Translating the Monstrous: Northanger Abbey

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ALONE IN HER ROOM in Northanger Abbey Catherine Morland searched fearfully and hopefully for evidence of Gothic mystery, of moral monstrosity. Perhaps Catherine was no sillier than I, because in the well-lit chapters of Jane Austen's first important novel, I am looking for the same things. Deluded by too much novel reading and not enough experience, Catherine cannot make distinctions between words and life. Deluded by too much novel reading and, far worse, too much theory reading, I may fail to make the same distinctions; and I expect to find, even in Jane Austen's most trivially entertaining novel, important traces of the fictions of excess she rejects.

I am comforted, however, by the fact that Catherine became the romance heroine she aspired to be and found her moral monstrosity after all—located humanly, if not geographically, precisely where she feared she would find it. To be sure, there was nothing monstrous in the forbidding chest in the corner of her room—only a laundry list. Nor was there anything in the modern and comfortable room of General Tilney's deceased wife, where Catherine expected to find the dead woman alive, imprisoned, and wasting away. Rather, the monster turns out to be General Tilney himself, though what is monstrous about him is only social greed and banality. If Catherine can find her monster, perhaps I can, too—and maybe more than one.

Though Northanger Abbey invites playfulness, I am not only being playful. It is a critical commonplace that the book begins in
parody and is to a certain extent trapped by the materials of literary gimmickry it rejects. But my contention is that its being so trapped is not an accident of Jane Austen's literary immaturity but, first, a condition of the terms of parody as a form and, second, a central quality of much of Jane Austen's more mature fiction and of the nineteenth-century realistic fiction that followed hers. Moreover, it is not merely playful critical excess to call General Tilney monstrous. The monstrousness is part of Jane Austen's literary imagination, a domestic but more serious monstrousness than that of, say, Lewis's *The Monk*, because it is a social commonplace. I do not mean to impose on *Northanger Abbey* a moral and literary burden that it does not propose to bear; but its very comedy implies a recognition of the way parodied literature reasserts itself in the language and form of its rejection. The laundry list, for example, in the book's last wonderful joke, turns out to have been left there by the servant of the man whose marriage to Eleanor Tilney makes possible Catherine's marriage to Henry Tilney. A romantic laundry list.

We laugh, with Jane Austen, at the artificiality of the device. But if we can dispense with the connection between Eleanor's husband and the laundry list, we cannot do without the husband as a fictional device. After all, Catherine must, on the terms of the genre Jane Austen adopts, marry the hero; at the same time, the conditions of the world created in the novel make such a marriage very improbable. At ease in the comedy, Jane Austen and her readers allow the rabbit, or the husband, to be pulled out of the hat; and we smile as Catherine—against the ironies of the novel's first paragraph—becomes the heroine. Casual as the comedy is, the ending implies a serious contradiction.

It is no accident, I think, that in the only direct parody in any of her major novels, Jane Austen includes explicit and unequivocal praise of the very fiction she seems to be mocking. She does not pretend to be writing a true history, but to be a novelist writing a novel. Rejecting solemnity, she praises novels—in the delightful excursus in chapter 5—as products of "genius, wit, and taste" which afforded more "extensive and unaffected pleasure."¹ Nevertheless,
critics tend to agree that Jane Austen outgrew the kind of literary comedy we get here and that the parody, to a certain extent, even gets in the way of the novel's real ends. I agree that Jane Austen became a better and even a more serious novelist. But the form of Northanger Abbey is not unique in her canon; it is, rather, the essential form of most of the major novels.

C. S. Lewis calls it the form of "undeception" or "awakening."^2 On the model of Don Quixote, I prefer to call it "disenchantment." But whatever the name we choose, it is a form recognizable as central to the tradition of the novel: the story of hero or heroine who must learn to recognize and reject youthful illusions in order to accept a less romantic, a more tediously quotidian reality. In this respect, Northanger Abbey is a near if rather slight and girlish cousin of Madame Bovary, Great Expectations, Pendennis, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, and Emma.

Parody is an almost inescapable source of this form. It begins in antagonism to falsifications, in literature and in society, of social and personal relations, of true feeling. These falsifications, modeled on the conventions of earlier fictions, almost always take the shape of excesses, and particularly of romantic attempts to move beyond the limits of a confining reality. Gothic and sentimental novels pretend to an emotional intensity that are belied by the realities of social and personal relations and that common sense shows to be absurd. There are real feelings, but one can be sure they are not real if they are expressed in a language that insists on its own high sensibility. Novels, by and large, cannot remain parodies exclusively, as Joseph Andrews or Don Quixote demonstrates. The parody in Northanger Abbey sets out for us starkly the contradictions latent in moving from parody to novel and, consequently, in the sort of realism latent in novels of disenchantment and the main stream of nineteenth-century fiction.

As a form parody always seems simpler and less serious than it is likely in the end to be. Parody always involves itself in certain contradictions, not only because the need for mockery is invariably—as in Northanger Abbey—a sign of respect for the power of the thing mocked, but also because the parody must exist in the medium of its predecessor. Moreover, the texture of parody is

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comic while the object of parody is frequently a literature allowing
too easy triumphs for hero or heroine. The logic of rejection would
often entail an unhappy ending; but a comic texture tends to imply
a comic form, so that to be true to its content parody frequently
would have to be untrue to its form.

Despite these difficulties, parody is not peripheral to the history
of the novel, but central. Harry Levin sees that history as a series of
movements through parody,\(^3\) whose long and impressive history
runs from *Don Quixote,* through *Joseph Andrews,* *Tristram Shandy,* *Les Liaisons Dangereuses,* through *Northanger Abbey,* the early
Thackeray, Joyce’s *Ulysses,* Pynchon’s *V.* The list might be much
longer; and insofar as we may think of parody more generally as
any work whose formal principles are determined by self-conscious
rejections of the expectations raised by previous fictions, we would
probably have to include every novel that marks a real development
in fictional technique. Such literature, in the name of a new truth,
is necessarily very literary because it defines itself against previous
literary constructions of reality. So *Don Quixote* is a quest novel
rejecting quest romances. So the values implicit in *Joseph Andrews*
are, largely, the values Fielding thought he could not find in Rich-
ardson but could find in other writers. *Don Quixote* includes many
discussions of the ostensibly despised chivalric literature, and the
barber and the priest, having decided to burn the Don’s library,
end up saving a surprisingly large number of the books they blame
for his madness.

There are not two but three terms in parody, as Levin, again, has
shown.\(^4\) There is the past literature; there is its ostensible opposite;
and there is the new reality that emerges from their juxtaposition.
The relationship among these is not stable, however. Romantic
forms, so often the butt of parody, must contain the energies that
might produce satisfying conclusions; comic forms, too, whatever
the imagined realistic obstacles, must contain these energies. As in
*Northanger Abbey,* “monstrosity,” energy larger than life, manages
to squeeze past Jane Austen’s ironies into the world that pretends
that monstrosity does not exist. Catherine’s innocence allows her to

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\(^3\) *The Gates of Horn* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 47. Some of the
titles of parodies listed here are not Levin’s responsibility, but mine.

\(^4\) This idea is extrapolated from Levin’s entire argument, pp. 48–56.
behave with precisely the kind of passionate naïveté that gives her
the qualities of a romantic heroine. The various lies and deceptions
of the Thorpes and General Tilney are what make the happy end-
ing possible. The logic of the particular narrative entails a mixing
of the antagonist elements.

Moreover, the third term in parody—the new reality emerging
from the contest between enchantment and disenchantment—
participates in and takes much of its shape from the two literary
ideas. Very quickly it becomes a new literary tradition. Thus when
Jane Austen denies assumptions about heroism, insists on "useful,
plain sense," she also rejects a view of the world as a place where
intense feelings can determine the shape of experience. The heroine
cannot embody the energies that allow her to get what she must
have by virtue of the intensity of her needs and passions. Catherine
cannot turn herself into a Gothic heroine by dreaming it, and she
cannot marry Tilney simply because she loves him. But Jane
Austen can arrange things so that General Tilney will imagine
Catherine to be rich and thus make the marriage possible. Com-
mitted as any sentimental or popular novelist would be to the
possibility of satisfactory resolutions, Jane Austen creates a reality
that allows such resolution, not from large passions but from ration-
al understanding of the self and of the social order.

So *Northanger Abbey* is a novel dedicated, in part, to demystify-
ing personal and social relations. But it assumes in its very structure
several things about reality that are not necessarily compatible with
themselves or with the parody: first, that relationships can be ex-
plained rationally; second, that it is possible, with useful, plain
sense, to work out satisfactory resolutions to life's difficulties; third,
that on the whole the world is just and moral; fourth, that attempts
to alter the social structure are mistaken, immoral, and the proper
butt of comedy. The literary parody thus functions to destroy con-
ceptions of society that imply that anything but natural forces, or
the forces of specifically human nature, determine the direction of
our lives. It also implies that what is mistakenly taken as the in-
trusion of supernatural or demonic energies into society is really
humanly created disorder. The natural state of society is "ordered";
when it seems disordered, that is the result of personal excess and
falseness.
Henry Tilney becomes the representative voice of ordered society. In marrying Catherine, he violates one of the rules of that society. He does so, however, because his father has forced a situation that requires invoking another rule. Once he makes his implicit commitment to Catherine by treating her as he did at the Abbey, General Tilney is morally obliged to accept her as his daughter-in-law, even if he has been wrong in thinking her a social equal.

By invoking two contradictory social and moral principles, Jane Austen moves beyond what parody can handle. If the parody be directed at the falsifications of excess and the consequent distortion of society, it cannot really function when the heroine has become the victim of distortion and the hero is attempting to set things right again. Thus the last chapters seem to have little to do with the parody of Gothic fiction that is the early focus. The logic of parody requires, in fact, that the parodied distortion have painful consequences: otherwise, there would be nothing serious to parody. Don Quixote must get his lumps. To satisfy the misguided heroine, Jane Austen must use the impossibilities of the world of excess as though they were possible. Though Henry Tilney acts from sane and strong moral principles, and from a clear understanding of social realities, only luck and the comic-Gothic machinations of James Thorpe and General Tilney make it possible for him to use those principles for the happiness of our antiheroine turned heroine. We know that Jane Austen is creating an ordered and sensible world; yet *Northanger Abbey* remains a comedy only because the world is not so sensible or rational in its working as Jane Austen wants us to believe.

The natural form of parody is what I have called the form of disenchantment; and it would be useful, in this circuitous pursuit of the monstrous, to examine some of the implications of this form. The heroine of such a novel must begin by not understanding what the real world is like. Typically, as with Emma Bovary, the illusions consort with an ambition to get beyond the limits of the social world into a more intense and richer sort of experience. This is the dream and the form of romance. Typically, too, the heroine or hero must cast off the illusions and settle for much less; and this is the dream and form of realism. Emma Woodhouse has a dream of independence and control that disappears as she comes to under-
stand that Mr. Knightley is not only right in almost all his readings of human behavior, but that he is lovable. The novel certainly implies that marrying Knightley is, in reality, far better than remaining the Emma who has “rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself.” Yet many critics feel the ending makes Emma much less interesting than she has been, or presages a long history of marital difficulties.

The difficulty in *Emma* is a more sophisticated and impressive version of the difficulty in *Northanger Abbey*. It depends upon the assumption that the real world, into which the heroine is “disenchanted,” is both more highly ordered and better than the world of illusion she has been forced to abandon. On the basis of this faith, Jane Austen can be unselfconsciously and successfully a comic novelist. And on the basis of this faith, less and less firm and stable, the central tradition of the mid-Victorian novel can allow more or (increasingly) less comic conclusions to minutely detailed social fictions.

The consequence of a structure in which the social order triumphs is that personal aspiration seems dangerous or immoral. Catherine can avoid being immoral because, except in the case of General Tilney, her misreadings of experience are always generous. Tilney feels that this makes her “superior.” Imagined at the start as a nonheroine, she is not given large ambitions. Though her desire for Tilney is obvious, she does not have romantic dreams about him, as Emma Bovary does about Rodolphe. She patiently suffers the rules, of society, or insists on fulfillment of her social obligations. The “true” false heroine, the forerunner of Mary Crawford or of Mrs. Elton, is Isabella Thorpe, who is ambitious (if a little stupid), does take chances, does push. As a consequence, the narrator makes her a comic villainess and punishes her without compassion. Isabella does not, like Fanny Price, simply wait, but is busy falsely snaring the wealthiest young men she can find. The question in the later novels will be, what would happen if the ambitious woman also had honest feelings and was not a mere charlatan. But the point, in *Northanger Abbey*, is clear enough. Ambition, in novels of disenchantment, is immoral, violates the social order, and must be punished. Moreover, immoral or not, it will be punished by the newly imagined reality.

But it is also a characteristic quality of novels of disenchantment
that they harbor, imaginatively, a secret sympathy with large ambitions, with aspirations to break from the quotidian, the sensible, the ordinary. Though obviously less evident in Jane Austen than in Cervantes, Flaubert, or Dickens, this sympathy is implicit in the form of parody itself and in all of Jane Austen's novels. The novelist's imaginative vitality is almost always richer in portraying the ambitious than in portraying those who acquiesce in the demands of a disenchanted world. This is one of the reasons *Mansfield Park* has so frequently been regarded as an aberration in Jane Austen's art. Mary Crawford seems to get less, Fanny Price more than she deserves, but only if one misunderstands Jane Austen's moral commitment in her novels of disenchantment. The attempt to punish ambition in a novel that does not seem to follow the structure of the form of disenchantment, as *Mansfield Park* does not, tends to seem arbitrary and unfair. Mary Crawford is more lively and more attractive than priggish Fanny Price. But Fanny is Catherine Morland in a more serious novel, without the structural support of comedy and ironies.

The fact that Fanny wins and Mary loses provides another illustration of the sorts of tensions I have been discussing. If I may invoke a difficult distinction, I would say that the moral energies of Jane Austen's fiction (and of much nineteenth-century fiction to follow) edge into conflict with the literary and imaginative energies. The punishment of personal ambition and overreaching is, in her novels, a moral condition, although it will be in later writers, like Hardy, and, to a more limited extent, George Eliot, an imaginative condition. Jane Austen makes it a moral condition by imagining the social order as not only more powerful, but, in essence, better than the personal desire. Catherine is understood to become morally better when she accepts Henry Tilney's preachments of social common sense. Fanny's priggish sense of the moral wrong in acting a play while Sir Thomas Bertram is away is to be understood as morally superior to the Crawfords' eagerness to divert themselves against the father's assumed wishes. Lionel Trilling calls Fanny a "Christian heroine," and Catherine Morland, though less fussily, is a Christian heroine too.

Within the fictions, goodness and Christianity require an es-

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5 "Mansfield Park," in Watt, p. 129.
sententially passive acquiescence in appropriate authority, while the
life of Mansfield Park depends on the energy and conflict required
in resistance to that authority. So, too, the life of Northanger Ab-
ney, depends on the silliness it mocks. It is, perhaps, proof of the
sad state of this fallen world that the silliness and personal ambition
are far more attractive imaginatively than the new reality
criticism of them implies. A disenchanted Catherine Morland, a
priggish Fanny Price, are early models of that new reality.

But ambition and illusion have an attractiveness for Jane Austen
too. And two of her novels, Emma and Persuasion, suggest how she
felt that attractiveness. Of her heroine Emma, Jane Austen said
that nobody but her creator would like her. This is the moral voice
understanding that arrogance, manipulativeness, conceit, and per-
sonal ambition are evils to be rejected. Yet the judgment of poster-
ity is that Emma as a character is both attractive and likable, pre-
cisely because she spends most of her novel not accepting the sensi-
ble and practical determinants of the social order, not recognizing
Knightley's true moral authority. She is never more interesting
imaginatively than when she is most reprehensible morally, in her
insulting of Miss Bates at the deadly dull picnic on Box Hill. When
we lose the Emma capable of these kinds of mistakes, we lose the
novel's narrative energy. In Don Quixote, disenchantment and
death come very close together. In Emma, disenchantment and
marriage come very close together. Both marriage and death are
endings.

Persuasion's narrative structure comes closer to an endorsement
of personal ambition, as opposed to social regulation. Mansfield
Park diverges from the form of disenchantment by giving us a
Christian heroine whose true literary ancestor is Pamela not Don
Quixote; but Persuasion diverges from the form in a way that al-
most parodies it. Anne Elliot is not suffering from an illusion when
she falls in love with Captain Wentworth. It is, rather, the society
that is seen to be mistaken and deluded by its own prudence. The
central issues of the earlier novels are turned around—almost. The
practical and well-intended advice of Lady Russell turns out, in the
fictional unraveling, to have been wrong, and the failure is Anne's
susceptibility to the persuasion. Anne's punishment for her early
romance is unjust, and her reward is to be allowed to have her
romance back. Once again, however, it is mere luck that produces
the happy ending, as it is in Northanger Abbey. Jane Austen manages to have her cake and eat it too, because Wentworth comes back a wealthy man, and a series of coincidences reveals to him that Anne still loves him and is lovable. So Anne escapes unjust punishment as Emma escapes just punishment. Allowing Wentworth to become a practically as well as romantically satisfying partner fudges the nature of the commitment somewhat, but Jane Austen, on the whole, seems here to be on the side of energy and romance, not merely imaginatively, but morally as well. This commitment entails a fundamental change in the novel's structure. There is no disenchantment in Persuasion.

Surely Anne is no Marlovian overreacher, but that her original ambitions are endorsed by the narrative suggests how Jane Austen's imagination flirted with the opposite of her critical and ironic commitment throughout most of her literary career. There is a continuing tension between personal need and desire and social order. The essential amoral thwarting of all personal ambition latent in the form of disenchantment is incompatible with Jane Austen's comic mode, for only if ambition is seen as unequivocal evil can the form resolve itself in poetic justice. Among later Victorian novelists the tendency is also to see such ambitions and illusions as evil, but with them it is far more difficult to dramatize the goodness of the social order, the justness of authority; and the form implicit in Persuasion keeps struggling to get loose and to grow. The struggle, I believe, partly accounts for the curious unevenness and strain in the great Victorian fictional achievements.

The penultimate step in this hazy progress towards monstrosity entails consideration of a characteristic pattern in other novels that seem very different from Jane Austen's. In the years just before the publication of Northanger Abbey, though actually several years after it was written, two enormously popular novels were published—Scott's Waverley and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Both of these acquired their popularity because they did not confine themselves to Jane Austen's kind of small canvas. But I am certain that their popularity was partly dependent on a vision not far from Jane Austen's in many respects. These novels invoke rebellion, heroism, monstrosity in part because through them the novelists can most effectively assert the value of the domestic and the ordinary. Waverley is, explicitly, a novel of disenchantment. The protagonist,
Edward Waverley, is as much a nonhero as Catherine is a nonheroine. He gets involved in rebellions by accident and through various literary illusions, and he is redeemed from his folly, coincidentally, by some rather shabby fictional tricks. Surprisingly, Victor Frankenstein is, for most of his novel, as passive as Waverley. He is only genuinely active in two things: creating his monster and then chasing him through the world, ineffectually trying to destroy him—his embodied illusion, his monstrous mistake. As in Northanger Abbey and Emma, ambition and illusion are to be punished and purged in the name of a saner and more modestly ordinary reality.

My point is that both sides of the opposition implicit in parody are attractive and remain so, whichever one seems to be getting the upper hand in a given moment of literary and cultural history. The elements of romance, allied as they are with excitement, personal ambition, the dream of large personal satisfactions, are irresistibly attractive even in a social context in which domesticity and acquiescence to proper authority are valued supremely. Scott's formula was perfect. He could place his romance in an unthreatening past and move to a more Austenian moral realism at the point when the rebellious mistakes of the past are put down by the forces leading to modern civilization. Ironically, the more immature of the novels, Frankenstein, found the more complex formula for satisfying the ambivalence. Released from the responsibility of minute fidelity to the details of the ordinary, it turns loose the antagonistic energies and is satisfied not entirely to resolve them. The quite valid cliché, that Frankenstein and his monster are one, can be taken as a symbolic statement of the duality I have been imposing on Northanger Abbey—a book that simultaneously celebrates and rejects Gothic and sentimental fiction.

All of these books are structured so as to allow us to have our cake and eat it too. They give us the pleasures, the frissons of romance, and at the same time remind us that romance is morally dangerous. But they do also entail the ultimate sacrifice of personal fulfillment within a form that requires resolution in personal fulfillment. So Edward Waverley, failing to get the dark-haired hero-

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ine, who is dangerous, gets the fair-haired one, who is not. And though Frankenstein dies and his monster immolates himself, the narrator, Walton, half-reluctantly turns his ship around and returns from the Arctic to his sister and to his society. So Catherine marries Henry Tilney, her teacher, and Emma marries Mr. Knightley, hers.

The form of disenchantment punishes, but allows heroes and heroines to escape the worst consequences of their illusions and ambitions as long as their narratives are buttressed by a fundamental faith in the moral meaning of experience and the moral significance of the social order. Late nineteenth-century versions of the story tend to differ from these by not allowing escape at all. One need think only of Gwendolen Harleth or Isabel Archer to see the contrast. Not only is the point of their stories that their dignity lies in their accepting the moral consequences of their illusions and ambitions, but their narratives reject the sorts of literary devices that get Catherine and Henry together. Gwendolen’s last moments in her novel are not saved by coincidences that allow her the man she loves, Daniel Deronda (well, maybe that is luck, after all). Isabel, freed from Osmond’s imprisoning power, chooses to go back to it. Apparently, choice rather than manipulation of plot determines fate here. This harsher form of disenchantment has moved generically from comedy to something close to tragedy. Residual “romance,” the possibility of personal triumph, slips from narrative incident to character psychology, from society to self. Gwendolen and Isabel are, if you will, natural daughters of Catherine. They differ from her in being more intelligent and more ambitious. But Catherine’s silliness is a necessary consequence of direct parody, and once parody has released Jane Austen into her own fictional reality, she immediately is freed to imagine real heroines again—Elinor Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet, Emma, Anne Elliot.

The demands of the novel form in which her parody came to life required that Catherine be more than silly. She has some of that spontaneous ethical sense that, Ian Watt points out, was a characteristic of eighteenth-century thought and that Jane Austen was to give to many of her heroines. And if the novel is to focus on her adventures, Catherine must, whatever the demands of parody, become a heroine. Thus, in the midst of the spoof of fictions that in-

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7 “On Sense and Sensibility,” in Watt, p. 44.
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variably show us innocent maidens in distress, Jane Austen gives us an innocent maiden in distress, and evokes the same feelings as the despised (and loved) originals.

One of the most moving and effective passages in Northanger Abbey deals with material that might, more claustrophobically, have come from Richardson. Catherine is being bullied, cajoled, and threatened by the Thorpes and her own brother to go with them rather than keep her promise to walk with Miss Tilney. However slight and comic the scene, it brilliantly creates an atmosphere of frustration and desperation that at once imitates, laughs at, and uses scenes out of Richardson and later popular novelists. We feel real concern for Catherine, whom the trio effectively misled into another expedition earlier. Her strength of refusal is both more credible and, perhaps, more moving than Pamela’s capacity to keep Lord B. off while she is trapped in his bed. Against Catherine’s wishes, James tells Miss Tilney that Catherine is otherwise engaged. The speech that follows is short, mature, heroinelike: “This will not do”; and, “I cannot submit to this” (100). The echo of the earlier fiction is intensified because Catherine is restrained physically—the entrapped heroine after all. She tears herself away from the grip of Isabella and James and dashes to the Tilney’s residence. Breathless, inarticulate, she races past the servant at the door, bursts into the drawing room, and makes her explanation.

This is not merely parody, and there is little comedy in it, the laughter, if there be any, being mildly and compassionately directed at Catherine, whose motives are entirely right, entirely spontaneous, innocent and heroic. Catherine is not imitating books; Jane Austen is. And instead of making Catherine seem silly because she acts out a false ideal, Jane Austen makes her seem strong because in her spontaneous feelings she is giving us a true version of the false heroism of romance.

So what we observe in Northanger Abbey is not the rejection of heroism but its translation into another language. When Catherine feels she is being snubbed by Henry at the theater, she is described in this way: “Feelings rather natural than heroic possessed her; instead of considering her own dignity injured by this ready condemnation—instead of proudly resolving, in conscious innocence, to shew her resentment towards him who could harbour a doubt of it, to leave to him all the trouble of seeking an explanation, and to
enlighten him on the past only by avoiding his sight, or flirting with somebody else, she took to herself all the shame of misconduct, or at least of its appearance, and was only eager for an opportunity of explaining its cause” (93). Here we have the sentimental conventions, the imagined opposite, and a new sort of reality, which is really a new sort of heroism. Catherine simply has another and a more convincing way to show her innocence than does the heroine of the sentimental novel. But they are both really innocent, really heroines.

Of course, as Henry James might have said, Catherine is too slight a vessel to carry a more ambitious novel. She is a tryout for dramas in which the questions of guilt and innocence, the nature of illusions are more complex, more serious. But it is not a long step from Catherine to Emma, or from Emma to Isabel Archer.

And just as the parodied fiction leaves its residue of romance in Jane Austen’s two inches of ivory, so it leaves its residue of villainy. We always need to be reminded that however slight the narrative may seem, there are important and serious issues involved in Jane Austen’s fictions. To be sure, it is a strain for a twentieth-century audience to feel the moral enormity of Catherine’s enforced early morning coach ride from the Abbey to her home. But Henry and Eleanor Tilney feel it, and so does the narrator. The usually generous-hearted Catherine, when told the whole story of her expulsion from the Abbey by the General, comes to feel it. She, “at any rate, [had] 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” (247). Even if there be a touch of irony at Catherine’s expense here, the last fluttering of the parody, the sentence is largely justified by the narrative. As A. N. Kaul puts it, “The monster of avarice, when she finally recognizes him, turns out to be as cruel and ruthless as any monster she had imagined, and not half so remote.” The monster is not so monstrous as Frankenstein’s monster, not really monstrous at all—just immoral. But after all, I have been interested in patterns far more than in literal romances, literal monsters. And the pattern is there. It is the pattern for most of Jane Austen’s fiction, and if Northanger Abbey is not really Jane Austen’s first major

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novel, as most people think of it though the dating is obscure, it ought to be.

This should be the end, but there is one more turn to the argument. It has to do with the fact that whatever the myriad surface details, the obstructing facts and ironies, realistic fiction and novels of disenchantment and parodies of romantic literature are all controlled formally by the needs of the heroes and heroines as their creators imagine them. That is, *Northanger Abbey* is a comic novel because it is controlled by Jane Austen’s sense that her heroine must get what she wants, must be freed from the banal pressures of an ordinary, shabby genteel life. However muted Catherine’s ambition, we must recognize that she wants to marry beyond her station, beyond what useful plain sense would suggest is possible. She wants more than society ordinarily allows; and the narrative endorses that want.

It is worth being reminded that what is really monstrous in later novels (in *Waverley* and *Frankenstein*, too) tends to be aspiration beyond the limits imposed by the social and moral order. Frankenstein’s desire to break loose from limits is embodied quite literally in a monster. It has been suggested that Pip, in *Great Expectations*, the quintessential story of disenchantment, has his double in the murderous Orlick who acts out in crime what are surely Pip’s own unarticulated wishes. Emma Woodhouse manipulates Harriet Smith almost as much as Miss Havisham does Estella, and comes close to ruining her life. Gwendolen Harleth is an accomplice in Grandcourt’s death.

The final turn to the argument is this: our heroine, Catherine Morland, whose happiness is the controlling element in the novel’s form, is a little, an incipient monster. The General, after all, only wants to keep her from doing what the parody suggests she should not do—rise from her class. Weak and innocent as Catherine is, she embodies the energies I mentioned earlier, the romantic energies toward satisfactory personal resolutions. The full power of her creator is behind her, manipulating experience, distributing rewards and punishments, reserving for her the best and richest young man around. Isabella Thorpe is mocked and punished for shooting

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too high. We know that Catherine must not—her mother positively moralizes to her about it—expect to rise above her station. But she does rise, and allows Tilney's amoral brother to do her dirty work for her.

Of course, in so pleasant a book as Northanger Abbey we cannot seriously entertain the notion of Catherine's monstrosity. But her story surely anticipates the increased ambivalence about personal ambition and romantic feeling that Jane Austen manifests in her career as a writer. She surely did enjoy romances, as she says in chapter five. And that attachment is manifest in Catherine's story, and in many details which there is not space to examine here. Romance, energy, aspiration beyond the limits that ordinary life allows are impossible and dangerous. But they constitute an important element even in Jane Austen's fiction. They are, from the perspective of the other Jane Austen, the ironist and spokeswoman for useful plain sense and the social order, quite monstrous. But they live not only in characters who may or may not be punished for them; they live at the formal heart of her fictions, balanced delicately against her own incisive ironies, parodied but not dismissed.

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