and Ireland. (2)

I hope that by keeping this research in mind, I will be able to examine Romantic literature in a way that does not ignore or silence the lives and experiences of people of color during the Romantic era. In addition, I think that it is important to interrogate the de-racialization of whiteness within Romantic literature. To do this, I have crafted my research questions with the intention of examining the intersections between race, gender, class, and sexuality. In my close readings, that means I will be analyzing the way in which Austen's characters discuss race and addressing the ways in which the de-racialization of whiteness impacted what is seen as a discussion about race in her novel.

Periodization

One of the ways in which our understanding of history has been whitewashed by the ideology of white supremacy is via periodization, the process by which history is divided temporally and geographically based on white historians' perceptions of intellectual and aesthetic movements and major events. Professors of English and British literature Urvashi Chakravarty and Ayanna Thompson have written about the effects of periodization on the English discipline. In their journal article "Introduction: Race and Periodization," Chakravarty and Thompson explain, "Periodization... is as closely responsible for, or complicit in, the institutional structures that mold our disciplinary experiences as anything else" (viii). In literary studies, periodization is the foundation upon which we study history, categorizing texts based on when and where they were created. Our entire institutional understanding of history is divided up into these periods through which we analyze these texts. In this way, Chakravarty and Thompson argue, "periodization itself...signals the operations of power" (v). Periodization is a concept created and enforced by ideas of Western supremacy, especially as it defines the history of non-Western European history against their contact with Western Europe.

Some Black Romanticists have pointed out that periodization has been used to deny the existence racism in pre-modern European history alongside claims that racism was invented in the European modern era which has been defined as beginning in 1789 by Timothy Baycroft and Matthew Hewitson in their research on the modern era in Europe. Additionally, this foundation of periodization in our discipline has historically

forced critical racial and ethnic studies into subsets of a time and place in history rather than as a field in its own right. And Black Romanticists have gone further to analyze how our current narrative around and understanding of the Romantic era is hindered by our insistence that it remains in one temporal and geographical space. Katherine Bergren, a scholar who studies globalism, race, and abolitionism in the Romantic era, says,

Periodization depends on chronology and contrast. For two reasons, then, strict periodization doesn't suit global Romanticism. First, many researchers in global romanticism study some form of reception...Second, since many of us study reception, we are often studying textual practices that establish continuity—like imitation and translation—in addition to those that emphasize difference, rupture, or originality...studying the global dimensions of a literary period means doing historicism differently. It means channeling the impulse to historicize into investigating a text's circulation, dissemination, and aftermath, wherever and whenever that may be, and not just into researching its composition and immediate reception ("Global Romanticism" 9-10).

Global Romanticism is one theoretical framework that opens up a discussion of history that is not based only on a specific time frame in a specific location but instead studies the reception and effects that individual works have in other areas and at different times.

Globalism. Examining the Romantic era and periodization through a globalist lens can help us expand our definition of the Romantic era past a time and a place. Global Romanticists have been deconstructing the strict time and place limitations that have been used to define the Romantic era in the past. One of the aspects of this that I find most

compelling is to consider Romantic works past their publication. Fulford and Kitson say, "it is certainly true that the Romantic canon did become...a part of the later nineteenth-century cultural imperialism of Britain's domination of nearly one quarter of the terrestrial globe" (5). Often, the British would force the people that they colonized to attend British schools in which only British culture was taught, forcing them to read British literary canon and punishing them for trying to connect with their own cultures. These active attempts to erase the cultures of these colonized peoples and replace them with British culture were enacted in many of the places that Britain colonized. Because we know that the literary canon developed during the Romantic era was—and still is—used as a tool of oppression in the locations that Britain has colonized, we can look to the reception of these texts after the Romantic era in these locations to determine that the Romantic era is not limited to Britain in the time between 1785 and 1835.

Nikki Hessell, a professor who has studied globalism in the Romantic era, discusses the Indigenous receptions, translations, and transformative works that were created out of the Romantic literary canon in her introduction to *Romantic Literature and the Colonized World*. Hessell claims that these texts were not just relevant at the time they were published but were also relevant afterwards in Indigenous communities: "It is my contention that there are concordant moments at work here: the original moment of English composition, sometime in the Romantic era, and the moment of translation [by and for indigenous peoples], sometime in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries" (5). In her introduction, she discusses the ways in which Indigenous people were able to transform these Romantic canonical texts into something more meaningful and relatable

by translating them into their native languages. So, while the canon has always been a tool of oppression, some Indigenous people did rework these stories into something better for their people. This is an example of the global impact that British Romanticism (and Western European Romanticism in general) had.

Examining the Romantic era—and other periods of history—through a globalist lens by introducing a comparative approach to understanding Romantic works across space and time can be a part of deconstructing the white supremacy that created those periods in the first place. Bergren says, "Approaching Romanticism as a global phenomenon only intensifies these geographic and temporal ambiguities, but in a good way, showing one path toward building a field that values rigorous imagining over gatekeeping and urgent collectivity over exclusivity" (2). Periodization has always been an effort to gatekeep academia and to put limits on what scholars of color can research and study. A globalist approach is just one way of breaking up these ideals that are so deeply embedded within academia.

Imperialism

During the Romantic era, Britain was increasing its imperial presence across the world. 1815 is often said to be the start of Britain's imperial century in which it grew rapidly and steadily for a full century. This rise in British imperialism was justified by many British people's belief in white supremacy, which included the idea that British people's intellect (and the intellect of the people of a select few other European countries) was naturally superior to that of any of the populations that they colonized. According to Tim Fulford, a scholar who studies colonization in the Romantic era, Romantics "sought

to define British imperialism by embodying it in a paternalist, dutiful and Protestant hero" (*Romanticism and Colonialism* 37). They justified their colonization by depicting their efforts as noble, charitable movements to help the Indigenous peoples that they colonized. While the British claimed to be improving the lives of the people they colonized, they were actually attempting to erase any and all cultures they deemed inferior to their own and forcing the people they colonized to assimilate into British culture. Additionally, many of the peoples that the British colonized at this time were abducted, abused, and forced into slavery. Ideas about white supremacy are rampant in Romantic era works, especially because the British Romantic movement (which was largely made up of white, upper-class writers and artists) was built on ideas about British peoples' right to connect to nature and pursue adventure. People of color that are mentioned in the tales of journeying through nature are represented as inferior because of this pervasive belief system and geopolitical imperial projects.

Because the British were convinced that their ways of living, their intellect, and their culture were superior to that of all of the Indigenous peoples that they colonized, the British believed that it was their duty to reeducate them using British standards. One of the most common ways this was done was by forcing Indigenous people to read the best of Britain's "superior" cultural and intellectual works. Many Romantic era texts that we deem canonical today are the same texts that they forced upon the people that they colonized. Peter J. Kitson and Fulford refer to this occurrence in their book *Romanticism and Colonialism*: "It is often pointed out that the historical moment which saw the emergence of the academic discipline of English also produced a distinct brand of

colonialism... Amongst the texts valued by the British in India were those which Romantic critics had helped to establish as embodiments of Englishness and Christianity—Shakespeare and Milton" (3). The English canon was created to force Indigenous peoples to assimilate to the "superior" British, Christian ways of living. This was largely done by erasing the culture of these Indigenous peoples and replacing it with British culture, such as the works of William Shakespeare and William Blake, which the British considered the superior culture. This historical, colonial background to canonical literature continues to live on through its current usage; the intention of the canon always has been and still is to enforce white, Western European (and American) culture by valorizing only the texts created by white, predominantly male authors.

One major change that altered the methods of British imperialism was the legal ban on British participation in the transatlantic slave trade. Many abolitionists worked for decades to get the legislation passed, but this was not the end of their battle. While the slave trade in the British Empire became illegal in 1807, slavery itself still existed, especially in the West Indies on plantations for sugar and rum ("How Did" Royal Museums Greenwich). Slavery was not abolished in Britain until the end of the Romantic era in 1839, and after its abolishment, it was replaced with other forms of exploitation and violence, especially in the West Indies.

Slavery was not the only injustice against people of color committed by the British at the time. Orientalism was also an issue as imperialism brought the West to the East. I include this information to illustrate the political climate at the time that these works were written and to further develop the point that racist ideas and frameworks are

ingrained in these literary works. This can be seen in novels such as *Jane Eyre* in which the romantic interest, Edward Rochester, dresses up as an "Oriental" psychic for a party for laughs and entertainment. This is a means of cultural appropriation, yellowface, and downright bigotry. It is important to keep in mind that these racist acts occurred during the Romantic era as ideas about white supremacy and social Darwinism flourished. These spurs in nationalism were intertwined with increasing British imperialism—as one rose, so did the other.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade. As I mentioned above, Britain outlawed participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 1807, but the abolishment of slavery in Britain did not occur until 1839. Atesede Makonnen points out that, "the British abolition movement and Romantic literary movement begin and end almost simultaneously" ("Even in the Best" 13). Many Romanticists were abolitionists themselves, actively seeking to either end the slave trade or end slavery in Britain altogether, such as Olaudah Equiano who wrote an autobiography in which he detailed the suffering he experienced while enslaved by the British in his narrative *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*. Another well-known abolitionist is Thomas Clarkson who campaigned to end slavery in Britain and its colonies. But Kitson makes the point that for some white abolitionists, "[g]uilt about British imperialism did not necessarily entail opposition to all forms of colonialism" (17). So, while some Romanticists may have been abolitionists, many of them still benefited from British imperialism in other ways and/or were still proponents of the expansion of the British Empire.

Some white abolitionists may have supported the end of slavery, but many did not care about the harm that the British Empire was doing by colonizing many parts of the world. For instance, some of them may have disagreed with slavery but still supported segregation. In his journal article, "Violence, Gender, and the Politics of She-Tragedy in British Abolitionist Literature," Dallin Lewis, a professor at Southern Virginia University, says, "Even [abolitionist] proposals that assumed some form of emancipation...were predicated on segregation, where...[Black people] would be resettled away from the metropolitan and colonial hubs of imperial Britain" (460). Romantic author Lucy Peacock even wrote a short story in which slavery was abolished and formerly enslaved Africans remained on plantations to continue working out of gratitude. The end of Britain's participation in the slave trade did not coincide with an end to white supremacy and racism in Britain and its colonies, nor did it coincide with the abolition of slavery in the British Empire.

In the West Indies, the British controlled colonies Southeast of the United States, enslaved Africans in the Americas continued to be tortured and oppressed while working to create many highly valued goods for the British Empire, such as rum and sugar. English writers' stories that reference the West Indies, such as Jane Austen's *Sanditon* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, are common in the Romantic era and typically use language that romanticizes, fetishizes, and exoticizes the West Indies, and they often represent it as a so-called exotic, primitive place where white Britons go to make their fortune. This type of language contributes to the stereotyping of Black people and validates chattel slavery as a way for British people to accrue money. This form of

misrepresentation continued on past the Romantic era; the abolishment of slavery in 1839 did not end the exploitation of, violence toward, and oppression of enslaved Africans in the West Indies or any other places colonized by the British Empire.

Orientalism. In the late eighteenth century, a discourse of Orientalism arose in Britain as a way of understanding, discussing, and oppressing people from "the East" (largely people from China and India). Edward Said named and defined these concepts in his book *Orientalism*:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" [the East] and...the "Occident" [the West]... [It was] a Western style for dominating restructuring and having authority over the Orient... by which European culture was able to manage-and even produce- the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period (10-11).

The discourse of Orientalism is how Britain maintained control over the East, prescribing a homogenous identity to those deemed "Orientals." In "Romanticism and Empire," researcher and English literature professor Saree Makdisi explains that during the Romantic era, ideas about Orientalism became more widely dispersed throughout Britain: "the Romantic's interest in difference and otherness...was largely enabled by the enormous vistas of cultural difference made available by the empire and...the steady flow of knowledge...coming back to Europe from the East" (Makdisi 37). With the advent of Orientalism, the field of study created by the British to examine the culture of the East, Orientalists, or those who studied the so-called "Orient," were able to use the influx of

Eastern media and knowledge in Britain to solidify and perpetuate Orientalist ideas about the East.

White Britons were also developing ideas about racial hierarchies in the eighteenth century, placing themselves at the top and all people of color below themselves. Black people were considered to be at the bottom of the hierarchy, and Fulford explains that Asian people were somewhere in between: "Higher up the chain were the inhabitants of the ancient civilizations of the East, high enough for Orientalism to become an established fashion in architecture, decoration, costume and poetry" (Fulford 42). As Fulford says, Orientalist aesthetics became a popular style in Britain and were often referenced in literature from the Romantic era. This popularity did not, however, shield those from the East from oppression and bigotry in the form of colonization, exploitation, and systemic mistreatment.

In creating racial categories, the British were not only defining those who were "other," but were also defining themselves. This was done, in part, by "racial scientists," such as Johann Friedrich Blumenbach and James Cowles Prichard, who were determined to categorize and analyze all of the races in the world in their research. In the case of the Orient and the Occident, the British created for themselves a national identity that was based on *not* being what was referred to as "Oriental." Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins, editor of the journal *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* and a professor of English and cultural studies, says, "Thus the foundation of modern orientalist thought that insists on an absolute difference between East and West was laid as a part of competition between varying

definitions of English identity" ("How Chinese Things" 151). In other words, the British created a national identity by defining who they were not.

One way that Orientalism pervaded British Romantic culture was through exoticism. *Oxford Reference* defines exoticism as the "romanticization, fetishization, and/or commodification of ethnic, racial, or cultural otherness, as in orientalism, or primitivizing representations of the 'noble savage'" ("Exoticism"). Essentially, the British used the romanticization and fetishization of the peoples and cultures of Asia and the Middle East as a way to maintain power and control over the British public's understanding and image of them. This portrayal of these peoples and their cultures made its way into British Romantic-era novels because it was so pervasive in everyday British discourses of nationalism, racial others, and the East.

One example that I mentioned above of orientalism entering British novels is through the character of Edward Rochester dressing up as an Asian fortune teller in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Scenes such as this one create stereotypes of Eastern people as exotic and mystical, as entertainment and a source of humor, rather than as people. By understanding orientalism as a racist lens that was commonplace in Britain during the time *Jane Eyre* was published, it becomes clear that this representation of the Orient, as mystical, romantic, and magical, is just as harmful as other stereotyping of people from the East. Edward Said's work on defining and criticizing orientalism within Western literature has created a lens through which academics can analyze and understand the complex ways in which the Orient was portrayed in British literature.

Imperialism embedded in Romantic era works. Many Romantic era works make references to the Orient, the West Indies, and other aspects of British imperialism. The abolition of the slave trade and the hope to abolish slavery are represented in many of these works, but that does not mean that these abolitionists were antiracist. Kitson says, "Even the most assiduous abolitionists rarely let those who had been subjugated to colonization speak: instead they appropriated the words of the colonized from mixed motives of their own" (25). Many white Britons were happy to spin tales about Black people suffering, especially Black women and children, to emotionally appeal to their audiences with the hopes that people would see the moral reasons that slavery is wrong. Dallin Lewis, a scholar researching British abolitionist literature written by white writers, writes, "Abolitionist writers...faced the challenge of imagining how both African men and African women would fit into British society. Abolitionist literature was largely written by, and for, women, and often appealed to feminine sensibility by highlighting suffering mothers, lovers, and children" (460). These writers were appropriating stories that these Black Britons should have been able to tell themselves, and, in the process, were able to play themselves off as white saviors of African peoples in Britain and the British colonies.

Romantic literature was also filled with references to British imperialism because of how pervasive it was in the public mindset. The idea that white Europeans, specifically white Britons, were superior and had a right to imperial expansion was embedded in many of the core values of society, especially during the Romantic movement which privileged aesthetics, nature, and the so-called "exotic". As mentioned above, the

Romantics created a canon with which they oppressed Indigenous peoples, forcing Western ideology, knowledge, and culture upon them. In the introduction to *Romantic Literature and the Colonized World*, Nikki Hessell says, "English literary texts were synonymous with the experiences of colonization" (3). These texts were a massive part of British colonial efforts across the globe, and they are remembered as such by many Indigenous populations. Imperialist ideas were embedded in these texts, and then these texts were used to enforce imperialism among native populations.

In his infamous address, "Minute on Indian Education (1835)," Romantic politician Thomas Babington Macaulay expresses the common British sentiment that British culture is superior to the culture of all other peoples, especially those which they colonized. He was of the opinion that the British should control the education provided to the Indian colony and that they should emphasize British knowledge and culture in this education. In this address, Macaulay says, "It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit [*sic*] language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England." His common belief that British education, knowledge, ideology, and culture were superior is a harmful one as it has been used to justify the erasure and eradication of the cultures, knowledge, and languages of Indigenous peoples for hundreds of years. By only allowing people to receive a British education, the British were able to sever their connection with their own cultural knowledge and products. For instance, if the British only allowed Indian people in their

schools to learn about Shakespeare and Milton, they would become disconnected from the literature produced by Indian authors about Indian experiences and ideologies.

The imperialism within the texts came because of the social discourses of the time that justified colonialism and white supremacy within Britain. Fulford explains how the cultural ideas became reflected within Romantic works: "Romanticism...[was] dependent on writers' historical understandings of the British Empire and other empires... shaped by their views on race, slavery and gender...influenced by their domestic politics...[and] motivated by their desire to imagine—and rule—the exotic" (47). The Romantic movement was rooted within these cultural ideas. For example, the Romantic romanticization (for lack of a better word) of exploration, nature, and the conquest and taming of nature comes from the cultural mindset that the British were not only justified but compelled by their white supremacy and superior culture to take control over the rest of the world. To tame the exotic was to assimilate native populations into the "advanced" and "superior" culture of the British.

Racialization

Though race as a concept existed before the Romantic era began, we can see how some ideas about race became more solid during the era. In fact, we can see how these Romantic ideas about race have shaped our modern understandings of race as well. The process of creating these concepts and ideas is called racialization. In their research on Blackness and race in Victorian-era literature, Ronjaunee Chatterjee, a professor specializing in nineteenth-century literature and sexuality studies, Amy Wong, a professor of literature, and Alicia Mireles Christoff, a professor who studies the novel

and Victorian literature, provide their own definition of this that I think summarizes the significance of racialization: "we follow Jamaican theorist Sylvia Winter's definition of racialization as the product, hierarchization, and regulation of human difference within global history of domination, exploitation, and expropriation." Here, Sylvia Winter explains that racialization is both a cause and an effect of British imperialism.

Racializing people who were not white Britons allowed the British to justify their cultural exploitation through a process that prominent cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall refers to as naturalization. By framing differences between the British and Indigenous people as natural, they become fixed ideas: "Whereas whites developed 'Culture' to subdue and overcome 'Nature,' for blacks, 'Culture' and 'Nature' were interchangeable...The logic behind naturalizing [differences] is simple. If they are 'natural' [differences]...then they are beyond history, permanent and fixed" (Hall 233-234). Naturalizing differences allowed the British to continue to see themselves as naturally superior due to their ability to create culture by assuming that Black and Indigenous people were incapable of creating their own sophisticated cultures to overcome their nature. This process of naturalization was done as a part of the process of racialization in order to justify British imperialism.

Racialization led the British to create many absurd theories about Black and Indigenous bodies. One manifestation of these theories is the concept that Black people could not feel pain. Bakary Diaby, a scholar who studies trans-Atlantic Romanticism, writes in his journal article, "The Black body's supposed incapacity to feel has been an issue for centuries, in no small part due to the global legacy of African chattel slavery"

(125). The British used scientific racism to justify their imperialism. Many of these ideas came from the pseudoscience of "racial studies." One British race scientist, James Cowles Prichard, was determined to catalogue and analyze every race of humankind. This type of work was created from and fed into the racial hierarchies and categorization that was prevalent in Britain in the eighteenth century.

These ideas about race theory were not limited to the British; they were common throughout Western Europe. Kitson talks about the ways that J. F. Blumenbach, a Romantic German anthropologist and race theorist, "followed the biblical account of race, arguing that the different varieties of humanity could be accounted for by the idea of 'degeneration'. The pure origin of humanity was the white male, all other forms were descended from this race according to gender or geography or a combination of the two"

(19). These types of ideas circulated around Europe, becoming popular ways of naturalizing difference and practicing racialization.

Hall discusses the ways in which these discourses surrounding race gave the British further power in their imperialism: "a *discourse* produces, through different practices of *representation*...a form of racialized knowledge of the other...deeply implicated in the operations of power" (250). The British were able to maintain their power by creating and then circulating racialized ideas about people of color. They created this knowledge to put themselves at the top of the racial hierarchy knowing that it only mattered that people believed this knowledge, even if it wasn't true. When the white, elite population of Britain believed and perpetuated this knowledge, it granted them the power of controlling the non-white populations of Britain and around the world.

A lot of the racialized knowledge being produced during the Romantic era was the result of the social movements to abolish slavery altogether in Britain and its colonies; a person could be an abolitionist and still be a white supremacist. Atsede Makonnen explains, "as the efforts of abolitionists began to see fruit, questions of new social boundaries and preservation of white supremacy brought renewed attention to the site of blackness and specifically how the white gaze should see and understand these bodies" ("The Actual Sight" 24). In other words, if Black and Indigenous people were not going to be forced into slavery anymore, how and where would they fit into society? This question created a lot of tension for white Britons and therefore sparked these debates about race and ethnicity, leading to the racialization that we can see in the Romantic era. For instance, if Black people could no longer be enslaved, then white Britons would get to decide what jobs would be available to them—if any. White Briton's arguments about if and how Black and Indigenous people would be allowed to integrate into the rest of British society were a breeding ground for racialization because their rhetoric in these debates became a part of the British Romantic-era discourse surrounding race.

Race: the self vs. the other. In the process of racialization, the Romantics had to determine how to draw the line between themselves and those they were othering. Saree Makdisi explains the way that the process of othering and racialization created a need for defining the self: "the process of self-definition, though it was inspired by contact with other cultures, ultimately came to be more about the self being defined than about the cultural others, the fascination with which had inspired self-awareness in the first place"

(43). To maintain white supremacy, the British had to create boundaries between those they saw as a part of their own group and those they saw as a part of the racial and ethnic other. Makdisi goes on to explain that because the Romantic movement was so caught up in "articulations of self" in their literature (whether that be in an individual or collective sense), these articulations were heavily influenced by the political and social context of the period (44). Thus, the sense of self that Romantics created was tied up in their identity as imperialists; they defined themselves against their definitions of the "others," whom they enslaved and colonized.

The Romantic conceptualization of self and other was a process of imperialization and hierarchization. Fulford and Kitson explain othering in their introduction to *Romanticism and Colonialism*: "Othering is a process of alienation and of epistemic violence...whereby an exclusionary distinction is made between the white westerner and the colonized subject" (6). By marking these differences as the boundaries between races, the Romantic participated in the process of racialization that is reflected in their cultural products such as their literature and their art.

De-racialization of whiteness. Racialization necessarily involved defining whiteness as a race. It was very easy for the British to decide how to define other races and ethnicities, but they did not want to have to stereotype themselves. To define whiteness as a race meant exposing it to scrutiny, so it was a lot less dangerous to just pretend that whiteness wasn't a race at all and was instead a lack of race. As a part of my project here, I think it is very important to understand whiteness as a product of *de-racialization*, and I have therefore crafted my research questions to interrogate whiteness

in *Northanger Abbey*. This evolution of my project has been inspired by Makonnen's article "Even in the Best Minds": "we must seek to comprehend not only the racial othering of people of color but also Romantic whiteness" (18). Whiteness in the Romantic era is very complex, but it is something that can be found and analyzed in Romantic works. Further, Deanna Koretsky, an English professor and one of the founding members of the aforementioned Bigger 6 collective, talks about how race and whiteness are a part of all Romantic works: "understanding that race is woven through materials with which we are already working highlights, in de la Peña's words, 'the significance of the obvious: that white people have race. And they make it, sustain it, and protect it' through various forms of cultural production, including the production of academic disciplines" ("The Uses and Limits" 154). These works contain representation of the racial discourses that existed during the Romantic era—including those surrounding whiteness—and are therefore a part of the production of racialized knowledge and power. By examining whiteness in Romantic works, we can better understand the power dynamics created by the racialization of people of color and the de-racialization of whiteness in the British Romantic era.

The Romantic movement

Through my research into Black Romanticism, I hope to create a project that is more conscious of the white supremacy that is embedded in the traditional narrative of the Romantic era that has been commonplace within academia. This has meant restructuring my research questions to examine whiteness and de-racialization in *Northanger Abbey*. Below I have included sections about the history of the Romantic era

and about the Romantic movement that have been relevant to my understanding of this novel.

Romanticism as an aesthetic and intellectual movement. As an intellectual and aesthetic movement, Romanticism focuses on themes such nature and adventure, largely as a response and rebellion against the rational thinking of the Enlightenment era, which spanned from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century. Art and creativity took the forefront of intellectual movements and ideals, while the English nation looked to industrialism and imperialism as a tactic for growth and expansion. These new industrial technologies entering the British sphere made artists look back fondly on rural landscapes and a connection to nature that felt weaker with the expansion of industry. Thus, genres such as the pastoral, which was originally popular in England in the late sixteenth century⁴, came back into popularity as artists attempted to strengthen their bond with nature. Ideas about passion and individualism also became points of discussion in many of the cultural products of the time. The *Norton Anthology of English Literature* asserts,

The emphasis in this period on unlabored art and on the spontaneous activity of the imagination producing it, and the premium placed on the immediacy of the relationship between author and poem, are linked to a belief in the essential role of passion... the intuitive feelings of 'the heart' had to supplement the judgments of the purely logical faculty, 'the head.' (16)

⁴ The pastoral is a form that was inspired by Ancient Roman poems. It was created during the Italian Renaissance—around the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—in Italy, and then popularized in England when the Renaissance spread across Europe in the sixteenth century. During the Romantic era, it became popular again.

These are some of the themes of the works that came out of the Romantic era by such authors as Percy Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Wordsworth, and Jane Austen.

The Romantic movement also had a focus on the "self" as a creative entity. Fulford and Kitson discuss historicist Raymond Schwab's definition of Romanticism within its context of orientalism and imperialism: "He [Schwab] defined Romanticism as Europe's response to the overwhelming experience of finding its civilization not unique but merely one of many, those of the east being older and, perhaps, its source" (10). As discussed above in the section "Race: The Self and the Other," the Romantics were concerned with defining the "self," and that process of definition can be seen in many Romantic works, such as in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and Keats's "Ode to Autumn" in which the authors develop a sense of interiority in their poems to create in them a sense of self. In his article "Romantic Self and Posthumanism," Ron Broglio says of Wordsworth's works, "The division is fairly clear. The 'inside' of his mind is turned outward through poetry." Through works like Wordsworth's, the Romantics were exploring their concept of the self.

Literacy. Another change that took place during the Romantic era was the increase of literacy among British citizens. This was due in part to the industrialism mentioned above—such as the creation of the penny printing press in the United States toward the end of the era—that made the creation and spread of literary works both more efficient and, consequently, less expensive. Additionally, the Church of England funded the opening of new, free Sunday schools for children, which gave access to education in reading and writing to working-class children (Lloyd). This expansion of education

provided them with a basic education and strengthened their ties to the church in a time when schooling was not guaranteed or required. Schooling was most common for working- and upper-class boys, but some girls received tutoring and schooling as well (Lloyd). The combination of these two factors led to increased literacy rates, especially in newly popularized genres such as the novel.

The French Revolution. The French Revolution coincided with the British Romantic era. Tales of bloodshed and horror were relayed back to the British, causing a swing toward conservatism out of the upper-classes' fear of political insurrection from the lower- and working-classes, who they feared would be inspired by the French revolutionaries. In France, the revolution against the aristocracy and French crown was intended to shift power away from the upper-class and toward the middle and lower classes. The new radical ideas coming from France seemed to be a threat to tradition and conservatism, not just in politics and government but also in social conventions and norms. The *Norton Anthology* explains that "French revolutionary principles were feared by English conservatives almost as much for their challenge to the 'proper' ordering of the relations between men and women as for their challenge to traditional political arrangements" (8). The French were known for their liberal mindedness in terms of some social conventions, especially those regarding sexuality and gender. This, too, was feared by the upper-class British conservatives as a threat to the patriarchal, heteronormative norms that reigned in British social structures, and, as a response to this fear, they increased their efforts to maintain and enforce these conventions.

Terminology

One important aspect to consider when researching and discussing history and historiography is terminology. While today we have many terms that we use to describe various different sexual identities and behaviors, the Romantics had a limited number of terms that they used as social labels in regard to same-sex desire and attraction. That is not to say, however, that their own terms did not exist; instead, Romantics used language in a way different from the way it is used in Western culture today. Currently, much of our descriptive (and prescriptive) language that pertains to sexual behaviors and desires is centered around identity. That is, a person may identify as a lesbian or as gay, making their sexual behaviors a foundational part of their identity. The Romantics viewed sexual identity differently. In most instances, sexual behavior existed separately from identity, and terminology was largely descriptive of this behavior, but was not primarily used to construct an identity category the way it is today. There were some exceptions, however, in that some terms circulated to ascribe social identities. In her book chapter "Female Sexuality," history professor Anna Clark says, "sexual identities did exist before the modern period, such as the effeminate sodomite or the prostitute; these people were not just seen as committing certain sexual acts, rather, their sexual behavior created a social identity" (57). For example, a woman was not necessarily considered a lesbian because of her sexual desires, but she may have been labeled a "fricatrice" or "tribade" if she was suspected of acting consistently on same-sex desire (more on these terms later).

But another question of terminology comes into play in this research: what labels and terms are appropriate to use in academic scholarship today given the fact that contemporary labels were not in use during the Romantic era? How can one reconcile the anachronism of applying the labels we use today with the nature of this research? In her article "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," queer theorist Eve Sedgwick makes the statement that, "the homo/hetero question is problematic for its anachronism: homosexual identities, and certainly female ones, are supposed not to have had a broad discursive circulation until later in the nineteenth century" (823). Essentially, Sedgwick is pointing out a common social constructivist line of thought—that identity is formed and understood in the context of a specific time period, society and culture, and that in the different society and culture of Romantic era Britain, today's terms did not exist and therefore cannot properly be applied. What we in twenty-first century United States define as lesbian is not a social role or category that existed in the Romantic era. So, what term should we use instead?

Sapphism, lesbianism, and other related terms

After consulting with many other scholars' works on this topic, I found that there seems to be some debate over which terms are the most accurate and appropriate to use—lesbian, sapphic, or something else. "Sapphic" refers to the poet Sappho, an ancient Greek author renowned for her poems expressing same-sex desire. In biographer Elizabeth Mavor's *The Ladies of Llangollen*, she says that in the eighteenth century, Sappho was known in two contexts: "'Sappho' referred either to a heterosexual poet authorized by an ever more complex tradition of biographical speculation, or to a lesbian

heroine whose adventures were either completely fictional or *à clef* fiction based" (120). Because during the Romantic era the poetry of Sappho was revered and stories about her lovers were well-known, terms such as sapphic existed to describe something akin to her works. In addition to sapphic, though, the term lesbian was in use by the eighteenth century, also to describe something as Sappho-like because Sappho was said to have lived on the island Lesbos. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, however, lesbian, like sapphic, was not put into common use to describe sexuality until 1895 (lesbian, *n.* and *adj.*).

While both terms did exist during the Romantic era, both being used on rare occasions to refer to a woman who experienced same-sex desire, I have decided against the use of any specific label to describe women who experienced passion, love, and/or desire for other women. To me, labeling these women or their relationships feels both prescriptive and anachronistic as Romantic era women did not have/frequently use terminology and labels to describe themselves or to describe a community of women who also experience same-sex attraction. I choose not to use the term lesbian specifically because our current definition and understanding of the term is heavily shaded by our culture's use of the term, and that is why it feels so anachronistic to apply it to Romantics. What we would describe as a lesbian today is vastly different from what Romantics would have described as lesbian. As Jodie Medd, author and professor of English and sexuality studies, says in the introduction to her book *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, there are "class, cultural, and racial assumptions and exclusions embedded in the term 'lesbian'" (1). Because of the current connotations that the term

carries, it would not be accurate to apply it historically. But I also do not think there is a term that could take its place in this research, as they would all boil down to stand-ins for the term lesbian. Instead, I will use *descriptive* terms over *prescriptive* ones, such as same-sex attracted or women who desired other women with the intent to describe the feelings and actions of certain women and female characters instead of prescribing them with an anachronistic label.

Other important terms

Some other terms that I have grouped together for their similarity are "fricatrice," "tribade," and "macroclitoridae" with a special mention of the term "hermaphrodite."⁵ These terms were all used during the Romantic era to describe women who were deemed by medical doctors to possess abnormal physical characteristics, such as a clitoris that was larger than average, that either caused them to feel same-sex desire or were the consequence of acting on same-sex desire. The French terms "fricatrice" (like friction) and "tribade" (like tribadism) were used because of their allusion to imagined or real sexual acts between women. A fricatrice or tribade was thought to be a woman who had sex with other women, though there are many contradictions in the discourse surrounding the possibility of women having sex, which will be discussed later. In spite of this debate about woman-woman sex, these terms persisted. Alternatively, the terms hermaphrodite—which has since been replaced by the term intersex—and macroclitoridae existed to describe physical "symptoms" of sexual and gendered

⁵ The term "hermaphrodite" has since been deemed a derogatory term. My use of the term in this project is only meant to define the terminology that was in use during the Romantic era with historical accuracy, not to advocate for its usage today.

misbehavior and pathology. These terms will be discussed further in the section labeled "Pathology of Sexuality." Interestingly, these terms were used to describe both the cause and the *results* of sexual misconduct.

Additionally, it is important to now introduce the concept of the romantic friendship, which will be elaborated on in the section labeled "Romantic Friendship." The concept of a romantic friendship was named as such by Lillian Faderman, a well-known historian of lesbian sexuality. It is a term she used to describe the real experiences of cohabitation of two women who felt passion and romance for one another but did *not* express these feelings for one another sexually. Following her creation of this term, there have been many other scholars in the field who have argued against Faderman's terminology, explaining that it is impossible for us to know whether there was or was not a sexual element to those relationships. For my own purposes, I have chosen to use the term to denote potential romantic relationships between women that may or may not be sexual as it is a useful way of explaining the ways in which these relationships functioned in society during the Romantic era.

Finally, I'd like to discuss the term "passing woman," which has been used to describe Romantic women who cross-dressed and essentially functioned in society as men. There is debate over the "real" reasons that women chose to pass as men. Some historians believed it was done to achieve the same privileges that men had at the time, such as working, traveling alone, or owning their own property, but others have inferred that it was done as a way to openly enter relationships with other women without social persecution. In her article "Pseudonymity, Passing, and Queer Biography: The Case of

Mary Diana Dods," British literature professor Geraldine Friedman makes a statement about Mary Dods, a Scottish passing woman who lived from 1790 to 1830, married a woman, and wrote under a male pseudonym: "we have no way of determining the precise role her sexuality or gender identification played in her male impersonations⁶." This statement can be applicable to other historical cases of passing women, but while we cannot know exactly why women chose to pass, we can identify some of the reasons that may have contributed to their decision. Friedman goes further to assert that, "presenting oneself as a woman in a conventional marriage to a man when that man is not a man and there is no legal marriage *is* passing." By this she means that passing women were not just the ones living as men but were also the ones in relationships with those passing women.

Historical and Social Discourses

Having established the meanings of some relevant terminology, it is important to now move on to discussion about some of the discourses that existed in the Romantic era in regard to same-sex desire between women. My work centers around middle- and upper-class white women from the era, and it is important to distinguish that the following discourses I will describe were applied most frequently to them. The experiences of lower-class women, men, and women of other races and ethnicities were

⁶ This transphobic wording belongs to the author of this quote and is not a reflection of my own beliefs. Gender identification and expression are not merely "impersonations" of maleness/masculinity or femaleness/femininity.

likely to be largely different. When referencing the authorities of the Romantic era, I am talking about such authorities as the law, the government, the social elite (such as other upper-class individuals), the church (as England was largely Anglican Christian at this time), and medical powers. These are all authorities that attempted to shape society, sometimes more effectively than other times. When it came to sexual behaviors and identities, these authorities were trying to dictate normative behaviors to maintain control over society.

Law

Many historians have documented that laws surrounding sexual behavior from this time were largely focused on behaviors between men and women and behaviors between men and other men. That is to say that there was *not* much in the way of lawmaking surrounding relationships and behaviors between women. Because of this, it is actually difficult to find "proof" of women engaging in sexual activity with one another because there are no court records that document this proof like there are regarding sexual activity between men and between men and women. In her article, literature professor and published author Katherine Binhammer talks about this phenomenon: "Unlike the policing of male same-sex sexuality through the criminalization of sodomy, there were no laws against women's sexual relations with women; thus, legal records provide little evidence" (2). This does not mean, though, that lawsuits concerning female same-sex desire never occurred, just that they were rare and difficult to find. One of the reasons that they rarely came to court was because, as Martha Vicinus—a scholar of English, women's studies, and history—puts it in *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved*

Women, 1778-1928, "The legal professional struggled to define, or to leave carefully undefined, passion between women. Recognition and denial went hand in hand" (61). If the authorities involved in creation and enforcement of the law recognized the existence of same-sex desire between women, they would be acknowledging the possibility of sex between women, something that was not believed to be possible at the time. In fact, in Britain in 1811, during the trial of *Miss Marianne Woods and Miss Jane Pirie against Dame Helen Cumming Gordon*—in which two school teachers accused of sexual relations by one of their students sued the student's grandmother for libelously spreading this accusation—the "judges explored virtually every reason why the women could not have had sexual relations: to do so was impossible for Christian ladies; it was economic and moral insanity; it was physically impossible because they used no 'tools'"⁷ (65). The authorities of the law were unwilling to accept the possibility of sex and sexual desire between women, making legal evidence of same-sex desires and behaviors difficult to find.

Religion

During the Romantic era, the majority of the British population was Christian. At the time, religious officials were determined to use their religion to control the sexual behaviors of their parishioners. For instance, there were rules forbidding extramarital and premarital sex and rules against sodomy. In fact, in the seventeenth century, convents and nunneries were commonly used as reform centers for women who exhibited undesirable

⁷ Here, "tools" was meant to refer to sexual aides such as dildos.

behaviors, including sexual ones such as prostitution (Clark 59). In the mid-eighteenth century, though, it became clear that these institutions would be unable to maintain control over prostitution and other "undesirable" acts such as extramarital sex, but this did not stop any of the church's efforts to quell this behavior, despite changes in public opinion: "the religious insistence on the sinfulness of desire contrasted with the prevalent popular attitude that female sexual pleasure was vigorous and necessary...[they created works that] presented the purpose of marriage as procreation and presented sexual pleasure, for both men and women, as a means to that end" (Clark 60). While the church tried to adamantly stomp out the "corruption" of nearly all sexual behavior, the general public remained partly unconvinced. During the Romantic era, white middle-class individuals began to define their own sexual morality against that of the upper- and lower-classes. They began to think of individuals who were not of the middle class as sexually degenerate (Clark 63-64).

Medicine

The medical sphere was perhaps one of the most influential authorities on sexual behavior because it controlled the general understanding of the workings of the body. It is important to remember that medicine at the time was not practiced in the same way that it is now; at the time, some of the methods that scientists used included analogies and visual observation. It was at the end of the 1700s that those studying medicine decided that they needed to "prove their legitimacy and distinguish themselves from quacks," leading them to become "more skeptical of invisible theories" (Sha, "Scientific"). This transition to professionalization in the medical field emphasized the value evidence for scientific and

medical theories. One form of evidence that was highly sought after was visibility because they believed that if something was visible, it was easier to prove. They felt that in order for a theory to be true, it needed to be provable via visibility; however, at the same time, "sexuality turned inward toward the brain and imagination...[and therefore] sexuality became a category especially resistant to scientific visibility and knowledge...[and] that makes sexuality a category ripe for liberation for so many Romantic artists" (Sha "Scientific"). Without the ability to *see* sexuality, scientists and medical men had to make do with what "evidence" they could find, including (incorrect) analogies—like relating plant reproduction to human reproduction and sexuality—and anatomical differences between sexes and between individuals. These anatomical differences became the basis for the understanding of the sexes and for the pathology of sexuality.

Gender and sexuality: To the Romantics, gender and sexuality were inherently entwined. Understanding this is the key to understanding sexual identity and behavior in the Romantic era. In her book, Vicinus says about Romantics' understanding of gender, "Well into the twentieth century, no distinction was made between sex and gender. Gender inversion, whether it was effeminacy in a man or masculinity in a woman, had long been an identifying characteristic of same-sex desire" (11). In other words, sex and gender were linked together; one's object of sexual desire was a symptom of one's internal gender manifested in one's gender expression. For instance, if a woman dressed in masculine attire, she must experience desire for other women, or if a man dressed in feminine attire, he must experience desire for other men. So, for the Romantics, sexual

desire was determined by gender. This is one of the reasons that labels such as lesbian or homosexual did not mean what they do today. It was assumed that everyone was either a man or a woman and that men were sexually desirous of women, and women, men. In "Scientific Forms of Sexual Knowledge in the Romanticism," Richard Sha, a historian and professor of British Romanticism, writes, "Romantic sexuality was [crucial] to the notion of gender complementary." Here, Sha is referencing the Romantic medical belief that the genders were complementary opposites of one another. A female would be the perfect social and biological complement to a male. In this case, that would mean that the only natural sexual pairing would be between a man and a woman because of their external sex organs. This is another reason for the idea that it was impossible for two women to have sex with one another—it simply was not medically or naturally possible since they were not complements of one another.

A second important connection between gender and sexuality exists between female bodies, and sex and reproduction. There were many conflicting beliefs about female passion. As Anna Clark points out, "If women's sexual pleasure was not necessary for conception, female desire would be downplayed" ("Female Sexuality" 56). Sha corroborates this idea as well when he talks about the analogies being made between human and plant reproduction: "The perceived lack of perceived visible similarity in the [female] sexual parts of plants [and the visible female sexual organs of humans] becomes the basis for the absence of women's essential contributions to the embryo" ("Scientific Forms"). Because the contribution of a plant ovum from the female sexual parts of plants is invisible, scientists did not know they existed. They analogized the perceived absence

of a sex cell in plants to a potential absence of a sex cell in human female sexual organs, thereby "proving" that neither one existed. In other words, scientists used "scientific" analogies to "prove" that women and their sexual desire were not as vital to embryonic creation as men. These ideas refuted prior notions that both male and female orgasm were necessary for conception, and, therefore, the female becomes *unnecessary* and so, too, does her desire. But that does not mean that the Romantics did not believe in female sexual desire at all. Female desire was now dangerous. If it was not necessary, it must be downplayed, as Clark explains it, largely in order to control women to accept heterosexual marriage and childbearing as inevitable. To Romantics, this mysterious, invisible, and complex female desire must be made visible and simple. And that leads into the pathology of sexuality—a way for the medical authorities to grasp these elusive concepts and regain control over them.

The pathology of sexuality: In order to regain control over society with these new ideas about sexuality existing within the brain, medical men and other such authorities knew they would have to make the invisible into the physical, the observable—the visible—in order to convince the general public of their claims' validity. British sociologist Mary McIntosh talks about the ability to control persons via labeling in her article, "The Homosexual Role": "The practice of the social labeling of persons as deviant operates in two ways as a mechanism of social control. In the first place it helps to provide a clear-cut, publicized, and recognizable threshold between permissible and impermissible behavior...Secondly, the labeling serves to segregate the deviants from others" (183). But, of course, this was not an easy task to accomplish for various reasons.

One reason is that not every individual's body looks the same physically, and not all bodies were made visible to authorities with the same frequency. Another is that behavior is not always visible. So how could these authorities *make* it visible? They had to conceptualize pathologies, diseases, and physical consequences that enabled them to control their population.

Hermaphroditism and macroclitoridae. One way of bringing sexuality from the mind to the physical body was to insist that specific differences between genitals were indicative of sexual behaviors, dispositions, and identities. Some medical authorities had initially believed enlarged clitorises to be penises, and upon realizing their mistake, they had to find a reason that these women who were previously thought to be "hermaphrodites" were still a sexual variant or sexual other—that they were not normal⁸. Instead, they decided to rename this variance by referring to these women as macroclitoridae. In "Scientific Forms," Richard Sha says, "medical men had to explain away [this enlargement] by pathologizing the clitoris through masturbation, or lesbianism, or the uterine furor, or racialized categories, or physiological monstrosity." In other words, medical authorities had to come up with a reason for what they considered to be abnormally large clitoris, and their reasoning found fault with the woman whose body they pathologized. One of the reasons that Sha lists is lesbianism. These medical

⁸ Today, it is possible that some of these individuals would identify as intersex. Others simply had larger-than-average clitorises and possibly would still identify as cisgender women. The Romantic classification of so-called "hermaphrodites" was almost entirely determined by the size and physical appearance of the clitoris and the vulva.

men were able to simultaneously demonize sexual behavior between women while also explaining away the existence of an enlarged clitoris.

But at the same time that these medical men were blaming sexual "misconduct" between women for these enlarged clitorises, they also felt that they had to take a stance against the possibility of "true" sex between women, sex that involved penetration by insisting that this enlarged clitoris could not truly be used to penetrate other women. Sha continues, "What drives this need to insist that sex/penetration between women is physiologically impossible? Because the clitoris might, even to a trained eye, pass for a penis, it had to be disciplined by pathology." If you'll recall, *naming* and *recognizing* sex between women was taboo, something that authorities did not want to do for fear of encouraging the notion that it was possible but also because they truly believed that it was not.

Another of the reasons that late eighteenth-century medical men gave for the existence of macroclitoridae was masturbation. It was believed that "excessive" masturbation could also cause an enlarged clitoris because that was also considered sexual deviance; in other words, they believed that it was the result of "bad" behavior. It was also believed that women who masturbated would not "show any interest in sex with men (since women were by nature passionate, women who seemed indifferent to sex must be satisfying themselves)" (Sha "Scientific"). To me, this reads as another way to discredit the possibility of desire and passion between women. By saying that women who masturbated clearly were not interested in men *because* of their masturbation,

medical men could purposefully erase the concept that women would feel desire for other women instead.

If macroclitoridae experienced sexual desires and behaviors differently than other women, the question that arises is *why*? Why are they masturbating and performing any kind of sexual act with other women, for example, in the first place? To reference Sha again, "Excessive sexual desire, then, results in ambiguously sexed bodies that hint at a sexuality that resists being subsumed by reproduction" ("Scientific"). This creates a sort of never-ending loop in which excessive sexual desire causes women to become macroclitoridae which in turn causes women to experience sexually atypically via sapphism, masturbation, and hypersexuality which is also what causes macroclitoridae to exist in the first place. If the logic throughout this section all feels a little bit confusing, that's because it is; I posit that Romantics were happy to jump through hoops to validate and justify their world views rather than accept the idea that two women may desire each other sexually.

Other methods of physicalizing sexuality. Aside from the invention of the macroclitoridae, there were other things that scientists wanted to make visible, specifically on women's bodies. They relied on things such as the hymen, menstruation, dulling teeth, complexion changes, and miscarriages to reveal a woman's sexual behaviors and deviances (Sha "Scientific"). For instance, an early start to menstruation or the birth of a physically disabled newborn may imply that a woman is sexually immoral. Signs such as these, which are often the cause of other factors, were believed to be proof, simply because medicine men thought it made sense.

Class and race. So, these authorities in medicine found ways to make the invisible visible, but there was another issue that they needed to take into account: they did not want to control all of society in the same ways because they wanted different outcomes for different groups of people. Class was one way that medicine men wanted to divide outcomes. In different classes, it was assumed that there existed links between behavior and sexual health that were based on the activities that one might commonly do as a part of their class. It was believed that upper-class persons must be careful because "refinement, inactivity, sedentariness, and urbanization led to sterility and consumption, a disease which many argued was the symptom of masturbation. Signs of luxury—like novels, French sauces, rich foods could now be diagnosed as signs of impending sterility" (Sha "Scientific"). Here I would like to take a bit of a detour to talk about how these assertions may have affected the acceptance of same-sex relationships among the upper class. If it was commonly believed by middle-class professionals that the upper classes were prone to asexuality⁹, sterility, and male effeminacy¹⁰, it makes sense that it would be easier for upper-class women to maintain semi-public passionate relationships with their female romantic friends. Women who were not sexual could not possibly be in any kind of sexual relationship with another woman, *especially* if two women were incapable of sex with one another. This is one reason that upper-class women may have had an easier time having these relationships.

⁹ A lack of sexual desire or of sexuality.

¹⁰ For men to exhibit the traits (physical, social, or mental) that are typically associated with women.

This is different, however, from how the middle-class was sexually pathologized. The middle-class believed that sobriety, frequent but not excessive sex, no masturbation, and economic moderation were ways to maintain sexual and reproductive health. The authorities wanted the middle classes to continue to reproduce while also being economically prudent and sober, things that authorities likely believed would cause a healthier society¹¹.

But class was not the only divider in the pathology of sexuality. Race was also a factor, and it was believed that people of color and non-Britons alike were different from white English people. Medically, this belief was the same, and medicine men analyzed situations differently for women of color than they did for white women. Sha points out an example in which one medical man was examining the hymens of deceased women and speculating on their sexual histories based off of its structure. For the white women, the man would make excuses and rationalizations to prove their "innocence" and virginity, but on a Black woman's body, he was willing to accept that she had experienced sex based on a hymen not dissimilar to some of the white women's. This medical and scientific racism was extremely common and was an extension of the racism and nationalism perpetuated throughout Britain at the time. In author Emma Donoghue's *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801*, she talks about other

¹¹ This line of thinking is a sort of precursor to the eugenics movement that began in the late nineteenth century. Eugenics is defined by *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* as "the idea that it is possible to improve the human race by choosing who is allowed to have children." The eugenics movement is a form of white supremacy as it was developed by white supremacists who believed that only white people should have children in order to "purify" the human race.

forms of medical and scientific discrimination against women of color and Indigenous women:

early European travellers' accounts of the Caribbean describe the indigenous women as just as tall and muscular as their men. No doubt this served to justify overworking black women as slaves. It also reinforced the idea that gender distinctions were a feature of a more civilized, refined society; gender blurring and the resultant sexual perversion were blamed on the 'natives'. (36)

Here we can see again how sexuality and gender were linked, but we can also see how they intersected with race. Donoghue's observation about gender being perceived differently for white women than it was for women of color and Indigenous women is part of an exoticism of female-female desire that existed in the Romantic era. Perceiving the sexuality and gender of women of color as different from those of white women contributes to a mystification and fetishization of women of color. This made women of color desirable to white Britons because of the perceived differences between them and white women. These differences perpetuated the idea that people of color both in the British colonies and in England were less civilized and less refined, adding to the pathologizing of sexuality that was already occurring in the Romantic era.

Social convention

A result of all of these authorities weighing in on issues of sexual behavior is that it altered social conventions of the time. While I have explained that there were times in which the general population disregarded authorities' recommendations about how to live their lives, the social class that was most scrutinized for their ability to follow these

recommendations and act as model citizens were the upper class. Individuals of the upper class were watched carefully by authorities and by other members of their class, and their adherence to the "rules" is part of what made them upper class.

The question is, then: what rules were in place regarding the relationships between white upper-class women? Lanser discusses female friendships and the role they played in society in her piece "'Put to the Blush': Romantic Irregularities and Sapphic Tropes": "By 1806, the public image of friendship had undergone something of a sex change...European gentlewomen had appropriated the cultural capital already attached to friendship between elite men as a resource in their struggle for autonomy, authority, and class privilege." But, as Lanser goes on to discuss, passionate relationships between women could pose a threat to male dominance; if women could choose each other instead of being forced into marrying men, it would mean fewer options for men to choose from: "When friendship was a substitute rather than a supplement for marriage, and thus a transgression of the heterosexual order whether or not the relationship was itself 'sexual'...the lines separating virtuous from transgressive alliances were often paper thin: a public word could make or break a reputation" (Lanser "'Put to the Blush'"). That means that these friendships between women were okay as long as they were not suspiciously romantic, committed, or passionate and did not "get in the way" of heterosexual marriage.

This social convention of allowing women to be in close friendships with one another opened the door for homosocial female-female relationships to hide in plain sight. So long as they were careful about their public reputation and portrayal of their "friendship," they could be together romantically and/or sexually in private. These types

of relationships were deemed romantic friendships by Lillian Faderman, another renowned researcher in this field.

Romantic friendship. Romantic friendships were one way for women in relationships with one another to protect themselves from rumors of their social transgressions. While Faderman developed this term in the late twentieth century to describe these relationships, Romantic women who desired other women were aware of such friendships in their day. Marylynne Diggs analyzed Anne Lister, known as the "first lesbian" (though she did not call herself that), and her diaries and said that the diaries "provide evidence that, at the turn of the nineteenth century, women were aware of the popular notion of nonsexual romantic friendships and engaged in sexual relationships under that cover" ("Romantic Friends" 319). Because romantic friendships were not thought to be sexual at the time, it was easy for women in relationships with one another to use them as cover to pass in public, regardless of whether their relationships were secretly sexual or not.

If you'll recall above when I discussed the medical and legal sides of sexuality, it was not considered possible for women to truly have sex or have romantic or sexual feelings for each other. H. J. E. Champion, a scholar and author who studies nineteenth-century writing, says,

The idea that middle-class women were generally considered unable to arouse each other meant that their 'romantic friendships' were socially acceptable. These relationships were a recognised, tolerated, and even *promoted* intimacy between women that lasted from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century.

Again, these romantic friendships were supported because of these misconceptions about the possibilities of sex and sexual attraction between women. Now it is important to talk about Lillian Faderman and her understanding of these relationships.

Faderman's original understanding. When Lillian Faderman first named this type of relationship between women, she thought of these relationships as entirely nonsexual, only existing at the romantic and platonic levels simultaneously. She says, "[it] was not only emotional and uplifting, it was sensual, intellectually stimulating" (*Surpassing the Love* 163). She also explains that men thought that women were using these friendships as a way to talk about their relationships with men, an example of relationships between women being viewed as a precursor to heterosexuality. Her main example when talking about these relationships was the relationship between the Ladies of Llangollen, a known romantic friendship that was well documented by both women in this long-term partnership, Sarah Ponsonby and Eleanor Butler.

Not all historians agree with Faderman, however, and it appears that even she has changed her mind about the true nature of these relationships. In fact, Anna Clark mentions Faderman's work in her own: "Faderman also argued that such women were unlikely to have had physical sexual experiences with each other, since they had no concept of lesbianism as an erotic activity" (68). This was accepted among historians and other scholars from the 1980s until about the 2000s, and Diggs postulates that this is because "the romantic friendship hypothesis provided a 'purified,' woman-centered notion of lesbian history that resonated with the lesbian feminist theories of the 1970s and early 1980s" (318). Scholar Francesca Blanch Serrat, who studies gender and age in British

history, also agreed that the concept that a relationship between women was the purest form of love was supported at the time that Faderman came out with her theory.

Faderman later went on to alter her claim: "Whether or not their relationships were sexual, romantic friends, in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, often liked to compare the 'purity' of their love for each other with the impure lusts they associated with heterosexuality" (*Chloe Plus Olivia* 5). Consensus today among scholars is that romantic friendships in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had the potential to have been sexual, especially after Anne Lister's diaries were found. In them, Lister detailed many of her sexual experiences with other women, therefore changing how scholars looked at the romantic friendships of the Romantic era.

The Ladies of Llangollen. Having touched on the importance of the Ladies of Llangollen above, I think it is now important to explain more about their relationship as they are considered by many Romanticist scholars as a prime example of romantic friendship. They are one of the more famous female-female Anglo-Irish couples of the Romantic era, in part because of their status as upper-class "ladies." Many Romantic authors and poets wrote about their idyllic relationship on their beautiful estate, idolizing their values and lives, but an invitation to Plas Newydd, their home in Wales, was extremely exclusive and limited to only those that the Ladies deemed worthy. Serrat explains that the Ladies were "aware of their privileged social status, which they used as a safeguard to keep their rejection of patriarchal heteronormativity within the socially acceptable" ("Thine Sacred Friendship" 76). By restricting their presence and access to

their home, the Ladies were able to continue to transgress social conventions safely without suspicion.

While the Ladies definitely valued their privacy, they also found it important to cultivate their minds at Plas Newydd. Serrat also explains that they were a representation of female social, financial, and political agency and that their home was considered a breeding ground for female intellectual ideas (73). Writing was a large part of the Ladies' lives, as well as reading and studying. The Ladies were written about in pastoral poems because of the location of their Welsh estate and their commitment to the countryside.

"Compensatory conservatism". Like the Ladies, many other women whose primary social relationship was with another woman feared suspicion about their relationships with other women. Some women received a break from the scrutiny because of an increase in popularity of friendships between upper-class British white women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but this was not a guarantee that their relationships were safe from the public eye. In "Put to the Blush," Lanser writes,

the fragile lines separating chaste friendship from suspect sapphism were heavily class-inflected, favoring gentlewomen who did not transgress external codes of propriety and femininity. In the end, though, the fine lines of distinction depended on the words and images that surrounded a particular relationship and on the interpretive conventions through which these could be read.

These women's relationships with one another could jeopardize their reputations regardless of class if they were suspected of being sexually involved with one another,

but upper-class women enjoyed the advantages of romantic friendships' cover because of their class.

In order to remain safely outside the public eye, many upper-class same-sex attracted women relied on what Lanser refers to as "compensatory conservatism" in which women who were suspect would act especially conservative in other areas of their lives and in politics to cast suspicion off of them ("Befriending" 187). If these women acted conservative enough in other aspects of their lives, they could fool the public eye into believing they would not engage in romantic or sexual behavior with women. An example of this is the way that the Ladies of Llangollen only allowed distinguished visitors to their home, such as members of the upper class and famous writers. Only those who were renowned for their talents or a part of the upper-class would be permitted to visit the Ladies. Regardless of whether the Ladies themselves had any personal disdain for those of the lower classes, they gave off the appearance of political conservatism to protect their status. Using their class and conservatism as a disguise, some women were able to keep their romantic relationships with other women a secret.

British Literature and Same-Sex Love

All of these discourses come together in Romantic era British society to explain how Britons understood and did or did not accept same-sex love between women. These discourses are reflected in all forms of Romantic art, including the literature produced at the time. Examining genres of the time can help us find some of the ways that this representation existed at the time as a gendered and taboo subject. Also, at this time, it

was important for any representation of female same-sex relationships to be subtle and understated. For these circumstances, encoded language was used to hide these relationships and desires from a general audience while revealing them to a very specific audience.

Genre

The ways in which same-sex love and desire is represented in literature varies by genre. Certain genres are also more likely to include these representations, such as the novel or the "passing narrative".

The novel. For my research, I have chosen to focus specifically on the female-female relationships depicted in Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey* (written in 1803 and published posthumously in 1817) because the Romantic era is credited for the rise of popularity in the genre of the novel and the genre became popular with women writers and readers. This popularity can be attributed in part to a growing number of women readers, who became a dedicated fan base for this new genre. I am interested in seeing how these early examples of the genre reflect the social conventions of their time. Additionally, for reasons explained below, the novel was not considered an academic genre in the way that other genres, like poetry, were. Because of this, novels were not as constrained by scholarly expectations as other genres; this meant that authors of novels were freer in their depictions of what real life looked like. They could write more directly about their experiences and perspectives of the society around them.

As the focus of my research, I find it important to highlight the ways in which novels were a key way for upper-class women to reflect the same-sex desire and the

discourses surrounding it that they may have experienced in their own lives. The Romantic era saw the rise of the popularity of the novel, and novels became a genre that required less practice and schooling to read and understand. Novels were considered inferior to other genres such as poetry because of this but also because they were a genre more commonly preferred by upper-class and middle-class women. In his article "What is a Romantic Novel?" British sociologist Robert Miles says about novels, "the marginalization of the Romantic novel is connected with the form's capture by women writers...the reception of the Romantic-era novel is studded with glaring examples of male critics dismissing the form on account of a feminine inability to respect appropriate boundaries" (Miles 181). The concerned boundaries here include the acceptable roles and activities for both real and fictional women, especially for upper-class and middle-class women. These critics believed that these female authors and readers were transgressing these boundaries by writing and reading novels, and they believed that the characters in these novels transgressed these boundaries as well. Because of the connection between novels and femininity, the plots of novels often revolved around what upper-class and middle-class white women were *supposed* to be concerned with—family, marriage, and the home.

The common marriage plot involved in many novels of the day allowed Romantics to explore relationships between the genders, communities, and families (Murphy 791). These plots are seen in the novels of authors such as Jane Austen and Emily Brontë, along with many other famous Romantic era writers like Maria Edgeworth. These marriage plot novels typically involve a female protagonist who starts

the novel single and ends the novel by getting married to a male love interest. In his work on Romantic sexuality, literary historian Andrew Elfenbein says, "because novels depicted sexualized behavior, they were obviously an instrument shaping that deployment of sexuality" ("Romantic Loves"). These novels, along with others that did not necessarily center around marriage plots, were both shaped by relevant discourses at the time and simultaneously shaped those discourses themselves. This is part of why the novel is such an important place to look for same-sex desire; if same-sex desire was at all a part of society and discourse, it would be represented in some way in the novel, a genre dedicated to representing and reflecting contemporary discourses. While nearly all of the marriage plots found in novels are heteronormative, the place to find same-sex desire in this genre is not always within the main plot or within the main character.

The gothic novel. The gothic novel is a subgenre of the novel, one that focuses on the macabre, on the grotesque, and on horror. These are only some of the elements that make a novel gothic; others include settings in medieval buildings, themes of isolation, and mystery ("Gothic Literature Guide" and "Gothic Novel"). Books in this genre include *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe, *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, and *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole ("Gothic Literature Guide"). This was a very popular genre at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it was satirized in its day for its dramatics and its status as a part of the genre of the novel.

As a subgenre, the gothic novel is known today for its queerness, though this queerness is not always explicit or related directly back to sexuality. In this usage of the

term, queerness means to subvert expectations and societal conventions. Gothic novels queer the genre of the novel with their transgressive ability to change what a novel is. Philosopher Michael O'Rourke and English professor David Collings talk about this in "Queer Romanticisms":

The gothic *is* queer. And the queer *is* gothic... The abject is that which threatens, is monstrous, other, overflows boundaries, and is marked by dirt, filth, and pollution. The abject unsettles, is culturally unintelligible. It is simultaneously outside culture yet also always fully inside it. The abject *is* queer, and the queer *is* abject...the gothic decenters literary representation itself, transforming it into a campy performance, a space for sexual invention, a challenge to homophobic reading, and a domain in which to affirm alternative possibilities for masculinity.

For contemporary critics, the connection that this genre has with queerness is why the gothic novel is an important part of understanding sexuality in the Romantic era, the time when it became such a popular genre. Authors' ability to transgress social norms, such as gender, passion, and drama, through this genre makes these novels a target of study when trying to understand the ways in which Romantics stood with or against those norms. As O'Rourke and Collings say above, "the gothic decenters literary representation itself, transforming it into...a space for sexual invention" ("Introduction: Queer Romanticisms"). Below I delve into the topic of encoded language, something that can be seen in gothic novels through scenes of death, pain, and nursing. Additionally, though, what O'Rourke and Collings say reminds us that both queer and gothic novels are closely

associated with campiness, dramatics, and transgressions of norms surrounding masculinity and passion.

Pornography. One of the literary genres that heavily features sexual activity between women is, of course, pornography. As Katherine Binhammer says, this is where we see the most representation of female-female sex in the Romantic era (7). As I have discussed, however, sex between women was considered a taboo or an impossibility, or, at the very least, something in which white, upper-class, British women could not and would not take part. This is also reflected within pornography from the time. As Donoghue explains, "Many of the texts from this period which include sex acts between women...[were intended] to educate or warm up the participants for heterosexual" (*Passions Between Women* 197). The depicted sex between women was not considered the final act of the pornography. Clark also corroborates this when she says, "Pornographic texts sometimes portrayed women initiating each other into sex...However, lesbian sexual desire was usually seen as a sideline to the main heterosexual event" ("Female Sexuality" 62). Sex between women was not the end goal or final result of these pornographic texts; this reflects the ways in which same-sex desires and behaviors were included in the discourses of the Romantic era. It could be something erotic to include as an addition to a story that has a heterosexual resolution, but it was not something that could stand on its own. This type of representation of female-female sex simultaneously erased the existence of women who desired other women while also providing further cover for their secretive, private relationships with one another. If sex between women was thought

to be the preamble to the main heterosexual event, same-sex attracted women were able to escape suspicion more easily.

The passing narrative. Popular at the time were gender passing narratives, fictional stories that were told about a woman who would cross-dress as a man and take a man's place in society. In these narratives, the women would usually do this to be able to work, travel, publish, etc., things that women in this era were not always allowed to do. While passing as a man, the protagonist would often be attracted to other women and have other women attracted to them. As a man, they were able to maintain a nonsexual, romantic relationship with these women, but once they were discovered to truly be women, these relationships would cease. This is heavily connected to Romantic ideas about gender and sexuality being intertwined; as long as a woman was passing as a man, she would even feel the attractions a man would feel.

But not all of the women depicted as passing men were respected and revered. Theresa Braunschneider, a scholar of British literature and the history of sexuality, explains that these writings "purport to narrate the true stories of historical women living as men in contemporary or recent England...occasionally censuring them as villains or even monsters" ("Acting the Lover" 211). While it was considered generally acceptable for these women to maintain relationships with other women as long as they were passing, there were times when these passing women were demonized. If the passing woman were to maintain a sexual relationship with another woman while passing as a man—which often involved the use of sexual aides such as dildos—and *especially* if the relationship were to continue after the passing woman's gender assigned at birth was

revealed, she would often be painted as a villain and a monster for her transgressive actions. She would be considered a threat to heteronormativity and the patriarchy (Braunschneider 216-218). These narratives existed as a way for authors to play with gender and sexuality, so long as their protagonists faced proper consequences for their transgressions against those concepts.

Encoded language and issues of visibility

The issue of representing female-female relationships and characters in Romantic era texts without drawing censorship or legal trouble exists because of the cultural taboo of same-sex desire and sexuality during the time. To write these relationships and characters in positive ways was to open oneself up to scrutiny and suspicion, especially outside of the context of pornography. The balance between visibility and invisibility was difficult to achieve and relied on the use of encoded language and specific tropes that I will discuss below.

Encoded language. Andrew Elfenbein refers to "the code" as "one of the most important forms of agency in the history of sexuality" ("Romantic Loves" 7). Code and encoded language have been vital to the existence of written language surrounding such taboo subjects as sexuality, and this is true of the Romantic era. Encoded language was used as a type of open secret, as Ashley Tauchert calls it, that allows those in the know to recognize these female-female homosocial relationships while those outside of the loop would remain oblivious to it ("Escaping Discussion"). Because of this, researchers trying to look for these female-female relationships in the texts of the Romantic era may miss some of the references to these relationships as some of the encoded language has been

lost to time: "the forms of lesbian representation are not always easy to interpret, often requiring readers to decode or read between the lines" (Gonda 107). To find the representation of homosocial female-female relationships in these texts, readers have to know what kind of language to look for. But current day scholars are not the only ones left out of the loop of this encoded language. Tauchert says that the open secrets that encoded language made possible were "an encoded discursive register that remains readable by 'knowing' readers, unrecognized as such by unknowing readers; a disavowal that both acknowledges this desire but also acknowledges that it is not 'possible' in a woman" ("Escaping Discussion"). Essentially, this means that the author of these texts only wanted some people to understand the homoerotic subtleties of their work while the rest of the general public would remain receptive to their text, oblivious to the open secret.

Using encoded language allowed Romantic authors to write more freely in a time when censorship was commonplace among published works. In 1787, King George III issued the "Proclamation for the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue, and for the Preventing and Punishing of Vice, Profaneness and Immorality," which was intended to protect the minds of the British citizens from encountering anything the King considered licentious or inappropriate. Following this, in the year 1802, the *Society for the Suppression of Vice and for the Encouragement of Religion and Virtue throughout the United Kingdom* was established to prevent and punish the spreading of such materials among the country. This proclamation was not repealed until the year 1857, after the Romantic era had ended, when it was replaced by the Obscene Publications Act (Perry).

If Romantic authors wanted to get around these limitations, they would have to encode their language to make the true meaning of their words perceptible only to those that would know what they mean.

This encoded language is not specific to published texts from the time, though. Anne Lister, who I have discussed above, used her own personal encoded language in her diaries: "Lister herself wrote the most revealing of her diary entries in code" (Lanser "Bluestocking" 260). For example, Anna Clark noted that Lister "recorded her passionately sexual relationships with several women, she noted orgasms with an 'x' in the margins of entries" (68). Anne Lister's diaries have provided researchers with many examples of encoded language, even in works that were never even meant to be published. This encoded language was created to protect women who desired other women from public scrutiny while still allowing them to express themselves to other women who felt the same.

Encoded language was not limited to written text. Martha Vicinus points out that "Androgynous or masculine nicknames, affectionate terms of endearment, and similar dress were each important indications of a lesbian marriage" (*Intimate Friends* 10). So, this language was used in more ways than just in writing, protecting women who desired other women in their everyday lives. One might wonder why women who desired women would be so willing to risk their open secret, even if they were doing so in code. Vicinus goes on to mention that "we see a sustained effort among women who loved women to construct a vocabulary and milieu suited to their sense of themselves as different from heterosexuals" (229). The need to express themselves and a desire for public acceptance

led same sex attracted women to create this code, allowing them to find others like themselves with whom they could share their hidden desires.

Nursing and pain. Some of the common homoerotic female-female encoded language that I have come across deals with the concepts of nursing and pain. These closely related topics have been—and still are—a large part of the discourse surrounding sexuality and sexual variance. Starting with the concept of pain, it can be seen in letters between suspected same sex attracted women from the Romantic era that pain was a way for women to embody their feelings and replace their desire: "the body represented in these writing is not the body in pleasure but the body in pain or distress...whether pain here legitimates attention to bodies and becomes in queer ways a displacement for erotic desire" (Lanser *Bluestocking* 271-272). But pain was not a part of the code that necessarily stood alone, for it was often accompanied by ideas of nursing.

Ashley Tauchert claims that there is a "trope of 'nursing' or 'supporting' to denote sexual intimacy...[It] deploy[s] a language denoting heightened physical contact coinciding with extreme outpourings of emotion" ("Escaping Discussion"). In writings from the Romantic era, nursing is a very intimate act, one done out of care, passion, and/or love for the sick or injured person. For instance, in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Bennet falls ill on her way to visit the Bingley family. They care for her until starts to feel better, denoting that they care for her and also marking a love interest between her and Mr. Bingley. Shortly after she falls ill, almost her entire family comes to visit her, and they fuss over her while they are there, again showing that they love her and care for her. There is an easy connection to make between nursing and intimacy, and, in

some situations, this nursing may represent sexual intimacy that is being shown via increased attention and care.

Death and memorial. One of the most common forms of encoded language that I have come across is that of death and memorial. These concepts have been a part of sexual discourse for a long time and have remained a part of our understanding of sexuality even today. With tropes such as "bury your gays" in which queer characters are written out of books and off of television shows, death is commonly linked with sexual variance today. But death has been a part of this discourse for some time. Susan Lanser references a Romantic poem in which two women are the matriarchs of a happy family but are killed off at the end of the narrative. This is like a prototypical "bury your gays trope," and Lanser makes a comment about why the author may have felt the need to destroy this happy family: "The good sapphic couple, we may start to be surmising, is the dead one" (Lanser *Sexuality of History* 238). Since women who are in a relationship with other women are so often destined to die in these narratives, the topic of memorial also arises.

Lanser discusses how important burial and memorial can be for two individuals in a relationship. The ability to remain together even after death is a desire of many couples, and this is not exclusive to heterosexuals. Two women in a relationship may be denied this right because of the religious significance of many burials and because of the taboo about it at the time. Lanser says about some of the rare instances in which these joint memorials do occur, "the shared gravesites both of Butler and Ponsonby...would soon add to the scant number of actual memorials to female couples...[to] turn monument

itself into a reproduction of a different sort" (*Sexuality of History* 231). Death and memorial are some things that heterosexuals have always been allowed to share, so for female-female couples, it has been a fight for their right to be memorialized together. This is represented in texts.

Pastoral imagery. Another type of encoded language involved elements of the pastoral. Most frequently, pastoral elements were included in poetry, like that which William Wordsworth wrote about the Ladies of Llangollen, idolizing their lives and estate which had pastoral qualities. At the time of the Romantic era, the pastoral and its elements were highly idealized for their simpleness, beauty, and connection to nature, all things that were important to Romantic ideologies. While pastorals were largely a poetic genre, the elements of the pastoral have sometimes been brought into prose. The pastoral, as Lanser puts it, "is already charged with homoerotic possibilities. It is a female inscription of these possibilities for bliss in a 'humble cottage'" ("Put to"). Lanser is not the only scholar who has noticed this pattern, though, and Bridget Keegan, an English professor at Creighton University, points out that "Numerous critics have observed the homosocial and homoerotic elements of both classical and early modern pastoral...the genre...potentially undermines heteronormative sexuality...[and is] 'titillated by transgression'" ("Romantic Labouring-Class"). Some of the things that makes the imagery of a pastoral an ideal life to same sex attracted women are its simpleness and its privacy. A life lived in the image of a pastoral would be natural and beautiful and kept away from the prying eyes of urban living.

As I have mentioned before, the Ladies of Llangollen are a perfect example of a female-female couple living a life inspired by the pastoral, but they are not the only couple that lived this way. Vicinus points out that "The fame of these...couples ensured the association of same-sex marriage with 'rural bliss,' far from corrupt society and prying eyes" (1). About the Ladies in particular, she says,

The great achievement of the ladies was to combine rural innocence with an equally venerated ideal, that of genius...External praise confirmed their decision to advertise themselves as the embodiment of the female pastoral. Rural seclusion remained a lesbian ideal into the twentieth century (12)

In Romantic texts, the pastoral provides a highly idealized setting, one that real female-female couples could fantasize about having, especially those who felt trapped by their more urban locations. These pastorals are one instance of encoded language to look for in Romantic era works for this reason.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current Research and Critical Analysis in Queer Romanticism

Analyzing and queering Romantic novels

Many English and history scholars such as Amanda Gilroy and Wil Verhoeven are discussing the political impact of the rise of the novel as a genre. In their introduction to a special Spring 2001 issue on Romantic-era novels for *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, they say: "The essays in this collection explore further her [Katie Trumpener] claims for the Romantic novel's political engagement and international mobility, as well as her insight that novels of the period 1760-1830 'have an aesthetic of their own' (xiv)" (149). It is important to keep in mind the political aspect of novels—the ways in which they both inform and are informed by Romantic social and political discourses. A lot of current critical analysis of Romantic-era novels cover topics such as race, novels in the context of other canon Romantic literature, and queerness/same-sex desire. For instance, Gilroy and Verhoeven discuss their methodological approach as an "attempt to put the Romantic-era novel back into the history of the novel, and the histories of the period, and thereby to recover something of the historicity of the Romantic-era novel" (157). In my own analysis, I examine *Northanger Abbey* as a product *and* influencer of the cultural, social, and political discourses of the time.

One instance of this approach can be found in Patricia Matthew's analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. In it, she explains how the monster is a metaphor for Otherness

within the Romantic context of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the ending of slave trade in Britain's colonies: "Shelley's audience would have understood the monster not just as an Other but one that represented enslaved men and women they both relied on for domestic goods (sugar, rum, cotton) and feared" (174). Here, Matthews is taking a new historical approach that is similar to the one I am taking to analyze gender, sexuality, and race within Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. She goes on to say that Romantic "Writers like Amelia Opie, Maria Edgeworth, Wollstonecraft, and others used slavery as a metaphor for white women's marginalization—not only as chattel but as objects subjected to men's appetites" (178). This is an important point that she brings up to show that this is not an isolated incident in Shelley's *Frankenstein*—it is a part of a larger trend in writing and has historical context that is important to how one understands the novel.

Novels held a status as feminine during the Romantic era because they were not considered an academic genre and because most novel authors and readers were women. It is important to remember the social attitudes toward the genre when analyzing its content. For instance, in *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen satirizes the gothic novel genre while simultaneously standing up for the writers and consumers of novels. Gilroy and Verhoeven say, "there was a pervasive sense that the novel was a debased form, mad, bad, and dangerous, particularly for impressionable female readers" (147). Novels have been viewed as inferior to other forms of writing due to their appeal to women readers. This appeal is a part of why the content can be seen as different from the content of other genres in which authors were writing at the time. Because novels were so distinct from other canon works from the time, such as the poetry of Samuel Coleridge or Percy

Shelley, they are often analyzed as a body of work that is largely separate from the Romantic canon. At the time they were written, they were not considered worthy of study or academic explorations. They did not enter the canon until after the Romantic era ended. Not all Romantic scholars necessarily agree with this separation of analysis, and many, like Robert Miles, have pointed out some of the many connections between the Romantic movement and Romantic novels: "the salient feature of the Romantic novel appears to be its failure to conform to and remain within accustomed boundaries. The generic boundaries—the seam lines—remain, just badly stitched together" (181). Here, Miles is making the point that Romantic novels *did* follow the ideals of the Romantic movement but in ways that were different from the ways in which other genres interpreted and expressed those ideals. In other words, they were a product of Romantic ideals and culture, just like the rest of Romantic canon. Like Patricia Matthews, Miles is taking an approach that can be considered new historical because he is placing the novels back into their context as a cultural product that came about alongside the Romantic canon. The history of the novel is a very important context for analyzing and understanding the content of these works.

Ashley Tauchert brings up an important point in her analysis of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary: A Fiction*. She explains that doing a queer reading of Romantic works can be difficult because of how difficult it is to find signifiers of female-female relationships within these works due to the lack of a public discourse surrounding female-female desire in Romantic society. Because these relationships were so taboo, the language to talk about them was often encoded, and for that reason, it can be said that

these authors had to signify these relationships using signifiers borrowed from other discourses (Tauchert). I have opted to analyze *Northanger Abbey* using a method similar to Tauchert's by uncovering this encoded language and looking for these borrowed signifiers.

Critical Analysis of Jane Austen

The project of queering Jane Austen has been ongoing for some time now in academic circles, and a lot of that work is being done through modern adaptations of her works, queer readings, and analysis of both her life and of all of her works, published and unpublished. Scholars often write about the importance of remembering that almost all of Austen's works contain marriage plots. While some may see this as a way that Austen reproduced the heteronormative and misogynist social discourses of the Romantic era, English scholars like Olivia Murphy have pointed out that Austen, and other authors of the time, used marriage plots in a way that is more complex: "Austen...did not invent the marriage plot of domestic fiction; she inherited it. The marriage plot she received was already an effective, if sometimes blunt, tool for exploring gender relations, the behaviors and tensions of dynamic communities, and the competing needs of the individual and the family" (791). Through novels with marriage plots, Austen was able to explore these complicated relationships and societal norms.

Other scholars have focused on the ways in which Austen wrote about women's sexuality, such as Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, an English professor who specializes in British Romanticism. She writes about the ways in which British Romantic culture stole from women and how they had to cope with that:

When she critiques how female erotic desire is described in conduct books and the like, she [Austen] shows how their sexuality is stolen and then returned to women in an altered form, as an excessive force that must be controlled. Moral tomes and lessons may superficially forbid female sexual expression, but they do so in a salacious way, one which encourages the reader to picture temptation, violation, or voluptuous surrender. (Put to the Blush)

In the Romantic era, social authorities worked to write-off women's sexuality as nonexistent, taboo, or fictional. This is not to say, however, that women's sexuality did not exist. These officials and authorities wanted to make their sexuality taboo and underwraps to avoid confronting its existence. Here, Heydt-Stevenson argues that Austen's works were a critique of these attempts to erase women's sexuality and that she wrote stories about women trying to cope with that.

Recently, Austen's works have been at the forefront of a conversation about race and white supremacy in today's media. With remakes, adaptations, and modernizations of her works comes a discussion about how we portray race in historical periods. There are discussions about how best to adapt her works in a modernized way to meet goals such as increasing student engagement, increasing the representation of people of color in her stories, and updating her texts to be more diverse. Some of these adaptations, including the television show *Sanditon* (2020) and the movie *Persuasion* (2022), have used color-blind casting in their decisions of how to cast the characters. Color-blind casting has been critiqued for inserting characters of color into stories without making a point to address racial issues that these characters certainly would have faced during these historical

periods, but it has also been praised for diversifying stories and creating more representation for people of color in media. While many Austen fans have been happy to accept these updated versions of these characters, there have also been many fans who are outraged about seeing people of color represent these characters on the screen.

Some of these fans have been very open about their white supremacist values, and they sometimes refer to Jane Austen's works as a representation of a "better" society, one where white people—especially white men—hold power. Some have called themselves "traditionalists" who believe that our society should return to the social dynamics of historical periods such as the Romantic era. But not all of these Austen fans are so straightforward and blatant with their white supremacy. There are some who instead critique the performances of the actors of color, complaining that they simply are not the right fit for the role, and some who try to hide their white supremacy by pointing out the historical inaccuracy of having these characters played by people of color. Journalists such as Amanda-Rae Prescott and Danuta Kean have published online articles about the different dog whistles that these white supremacists are using to try to bury their racism.

Critical analysis of race in Austen's works is not limited to these contemporary adaptations of her novels. Some scholars have investigated the character of Miss Georgiana Lambe from Austen's unfinished novel *Sanditon*, a woman who is canonically mixed-race and an heiress, while others have focused on the ways in which Austen discusses race in her novels in other ways. While the majority of Austen's characters are white, she does sometimes write dialogues in which characters make references to or

speak directly about race and ethnicity, such as in *Northanger Abbey* when Henry Tilney gives a short speech about the civility of Englishmen.

Critical Analysis of *Northanger Abbey*

There are many different topics of critical analysis within Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. A lot of contemporary critical analysis focuses on the connection between genre and gender both within the novel and within British Romantic society. Scholars such as Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Claudia L. Johnson have written articles connecting the events and characters of *Northanger Abbey* with the social norms and discourse surrounding the genre of the novel. Others have written about the political sphere in Romantic Britain, detailing how it relates to the plot, while still others have focused on the ways in which circulating libraries made the events of this novel possible (Hopkins, Erickson).

The scholar whose work most closely aligns with my own is Susan Greenfield who analyzes the novel using a queer lens herself. In her analysis, Greenfield focuses on the descriptions of Catherine Morland, the protagonist, and Henry Tilney, her male love interest, and the ways in which these characters can be read as queer. She points out the way that Catherine was described as a young girl in opposition to how she is described as a young adult, showing her indoctrination into womanhood from a more tomboyish childhood. Further, she shows Henry as an effeminate character; in the Romantic era, because gender and sexuality were thought of as connected, his effeminacy may be read as an indication of an attraction to other men. Greenfield also takes the time to note that whiteness is heavily ingrained in the novel, referencing times in which characters make

connections between their nationality and race within the novel. These ideas will be explored further in my own analysis.

Sarah Eason is another English scholar who points out the ways in which Henry Tilney can be read as "queer." Eason chooses the word queer because of the ways in which Henry does not fall perfectly into a gender binary; she writes, "At times, he performs as the masculine hero, but at others he clearly identifies with feminine characteristics" (Henry Tilney: Queer Hero). Sometimes, he acts as the perfect male love interest for Catherine, while other times, he divulges his preferences for activities that would have been considered feminine, such as reading novels and recommending dresses for his sister, Eleanor.

Eason also addresses the inherent queerness of the genre of the gothic novel. She links this queerness to Henry's character and shows how the gothic elements of this novel add to her interpretation of him as queer. She explains that "gothic literature...is an excellent space in which to examine these 'different' sorts of gender performances because the Gothic by definition points out tensions in seemingly "normal" heterosexual narratives. It allows for characters whose actions, thoughts, and desires do not fall within what normative society deems acceptable behavior." By writing within and around the genre of the gothic novel, even satirically, Austen is able to include a character such as Henry who can explore gender performance and expression. Both Eason and Greenfield bring up Judith Butler's theories of gender as a performance in their analysis of Henry as a queer character.

ANALYSIS: *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

Northanger Abbey: An Overview

The novel *Northanger Abbey*, written by Jane Austen in 1803 and published in Britain in the year 1817, tells the story of a middle-class young woman, Catherine Morland, entering British society, traveling, and falling in love. The plot of *Northanger Abbey* actually takes a backseat to many intimate moments between friends that Austen includes to show Catherine's growth through her experiences in British society.

The novel takes place in two volumes. The first volume details her trip to Bath with two family friends. While there, she becomes quick friends with Isabella Thorpe, whom I argue is her first love interest. Through her trips to balls, theatres, and pump rooms, Catherine meets Henry Tilney, the male love interest for whom Catherine is willing to directly express her admiration, and Eleanor Tilney, Henry's sister for whom Catherine has more—to use today's terminology—closeted feelings. Catherine's naïveté and inexperience within society open her character up for a number of misunderstandings, miscommunications, and mishaps, but I posit that this inexperience with society, friendship, and romance also influences her understanding of her relationships, of her racial identity, and of her romantic and sexual desires.

In the second volume of the novel, Eleanor Tilney invites Catherine to extend her travels and stay with her and her family at Northanger Abbey. Catherine, an avid reader of gothic novels, a genre increasing in popularity at the time this book was written, is

ecstatic to join her friend *and* to experience an abbey in person. Abbeys are a common setting for Romantic gothic novels, and Henry Tilney, aware of her interest in the genre, teasingly promotes the idea to her that the abbey has a tragic history. Catherine, in all of her innocence and gullibility, begins to suspect that Henry is alluding to a dreadful secret—that his father, General Tilney, has killed or imprisoned Mrs. Tilney within the abbey. Henry finds Catherine out, and she is embarrassed to have thought so lowly of the general. Due to a miscommunication between the general and a member of the Thorpe household, General Tilney believes that Catherine has willfully deceived his family into thinking her wealthy and, therefore, kicks her out of the abbey and sends her home. Finally, Henry is able to rectify the situation, admits his love for Catherine, and the two marry off-page within the final chapter of the novel.

The two female-female relationships I am analyzing center on Catherine and her attraction to Isabella and to Eleanor. *Northanger Abbey* contains many forms of encoded language, which Austen uses to expose Catherine's innocence and naïveté as a character unused to the social norms and etiquette of the British upper middle class. One type of this encoded language highlights the same-sex desire that Catherine and her female love interests have for one another and takes such forms as letter writing, pastoral imagery, and teaching. There are many more instances of language that are direct and hidden in plain sight in which these young women express their love and dedication to one another under the guise of a female friendship. Further, Catherine's inexperience with the social norms and euphemisms of the upper middle class leave her clueless about different characters' intentions and often prevents her from seeing the subtext within the

conversations she has with the people she meets in Bath. Catherine's cluelessness leads her to be impressionable and easily persuaded by the people in her life that she considers intelligent and kind, causing Catherine to naturalize and accept their ideas about race, nationalism, and upper-middle-class society.

Meta-recognition of the novel and satire of the gothic novel

One of the elements of *Northanger Abbey* is Austen's insistence on the validity of the genre of the novel. Not only do all of her characters like novels, but Austen even takes a couple of pages to break the fourth wall to discuss and defend the genre. In this digression, she alludes to the popularity of the genre among women who both read and authored novels. She also criticizes the trope of novels' protagonists having a distaste for the genre, saying, "I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of...joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine" (22). The novel is a genre that gave upper- and middle-class white women a voice within their society, a way to be heard and seen by other women. Novels were a way for these women to document their experiences and their perspectives surrounding British society; one common experience documented in these Romantic novels was the intricacies and importance of female-female friendships.

The only character that expresses a distaste for novels is John Thorpe, Isabella's miserable brother and one of the few characters that we, as readers, are meant to dislike; however, he is lying to cover his enjoyment of the genre. He has clearly read many

novels given the fact that he knows all of the titles, authors, and characters in them. In a conversation with Catherine about novels he says,

Novels are all so full of nonsense and stuff; there has not been a tolerably decent one come out since Tom Jones, except the Monk; I read that t'other day; but as for all the others, they are the stupidest things in creation...I was thinking of that other stupid book written by that woman they make such a fuss about. (31)

In this conversation, he is able to list many novels, novel plots, and novelists such as Ann Radcliffe and her novels *Camilla*, *The Monk*, and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Though John Thorpe claims he doesn't like novels, he secretly *does* like them, but he refuses to admit it because of the cultural connection of the novel with women. This is one of the ways that Austen paints his character to be so unlikeable.

Another layer that builds on this aspect of the novel is the way in which Austen satirizes the gothic novel, a genre of novel that was very popular at the time. Gothic novels, as I've stated above, involved themes of horror and mystery. In these novels, settings such as old abbeys and decrepit castles tied in an appreciation of history with these themes. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine is written to love gothic novels. She shares her love for them with all three of her love interests: Isabella, Henry, and Eleanor. For instance, when Catherine and Isabella meet in the pump rooms, Isabella says, "Dear creature! how much I am obliged to you; and when you have finished Udolpho, we will read the Italian together; and I have made a list of ten or twelve more of the same kind for you" (24). Another time, Catherine is walking with Henry and Eleanor around Beechen Cliff and the topic of novels comes up. Henry says, "'The person, be it gentleman or lady,

who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid. I have read all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and most of them with great pleasure" (72). It is my assertion that Catherine and her love interests are forging an intimacy with one another by expressing their love for novels and reading them together, especially with her female love interests, Isabella and Eleanor.

Whiteness in *Northanger Abbey*

Throughout the novel, race and ethnicity are not topics that are brought up often either by the narrator or by the characters in the story; however, that does not mean they are not relevant to the story itself. The only times that ethnicity, race, or nationality get mentioned are the times in which John Thorpe, Isabella's brother, makes passing antisemitic remarks; when Henry Tilney gives a speech about being an Englishman; and when Catherine later reflects on that speech.

John Thorpe brings up stereotypes about Jewish people and money, mostly to make analogies within his dialogues with other characters. For instance, in conversation with Catherine he says, "'Old Allen is as rich as a Jew—is not he?' Catherine did not understand him." (42). This is not the only time he makes such a remark. Notably, John Thorpe is particularly singled out as an arrogant and undesirable character. Catherine has no interest in talking with him or even being around him, and she is very upset when he makes romantic advances toward her. Through a great deal of situational irony, Austen paints him as both vain *and* incompetent. Austen uses this technique in many of her novels; rather than writing her narrator to outright disagree with certain bigotry or opinions that Austen wants to critique, she instead writes her most awful characters as

having these opinions. In this way, she invites the audience to laugh alongside her at these terrible characters saying terrible things.

Susan Greenfield, a scholar who has written about the ways in which race and sexuality are a part of the plot of *Northanger Abbey*, points out that aside from John Thorpe's antisemitism, the only other time that race and nationality are brought up is when Henry chastises Catherine for suspecting that General Tilney may have killed or imprisoned his wife. In this scene, Henry says, "Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained...Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation" (136). Here, Henry is equating their Englishness (and their whiteness and Christianity) to lawfulness, civility, and goodness, suggesting that as English subjects and Christians, it is implausible that his father would do such a thing. This is a statement directly linking morality with nationality and religion and indirectly linking it with race, making it one of the few times that race, nationality, or ethnicity is brought up in this novel. The English nationalism that Henry is expressing is rooted in white supremacist ideals because the British Empire was founded on the colonization of indigenous peoples and the oppression of many peoples of color. His speech serves only as a way for Henry to patronize Catherine and prove that her suspicions about his father are incorrect—Austen does not take this opportunity to critique white supremacy as she critiqued antisemitism with John Thorpe's character, suggesting that this may have been a belief which she held herself.

At the beginning of the next chapter, Catherine reflects on Henry's speech and the plots often found within gothic novels. Austen writes,

Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for...Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country...[b]ut in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age. (137)

Here, Austen plays off of Catherine's impressionable character, writing that Catherine admonishes herself for her own lack of faith in the English and for allowing herself to believe that an Englishman could possibly abuse his wife, morally or legally. Catherine recognizes that, though Ann Radcliffe might have written many gothic novels that contained violence against women, it was unreasonable for her to believe that this would be reflected in English life. Catherine's reflection on Henry's white supremacist speech shows the pervasiveness of such beliefs and ways of thinking throughout the Romantic era. One could point back to Austen's tendency to critique the cultural climate of Britain at the time, connecting the ways in which she writes Catherine as an extremely naïve character with the ways in which Catherine thinks about whiteness and nationalism, but this does not remove the glaringly obvious way in which Austen normalizes and factualizes white supremacist beliefs through the ways in which she writes these two characters.

The difference between these two characters shows a very complex discourse surrounding race, nationality, and ethnicity in the British Romantic era. While Austen

critique's John Thorpe's blatant antisemitism by making his character undesirable to Catherine, she does not do the same with Henry's nationalist remarks. This shows an important dynamic within the discourses of race, nationalism, and ethnicity; Catherine's immediate acceptance of and agreement with Henry's statements may be credited to her naïveté, but there is still an underlying message here about the naturalization of the deracialization of whiteness in Romantic-era Britain. Catherine does not view what Henry says about being English as out-of-place. In fact, she immediately normalizes and internalizes these statements in a way that she does not with John Thorpe's antisemitism.

Catherine never reflects on John Thorpe's comments. Instead, she doesn't seem to take much note of them. This is in stark contrast with her reaction to Henry's speech, which she reflects upon as logical and natural. The mere fact that Catherine ends up marrying Henry points to the acceptance of this kind of speech. While John Thorpe is a sort of antagonist for Catherine, Henry is the love interest that Catherine marries. This shows a type of acceptance of nationalist rhetoric. Austen makes a point here that blatantly antisemitic remarks are not something as socially acceptable as remarks about English nationalism that supports white supremacist thinking. Perhaps the point Austen makes by drawing attention to the difference in these two characters is less about condemning the use of antisemitic rhetoric and more about manners, i.e., using the proper tone and wording of those statements—positive statements about the moral "superiority" of white English (read: white) Christians are endorsed by Austen's protagonist as are logical while negative statements about the "inferiority" of Jews is coded as rude.

The ways in which it was considered acceptable for these characters to discuss race and ethnicity can be considered a form of encoded language, a part of a social code that Catherine has to adapt to in her time away from home. This social code is already partly normalized for Catherine by the point in the book in which Henry makes his nationalist statements; she is able to recognize that Henry's way of speaking about race and nationality is considered acceptable in comparison to John Thorpe's way of expressing his antisemitic views.

These examples do not insinuate, however, that Austen wrote *Northanger Abbey* to include any type of nuanced or purposeful conversations about race and ethnicity. Though John Thorpe's antisemitism, Henry's speech to Catherine, and Catherine's reflection afterward are obvious instances in which she brings up these topics, Austen does not designate any other part of her novel to this discussion. Regardless, race is still a large part of this story. Every character in the novel is written to be middle-class and white which directly affords them with the funds and resources for the travel and activities in which they take part. For instance, Catherine would not have entered the season, gone to any balls or theatres, or vacationed in Bath in the first place if she did not belong to a middle-class, white family. Every one of Catherine's opportunities and experiences were segregated from those of other classes, races, or ethnicities. This is the space that whiteness occupies within this novel.

The very limited discussion of race and ethnicity in this novel does not mean that it is without race—only that attention is not being drawn to it. While Austen herself may or may not have intended to contribute to deracializing whiteness through her works, the

social norms of the time are reflected in her works, meaning that this form of white supremacy—in which whiteness is considered neutral and normal—is also reflected in this novel. The discourse of race during the British Romantic era is affected by and affects the cultural products that were made at the time, and we can see these discourses at work in *Northanger Abbey* by the naturalization of an all-white cast of characters. Austen herself may not have even thought about this when she wrote the novel, but the discourses from the time still show through her works. Thus, Catherine has many advantages in terms of resources and opportunities that her character would not have had if she were a woman of color or of a lower class.

As I said above in the literature review portion of this project, the behaviors, attitudes, and opportunities written into works such as *Northanger Abbey* are reflective of white, middle-class women, a very specific group. Not all women of other races, ethnicities, and social classes had the same luxuries when it came to their relationships with other women. For instance, Catherine's ability to even visit Bath in the first place to meet Henry, Eleanor, and Isabella is largely due to her privileged status in life.

Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney as queer-coded characters

As a character, Austen describes Catherine in a very particular way at the start of the novel. In the first chapter, she says,

She was fond of all boys' plays, and greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush...she was moreover noisy and wild, hated

confinement and cleanliness, and loved nothing so well in the world as rolling down a green slope at the back of the house. (5-6)

Here, Austen is explaining that, as an upper-middle-class, white, female child of ten years old, Catherine expressed many characteristics that are often considered to be masculine. She then goes on to explain that over time, Catherine loses her preference for "cricket, base ball, riding on horseback, and running about the country" and instead picks up an interest in reading, cleanliness, and finery (7). Susan Greenfield connects this character development with Judith Butler's ideas about gender as a performance, saying that Catherine grows up and learns to perform her gender as a woman in Romantic society despite her inclinations toward more masculine traits and activities as a child. Greenfield's take "queers" Catherine as a character, showing the ways in which Catherine subverts gender norms until she is required to learn and perform them.

Greenfield then goes on to queer Catherine in a different way, highlighting the ways in which her interest in Henry (and sometimes her other friends) is directly competing with her interest in gothic novels. For instance, she struggles with the choice between going to the pump rooms to socialize with Henry and staying in to finish *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, a gothic novel that was in circulation at the time. Further, she spends her time at Northanger Abbey obsessing over the rather gothic idea that General Tilney may have killed or imprisoned his wife. Rather than taking the opportunity to be close with Henry and Eleanor, she allows the gothic to draw her in. Finally, when Henry leaves for Woodston, she hardly notices his absence, and she is instead preoccupied by Eleanor and the gothic mystery she thinks the General is hiding. Greenfield's larger point

here is that Catherine, while she does express interest in Henry, is not nearly as interested in him as she is with gothic novels, displaying that her interest in her male love interest may not be as deeply rooted as we as readers are led to believe.

Catherine is not the only character that can be read as queer coded. Henry himself has been read and analyzed as queer by many scholars, including Susan Greenfield and literary scholar Sarah Eason. Eason summarizes the crux of the argument for a queer Henry in her article, *Henry Tilney: Queer Hero of Northanger Abbey*:

Henry Tilney, whose gender performance resists categorization...At times, he performs as the masculine hero, but at others he clearly identifies with feminine characteristics. Shifting between these roles depending on the situation at hand, Henry does not fall neatly within binary gender system. Rather, he falls into the 'other' space of queerness.

As the masculine hero of the novel, Henry educates, teases, and gently (read: patronizingly) chastises the women in his life, such as Eleanor and Catherine, like when he takes them on a walk in Bath and discusses education, novels, and art with them. At the end of the novel, he even stands up against his father, going against his wishes by marrying Catherine and "saving" her from her life without him. At moments like these, Henry is the masculine love interest and hero.

Henry often crosses over into more traditionally feminine characteristics. Both Greenfield and Eason point out his familiarity with fabrics, textiles, and gowns in the scene in which he talks about them with Mrs. Allen and in the scene in which he jokes about the types of things that young ladies would write about in their diaries about their

visit to Bath. Further, at multiple points throughout the novel, Henry talks about how much he enjoys reading novels, saying, "The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid" (72). Since the novel was considered a genre for women in the Romantic era, Henry's unabashed confession of his enjoyment of the genre is another way in which he satirizes and crosses gender norms. His refusal to sit neatly inside of the gender norms of the Romantic era show a way in which he queers gender and sexuality within the novel.

The language of female friendship

Eleanor, Catherine, and Isabella speak to and about one another with a great deal of heavy-handed affection. Though some novels written at the time, such as *Evelina* and *A Sicilian Romance* depict female friendships as verbally affectionate, *Northanger Abbey* seems to take that a step further. Some of the phrases used in the book are common in other Romantic works, such as the many times Isabella refers to Catherine as "my dearest creature" and "my dearest Catherine" (23-24). Austen, however, writes these characters as very affectionate with one another, using language that indicates a level of physical attraction that is unique to Catherine's relationships with Eleanor and Isabella. This can be seen when Isabella addresses Catherine at the theatre:

'Oh, heavens! My beloved Catherine, have I got you at last?' was her address on Catherine's entering the box and sitting by her....'My sweetest Catherine, how have you been this long age? But I need not ask you, for you look delightfully. You really have done your hair in a more heavenly style than ever; you mischievous creature, do you want to attract everybody?' (46)

Here, Isabella appears almost rapturous to see Catherine, and she goes so far as to compliment her by telling her that she looks so beautiful that she must have done her hair intentionally to attract everyone at the theatre. Notably, Isabella says that Catherine could attract "everybody"; Isabella pays this compliment in such a way that she is included among the people who she insists must find Catherine attractive. These types of over-the-top compliments are very common in the dialogue between Catherine and Isabella.

Isabella does not only pay these types of compliments to Catherine. She occasionally brings up a friend from home, Miss Andrews, whom she speaks of affectionately. For instance, she says, "a particular friend of mine, a Miss Andrews, a sweet girl...I think her as beautiful as an angel, and I am so vexed with the men for not admiring her!" (25). Here, again, Isabella speaks on how attractive she finds another woman and how she thinks that others should find that woman attractive, too. This reads as a displacement of her feelings onto the men around her; she feels a desire for Catherine and for Miss Andrews, but she speaks as though the men around her should feel that desire as a way of displacing her feelings. This way, she would not have to admit to her own desires for these women in a direct way. In fact, Isabella goes on to say, "I make it a rule to never mind what they [men] say" (26). Isabella is very open about her attraction to Catherine and her desire to be with her, and she also expresses a disinterest in men's opinions, especially their opinions of her, implying that she might only mind what women think.

While Isabella is obvious about her feelings for Catherine, Catherine is the one who is desirous of Eleanor. Catherine, being a more subdued, polite character, does not

speaking with Eleanor in the ways that Isabella spoke to her. Instead, Catherine's attraction to Eleanor is more subtle and is expressed most frequently by the narrator of the novel. The narrator constantly remarks about the ways in which Catherine views Eleanor and her excitement to meet her and spend time with her. For instance, before they get a chance to be introduced, this is how the narrator describes Catherine's interest in getting to know her:

Miss Tilney had a good figure, a pretty face, and a very agreeable countenance; and her air...had more real elegance. Her manners shewed [*sic*] good sense and good breeding...and she seemed capable of being young, attractive, and at a ball, without wanting to fix the attention of every man near her...Catherine, interested at once by her appearance and her relationship to Mr. Tilney, was desirous of being acquainted with her" (37)

Catherine instantly notices Eleanor's appearance and at once makes up her mind to meet her. While part of Catherine's interest in Eleanor has to do with her relation to Henry, Eleanor spends much more time talking about her physical attraction to Eleanor than she does talking about the fact that they are related. While Catherine could use a relationship with Eleanor to get closer to Henry, she doesn't actually do this in the novel. She spends time with Eleanor for the sake of spending time with her, not to get closer to Henry. Shortly after this passage, the narrator says, "The first wish of her [Catherine's] heart was to improve her acquaintance with Miss Tilney" (39-40). This is particularly important because it shows that Catherine was even more interested in getting to know Eleanor than she was to spend time with Henry (or even Isabella).

Many of the characteristics that Catherine admires in Eleanor refer to her grace and politeness, which the narrator attributes to her "good breeding." This is an example of encoded language about race and class; rather than outright state that Eleanor is white, English, Christian, and of the upper middle class, Austen opts to imply this information within a comment about her "good breeding." This encoded language sanitizes this type of white supremacist thinking, making it more socially acceptable in narration or conversation. Catherine is, in part, drawn to her specifically for her education, class, and race.

The narrator also expresses Eleanor's desire for Catherine: "Miss Tilney took pains to be near her" (89). Clearly, Eleanor is attracted to Catherine as much as Catherine is attracted to her. Eleanor and Catherine's desire for one another is less explicit but just as direct as Isabella and Catherine's desire for each other. In another scene, the narrator shows that the time that Catherine and Eleanor spent together improved their intimacy and that Eleanor and Catherine had a great desire to spend time with one another (152). Every moment that Catherine and Eleanor spend together seems to leave Catherine looking forward to the next time they will see each other. The narrator says,

[H]er friends attended her into the house, and Miss Tilney, before they parted, addressing herself with respectful form, as much to Mrs. Allen as to Catherine, petitioned for the pleasure of her company to dinner...No difficulty was made on Mrs. Allen's side—and the only difficulty on Catherine's was in concealing the excess of her pleasure. (79)

Here, the narrator exhibits Catherine's pleasure at the mere thought of seeing Eleanor again soon, showing that she was so pleased that it was difficult for her to hide just how excited she was. Catherine's excess of pleasure does not come from Henry, but it does come from Eleanor. Toward the end of the novel, Catherine says, "No friend can be better worth keeping than Eleanor" (163). Eleanor and Catherine maintain their attraction toward one another through their friendship throughout the novel, from the time they are introduced to the time the novel ends.

Teaching and flowers. *Northanger Abbey* includes many intimate instances between Catherine and her female love interests that are interpretable as encoded language. One of these instances that I find compelling is the scene in which Catherine and Henry discuss hyacinth flowers. Catherine says, "I have just learned to love a hyacinth...Your sister taught me; I cannot tell how...but I never could, till I saw them the other day in Milsom-street" (119). One form that encoded language took in the Romantic era was that of mentorship and teaching; here, Catherine says that Eleanor took on the role of a teacher, teaching Catherine to love a hyacinth. In the Romantic era, it was common for women to take on teaching roles to initiate younger women into society, specifically into what limited culture existed for women-loving women.

Further, the fact that Catherine learns to love a hyacinth is particularly important. Throughout many historical writings, flowers have been representational of women, their virginity, and female genitalia (Farago). For example, one of Sappho's poems, "One Girl," has been translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and specifically references hyacinths; the second verse reads, "Like the wild hyacinth flower which on the hills is

found / Which the passing feet of the shepherds for ever tear and wound / Until the purple blossom is trodden in the ground." In this poem, Sappho is exploring the institution of marriage, comparing the girl to a trampled hyacinth after she has been married. The message behind this poem is that marriage confines, harms, and oppresses women. These types of comparisons between women and flowers have been commonplace in art and writing for centuries and picked up in usage during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As I mentioned in the section of historical contexts about medical discourses of the Romantic era, a medical analogy was made between the anatomy of women and the anatomy of flowers in 1753 with botanist Carl Linneaus's *Species Plantarum* of 1753 (Sha "Scientific Forms"; Farago). It is no coincidence that Eleanor specifically teaches Catherine to love a flower, specifically a hyacinth—she is teaching her to love women and female genitalia.

The pastoral. *Northanger Abbey* incorporates pastoral elements into its setting, something common in Romantic literature, but these pastoral elements are noteworthy for their significance to women-loving women. The famous Ladies of Llangollen, for instance, were known for their estate in the Welsh countryside, and their relationship was known to be outside of the norms of platonic female friendships of the time. Depictions of female-female intimacy in a pastoral setting are an homage to this trope of women-loving women living together in the countryside. As the second volume largely takes place at Northanger Abbey in a beautiful countryside, there are moments in which Catherine and Eleanor are depicted within that pastoral setting: "'This is so favourite a walk of mine,' said Miss Tilney, 'that I always think it the best and nearest

way'...Catherine, struck by its gloomy aspect, and eager to enter it, could not, even by the General's disapprobation, be kept from stepping forward" (123). Catherine relishes in their separation from the General, saying that she was glad to be rid of him. Her relief at separating from him can be attributed to her suspicion that he had violently attacked his wife, but she also notes that the General's presence often puts the other characters in the story on edge. Catherine observes that everyone is easier and more relaxed when the General is not around, meaning that his presence restricts the intimacies between Catherine and Eleanor. In other words, this can be interpreted as excitement to spend time with Eleanor alone in a pastoral setting without the looming presence of the General.

As I mentioned above in my discussion of the pastoral's resurgence during the Romantic era, pastorals were re-popularized because of the Romantic ideals about nature and the self. They were a genre that allowed Romantic writers to explore connections between themselves and nature. These ideas about conquering and living within nature sparked some of the exoticism of and racism toward indigenous cultures and peoples. Austen's depiction of a pastoral setting as a peaceful one—at least when the General isn't around—is a part of this mythos surrounding nature that shows that nature exists to be conquered by the British and therefore become peaceful.

Touch. Another form of affection between Catherine and her female love interests was much less subtle: touch. Touch often substituted spoken language between these characters. For example, Austen writes the following about Eleanor and Catherine: "A long affectionate embrace supplied the place of language in bidding each other adieu" (158). Touch is also mentioned between Isabella and Catherine. For instance, in a scene

when they go to the theatre together the narrator describes their physical intimacy with one another: "whispering to each other whenever a thought occurred, and supplying the place of many ideas by a squeeze of the hand or a smile of affection...Isabella had only time to press her friend's hand and say 'Goodbye, my dear love'" (34). The narrator even says that these touches took the place of language as a way for these women to express their affection for one another.

Female connection over the novel. Throughout the novel, Catherine often talks about her love of novels with her friends, but also, the narrator makes it a point to note that Catherine and Isabella's relationship is partially built on their shared love for gothic novels. Austen writes that their friendship was "a very warm attachment, and of this delicacy, discretion, originality of thought, and literary taste which marked the reasonableness of that attachment" (23). As a genre considered feminine at the time, it makes sense that the female friends in the story bond over their shared love for novels. Much of Catherine and Isabella's intimate time is spent reading: "and if a rainy morning deprived them of other enjoyments, they were still resolute in meeting in defiance of wet and dirt, and shut themselves up, to read novels together" (22). The young ladies' insistence on meeting with one another, even in rough weather, to read can be interpreted as an act of dedication and commitment to each other.

Catherine and Isabella's ability to spend their leisure time reading novels speaks to their social rank and class status. Both women are well-off enough that they can take luxurious vacations to Bath and spend their time there reading together. Further, the fact that they even have the ability to read in the first place is indicative of their status as

members of the middle class. Their whiteness also contributes to their status in British society. Because they are white, they can be of the middle class and educated, and they can find the time to share this hobby with one another.

Letter writing. One way in which Catherine stayed in touch with both Isabella and Eleanor was through letter writing. In the first volume of the book, Isabella writes to Catherine to request her presence: "Early the next day, a note from Isabella, speaking peace and tenderness in every line, and entreating the immediate presence of her friend on a matter of the utmost importance, hastened Catherine, in the happiest state of confidence and curiosity, to Edgar's Buildings" (80). Notably, Catherine becomes extremely happy to see her friend, especially after Isabella writes with "peace and tenderness." This letter is one instance in the novel where you can see the importance that Catherine places on her relationships with her love interests. She is as happy to meet with Isabella as she would be to meet with Henry.

In the second volume of the book, Eleanor begs Catherine to write to her after Catherine is kicked out of Northanger Abbey: "'You *must* write to me, Catherine,' she cried; 'you *must* let me hear from you as soon as possible. Till I know you to be safe at home, I shall not have an hour's comfort. For *one* letter, at all risks, all hazards, I must entreat'" (157). Though Eleanor knows that receiving a letter from Catherine could get her in trouble with her father, she pleads for correspondence between them. This is reflective of a common occurrence during the Romantic era in which romantic friends would be separated from one another, often through marriage to a man, and could only communicate via letter. This scene also mimics the romantic trope of forbidden love.

Catherine says that she will not write a letter to Eleanor since it is forbidden by the General, but Eleanor convinces her to write anyway.

These letters often included very intimate sentiments and were sometimes written in encoded language to avoid suspicion by others who may read the letter. Austen writes, As soon as breakfast was over, she sat down to fulfil her promise to Miss Tilney...never had it been harder for her to write than in addressing Eleanor Tilney. To compose a letter which might at once do justice to her sentiments and her situation, convey gratitude without servile regret, be guarded without coldness, and honest without resentment—a letter which Eleanor might not be pained by the perusal of—and, above all, which she might not blush herself, if Henry should chance to see, was an undertaking to frighten away all her powers of performance...enclosed with...the thousand good wishes of a most affectionate heart. (162)

The narrator is very clear here that Catherine had to write in such a careful and encoded way as to avoid raising Henry's suspicion of her relationship with Eleanor. Catherine has to reel in her desire to express her affection and best wishes for Eleanor because if she wrote her true feelings and Henry intercepted the letter, it would make both her and Eleanor very embarrassed. Her love and affection for Eleanor is so great that it would illicit scrutiny from Henry for breaking the social norms of how women should care about and interact with another.

Catherine, Eleanor, and Isabella all owe their ability to write letters to their status as white, middle-class women. While literacy rates were on the rise in the Romantic era

as discussed above, not every family could afford to send their children to the Sunday schools opened by the Church of England. Further, many British people of color did not have the opportunity to learn to read or write because of their race and status in society. In real life, women like Catherine, Eleanor, and Isabella would have had the privilege to learn to write because of their position in society as white and upper middle class.

The marriage plot

As mentioned above in the section "The Novel," one of the common storylines that Romantic novels follow is the marriage plot. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen uses the marriage plot to explore intimacies between women as a sort of warmup for heterosexual intimacies. First, Catherine meets Isabella. Isabella gives Catherine an introduction to female-female relationships and is the first romantic love interest in the story. Her character serves to prepare Catherine for her future relationships with Eleanor and Henry, which she does by teaching Catherine about entering into upper-middle-class British society. Soon afterwards, when Catherine meets Henry and develops an attraction to him, Isabella is her confidante. She encourages Catherine's attraction, but she doesn't outright push her toward him.

A little later in the novel, Catherine meets Eleanor, Henry's sister, and the two immediately hit it off. From this point onward, Isabella starts taking the backseat to Catherine's friendship with Eleanor. This makes Isabella jealous: "Isabella...reproached her [Catherine] with having more affection for Miss Tilney, though she had known her so little a while, than for her best and oldest friends... 'I cannot help being jealous, Catherine, when I see myself slighted for strangers, I, who love you so excessively'" (66). Isabella is

slowly removed from Catherine's pool of love interests, starting with her engagement to Catherine's brother and ending with her accidental confession of her cheating tendencies.

Meanwhile, Eleanor becomes the most important character in Catherine's life. As discussed below in the section "Displaced Interest and Marrying off Quickly," Catherine is even more devoted to her relationship with Eleanor than she is to her relationship with Henry. Eleanor becomes Catherine's next mentor in intimacy, becoming so close that she invites Catherine to vacation at her home in *Northanger Abbey*.

Henry, who has been one of Catherine's love interests since he was introduced, doesn't take center-stage in her life until the very end of the novel when it is revealed that he intends to marry her *and* that Eleanor married an unnamed character. Catherine spends the entire novel being prepared for her marriage to Henry, which doesn't occur until the last chapter of the book. This novel does follow the conventional story arc of the marriage plot, with the heterosexual love interests marrying at the end of the novel, but not until Catherine has been thoroughly taught about romantic interest and intimacy from Isabella and Eleanor.

Displaced interest and marrying off quickly. Austen puts one barrier in place between Catherine and her female love interests: potential male love interests. Often, however, Isabella's attraction to Catherine is displaced onto James Morland, Catherine's brother, and Catherine's attraction to both Isabella and Eleanor is displaced onto Henry. When Isabella becomes engaged to James, she says to Catherine, "You will be so infinitely dearer to me, my Catherine, than either Anne or Maria [Isabella's sisters]: I feel that I shall be so much more attached to my dear Morland's family than to my

own'...'You are so like your dear brother,' continued Isabella, 'that I quite doted on you the first moment I saw you" (81-82). Here, Isabella displaces her interest in Catherine onto James as a way of reconciling her feelings for Catherine with the heteronormativity present in British Romantic society. In fact, she even compares Catherine directly to James, saying that the two are so similar that she started doting on her immediately when they first met.

In a parallel to Isabella, Catherine displaces her attraction to Eleanor onto Henry, Eleanor's brother. While she expresses attraction to both Eleanor and Henry, she only directly communicates her *romantic* interest in Henry, not Eleanor like when she and Isabella are discussing her interest in Henry and she says, "I do not pretend to say that I was not very much pleased with him" (26). The relationship she has with the both of them allows her to act as if her romantic interest lies only in Henry, despite her clear attraction to them both. She muses about her desire to see Eleanor, possibly as much or more than she does about seeing Henry. The narrator often talks about Catherine's desire for Henry alongside her desire for Eleanor: "She did—almost always—believe that Henry loved her, and quite always that his father and sister loved and even wished her to belong to them" (152). Catherine also seems to be attracted to Henry for his queerness and feminine characteristics. She likes that he has similar interests to her, especially when it comes to novels. In the scenes in which Henry and Catherine interact, she often sees this feminine side to him, such as when they first meet and have a discussion about textiles and dresses: "I always buy my own cravats, and am allowed to be an excellent judge; and my sister has often trusted me in the choice of a gown" (16). This conversation with

Henry—which spans from journaling to letter writing to gowns—is what makes Catherine initially interested in him. Catherine's interest in Henry forms because of interactions like this one.

Moreover, many of the things that Catherine likes in Henry are also characteristics found in Eleanor. For instance, Eleanor shares Henry's love of novels, his interest in history and gowns, and knowledge of art and drawing. These similarities are revealed on the walk that the three take around Beechen Cliff; Henry tells a story about the time he read *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Eleanor says, "I remember that you undertook to read it aloud to me, and that when I called away for only five minutes to answer a note, instead of waiting for me, you took the whole volume into the Hermitage-walk" (73). Catherine's romantic interest in Eleanor makes sense given her romantic interest in Henry and the feminine side of Henry's personality.

After Catherine meets Eleanor for the first time, she seems to almost always desire Henry *and Eleanor* together in the same thought rather than just Henry alone. Here, she mentions them together, "She could never do justice to Henry and Eleanor's merit; she felt it too strongly for expression; and should a dislike be taken against them, should they be thought of unfavourably, on their father's account, it would cut her to the heart" (160). Catherine is just as interested in Eleanor as she is Henry, and she cushions her desire for Eleanor as a part of her desire for Henry.

Simultaneously, Catherine also often thinks about Eleanor without mentioning Henry at all. One instance of this occurs after Catherine fears having offended the Tilneys. Instead of asking her chaperone, Mrs. Allen, if she could go apologize to both of

them, she says, "will there be any harm in my calling on Miss Tilney to-day? I shall not be easy till I have explained everything" (61). Even though she feared offending the both of them, Catherine was most concerned with explaining the situation to Eleanor rather than to both Eleanor and Henry.

Furthermore, Austen writes a lot of these characters marrying very quickly and abruptly. For instance, Isabella's engagement to James is rather sudden (though hinted to in their occasional flirtations). It completely surprises Catherine: "Catherine's understanding began to awake: an idea of the truth suddenly darted into her mind; and, with the natural blush of so new an emotion, she cried out, 'Good heaven! My dear Isabella, what do you mean? Can you—can you really be in love with James?'" (81). While it is implied that Catherine simply did not notice James and Isabella's interest for one another because of her naïveté, it does appear rather suddenly in the narrative. In fact, Catherine's dialogue here can even be interpreted as jealousy as she believes that Isabella has moved on from their intimate friendship. It isn't until Isabella explains that this marriage will bring them even closer as friends and now as family that Catherine starts to calm down. Catherine really perks up upon hearing Isabella's promise to live close to her. Again, this is a reflection of real British Romantic society, in which female romantic friends were both a preparation for and separated by heterosexual marriage; Catherine feels fortunate that, in this case, this marriage would allow her to stay close with Isabella because they would become sisters-in-law and therefore connected through marriage. With this marriage, Isabella would no longer represent a love interest for Catherine in the same way—their relationship would have to take a different form. Here, Austen is setting

up the removal of Isabella from the pool of Catherine's romantic interests. Because the nature of their relationship would have to change, Isabella's character is slowly written out. Later in the novel, Isabella accidentally exposes that she is cheating on James Morland, and Catherine immediately ends their friendship out of loyalty to her brother. Here, Austen finishes the job of taking Isabella out of Catherine's pool of potential love interests. She was the warm-up for Catherine's relationship with Henry. She teaches Catherine about friendship and intimacy, but at this point in the novel her job has been completed.

Before Catherine can end up with Henry, Austen has to also remove Eleanor from the running. At the very end of the novel, when Henry visits Catherine to admit his feelings and clear up the confusion of her being kicked out of Northanger Abbey, he expresses his intention to marry her as soon as he can. He also explains that Eleanor has been happily married off to a nameless viscount that is otherwise unmentioned in the story. By marrying Eleanor off to an unnamed character, Austen leaves only Henry in the competition for Catherine's love interest. The two marry off-page shortly after the events of the novel. All of these events, having happened, again, off-page and suddenly, can be attributed to a rushed ending *and* to an easy way to write out Catherine's female love interests to leave only Henry in the running. This narrative structure—in which female love interests are introduced and then written out by the ending—allows Austen to portray romantic love between female friends without violating the conventions of the marriage plot or the heteronormativity in place during the Romantic era.

The Threat of Violence. Before Catherine arrives at Northanger Abbey with the Tilneys, Henry jokes about her excitement to visit a real abbey; abbeys are common settings in gothic novels, which Henry and Catherine both love. Henry teases that the abbey harbors a tragic past as a reference to this common setting and plot point, and he says, "And are you prepared to encounter all the horrors that a building such as 'what one reads about' may produce?—Have you a stout heart?—Nerves fit for sliding pannels [*sic*] and tapestries?" (107). He then makes up a story detailing her investigation of and adventure in the abbey as though she were the heroine of a gothic novel. Even though Henry was entirely joking to playfully tease Catherine for her eagerness to see the abbey, this conversation primes Catherine to imagine violence and horror in the abbey.

During her time at the abbey, Catherine is on the lookout for anything gothic. She learns that Henry and Eleanor's mother, the late Mrs. Tilney, died many years ago. After observing the harshness of General Tilney and the way that Henry and Eleanor visibly relax when the General is not around, Catherine begins to suspect that either the General killed Mrs. Tilney or is secretly keeping her captive in a discreet part of the abbey. She becomes suspicious of everything he does, even mundane things like staying up late to get some work done:

To be kept up for hours, after the family were in bed, by stupid pamphlets, was not very likely. There must be some deeper cause: something was to be done which could only be done while the household slept; and the probability that Mrs. Tilney yet lived, shut up for causes unknown, and receiving from the pitiless

hands of her husband a nightly supply of coarse food, was the conclusion which necessarily followed. (129)

This story that she invents about the General is heavily influenced by all of the gothic novels she reads; these novels often portray patriarchal violence against women in the form of kidnapping or murder. In particular, the story that Catherine imagines—that the General is secretly holding his wife captive in a separate part of the abbey—is the exact plot of Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*, a gothic novel published in 1790 that Catherine surely would have read as a huge fan of Radcliffe's novels. Catherine later finds out that she was wrong, and she extremely embarrassed to have been caught and scolded by Henry for her imaginative thinking.

Catherine views the General as a representation of patriarchal violence against women, specifically a husband's violence toward his wife within a heterosexual marriage. Even though the General never did these things, Catherine's consumption of many gothic novels leads her to view the patriarchy and the institution of heterosexual marriage as dangerous and threatening. In this way, Catherine is unconsciously expressing a fear of heterosexual relationships and the violence of the patriarchy. Her relationships with Isabella and Eleanor are never influenced by fear of violence, but she does fear the violence she perceives men commit against their wives. This is part of why it took so long for Catherine to be ready to let go of her female love interests and have a heterosexual marriage with Henry. The threat of patriarchal violence within the institution of marriage haunts this novel's marriage plot.

Catherine Morland's heterosexual final form. As I've explained above, Catherine's love interests are slowly taken out of the running for her full attention as the novel's plot moves along—often rather abruptly. The two possible female love interests are removed first, leaving only her male love interest at the end. This mirrors one of the common ways in which same-sex desire was represented in pornography before and during the Romantic era. As I've explained above in my section titled "Historical Contexts," pornographic literature in the Romantic era often started out with female-female scenes. These were framed as a warm-up for the final act of heterosexual sex. In these scenes, one of the women often teaches the other about sex and pleasure, preparing her for sex with a man.

While *Northanger Abbey* is obviously not a pornographic novel, there is a similar narrative structure in which first Isabella and then Eleanor teaches Catherine about love and non-sexual intimacy. Catherine is finally "prepared" to marry Henry at the end of the novel after she has "warmed up" with Eleanor and Isabella and has developed and grown as a character. Catherine's character has to go through a period of learning with her female romantic interests before she can marry Henry, mirroring the way in which pornographic novels were written at the time.

CONCLUSION

Through my research into encoded language and the social discourses, conventions, and norms of the Romantic era, I have located multiple instances of queerness within the novel *Northanger Abbey*, specifically female-female desire between the characters of Catherine Morland and both Eleanor Tilney and Isabella Thorpe. Further, I have been able to identify the ways in which race affects the representation of these characters of women-loving women, specifically via the deracialization of whiteness. By analyzing race alongside the sexuality and sexual behaviors and desires of these characters, I have been able to complete a more intersectional queer reading of the novel than if I had only focused on gender and sexuality. Because Austen's work—rather consciously or unconsciously—contributed to the deracialization of whiteness, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which the characters' races and ethnicities affect their outward expression of their sexualities.

Though *Northanger Abbey* has been read queerly by many other scholars before me, I found myself intrigued by the lack of discussion I saw surrounding the queerness of the female characters, especially the side characters Eleanor and Isabella. I feel that I have been able to contribute to the current Queer Romantic conversation by reading queerly for female-female desire in particular, but also by keeping race and ethnicity in mind within this reading. Examining the intersections between race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality can remind us to pull the conversation in the right direction, keeping intersectionality and the representation of intersectionality in mind when we are

discussing the queerness we see in the Romantic era. In further research surrounding queerness in *Northanger Abbey*, perhaps further dimension can be added to the conversation by analyzing the ways in which religion and nationality are tied closely together in the novel and the ways in which these aspects affect the representation of queer characters.

In a broader sense, I believe that this research can contribute practically to the academic world for its emphasis on representation and intersectionality. In my efforts to complete a queer reading of *Northanger Abbey* with race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity in mind, I have found more evidence to support a more subversive reading of this canonical classic. Rather than using this novel to uphold white supremacist ideals from both the Romantic era and today, it can be read using these frameworks for a more subversive meaning about queerness and gender. Of course, Romantic era norms and discourses still pervade the novel, but with subversion and deconstruction in mind, readers of *Northanger Abbey* can find new ways to dismantle the narrative that has been constructed about what it means to be queer now and what it may have meant to be a women-loving woman during the Romantic era.

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