



## Consuming Modes in *Northanger Abbey*: Jane Austen's Economic View of Literary Nationalism

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FASHIONABLE CONSUMERISM prevails in the society in which Catherine Morland acquires her literary tastes. In satirizing modish consumerism, Jane Austen places Catherine's tastes in ironical contexts. But, while she ironically displaces some modes of consumption, Austen reinscribes others to sustain a probing criticism of middle-class aspirations. To weigh the practice by which Austen belittles and endorses consumerism is to measure her sense of how much the industrial and agrarian revolutions were shaping society and to see that her challenge to conventional moralizing stems from shrewd economic insights. When Mrs. Morland retrieves the Edinburgh periodical *The Mirror* to chasten Catherine's supposed fascination with the luxurious modes of Northanger Abbey, Austen displaces the periodical with Henry Tilney's marriage proposal. This romantic suppression of the periodical helps reveal Austen's dissatisfaction with facile scorn of fashion, money, and hierarchy and clarifies the narrative meaning of fabrics, furniture, architecture, transportation, and finance. Her satire and promotion of consumerism confirm her view that hatred of the French Revolution could not reduce cultural exchange with the enemy, France retaining a shaping cultural influence on Britain.<sup>1</sup>

Catherine Morland is clever and thoughtful as well as inexperienced and willful, sensitive and open-minded as well as dull to social

signs and slow to connect economic and moral ideas. Gaps in her understanding invite us to look beyond her. She lives far from aristocrats; no lords or baronets reside in her neighborhood (16). Yet her preference for “all story and no reflection” (15) makes her think them ubiquitous: romances cause her to expect that her trip to Bath will lead her mother to caution her against nobles because they abduct women to remote farmhouses. Mrs. Morland neither warns Catherine about lords nor generalizes their evil: in her mother’s eyes, Catherine is in no danger from aristocratic machinations (18). When General Tilney dismisses Catherine, her truisms are again disappointed; she is exposed to the hardship of solitary travel by a man whom desire for rank renders greedy and obsequious. Austen again challenges Catherine’s prejudices when she introduces Mrs. Thorpe. Far from extending the introduction to several chapters in a Gothic mode that decries aristocrats and attorneys, Austen introduces Mrs. Thorpe matter-of-factly (34).

It is appropriate that General Tilney discomfits Catherine since they both depend excessively on aristocrats. The General is a typical hanger-on who tires of Bath since his supposed old friends, the Marquis of Longtown and General Courtenay, stay away (139). Catherine is too new to consumer modes in Bath to tire of the resort: shopping and entertainments there even modify her literary prejudices. Moreover, her distrust of aristocrats is more pardonable than the General’s reliance. Thwarted greed on learning from John Thorpe that Catherine is no heiress leads him to use aristocratic friends as an excuse to dismiss her from Northanger Abbey. His trumped-up visit to Lord Longtown’s house near Hereford makes his incivility more striking (224).

However, if Austen asks us to ponder why the General’s running after aristocrats removes him from aristocratic values, she invites us to see that Catherine’s reading undermines her intuitions and critical intelligence. Catherine rightly sees the General’s affront as intentional, but cannot grasp its economic motivation, despite how much she matches his consumerism, and how much Henry and Eleanor warn her about materialism. For example, Henry tells Catherine that people say they are weary of Bath because they cannot afford to stay on; they decry the place to conceal their relative poverty (78). From a belief that social ambition makes middle-ranking people behave erratically, he warns Catherine also that Isabella will be constant to her

brother James as long as a baronet does not enter the scene (206). Given Isabella's constant Gothic and sentimental posturing, Catherine is disingenuous to be shocked when Isabella courts Frederick, Henry's brother. While Austen teaches Catherine that materialists such as the General and Isabella and John Thorpe cannot recognize the wealth they covet, her further target is to show that aristocrats are not sexually dangerous in ways upheld by literary tradition, but become powerful by the deference paid them by middle-ranking materialists.

Austen exploits this systemic greed. General Tilney's gratification is the external cause why Catherine and Henry marry early. When Eleanor weds an aristocrat, the General's accession of dignity throws him into a fit of good humor, the metaphor explaining why Austen gives her fictional blessing. The General loves Eleanor most when he calls her "Your Ladyship," since he puts status before her companionship, utility, and patience. While Austen says that the husband's moral character is independent of peerage and wealth (251), she connects character and money by arranging that the Viscount and Viscountess influence the General to give Henry and Catherine an estate of £3,000. This middle-ranking couple gains a substantial income from aristocratic influence while confirming the patriarchy of the unrepentant father. At novel's end, Catherine's equation of villainy and aristocracy is displaced by reinscribed aristocratic power. Catherine's villains are refigured in the worthy husband, the most charming young man in the world. Austen suggests that her *dénouement* is a jocular formula that celebrates moral individualism, but economic motifs throughout *Northanger Abbey* confirm this serious aspect of the comedy.

Critics usually find Austen's comedies to be intellectual, but her first novel stresses the economic consumption of material things.<sup>2</sup> The architecture and furniture of Northanger Abbey displace the antiquarianism of the Gothic and sentimental genres. Prudent consumers, the Tilney family obliges Austen to limit her satire of consumerism. The most amusing fictional displacement effected by the Tilneys' consumerism is Catherine's disappointed discovery of manuscripts in the chest: this "collection of papers" in "coarse and modern characters" is significant in its banality. Washing bills confront her with "[s]hirts, stockings, cravats, and waistcoats," lists of spending on "letters, hair-powder, shoe-string and breeches-ball" emphasize household budget-

ing, and the cover sheet's caption "To poultice chestnut mare" designates a farrier's bill that Catherine cannot bring herself to read (172). These texts invite readers to question Catherine's resistance to domestic and market economy and to view her in economic terms. Self-correction about the false expectation of finding an ancient manuscript in a modern abbey is not Austen's whole point. Catherine's self-correction is abstract and fictional; it evades domestic finances and that relation of writing to accounts taught by her father (14).

Henry Tilney studies domestic economy from the viewpoint that we are all consumers independently of gender. He buys his own cravats and his sister's gowns. He knows materials and bargains. He buys one gown of "true Indian muslin" at Bath for "five shillings a yard" (28). Catherine's chaperon, Mrs. Allen, cannot equal his shopping, despite her obsession with finery. She pays nine shillings a yard for a muslin gown, thinking the price low. This gown soon develops a hole in the sleeve. In his teasing approach to intimacy, Henry warns Catherine that, if her muslin gown will wash badly and fray, the material will serve as a handkerchief, cap, or cloak. His advice follows his sister's experience (29). If Henry studies the utility of cloth, Mrs. Allen is more concerned with fashion and conspicuous consumption. Smitten by Eleanor's "very pretty spotted muslin," she does not think that Henry might have chosen it for durability (68). Supposed to shield Catherine, Mrs. Allen ventures into Bath society only when protected by "the newest fashion" (20). Her simple-minded delight in fashion dulls her to the tension between desire for uniqueness and standardized imitation. Having observed that Eleanor always wears white, she urges Catherine to do the same when visiting Milsom Street, on the basis that those who dress alike are socially equal (91). When summoning James Morland to guess the price and weigh the merits of a new muff and tippet (51), Mrs. Allen asserts consumer skills to pretend to rank and taste. But Austen invites us to deny Mrs. Allen's disjointed sense of utility, rank, and style.

Mrs. Allen is so voluble about fashion that when she tries to convey what it can signify for Catherine's benefit, she succeeds only in turning her ward away from social codes. In gossiping with Mrs. Hughes, a former schoolfellow, Mrs. Allen learns that the Tilneys are rich because the General's wife had a marriage settlement of £20,000 and because her wedding outfit was produced in a warehouse at a cost

of £500 (68). The bride received a beautiful set of pearls on her wedding day, a set inherited by Eleanor. If Catherine rightly says that Mrs. Allen has “no real intelligence to give” about the Tilneys, she is wrong not to interpret what the gossip says about the Tilneys’ economic and social standing.

Catherine is wilfully abstract about material reality. When Henry says teasingly that her journal entries likely focus on her “sprigged muslin robe with blue trimmings” (26), she sensibly denies being obsessed with clothes; in not keeping a journal, she resists being typed. But she embraces as well as resists being gendered by literary stances. She embodies female concern for dress. Her arrival at Northanger during a shower takes her attention from the modernity of the architecture and puts “all her thoughts on the welfare of her new straw bonnet” (161). Amusingly, reflexive concern for her hat impedes her Gothic stance. She notes the Abbey’s interior features and furnishings with some precision, but disappointment with “the profusion and elegance of modern taste” means that her account of the house is partial and fragmentary. She discounts modern industry and domestic efficiency; she had hoped for a fireplace with “the ample width and ponderous carving of former times,” but it is merely “a Rumford, with slabs of plain though handsome marble, and ornaments over it of the prettiest English china” (162). This complaint leads Austen to assert that the fire conserves heat and does not smoke. On seeing the Abbey’s modernized Gothic windows, Catherine does not grasp that Gothic form may be functional; she is merely disappointed that the casement panes are large, clear, and light rather than small, painted, and dirty (162). She notes that the walls in her apartment are papered, that its floor is carpeted, and that its furniture is comfortable, if not in the latest mode, but she will not read social and economic signs in the domestic setting (163). Her reaction to the dining room manifests a dullness to form: the room “is fitted up in a style of luxury and expense which was almost lost on the unpractised eye of Catherine, who saw little more than its spaciousness and the number of their attendants” (166). She treats domestic design clumsily. When she praises the breakfast set chosen by the General, his overreaction to her approval blinds her to the signs that first bring the set to her notice. To his false modesty, the set is simple and neat, bought to “encourage the manufacture of his country,” tea being “as well

flavoured from the clay of Staffordshire, as from that of Dresden or Sève.” The General, having seen new sets in town, knows that the manufacture has improved and anticipates buying a new set for someone. Far from questioning the General’s economic nationalism, Catherine is the only one present not to see that he is thinking of her as the recipient of a future wedding gift (175).

Catherine’s reaction to the General’s economic and modish improvements of Northanger Abbey is not acute or thoughtful. She cannot take in his enclosed grounds: the walls seem countless, the hot houses contain the whole village (178). She makes little of the drawing room: her “indiscriminating eye scarcely discerned the colour of the satin” (182). Her antique tastes resist costly and elegant products: she likes “no furniture of a more modern date than the fifteenth century” (182). She despises “mere domestic economy” for displacing the old aesthetic modes (184). Inventions that facilitate the labor of cooks make her almost rave against the “spacious theatre” of the General’s kitchen (183). Guest rooms fitted up with everything money and taste could do to make them comfortable and elegant do not please Catherine (185). Her stealthy exploration of the late Mrs. Tilney’s room shocks her into realizing that it is of a piece with the house: “a large, well-proportioned apartment” with “an handsome dimity bed, arranged as unoccupied with an housemaid’s care, a bright Bath stove, mahogany wardrobes and neatly-painted chairs”; it is accessible to the sun (193). Her dullness to the conformity of external site and internal space, of architectural style and function, matches her ignorance of the social meaning of landscape aesthetics.

Of course, Austen is gentler in satirizing Catherine than more ignorant and hypocritical consumers. When it comes to personal appearance, Catherine is typical rather than eccentric in preoccupying herself with fashion. She may think hard about her gown and head-dress, one night “debating between her spotted and her tamboured muslin” and wishing that the shortness of time had not prevented her from purchasing a new one. But on this occasion she falls asleep after only ten minutes of debate, not a victim of obsession because she knows that dress is “frivolous distinction” (73). A brother, more effectively than a great aunt, might have told her that men’s hearts are not moved by new and costly gowns nor by the texture of muslin, whether “the spotted, the sprigged, the mull or the jacksonet” (74). But

Catherine is likable since she corrects herself without gravity. Unlike other unself-conscious consumers in *Northanger Abbey*, she escapes being a type common in newspapers and periodical essays.

This is not the case with John Thorpe. He comports himself like a groom because his consumption of horse flesh and carriages is based on the jargon of newspaper advertisements (45). When he boasts of his carriage, he confuses the stances of seller and buyer: “Curricled-hung you see; seat, trunk, sword-case, splashing board, lamps, silver moulding, all you see complete; the iron-work as good as new, or better. He asked fifty guineas; I closed with him directly, threw down the money, and the carriage was mine” (46). Thorpe is a waster who hates bargaining and blathers about money. He claims that he could have resold the gig the next day for a profit, forgetting that the would-be purchaser also wanted his horse. Thorpe would not, he claims, have sold the horse for £100. His professed disinterest in money and charity is clearly false. Catherine’s dislike of him is well-founded, but her slowness to judge his lazy consumerism and false calculations is questionable. When he calls his wine at Oxford “famous good stuff” (64), his modish vagueness is apparent. When he goes on about the complete springs in his carriage, his advertising jargon is overwhelming (64). Boring and self-absorbed, he looks upon everyone he meets as a horse trader bent on finding customers (76). Catherine is as slow to judge the General as John Thorpe. She does observe the General when he eats at his son’s house and expects more luxury than provided. But her sense of his consumerism is not sharp because she cannot estimate his unusual lack of fussiness as can Henry and Eleanor (215). The point is that Catherine is a consumer, if she does not always admit so. When she drives with the General from Bath to Northanger, she relishes “the sober pace in which the handsome, highly-fed four horses of a gentleman” move (155). The “fashionable chaise and four” with liveried postilions rising regularly in their stirrups and with the numerous outriders impress her (156). When she transfers to Henry’s curricled, she finds it “the prettiest equipage in the world” (156) and enjoys Henry’s driving: his hat sits so well, and the innumerable capes of his great coat looked so becomingly important (157). But, given her taste for modish transport, why does she not criticize John Thorpe’s vulgar manners?

One answer lies in Catherine’s unconcern with money. Unlike

Austen in her letters, Catherine disclaims money and economic power in her cultivation of novelistic renunciation. She does not complain when her father gives her ten guineas rather than a banker's blank order (19), but she usually postures about money, as when exclaiming against marriage as a financial contract. In her creed, only one partner need have money, for it is the "wickedest thing in existence" to marry for money (124). Her stance is extreme: dismissed by the General, she lacks money for travel because she had not thought of it. Not until she looks into her purse does she realize that Eleanor has anticipated her need (229). Once home, she returns Eleanor's money but cannot express her gratitude because she is overcome by the economic complexity of her situation. In this context, Catherine finds it difficult to hear her mother talk with relief about James's relationship with Isabella ending, on the basis that Isabella is insignificant and "entirely without fortune" (236).

Catherine is more baffled about money than need be because she pays no heed to economic bias in conversation. When John Thorpe pumps her about her chaperon's husband, Catherine misses his point: Thorpe thinks Mr. Allen rich since he hopes that she will be Allen's heir, but she ignores his drift (63). She prefers hearing her renunciation of money echoed by Isabella: "Had I the command of millions, were I mistress of the whole world, your brother would be my only choice" (119). Catherine deliberately sets aside Isabella's economic inconsistency. Declaring that "the smallest income in nature would be enough" because "poverty itself is wealth," Isabella dreams of a villa in Richmond and "the quality of her wedding-gown" (119-20). Her boasted renunciation stems from complacency that her marriage settlement will be either "landed property" or "funded money." Readers of Samuel Foote, David Garrick, and Hugh Kelly will recognize a dramatic type in Isabella; she embodies the modish consumerism of a metropolitan mercantile class keen to transcend its social origins. A quick marriage will let Isabella make her friends in Putney envious of her carriage, calling cards, and hoop rings (122). Just as Gothic biases dull Catherine to the journalistic clichés of John Thorpe, so they dull her to the stage jargon of Isabella. Her literary naivete is no less when she consoles herself about her brother's letter of disappointment in Isabella by repeating the General's words that he values money only as it promotes his children's happiness (205).



One reason why we may question Catherine's naive literary posturing from an economic perspective is that she is not always obtuse about money. In the face of John Thorpe's criticism of her brother's carriage, she simply declares that her brother cannot afford another (89). Yet she does not fault Thorpe's gross view of her brother rolling in money; she does "not even endeavour to understand" it (89). Again, when Thorpe would charm her by pretending that he does not expect money with a wife, Catherine is too intent on her unworldly stance about marriage to scrutinize his views (124). The same ideological blindness governs her relationship to Isabella. The latter's claim to have fallen in love with James at first sight is undermined by her self-regarding attitude to dress. While Catherine thinks that she indulges in Isabella a susceptibility to romance that she herself does not share, the reader marks Isabella's modish consumerism. When she first met James, she wore a "yellow gown, with [her] hair done up in braids" and Miss Andrews wore "puce-coloured sarsenet" (118). Blind to Isabella's envy of her dress (39), Catherine thinks happily that her friend dotes on her brother. But Catherine's romantic creed enables Isabella to give her back a narrow, distorted image of herself and to exploit their friendship (71).

Isabella's economic hypocrisy becomes unavoidable when James sends her news of their proposed marriage settlement. Mr. Morland, patron and incumbent of a living worth £400 a year, agrees to resign it to his son on the latter's maturity. This gesture, generous given the family's ten children, is matched by the promise of an equal inheritance. Never having given a thought to her father's income, Catherine is satisfied with the settlement (135). Isabella and her mother repine, however: the income is too small. It will not provide the "common necessities of life" (136). Had they possessed a fortune, Mr. Morland would have been more generous. Hurt by these insinuations, Catherine defends her father for having done his utmost for her brother. However, she is distracted from criticism of Isabella by the latter's declared hatred of money and pretended desire to marry as soon as possible, if only on £50 (136). This false disclaimer suggests that Catherine largely gulls herself with her own willful renunciation of economic thoughtfulness.

When Isabella declares that there are "more ways than one of our being sisters" (145), Catherine cannot read her friend's acquisitive

and ambitious rationalizations. Against all the evidence, she cannot imagine that Isabella will exploit romantic truisms or circumscribe them with economic calculations. When Isabella admits that “after all that romancers may say, there is no doing without money” (146), she almost lets slip that she has warned John against marrying Catherine. But Catherine will not contemplate that Isabella might be planning to be unfaithful to James: “What one means one day, you know, one may not mean the next” (146). Baffled, Catherine naively hopes for consistency: Isabella must talk “more like her usual self and not so much about money” (148). This wish for consistency of character prevents her from judging the General’s hypocrisy about money. She credits his profession that “money is nothing, it is not an object” much too easily (176). Eleanor and Henry know that Isabella’s lack of wealth will prevent Frederick from seeking her hand, but Catherine ignores the parallels between herself and Isabella, instead relying on the General’s “particular partiality” for her and on his “generous and disinterested sentiments on the subject of money” (208). Her bias means that she cannot internalize Henry’s amusing journalistic talk about money and morality when he observes that “pleasures in this world are always to be paid for, . . . we often purchase them at a great disadvantage, giving ready-moned actual happiness for a draft on the future, that may not be honoured” (210).

Catherine may not think in monetary metaphors, but Austen unsettles her economic naivete in the *dénouement*. Catherine is so excited by her visit to the parsonage at Woodston that she gives in to nervous self-recrimination and inarticulate desires for a marriage settlement. Her dismissal from the Abbey, though wretched, requires her to use her youth, civility, and money to travel home (230). Her “hack post-chaise” displaces the fictional contrivance that might dignify a new countess and a train of noble relatives (232). If her family treats the General’s breach of hospitality as inexcusable (234–35), she comes to see that her love for Henry makes her depend on the General. She also must face up to why the vanity and avarice of John Thorpe and the General have victimized her (244): she and her family, like everyone in society, are objects of calculating and speculative thought. When Henry and Catherine marry, they are no more inclined than entitled to demand the General’s money. But Catherine must admit that the General settles an income on Henry that gives him

independence and comfort. Moreover, her parents emphasize that her match is financially beyond her claims (249).

Austen's comedy invites readers to enjoy a stance based on an empirical sense of literary and economic correspondence: early on in *Northanger Abbey*, she says that "strange things may be generally accounted for if their cause be fairly searched out" (16). Although Catherine is blind to social and economic signs, her absorption in Gothic romance is no more unique than her proficiency in French (14). When Henry goads her, she sensibly resists the literary modes she cultivates, as when she declares that she keeps no journal and rejects his extended analogy between dancing and matrimony (27, 77). Catherine's prosaic refusal to be typical matches Austen's attack on modish literary consumption.

Not only does Austen deride anthologists who abridge Milton, Pope, Addison, Steele, and Sterne and spoil the market for contemporary novelists, but also she attacks bad taste, coarse language, and social irrelevance in *The Spectator* (37-38). No wonder that, when Mrs. Morland turns to *The Mirror* to lesson her daughter, Austen displaces the conventional moralizing of this descendant of *The Spectator* with Henry's surprising but gratifying arrival.

Still, Austen insists that Catherine's reading is narrow and that this narrowness explains her failure to see literary and economic correspondences. Catherine dislikes history: it is about good-for-nothing men, there are hardly any women in it, and, if largely invention, it is tiresome (108). Her view is countered by Eleanor's appreciation of the documentary research and rhetorical style of the Scottish historians David Hume and William Robertson. When Henry says that he has read hundreds of novels, Austen challenges Catherine's gendered view of reading. Henry does not demean novels as unworthy of Oxford gentlemen (107). He is remote from the prejudiced, illiterate John Thorpe who pretends to have read Mrs. Radcliffe without knowing she wrote *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and who dispraises Fanny Burney's Camilla because she married a French emigrant (49). Henry's reading takes in the lexical and rhetorical studies of Samuel Johnson and Hugh Blair (108). He shares with Eleanor a taste for the picturesque creation of prospects in the landscape (110), a fashion as remote to Catherine as the architectural mode for refurbishing and modernizing Gothic abbeys. By contrast to Henry and Eleanor, Catherine confuses literary

and political events, as when she describes the product of a circulating library in terms that better suit a riot (113). Her uncritical consumption of Gothic romances means that she blurs the nation state with the literary market. She knows that Mr. Allen and his friends consult the newspapers to keep abreast of current events, but she ignores them, preferring distinct spheres for the sexes (90). Given her awareness that men so habitually consult newspapers, it is the more striking that her Gothic prejudices suppose that, far from staying up at night to read “stupid pamphlets,” the General must be torturing the wife whose death he has fabricated (187-88). Catherine’s cultural naivete is accented in her confession that, although she has never been abroad, she always thinks of the south of France when she reads Mrs. Radcliffe (106), this cognitive folly justifying Austen in standing behind Henry when he tells Catherine that her Gothic speculations ignore social context and personal experience and have induced her to forget the nation in which she lives and the religion to which she adheres. His lesson may be imperial and firm, but Henry rightly points out that Catherine’s sense of probability and social awareness are rendered defective by Gothic reading habits (194-95).

Although Catherine does not speak French well and bases her idea of the south of France on shallow literary grounds, her liking for the French bread made in Northanger Abbey’s modern kitchens troubles Mrs. Morland, prompting her to lesson her daughter with *The Mirror* (241). The French bread reveals the General to be less of a nationalist than he claims and Catherine to be more susceptible to modes than she admits. However, these points do not depend on *The Mirror*, for Austen defies as well as accepts the periodical’s nationalism. The number Mrs. Morland wants her daughter to read presents John Homespun’s four daughters who follow aristocrats in favoring French manners (6 March 1779). It holds that “intercourse with the persons or families of *Dukes, Earls, Lords, Nabobs, or Contractors*” is dangerous. A month before, *The Mirror* had warned that courtly promotion of France was corrupting English gentry with French cookery (6 Feb. 1779). In this number, sons familiar with “fashionable *ragoos* and *fricandeaus*” and the celebrated chefs of Paris cannot abide their father’s English table. But Austen distances herself from francophobia based on such anti-aristocratic prejudice. She is closer to comments in *The Mirror* that claim that the English mimic the false politeness but not

the good breeding of the French (24 April 1779). Henry Mackenzie, noting how cultural exchange is sped up by improved transport, admits that in the “translation of the manners, as in the translation of the language, of our neighbours, we are apt to lose the finesses, the *petits agréments*” (8 May 1779). The result of such comments is that modish consumerism cannot be blamed on French culture or on aristocratic manners so much as on middle-class assumptions that French modes will advance trade and business. When Letitia Lappet opens a milliner’s shop, she follows friends’ advice to put as much French as she can into her advertisements and shop-bills (14 March 1780). Two weeks later, *The Mirror* insists that conspicuous consumerism or “*Figure-making* is common to all ranks, ages, tempers and situations” (25 March 1780).

When she was writing *Northanger Abbey*, Austen’s letters reveal that she was a figure-maker, a consumer who looked upon clothes and furniture as signs. Far from attacking aristocratic fashions, she admits that personal dress has many social functions.<sup>3</sup> She shops for others and gets others to shop for her. She gives clothes to servants and poorer women because dress is a social bond between herself and inferiors, just as clothes signify her middle rank. Austen has an eye to bargains in materials, costume, and furniture. She champions contemporary modes, but always weighs their price. As much as she critically reads English and French novels, she appreciates foreign and domestic cloth and patterns of garments. Making a figure is important because it involves her in a series of social and economic processes that are part of national culture. In her letters and in *Northanger Abbey*, she resists propaganda against social hierarchy. She does not promote renunciation in favor of antique modes, because she bears witness to a literary nationalism that incorporates respect for French modes, and that values the cultural borders crossed with increasing power and creativity by European aristocrats.<sup>4</sup>

## NOTES

1. "To some extent, keeping up with the latest styles and trends, for Austen and her family, related to French culture and its impact on English life": Warren Roberts, *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1979) 32.
2. Darrell Mansell, *The Novels of Jane Austen: An Interpretation* (London: Macmillan, 1973), strenuously denies that Austen is concerned with material reality (10, 11, 25, 31). James Thompson, *Between Self and World: The Novels of Jane Austen* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1988), asserts that Austen introduces financial and material topics only to dismiss them (32-33). Thompson also suggests that Austen is concerned to chastise the decadent aristocracy (40). Neither view is upheld by the present article. A useful corrective is to be found in Samuel L. Macey, *Money and the Novel: Mercenary Motivation in Defoe and His Immediate Successors* (Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis, 1983).
3. Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986), is surprised that Austen does not see women's obsession with dress as "part of the mating- or courting-game" (63). His avoidance of Austen's economic perspective arises partly because he demonizes the General as a "ruthless, dehumanised consumer-acquisitor" (65).
4. On Jane Austen's defense of aristocratic culture in *Northanger Abbey*, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 1992) 173-74. The fullest and most persuasive account of the rise of the aristocracy through the middle of the nineteenth century is to be found in David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990).

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