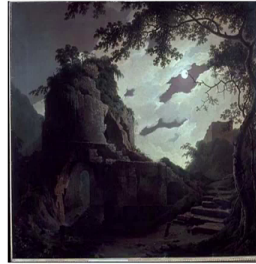


**Austen's Northanger Abbey**  
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**Lecture 19**  
**Gothic Parody and Female Gothic**

(Refer Slide Time: 00:11)

Week 4:  
Austen's  
Northanger  
Abbey



LECTURE 4D: GOTHIC PARODY AND FEMALE GOTHIC

IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTP://WWW.JIMANDELLEN.ORG/PROPOSALNORTHANGER.HTML](http://www.jimandellen.org/proposalnorthanger.html)



Hello, and welcome to week four's lectures on Austen's Northanger Abbey. In today's session, I am going to talk about Gothic Parody, the plot that Henry Tilney comes up with for the benefit of Catherine Morland, and I am going to conclude by talking a little bit about female gothic and the despotism of General Tilney.

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## Artful parody



"We can all agree, I think, that for her first set of terrors Henry himself is largely to blame.

His artful parody of gothic, as he drives her towards the Abbey, supplies her with all the matter for her imaginings on that first stormy night. Since he delivers his beguiling narrative in the second person and the future tense—"How fearfully will you examine the furniture of your apartment!" (158)—it has the force of prophecy."

(MacMaster, 2010, 21)

<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/printed/number32/mcmaster.pdf>



One can call the narrative of Henry Tilney, the gothic narrative of Henry Tilney as artful parody. He parodies the gothic plot when he is driving towards Northanger Abbey with Catherine Morland. And the critic MacMaster argues that we can all agree that for her first set of terrors, Henry himself is largely to blame. "His artful parody of gothic as he drives her towards the Abbey, supplies her with all the matter for her imaginings on that first stormy night.

Since he delivers his beguiling narrative in the second person and the future tense, how fearfully will you examine the furniture of your apartment, it has the force of prophecy." So this is a very interesting comment that we can closely examine it for the implications that they have for the character of Catherine as well as for Henry Tilney.

So Henry Tilney is an excellent reader of gothic. We have seen that much in our previous lectures. So even though he is an excellent reader and he parodies the gothic, he makes fun of Catherine Morland's impressionable nature, especially in reading the world through gothic lens, we also realize that Henry Tilney is culpable in creating gothic terrors in the mind of Catherine Morland. When he drives towards the Abbey with Catherine Morland, the narrative that he comes up with is so beguiling, is so charming, is so fascinating for Catherine that she begins to kind of be taken up so much by that kind of

story, that when she actually enters that house, she begins to read everything around her as if she is reading a gothic novel.

So, there are two very important aspects to this, a bit of criticism by MacMaster, which is firstly, she points out that Henry Tilney is addressing Catherine Morland directly. You can see the use of the second person. How fearfully will you examine? So he is imaginatively placing Catherine Morland in that house, in that Abbey and he is somehow, in a weird way capturing the future in the present, so that Catherine Morland becomes a gothic heroine of sots.

Secondly, she says that, this kind of foreseeing of the future is prophetic because Catherine Morland puts it into practice when she stays in Northanger Abbey. So you can see how implicated Henry Tilney is in the way Catherine Morland behaves in Northanger Abbey. And we also remember that Henry Tilney is an avid reader of the gothic too. He has read a lot of gothic fiction, but he is a “good reader,” because he knows the difference between reality and fiction. And even though he knows all the gothic tropes and all the attributes of gothic, he is able to differentiate between the two, the tropes that one finds in a gothic novel, and the furniture of reality, of domesticity.

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## Henry Tilney's Gothic Narrative

"No, certainly. We shall not have to explore our way into a hall dimly lighted by the expiring embers of a wood fire--nor be obliged to spread our beds on the floor of a room without windows, doors, or furniture. But you must be aware that when a young lady is (by whatever means) introduced into a dwelling of this kind, she is always lodged apart from the rest of the family.

Image source: <https://austenauthors.net/jane-austen-and-the-concept-of-accepting-a-marriage-of-convenience/>



Now, we have referenced Henry Tilney's gothic narrative of so many times in our lecture discussions, it will be better to read from the novel this gothic narrative conjured by Henry Tilney. So I am reading from the novel. So this is a quotation from the novel and this is what he tells Catherine Morland that might happen to her. “No, certainly. We shall not have to explore our way into a hall dimly lighted by the expiring embers of a wood fire nor be obliged to spread our beds on the floor of a room without windows, doors or furniture. But you must be aware that when a young lady is by whatever means introduced into a dwelling of this kind, she is always lodged apart from the rest of the family.”

Look at the way he concludes here in this extract on the slide that, perhaps Catherine Morland is going to be put in a part of the house which is isolated from the rest of the family and this kind of comment makes Catherine wonder as to the reasons, as to why this particular guest is lodged in a different part of the household and away from the rest of the family.

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## Henry Tilney's Gothic Narrative



“While they snugly repair to their own end of the house, she is formally conducted by Dorothy, the ancient housekeeper, up a different staircase, and along many gloomy passages, into an apartment never used since some cousin or kin died in it about twenty years before. Can you stand such a ceremony as this?”

Image source: <https://austenprose.com/tag/felicity-jones/>



“While they snugly repair to their own end of the house, Henry Tilney continues the story, she is formally conducted by Dorothy, the ancient housekeeper, up a different

staircase and along many gloomy passages into an apartment never used since some cousin or kin died in it about 20 years before. Can you stand such a ceremony as this?" asks Henry Tilney to Catherine Morland.

So you can see how he is gently poking fun at the kind of events that Catherine Morland perhaps anticipates when she is going to stay at Northanger Abbey. So he says that, while the rest of the family are going to go to their safe, snug, comfortable spaces, living spaces, she will be, Catherine Morland will be formally taken away by that ancient housekeeper and she will be taken up a different staircase, past many gloomy dark passages into an apartment that had never been used since somebody died in it a couple of years ago, ages ago.

So you can immediately see all the cues and paraphernalia of the gothic narrative such as the ancient housekeeper. Just as the house is very ancient, the housekeeper is also ancient and we also are reminded of the gothic trope of how the structure of the gothic house is something which is a vestige from the past. So just as the gothic castle, the Northanger Abbey and other key domestic set ups, domestic structures of gothic novels are elements from the past, so is this present one to which a Catherine Morland is going to be a guest.

So the element of the ancient is a gothic characteristic, gloomy passages, of course, and the idea that the guests would be placed in an old, unused bedroom of sorts is part and parcel of the gothic paraphernalia. So he is trying to scare Catherine Morland as well as get her excited about her fascination with ancient structures, such as gothic Northanger Abbey.

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## Henry Tilney's Gothic Narrative

"Will not your mind misgive you when you find yourself in this gloomy chamber--too lofty and extensive for you, with only the feeble rays of a single lamp to take in its size--its walls hung with tapestry exhibiting figures as large as life, and the bed, of dark green stuff or purple velvet, presenting even a funereal appearance? Will not your heart sink within you?"

Image source: <https://strongsenseofplace.com/2019/10/28/5-gothic-novels-that-feature-moody-houses-and-haunted-heroes/>



He continues the gothic narrative. "Will not your mind misgive you when you find yourself in this gloomy chamber too lofty and extensive for you with only the feeble rays of a single lamp to take in its size, its walls hung with tapestry exhibiting figures as large as life and the bed of dark green stuff or purple velvet, presenting even a funereal appearance? Will your heart not sink within you?"

So he continues with the gothic description of the interiors of her chamber, of her bedroom in that Abbey and he says that it is going to be very gloomy, it is large as well, it is lofty, it is vast, it is too vast perhaps for Catherine, for this young small female and there will only be a single source of light, which is this lamp and that lamp is of course not sufficient to lighten up the entire chamber. And he further goes on to say that there will be tapestry, hangings, clock hangings and on those material, there will be figures, figures depicted on it, which are larger, which are as large as life and the bed is dark in color, dark green or purple, and all these color have a symbolic association with the funeral with death.

And so, this kind of ambiance will, Henry Tilney suggests that might make Catherine Morland's heart sink within her. So you can see how very full on his gothic description of

Northanger Abbey is for the benefit of Catherine Morland. He is playing with her. He is toying with her. He is being sarcastic. He is being playful and yet there is a subtle element of threat that is coded in Northanger Abbey. It is a symbolic threat, but the threat is there.

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## Henry Tilney's Gothic Narrative



"How fearfully will you examine the furniture of your apartment! And what will you discern? Not tables, toiles, wardrobes, or drawers, but on one side perhaps the remains of a broken lute, on the other a ponderous chest which no efforts can open, and over the fireplace the portrait of some handsome warrior, whose features will so incomprehensibly strike you, that you will not be able to withdraw your eyes from it."



"How fearfully will you examine the furniture of your apartment and what will you discern? Not tables, toilets, wardrobes or drawers, but on one side, perhaps the remains of a broken lute, on the other a ponderous chest which no efforts can open and over the fireplace the portrait of some handsome warrior whose features will so incomprehensibly strike you that you will not be able to withdraw your eyes from it."

So he continues. Henry Tilney continues with the gothic description of that apartment. And he says that, nothing will be of the usual or the routine or the everyday, but there will be broken objects, objects which are inaccessible to her. In terms of a broken object, there is a broken lute, symbolizing some kind of broken romantic narrative and there is a chest suggesting mystery. It is so heavy that one cannot open it and there will be a painting of course, all gothic novels have paintings. And that painting will depict a handsome warrior, who will be so striking that Catherine will not be able to take her eyes off it.

So you can see that while he is describing, he is drawing the attention of Catherine to his narrator. In fact, you can say that he is enjoying the attention that he receives from Catherine. You can see or imagine the rapt attention of Catherine Morland. You can see her expression increase in intensity as she is listening to Henry Tilney. So this kind of attention is enjoyed by Henry Tilney. And while he is telling her an exciting tale, he is also frightening her. So this combination is what makes the gothic work. The combination of fear and excitement and curiosity is such a heady mixture that Catherine is hooked.

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Henry Tilney's Gothic Narrative

"Dorothy, meanwhile, no less struck by your appearance, gazes on you in great agitation, and drops a few unintelligible hints. To raise your spirits, moreover, she gives you reason to suppose that the part of the abbey you inhabit is undoubtedly haunted, and informs you that you will not have a single domestic within call. With this parting cordial she curtsies off—you listen to the sound of her receding footsteps as long as the last echo can reach you—and when, with fainting spirits, you attempt to fasten your door, you discover, with increased alarm, that it has no lock."

<https://kellyrfineman.livejournal.com/472595.html>



Henry Tilney continues with his gothic narrative. He states that, “Dorothy, meanwhile, no less struck by your appearance, gazes on you in great agitation and drops a few unintelligible hints. To raise your spirits, moreover, she gives you reason to suppose that the part of the abbey you inhabit is undoubtedly haunted and informs you that you will not have a single domestic within call. With this parting cordial she curtsies off, you listen to the sound of her receding footsteps as long as the last echo can reach you and when with fainting spirits, you attempt to fasten your door, you discover with increased alarm, that it has no lock.”



You can see how he is increasing the horrors that might visit Catherine Morland, while she is staying within the abbey. He states that, Dorothy, the ancient housekeeper, will be hinting something unintelligible to Catherine Morland and those hints are going to increase Catherine's susceptibility to potential gothic threats.

In this passage, you can see how Henry Tilney touches on both the suggestive aspects of the gothic and the kind of real terrors as well. The suggestive relates to comments about unintelligible ideas regarding threats that could affect Catherine and the reference to hauntings, the potential for spirits to visit that part of the household. And the real terrors involve the point there that is mentioned by Tilney that, when Catherine tries to lock the door, this imaginary Catherine in the future, when she tries to lock the door, she will discover that it has no lock.

So this is a very interesting passage in that regard. You can see how he also uses the character of Dorothy to scare Catherine, this Catherine who would foresee or who would enjoy all these happenings to her when she is staying in Northanger Abbey. So this housekeeper is the one who also apparently mention, would mention to Catherine that, there will be no domestic within call in case she needs any help in the middle of the night.

So all of these gothic tropes, the trope of spirits, the trope of the scary housekeeper who is very old, the idea that there is no lock to her door, which might protect her, a lock door always protects the resident in that bedroom, but you can also see that that is not going to be available to Catherine Morland.

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## Artful parody

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Henry being her oracle, Catherine is almost bound to do as he predicts. And he knows full well how suggestible she is. When he concludes, "[Y]our lamp suddenly expires in the socket, and leaves you in total darkness," she exclaims, "Oh! no, no—do not say so" (160). But he does nothing to disarm his dangerous prediction or bring her back to reality.

(MacMaster, 2010, 21)

<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/printed/number32/mcmaster.pdf>



So this narrative that I have read across these slides tells you the powerful nature of Henry Tilney's tale. He is not just a storyteller, he is kind of a prophet, an oracle, one who foresees things that might happen to Catherine in Northanger Abbey. So the Catherine who is traveling with Henry Tilney is kind of foreseeing the Catherine who is going to enjoy, suffer through all these gothic terrors and that kind of foresight is given to her now by her companion Henry Tilney.

So you can see very kind of post-modern framework that is being set up in this moment in the novel when the present Catherine kind of has a glimpse into the future of her life and she undergoes all these gothic terrors when the housekeeper terrifies her, when she would realize that there is no lock to her room. So all these are incidents which are part of that tale that Henry tells Catherine.

So, Henry being her oracle, Catherine is almost bound to do as he predicts. So he, since he is prophet like figure, Catherine has no choice, but to kind of enact that prophecy, it is almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy in some respects. So he predicts something and Catherine make sure that she does something more or less similar to what he has predicted.

And he knows fully well how suggestible she is. Henry knows that she is very impressionable that she is consuming a lot of gothic fiction and she has a particular idea about Northanger Abbey which is along the lines of the gothic. So when he concludes, when he, referring to Henry, when Henry concludes his tale, your lamp suddenly expires in the socket and leaves you in total darkness. She explains, Catherine exclaims, “Oh, no, no, do not say so,” but he does nothing to disarm his dangerous prediction or bring her back to reality.

So you can see, when he is telling the tale, Catherine is responding as that Catherine in the future in Northanger Abbey lost in that gothic darkness would respond. So when she says, oh, no, no, do not say so as a response to his comment that the lamp will go out, she is reacting as how that Catherine lost in the darkness would react. So she has inhabited that story. She has gone into that future narrative.

So, you can see how very suggestible, innocent, naive that Catherine Morland is, but you can also see that Henry Tilney does not do anything very significant to collapse that tale, to kind of deconstruct that tale to tell her that, okay, this is just a figment of his imagination that he has conjured up to scare her, to excite her and he does not really kind of bring back to the actual world. He does not tell her very effectively the difference between reality and fiction.

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## Catherine's Gothic fantasy



"Of her unhappiness in marriage, she felt persuaded. The General certainly had been an unkind husband. He did not love her walk :-could he therefore have loved her? And besides, handsome as he was, there was something in the turn of his features which spoke his not having behaved well to her."

(MacMaster, 2010, 23)

Image source: <http://merytonpress.com/janewithatwist-the-generals-order/>



Now, Catherine has her own assumptions about the nature of the relationship between General Tilney and his wife who was dead. So, "of her unhappiness in marriage, she felt persuaded in her efforts to Mrs. Tilney. The General certainly had been an unkind husband. He did not love her walk. Could he therefore have loved her? And besides handsome as he was, there was something in the turn of his features which spoke his not having behaved well to her."

So you can see there is some vices, the assumptions that Catherine Morland makes about the nature of General Tilney's marriage. She quickly comes to certain conclusions. The General did not like the walks of his wife. Therefore, he did not love her. And even though he was handsome, there is a peculiar turn of his features, there is a certain element in his facial expressions, his features that perhaps suggest that he did not treat his wife well. So these are some of the conclusions to which Catherine comes to, and this is a gothic fantasy that she believes in really, so that this kind of belief also helps her to navigate the spatiality of Northanger Abbey.

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## Reading Life through gothic

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"Reading physiognomy is a recurring activity in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and Catherine aspires to be as expert in the art as Emily St. Aubert. Soon, as the General silently stalks the drawing-room "with down cast eyes and contracted brow," Catherine concludes she has "the air and attitude of a Montoni!" (187)—the abuser, incarcerator, and probably the murderer of his wife. Her gothic plot-making once begun, the horrors multiply."

(MacMaster, 2010, 23)



“Reading physiognomy is a recurring activity in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Catherine aspires to be as expert in the art as Emily St. Aubert. Soon, as the General silently stalks the drawing room with down cast eyes and contracted brow, Catherine concludes that he has the air and attitude of a Montoni! - the abuser, incarcerator and probably the murderer of his wife.” Her gothic plot making once begun the horrors multiply.

So reading somebody’s face is also a gothic trope and this happens in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, when Emily St. Aubert reads the facial expressions of Montoni. So in that kind of tradition, Catherine Morland reads the physiognomy of General Tilney and she watches him silently stalk the room, walk up and down the drawing room and he is down cast. He looks upset and he is thinking about something intensely with contracted brow. And Catherine immediately concludes that, he looks like he has the behavior, he has the attitude and air of a Montoni, Count Montoni from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, who is an evil villain who locks up Emily and her aunt.

So you can see how very quickly Catherine Morland connects the appearance of General Tilney with the appearance of Count Montoni. At this point, General Tilney has not done anything to suggest to Catherine that he is really evil. He has not locked her up. He has not kicked her out of the house yet, but you can see that Catherine Morland is quickly making a lot of judgments about General Tilney and she draws parallels between

Montoni who is an abuser, incarcerator. And so, you can see General Tilney becomes Count Montoni and her gothic plot making once begun by Catherine the horrors that she imagines multiply hugely.

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## Gothic plot



"Having moved from gothic decor to gothic plot, Catherine is the more likely to get into trouble; and she does. This time Henry catches her in the act of snooping near his dead mother's room, and Catherine is overwhelmed with guilt."



(MacMaster, 2010, 24)

Image source: <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Literature/NorthangerAbbey>



“Having moved from gothic decor to gothic plot, Catherine is the more likely to get into trouble and she does. This time Henry catches her in the act of snooping near his dead mother's room and Catherine is overwhelmed with guilt.” You can see how this over imaginative heroine, Catherine Morland, acts on the various narratives that she has read and heard including the one told to her by Henry Tilney and she tries to put into practice whatever she has read and heard.

And she snoops near Mrs. Tilney's room, the dead mother of Henry Tilney's room and she is caught in her act of snooping. And when Henry Tilney takes her to task, she is overwhelmed, she is suddenly aware of the excesses of her gothic imagination and she feels terribly guilty about suspecting General Tilney's hand in the death of Mrs. Tilney.

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## Horrid surmise



"Henry is onto her suspicions in a flash—so fast, in fact, that he creates some suspicions himself. "You had formed a surmise of such horror [he reproaches her] as I have hardly words to—", and indeed words fail him. But just how much evidence is there for Henry to deduce her horrid surmise? True, she's clearly guilty about her unwarranted explorations to his mother's room."

(MacMaster, 2010, 24)

Image source: <http://henryfordreams.blogspot.com/2007/03/northanger-surprise.html>



“Henry is onto her suspicions in a flash. So fast, in fact, that he creates some suspicions himself. You had formed a surmise of such horror, he approaches her, as I have hardly words to, and indeed words fail him. But just how much evidence is there for Henry to deduce her horrid surmise? True, she is guilty about her unwarranted explorations to his mother's room.”

You can see how MacMaster not really questions Catherine's actions here, she also questions the behavior of Henry Tilney. How could Henry becomes so suspicious so quickly. So if he is kind of coming to the point so directly, what makes him come to such a conclusion about Catherine Morland's assumption? So is he also thinking along the lines of Catherine Morland about the death of his mother? So these are the questions that immediately come to critics such as MacMaster.



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## Unhappy Marriage and Gothic



"Henry becomes intensely upset over Catherine's imaginings because (as he implicitly concedes) they bruise his sore feelings and memories: his mother had had to bear much from her husband's temper and coldness, the motives for the marriage had been pragmatic and mercenary for the husband, and as a result for the wife (insofar as her life with her husband was concerned) unhappy."

(Source: Ellen Moody)

<http://www.jjmandellen.org/ProposalNorthanger.html>



We realize that Henry becomes intensely upset over Catherine's imaginings, because as he implicitly concedes they bruise his sore feelings and memories, his mother had had to bear much from her husband's temper and coldness, the motives for the marriage had been pragmatic and mercenary for the husband, and as a result for the wife, insofar as her life with her husband was concerned, unhappy.

So we deduce a lot of things from Henry's confessions, quote unquote, because he does inform Catherine Morland that the narrative of his mother, the story of his mother is associated with painful memories, sore feelings. So he also concedes, confesses, accepts that the marriage of his father and mother were made for pragmatic practical reasons for mercenary reasons. It was not a romantic marriage and as a result, the wife was unhappy, Henry's mother was unhappy.

So because of these memories, Henry is upset to realize that Catherine Morland is kind of further questioning the nature of the relationship between General Tilney and Mrs. Tilney. So all these associated ideas makes them unhappy that he is not even able to kind of fully put it in words, the assumptions of Catherine Morland.

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## Catherine's horrid surmise



"And her own words certainly suggest suspicion: "[Y our mother' s] dying so suddenly . . . an d you— none of you being at home—and your father, I though t—perhaps had not been very fond of her " (196) . That's all she says ; and it 's not much to go on , is it? And yet he guesses, "[Y ]ou infer perhaps the probability of some negligence—some—(involuntarily she shook her head)—or it may be—something still less pardonable. "

(MacMaster, 2010, 24)



And Catherine's horrid surmise is put in these words, she becomes suspicion because of certain circumstances. She states, "your mother is dying so suddenly and you, none of you being at home and your father, I thought perhaps had not been very fond of her, that is all she says. And it is not much to go on, is it? And he yet, and yet he guesses, you infer perhaps the probability of some negligence, some involuntarily she shook ahead or it may be something less, still less pardonable."

So you can see how Catherine arrives at her horrid surmise, a horrid assumption that General Tilney perhaps killed his wife, which is that none of the children were at home when her mother died and your father, she says to Henry was apparently not very fond of her. And not being fond does not mean that he had in fact murdered her and so, Henry is really offended by the kind of quick assumptions that Catherine Morland comes to.

So, but you can see how Catherine Morland picks up on certain suggestive elements surrounding the death of Mrs. Tilney and those suggestive elements are some of the tropes of gothic narrative.

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## The General's Character



"If he can so swiftly guess her surmise, and on such slender evidence, doesn't it suggest he knows that the General was brutal to his wife, that he did drive her to an early grave, even if he didn't actually murder her? At the end of the novel, sure enough, after the General's outrageous behavior to Catherine herself, we are told, "Catherine . . . heard enough to feel, that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty"

(MacMaster, 2010, 24)

Image source: <http://pennyforyourdreams.blogspot.com/2007/03/northanger-abbey.html>



The question is, "if he can so swiftly guess her surmise, he referring to Henry Tilney, if Henry can so swiftly guess Catherine's surmise and on such slender evidence, does not it suggest he knows that the General was brutal to his wife, that he did drive her to an early grave, even if he did not actually murder her. At the end of the novel, sure enough, after the General's outrageous behavior to Catherine herself, we are told, Catherine heard enough to feel that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character or magnified his cruelty."

So there is a suggestion which is very clear and what is that suggestion? Even though Henry, his father General Tilney did not actually murder his wife, he could have put, driven her to an early grave, he could have killed her out of his indifference, coldness. And all these comprehension that Catherine Morland eventually derives about the General makes her feel that she had actually not sinned against his character or she might just have magnified his cruelty.

So Catherine feels that she was right in guessing that the General had been cold and not very fond of his wife. So it might not be a literal murder, but it is a death brought about by the General's indifference and the treatment, the cold treatment of his wife.

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## Female Gothic

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"In essence, female gothic novels expose societal gender inequalities. *Northanger*

*Abbey* evokes and plays with gothic tropes and conventions, and it alludes to other gothic

novels."

Source: (Carrie Wright)

<http://jasna.org/publications/persuasions-online/volume-40-no-1/wright/>



Now, let us come back to the idea of the female gothic. In essence, female gothic novels expose societal gender inequalities. In fact, that is the most important point about a female gothic and how very powerfully it lays bare the gender discrimination, the double standards and the inequality between the sexes. And *Northanger Abbey* evokes and plays with gothic tropes and conventions and it also makes references to other gothic novels.

So by playing with gothic tropes and conventions, it becomes part of the gothic even though there is a parody of it. In fact, using that parody, *Northanger Abbey* is very successful in laying bare the gender inequality and the oppression suffered by the female sex.

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## Northanger Abbey and Female Gothic



"Miriam Rheingold Fuller asserts that *Northanger Abbey* represents a particular brand of the female gothic—the "domestic gothic," the purpose of which "is to underscore the realistic, but seemingly innocuous, dangers and misfortunes that beset Catherine and Eleanor" (92), whether they be social, financial, or sexual."

Source: (Wright 2019)

<http://jasna.org/publications/persuasions-online/volume-40-no-1/wright/>



“Miriam Rheingold Fuller asserts that *Northanger Abbey* represents a particular brand of the female gothic, the domestic gothic, the purpose of which is to underscore the realistic, but seemingly innocuous, dangers and misfortunes that beset Catherine and Eleanor, whether they be social, financial or sexual.”

So what Fuller here tries to do is give another subcategory to the female gothic which is that of the “domestic gothic” and the domestic gothic points very powerfully to the misfortunes and the dangers on the oppressions and sufferings undergone by women with regard to social, financial and sexual domains. So Catherine and Eleanor are caught in that the set of discriminations. You know that Catherine cannot marry Henry very easily because she is not rich enough and Eleanor and her lover cannot join in holy matrimony that very easily because of objections to their marriage.

So, the domestic gothic and the female gothic come together here to make a very powerful comment about the nature and role of women in society. So they do not have financial independence. They are socially underprivileged, if they do not have the right connections, the right amount of wealth, and they need to be endowed in various aspects to be attractive to the male partner.

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## General Tilney



He is a despot, "accustomed on every ordinary occasion to give the law in his family"

(p. 247). His binding authority is such that he is "always a check upon his children's spirits" (p. 156).

(Source: Minna, p.504)

Image source: <http://www.jimandellen.org/austen/gothicna.html>



Now, let us talk very briefly about General Tilney. “He is a despot, accustomed on every ordinary occasion to give the law in his family. His binding authority is such that he is always checking his children's spirits.” So General Tilney is a person who wants absolute control and authority over his family. In fact, his children's spirits are also controlled by General Tilney. He is the law-giver and he wants his household to be under his thumb entirely.

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## General Tilney's Despotism



"Yet Jane Austen's representation of his despotism is subtle. Alistair Duckworth observes that his domestic tyranny is revealed in his exacting demand of punctuality from his family; he betrays an extraordinary degree of impatience and irritation with any delay, and certainly "his obsessive attitude toward time."

(Source: Minma, p.504)

Image source: <http://www.jimandellen.org/austen/gothicna.html>



"Yet Jane Austen's representation of his despotism is subtle as well. Alistair Duckworth observes that his domestic tyranny is revealed in his exacting demanded of punctuality from his family. He betrays an extraordinary degree of impatience and irritation with any delay and certainly his obsessive attitude towards time." So, his obsession with time is also an indication of his exacting behavior of his domestic tyranny. The demand for punctuality is actually an assertion of his authority. And when somebody disobeys him in this regard, he becomes extremely impatient and irritated.

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## General Tilney



"General Tilney is very similar to Montoni because of his thirst for money and his severe attitude, but he does not kill anyone. He is a burlesque version of Montoni and this is characterized by his manifestation of violence in trivial events. Montoni gets angry and has a tyrannical attitude whereas General Tilney is violent for the sake of being violent: "General Tilney was pacing the drawing-room, his watch in his hand, and having on the very instant of their entering, pulled the bell with violence, ordered 'Dinner to be on table directly!' ". In other words, he is like a villain who lost his authority and who feels the need to remind us constantly that he is the master". (p.51)

Source: Aurélie Chevalere. Gothic Humour and Satire in Northanger Abbey. Literature. 2012. ffdumas00936705f

<https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-00936705/document>

Image source: <https://www.tumblr.com/search/general%20tilney>



So, we realize that General Tilney is very similar to Montoni because of his thirst for money and his severe attitude, but he does not kill anyone directly. It is a kind of a symbolic murder of happiness that he does. If at all he can be called as a murderer, it is a symbolic murderer and not a literal one. He is a burlesque version of Montoni and this is characterized by his manifestation of violence in trivial events. Montoni gets angry and has a tyrannical attitude, whereas General Tilney is violent for the sake of being violent.

For instance, “General Tilney was pacing the drawing room, his watch in his hand, and having on the very instant of the entering, pulled the bell with violence, ordered dinner to be on the table directly.” So you can see how very patriarchal that General Tilney is and that kind of power on his part, the demand for obedience from his inferiors and from his family members reflects on the imposing nature, oppressively imposing nature of General Tilney.

In other words, he is like a villain, who has lost his authority and who feels the need to remind us constantly that he is the master. So, those subtexts are also prevalent to the character of General Tilney. He thinks and he believes that power is slipping away from his hands and he has to kind of establish that in a very loud manner, in a very aggressive and violent manner.

Thank you for watching. I will continue in the next session.