

Northanger Abbey
Professor Dr. Divya A. Dohss
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Lecture 20
Parodying the Gothic Villain

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Week 4: Northanger Abbey



LECTURE 4E: PARODYING THE GOTHIC VILLAIN

IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTPS://SARAHEMSLEY.COM/2018/06/11/GENERAL-TILNEY-THE-GGFE-OF-NORTHANGER-ABBEY/](https://sarahemsley.com/2018/06/11/general-tilney-the-ggfe-of-northanger-abbey/)

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Hello, and welcome to week four's lectures on Northanger Abbey. In today's session, I am going to talk about Parodying the Gothic Villain. We know that there is no Gothic villain in the traditional sense, but there is a villain of sorts in the novel, and in today's session, we are going to talk about that character.

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Northanger Abbey

"In 1798 Jane Austen sat down to write the novel that was published posthumously as Northanger Abbey. More topical than any of her other works, Northanger Abbey reads as a critique of both the gothic and the sentimental sensibilities that were being foisted on women readers at the time." (Diane Source: (Hoeveler, 1995, 5)



Now some preliminary concepts about Northanger Abbey, which will offer us perspectives which are different to those that I have discussed in the previous sessions. Here is a criticism by Hoeveler. "In 1798, Jane Austen sat down to write the novel that was published posthumously as Northanger Abbey. More topical than any of our other works, Northanger Abby reads as a critique of both, the Gothic and the sentimental sensibilities that were being foisted on women readers at the time."

Now we see that this particular critique is being placed in the context of the time in which the novel was first written. So this critic goes back to 1798, as the point of time in which Austen sat down to write this novel and she calls this novel as topical. It is very relevant to the issues that were circulating in society at that time.

So, in that period, the late 18th century the Gothic was having its heyday. It was a very popular genre of the novel, and a sentimental novel was also extremely popular and fashionable among the reading public. And the reading public was composed of women readers largely at that time.

So you can see how this particular critique offered by Hoeveler is suggesting that both the Gothic and the sentimental, were genres, sub genres that were being offered. She calls it foisted, that were being kind of given, forced upon the women readers at that time. So there is the implication then that both the Gothic and the sentimental were somehow detrimental to the intellectual makeup of the women.

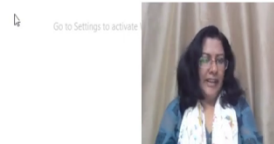
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Catherine and Isabella

"If Catherine Morland, coded as "gothic," is victimized and rather foolish, then so is Isabella Thorpe, coded as "sentimental." In many ways, Northanger Abbey fictionalizes the major points in Wollstonecraft's treatise, showing that women who are given inadequate educations will be victims of their own folly as well as of masculine hubris, lust and greed."

Source: (Diane Hoeveler, 1995, 5)



Diane Hoeveler further goes on to say that, "if Catherine Morland coded as Gothic is victimized and rather foolish, then so is Isabella Thorpe coded, as sentimental. In many ways Northanger Abbey fictionalizes the major points in Wollstonecraft's treatise showing that women who are given inadequate educations will be the victims of their own folly as well as of masculine hubris, lust and greed."

Now there are two points here, which are that, women such as Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe are victims. So they are also victimized and made foolish by the society around them. So that is the first point that we can derive from this criticism. Secondly, because they are somehow victims of society, they can in turn be victimizers. In other words, they also adopt masculine hubris such as lust and greed, that is what we see on the part of Isabella Thorpe.

So, if Catherine Morland is seen as a victim, then one should also see this duplicitous Isabella Thorpe that calculating, manipulative Isabella Thorpe as someone who is also a victim of society, because she is structured, her mental faculties are manipulated by the needs of society in such a way that she is trying to work with the system by being greedy as well.

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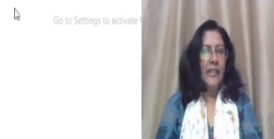


"On the one hand, Isabella Thorpe is considered the anti-heroine of the novel. Nevertheless, Catherine admires her when they first meet; she is impressed by Isabella's knowledge about fashion, balls and relationships."

Adriana Peraza Cruz, 2015, 17

https://riull.uil.es/xmlui/bitstream/handle/915/1375/Proto-Feminist+insights+into+Jane+Austen's+Northanger+Abbey_.pdf;jsessionid=BB3EA57AD0C2F2AE90A66484706360A8?sequence=1

Image source: <https://de.fanpop.com/clubs/period-drama-villains/images/21468614/title/isabella-thorpe-photo>



On the one hand, Isabella Thorpe is considered the anti-heroine of the novel. Nevertheless, Catherine admires her when they first meet and she is impressed by Isabella's knowledge about fashion, balls and relationships. So we know that she is the anti-heroine because she is extremely cunning and she breaks engagements, which are which are not ideal for her benefit in terms of mercenary needs. So she is the anti-heroine because she is disloyal, unfaithful and she just toys with Catherine, she kind of manipulates Catherine.

Yet, we also see that when Catherine first meets her in Bath she admires her. She is kind of impressed by Isabella's knowledge about fashion, balls and relationships. So she kind of looks up to Isabella Thorpe, Isabella Thorpe becomes a kind of a guide and a mentor figure until the Tilney's arrive in Bath. So Catherine Morland can only put away the books, the Gothic novels, in order to spend time with Isabella. In other words, Isabella Thorpe is more attractive to her than Gothic fiction that she reads.

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Isabella and Catherine

"These powers received due admiration from Catherine, to whom they were entirely new.

(...)Catherine then ran directly up stairs, and watched Miss Thorpe's progress down the street

from the drawing-room window; admired the graceful spirit of her walk, the fashionable air of her

figure and dress, and felt grateful, as well she might, for the chance which had procured her such

a friend."

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Now, this is a quote from the novel and this quote tells us about the kind of impact Isabella had on Catherine Morland. "These powers received due admiration from Catherine, to whom they were entirely new. Catherine then ran directly upstairs and watched Miss Thorpe's progress down the street from the drawing room window; admired the graceful spirit of her walk, the fashionable air of a figure and dress and felt grateful, as well she might for the chance, which had procured her such a friend."

So you can see how in awe of Isabella, Catherine is. So Catherine even admires the way she walks down the street. She admires the graceful way she walks. And we need to remember that in those times in the 18th and 19th century the demeanor of women are very, very important. The etiquette that they exhibit, the kind of accomplishments that they possess are hugely important for the kind of status that they have in polite society. So you can see how Isabella is being appreciated for the fashionable air of her figure and dress and Catherine is immensely grateful that she got Isabella as her friend in Bath because she can be guided by Isabella.

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Isabella Thorpe

"So, Isabella Thorpe is going to have a prominent function in the story's development, as both Catherine's most faithful friend and role model for her,

at least until Catherine discovers that she was not such a loyal friend. Both Isabella and Catherine enjoy reading novels, but the former does not seem to read as much as Catherine. In fact, Isabella feigns having made out a list of ten or twelve novels, but later acknowledges that she hasn't read all of them and that she neither made the list, but a friend of hers"

Source: (Adriana Peraza Cruz, 2015, 17)
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/242983342365582168/>



So we have realized that Isabella is going to have a prominent function in the stories development as Catherine's most faithful friend and role model, at least until Catherine discovers that she is not such a loyal friend. Both Isabella and Catherine enjoy reading novels, but the former does not seem to read as much as Catherine. In fact, Isabella feigns having made out a list of ten or twelve novels, but later acknowledges that she has not read all of them and that neither, that she neither made the list but a friend of hers did.

You can see the fraudulent nature of Isabella Thorpe kind of slowly emerge from this incident of novel reading. So she makes out a list of Gothic fiction for the benefit of Catherine Morland, but then we realize she has not read these novels, but she just made the list for the benefit of Catherine, and we also saw how it was important for a fashionable women to have read all these fashionable novels.

So Gothic fiction is part of polite society in this way and Isabella Thorpe is somehow an outsider, that is the impression that we get from the way she kind of wants to be part of a fashionable society, but she is not really part of it. Catherine does read all the novels, but Isabella Thorpe who is so fashionable, does not do it, does not read all these novels, so she is a kind of an interloper figure in some sense.

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Parody-Gothic Villain



"Thorpe's characterization is quite typical of Gothic fiction: the man who often persecutes the heroine and endangers her safety, for example when he forces Catherine to stay in the carriage though she was asking him to stop and let her go. Here, Austen parodies the figure of the Gothic villain."

Source: Adriana Peraza Cruz, 2015, 19

Image source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/384424518163221366/>

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Now John Thorpe is the brother of Isabella Thorpe and his characterization is very significant to our understanding of the Gothic nature of this particular novel, *Northanger Abbey*. So Thorpe's characterization is quite typical of Gothic fiction: the man who often persecutes the heroine and endangers her safety. For example, when he forces Catherine to stay in the carriage though she was asking him to stop and let her go. Here, Austen parodies the figure of the Gothic villain.

So Gothic Villian is the kind of subtext that is given to John Thorpe. John Thorpe is interested in Catherine Morland. He has romantic notions towards her, primarily, because he thinks that Catherine Morland is rich and he will get a lot of money if he marries her. So when he is on the process of this courtship, we see him endangering her safety and going against her wishes too. So when Catherine is driving with John Thorpe on the streets of Bath, at one point she notices her friends Henry and Elena Tilney and she wants Thorpe to stop the carriage, but he does not. So this behavior of John Thorpe, who is not respecting the wishes of the individual, one who persecutes the heroine is a Gothic villain's trope.

And this is something that Austen gives John Thorpe to make sure that she is criticizing such character. So while there was a parody going on in relation to John Thorpe, the way he kind of bumbles around this novel, his vulgar language, his pretence, his bravado all these even though make him appear as a comic character, there is a kind, there is a seriousness to his

character as well. He is on the verge of threatening the happiness and safety of Catherine Morland.

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John Thorpe

"From the very beginning John Thorpe is depicted as egocentric, conceited, arrogant and ill-mannered.

He just talks about his horses and his main interests are carriages and money. In fact, greed is considered one of the main elements of the novel. Ambition contributes to the most important events of the novel, in which characters are moved by avarice".

Source: Adriana Peraza Cruz, 2015, 19



So “from the very beginning John Thorpe is depicted as egocentric, conceited, arrogant and ill-mannered. He just talks about his horses and his main interests are carriages and money. In fact, greed is considered one of the main elements of the novel. Ambition contributes the most important events of the novel, in which characters are moved by avarice”.

So you can see how John Thorpe becomes an important character in the novel because he embodies all the characteristics, which are detrimental to the happiness of individuals. He is arrogant, he does not have good manners, he is bombastic, he is selfish, self-centered, egocentric, and he is obsessed by his interests, which are horses and carriages and money.

Of course, so when he is interested in Catherine Morland, he is interested because he really believes that she is going to be the heir to wealthy Allen's, the companions who are taking Catherine Morland on this trip to Bath with them. So, avarice, the greed of society is criticized in this novel through two characters. One is General Tilney, whom we discussed in previous lectures and the other is John Thorpe, the brother of Isabella.

Isabella, also we understand is someone who is extremely interested in money and she befriends Catherine because she also believes that she is going to be the heir of, one of the heirs of the Allen's and she is proven wrong, and therefore she kind of realizes that she made

a mistake in befriending Catherine Morland, and her brother James Morland and she goes so far as to break up the engagement with James Morland as well. So all as we saw in the discussion about the plot of this novel.

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John Thorpe



"As a result, Catherine is affected by other characters' greed. John Thorpe's manners are not displayed properly with Catherine, neither with his mother and sister. The narrator again uses irony to describe this attitude: "fraternal tenderness" which instead of greeting his family he "asked each of them how they did, and observed that they both looked very ugly." (48)

Adriana Peraza Cruz, 2015, 19



If you see how Catherine is affected by others greed. For example, the greed of General Tilney and the greed of John Thorpe. John Thorpe manners are not displayed properly with Catherine, neither with his mother and sister. The narrator again uses irony to describe this attitude: fraternal tenderness which instead of greeting his family, he asked each of them how they did, and observed that they both looked very ugly. These manners provoked Catherine's revulsion and she realizes that Thorpe is the clear antithesis of the gentlemanly Henry Tilney.

You can see how vulgar and improper John Thorpe is through his behavior with his family and friends and all these characteristics make him extremely unappealing to Catherine and she contrasts his behavior with that of Henry Tilney, who comes off as extremely gentlemanly.

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John Thorpe

"On the occasion when, persuaded by Isabella, James Morland, John Thorpe and Catherine, take a trip, James Morland and Isabella Thorpe are left on their own while Catherine has to bear the impertinence of John Thorpe. He exhibits his arrogance and his obsession with wealth at all time but mostly when he asks Catherine about Mr. Allen's wealth:"

Adriana Peraza Cruz, 2015, 19

Image source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/39828177924691691/>



“On the occasion when persuaded by Isabella, James Morland, John Thorpe, and Catherine take a trip, James Morland and Isabella Thorpe are left on their own while Catherine has to bear the impertinence of John Thorpe. He exhibits his arrogance and his obsession with wealth at all time but mostly when he asked Catherine about Mr. Allen’s wealth.”

So even when they are taking a picnic, a trip to do a bit of sightseeing, we realize that the real motives of the Thorpes is to find out how much money that they are going to get. And the point of interest for them in relation to Catherine and her brother James Morland is because of the association with the Allen’s. So even when they are out in a picnic, John Thorpe comes back to the same point about Mr. Allen's wealth.

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John Thorpe



"Old Allen is as rich as a Jew—is not he?"

Catherine did not understand him—and he repeated his question, adding in explanation, "Old Allen, the man you are with."

"Oh! Mr. Allen, you mean. Yes, I believe, he is very rich."

"And no children at all?"

"No—not any."

"A famous thing for his next heirs. He is your godfather, is not he?"

Image source: <https://www.digitaustaen.org/node/49>



NPTEL



So this is a conversation that John Thorpe has with Catherine on that trip. "Old Allen is as rich as a Jew, is he not? Catherine did not understand him and he repeated his question, adding an explanation, old Allen, the man you are with. Oh! Mr. Allen, you mean. Yes, I believe he is very rich. And no children at all? No, not any. A famous thing for his next heirs. He is your godfather, is he not?" So you can see is that the point of interest is very clearly the Allen's and he also jumps to conclusions about the fact that Catherine Morland and James Morland are potentially going to receive a lot of money from the Allen's which is not the case.

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John Thorpe's imagination

"It was probably from this moment onwards that John Thorpe imagines that Catherine Morland is Mr. Allen's heir, so she would be well positioned in the future. However, Thorpe's suspicions are false. Catherine was raised by humble parents who did not have great possessions. In addition, Mr. Allen was not as rich as John has imagined and Catherine was neither his heir."

(Source: Adriana Peraza Cruz, 2015, 20)



NPTEL



“It was probably from this moment onwards that John Thorpe imagines that Catherine Morland is Mr. Allen’s heir, so she would be well positioned in the future. However, Thorpe suspicions are false. Catherine was raised by humble parents who did not have great possessions. In addition, Mr. Allen was not as rich as John has imagined and Catherine was neither his heir.” So you realize how quick that John Thorpe is coming to drastic conclusions, the very fact that the Allen’s do not have any children and that they have accompanied Catherine Morland on this trip makes him come to this assumption that they are going to be the heirs of the Allen’s.

So, this is not reality, but John Thorpe imagines it to be in his own bumbling way. Catherine was raised by humble parents, she does not have a lot of money, not a lot of possessions but enough to be satisfied with life.

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John Thorpe and General Tilney

"John Thorpe and General Tilney share the characteristic features of the villain, commonly represented in Gothic fiction. Instead of using just one villain, the author uses in Northanger Abbey the figures of two characters that fit in the role of bad characters. John Thorpe and General Tilney are interested in Catherine Morland because both believe that she is a rich woman. But their interest disappears when they discover that it is not true. John boasts about Catherine's wealth with Mr. Tilney in order to show that his acquaintances are usually very distinguished."

(Source: Adriana Peraza Cruz, 2015, 20)



“John Thorpe and General Tilney share the characteristic features of the villain, commonly presented in Gothic fiction. Instead of using just one villain, the author uses in Northanger Abbey the figures of two characters that fit in the role of bad characters. John Thorpe and General Tilney are interested in Catherine Morland because both believe that she is a rich woman. But the interest disappears when they discover that it is not true. John boasts about Catherine's wealth with Mr. Tilney in order to show that his acquaintances are usually very distinguished.”

So in this novel, we have two characters who are interested in Catherine Morland for monetary reasons. One is John Thorpe and the other is General Tilney. John Thorpe kind of bluffs to General Tilney in order to show that his acquaintances such as Catherine Morland are very distinguished. He implies that he has a set of friends and acquaintances who are rich and sophisticated. So in order to kind of make himself appear in a very important way to General Tilney, he increases the stature, the position and status of Catherine Morland.

John Thorpe's words to General Tilney have ramifications that he perhaps did not anticipate. And General Tilney picks up on the nature of the characterization of Catherine Morland that he gets from John Thorpe and start making his own plans. So though this is a Gothic parody, though this novel is a Gothic parody, we understand from the behavior of John Thorpe and General Tilney, that they also fit the character of Gothic villains because Gothic villains

traditionally harass and imprison and ill-treat heroines in Gothic fiction in order to get at property and money.

So, John Thorpe almost abuses Catherine Morland. He almost oppresses Catherine Morland because he believes that she is rich and that he can make her his wife. General Tilney also behaves with Catherine Morland in such a manner because he believes that she is rich and that she can become the wife of his son, Henry Tilney. So his behavior has two phases, one is being extremely nice and the other is extremely cruel. We will come to that.

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General Tilney's designs

General flatters Catherine and pleases her as much as he can:
"Modesty such as your's—but not for the world would I pain it
by open praise. If you can be induced to honour us with a visit,
you will make us happy beyond expression."

(Source: Adriana Peraza Cruz, 2015, 21)

Image source: <http://janitesonthexames.blogspot.com/2008/01/northanger-abbey-general-tilney-real.html>



“The General flatters Catherine and pleases her as much as he can: Modesty such as yours but not for the world would I pain it by open praise. If you can be induced to honor us with the visit, you will make us happy beyond expression.” General Tilney who believes that Catherine Morland is going to be the heir of the Allen’s wants to make sure that she will get engaged to his son Henry Tilney and become the daughter-in-law.

So therefore, he modifies his behavior in order to please her, which is why, look at the way in which he talks to her. He praises her indirectly by saying that modesty is so important to Catherine Morland and look at the way he requests her to pay them a visit in Northanger Abbey. This kind of behavior is duplicitous and cannot be trusted with.

And in this respect, he reminds us of Isabella Thorpe as well. Isabella Thorpe flatters, is extremely nice to Catherine takes her by the hand and introduces Catherine to the society of

Bath. So Isabella Thorpe is not much different to General Tilney. General Tilney is not greatly different to Isabella Thorpe. Only one thing connects the both of them, which is that they want to marry for money or make arrangements so that they will benefit from a marriage.

So Isabella Thorpe thinks that by marrying James Morland, she will become more wealthy than she already is that she will marry into money, but then she is disappointed to know that James Morland is not going to get a lot of money from the Allen's and she breaks the engagement. And then she gets engaged to Captain Tilney, the eldest son of General Tilney and even that engagement does not come out the way she expects it to.

You can see how much she calculates and tries to make her move in order to settle well and the same thing can be seen in the behavior of John Thorpe. He wants to marry Catherine because he thinks he can settle well by marrying her and then General Tilney likewise thinks that if his second son, Henry Tilney marries Catherine Morland, then he will also come into a lot of money. It will be a sophisticated proper wedding for his son.

So everybody designs certain things in their life based on, based on the end point of money, based on what they would get out of it ultimately in monetary terms. And General Tilney when he realizes again through John Thorpe that Catherine is not going to get a lot of money, he becomes extremely displeased with her and he unceremoniously asks Catherine Morland to leave Northanger Abbey.

So how do we see this? This world is as much of a nightmare to young women who want to marry well, who want to kind of not be shut out of a particular class position. Isabella Thorpe wants to marry well because she wants to be part of polite society rich, polite society and Catherine Morland wants to marry for love and not for money. And for the first time we see that Henry Tilney, he thinks that money is not as important as romance and Henry Tilney decides to go against the villain, pleasure of his father by marrying Catherine Morland.

So this world is not much different from the world of the serious Gothic fiction. In serious Gothic fiction, we have men marry for money, we have men imprisoning women for money and likewise here, in this novel, women are cornered because of mercenary monetary reasons. So this is a novel which seems to parody the Gothic novel, but we also realize that

perhaps there is not a parody in it, there is also a kind of an imitation of the Gothic formulas in a domestic setup in a polite society in Regency England, and that kind of imitation is a different kind of Gothic. One can call it a domestic Gothic, the British Gothic as well.

The secondary characters in this novel are quite important in understanding the nature of the world in which this novel is set. So the subplot with Isabella Thorpe and John Thorpe is kind of mirroring the world of the Tilney's in a different way. We have Henry Tilney, Eleanor Tilney, who are being controlled by General Tilney. So both that world and the world of Thorpe's are shaken up, one can say both these worlds are directed by the need for money, the need to make more money.

So while the Thorpe seem to be quite different to the Tilney's, they are not greatly different from this sophisticated bunch of people. They seem to mirror them in a different way. So while John Thorpe is extremely crude and rude and buffoonish, Henry Tilney is very sophisticated and he understands the motivations of people. He understands the nature of the Gothic and he understands the impressionable nature of Catherine Morland, and he perhaps also understands the nature of the relationship between his father and mother, and he knows that a marriage made for the sake of money is not going to be one which is full of happiness and contentment.

And that is why any memory of his mother, especially with the implication that perhaps the father is responsible for the death makes him very upset because he realizes that that marriage was extremely unsatisfactory for the mother at least. So you can see how marriages can turn into spaces of the Gothic.

So when Catherine Morland imagines a Gothic plot in relation to General Tilney and Mrs. Tilney, the domesticity, the nature of their relationship offers her the space to do it, and so their world, including the Abbey, the nature and structure of the Abbey and the character of General Tilney is kind of leading her to imagine a nightmarish scenario.

So what you can see is General Tilney's nature is kind of leading Catherine to come up with Gothic plots, but there are also other less horrible plots, perhaps but there are other similar plots that can be constructed in relation to Isabella Thorpe and John Thorpe. The two

characters who have a lot of control over Catherine Morland for certain period in her life in Bath.

So Catherine Morland sees different examples in front of her. And through her journey in Bath and her visit to Northanger Abbey, she learns that she has to grow up, she has to learn the fake from the real, she has to know true friendships. She has to learn loyalty, loyalty, and that is what she learns from Henry Tilney and Eleanor Tilney. So they come out as the ideal mentors, ideal friends for Catherine Morland, whereas the other figures, the Thorpes kind of fall away from her and then Catherine realizes that they are not ideal mentors for her in this polite society.

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