

Catherine Morland: Northanger Abbey's Realistic Heroine

Senior Thesis in English Literature

Submitted to

Margaret Case, Ph.D., Thesis Director
Chair, Department of English Literature and Creative Writing

December 14, 2016

in fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in English

by

Ali Gowrie

Class of 2017

Second Reader: _____
Renee Soto, M.F.A., Professor of Creative Writing

From the very beginning of *Northanger Abbey* (1818), Jane Austen's narrator seems to undermine the expectations of the reader when it comes to judgement of the heroine's character. The narrator explains that "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be a heroine" (Austen, 5). The narrator then goes on to explain that Catherine's situation in life is not heroic, nor are the characters of her parents, nor her own person and disposition. Catherine's father "was a clergyman, without being neglected or poor." This situation breaks the stereotype for novel heroines in Austen's day, who often were fatherless or otherwise unprotected (Austen, 5). Likewise, the narrator describes Catherine's mother as "a woman of useful plain sense," pointing out that her sense was useful, but it was also plain (Austen, 5).

The narrator undermines Catherine in numerous other ways as well, which this essay will explore below. But here it is worth suggesting that perhaps critics of this novel are echoing Austen's narrator when they also undercut Catherine's status as a heroine. Austen Critic Marvin Mudrick writes that Catherine "fails to measure up, not only to the idea of a gothic heroine, but even to our idea of an interesting person" and that "her naivete begins to resemble dullness" (Mudrick, 53). W. D. Howells describes Catherine Morland as a "goose" (Howells, 58), Avrom Fleishman states that "Catherine's ideas can hardly be considered flowering" (Fleishman, 649), and Waldo S. Glock calls her "irrational" and refers to her as a "conventional Gothic prima Donna, basing absurd conclusions on the slightest evidence" (Glock, 34).

However, despite the narrator's seemingly dismissive comments and despite decades of negative criticism, it could be argued that this novel is in fact not undercutting Catherine as a heroine at all. Despite the often negative critical reaction to Catherine's character, a close

reading of this novel will instead reveal that Catherine is a strong-willed, sensible, intelligent young lady who breaks social norms and gender roles and could very well be Jane Austen's successful attempt at redefining the "sentimental heroine" which appears in both sentimental novels and gothic novels. Catherine Morland's character, unlike most sentimental heroines, adheres to more realistic expectations while simultaneously challenging traditional gender norms, and breaking the gothic convention.

To explore the complex nature of Catherine's heroic characteristics, it will prove useful to look at specific criticisms that literary critics have made about her character. Critic June Sturrock points out that Jane Austen normalizes the Morland family and further explains that "Catherine, too, is normalized: all the playful references in the first chapter to her status as a heroine establish that having been an ordinary little girl, she has become an ordinary young woman" (Sturrock, 16). However, it is worth asking how "normal" Catherine actually is. Catherine actually strays from her family's attempts to normalize her when she resists music and drawing lessons and by breaking other social norms that her family also presses on her. Austen's narrator explains that although Catherine's mother "wished her to learn music", she only learned for a year and "could not bear it" (Austen, 6). Although she does try to learn music, once she realizes she does not like it, she resists what her mother wishes. Furthermore, Catherine's parents allowing her to stray from their own expectations seems unheroic as well, but could also go against June Sturrock's point of the Morland family being normalized. The narrator directly explains one way in which the Morland family is not like most heroines' when Catherine leaves for Bath: "Every thing indeed relative to this important journey was done, on the part of the Morlands, with a degree of moderation and composure, which seemed rather consistent with the

common feelings of common life, than with the refined susceptibilities, the tender emotions which the first separation of a heroine from her family ought to excite” (Austen, 9). This shows that the Morland family was not heroic as they do not respond to Catherine leaving for the first time the way a regular heroine’s family would. They are less sentimental and express their feelings with moderation, which once again retracts the idea of the family being “normalized”.

As critics view Catherine Morland as normalized, it is also arguably ironic that Austen’s narrator frequently uses the word “plain” while referring to Catherine Morland because other parts of her description of the unlikely heroine suggest that she is unique and different from most girls her age. For example, she explains that Catherine was fond of boys’ games like cricket and even preferred them over dolls: “Indeed, she had no taste for a garden, and if she gathered flowers at all, it was chiefly for the pleasure of mischief, at least so it was conjectured from her always preferring those which she was forbidden to take” (Austen, 5-6). Conflicting with popular opinion, Catherine’s love of mischief seems quite special for a young girl her age. Her love of mischief also ties into her need for practicing her imagination. Her mind is not stagnant and she enjoys exploring its boundaries and using it the way she pleases. Certain descriptions could also be open for judgement. When the narrator notes that Catherine “was, moreover, noisy and wild” and that she “hated confinement and cleanliness,” once again this heroine might be “plain” in the sense of homely, but she is certainly not an ordinary girl who is living up to heroic expectations of the period (Austen, 6). It was not proper for a nineteenth-century young lady to be noisy or wild. Moreover, the fact that she hated confinement, music and drawing lessons does not bode well for her ability to conform to later domestic subordination.

Another Austen critic who seems to undermine Catherine's positive attributes is Marvin Mudrick who refers to Catherine as "dull" (Mudrick, 56). It seems that Mudrick has fallen for the narrator's negative descriptions of Catherine at the beginning of *Northanger Abbey*. One Austen critic who argues against the way Marvin Mudrick views Catherine Morland as dull is critic Margaret Oliphant, stating that Austen's heroine is actually "Such a picture of delightful youth, simplicity, absurdity, and natural sweetness... Catherine Morland, with all her enthusiasm and her mistakes, her modest tenderness and right feeling, and the fine instinct which runs through her simplicity, is the most captivating picture of a very young girl which fiction, perhaps, has ever furnished" (Oliphant, 257). This description relates back to the description that appears later on in the novel that the narrator provides in contrast to the early descriptions of Catherine, which directly addresses the reader: "It may be stated, for the reader's more certain information, lest the following pages should otherwise fail of giving any idea of what her character is meant to be, that her heart was affectionate, her disposition cheerful and open, without conceit or affectation of any kind; her manners just removed from the awkwardness and shyness of a girl; her person pleasing, and, when in good looks, pretty; and her mind about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is" (Austen, 8-9). The narrator finally has dismissed Catherine's faults and has become more realistic about the nature of a young girl who is held to such high standards by society and evidently, those who read about her character as well. Therefore, in each example above, when scholars are reading Catherine with a negative view, they are isolating aspects of her behavior or personality that are in fact positive characteristics which it requires close reading to reveal.

By seeming to deny Catherine's status as a heroine, this novel is redefining a heroine in terms of popular novels of the day, such as Elizabeth Harvey's *Louisa*, Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline*, and Helen Maria Williams' *Julia*, three popular heroines, from three contemporary novels that were widely read in Austen's day. The sentimental heroine was still in style when Jane Austen was creating her own heroines, which would have set a common standard for what her heroines should have been like. As Jane Austen most likely noticed, the expectations were set extremely high for these sentimental heroines. It is possible that she intentionally created Catherine Morland to challenge this standard. Critic A. Walton Litz explains that "Jane Austen fashioned in Catherine Morland an 'anti-heroine', whose early life is at every point the reverse of the classic heroines" such as *Emmaline*, whose taste for drawing out stood Catherine's drawing capabilities and interest (Litz, 62). *Emmaline's* narrator explains that "she endeavored to cultivate a genius for drawing, which she inherited from her father; but for want of knowing a few general rules, what she produced had more of elegance and neatness than correctness and knowledge" (Smith, 12). The sentimental heroine character defined in *Emmeline* clings strongly to her drawing ability. It is helpful to note that she inherits them from her father as well and the ability seems to come natural to her although she lacked heavy knowledge on the fundamental subject of drawing. This is one trait in which sentimental heroines of the time were expected to possess to an unexpected, almost unnatural degree. It is made overtly evident by Catherine Morland's narrator that this is a trait of a sentimental heroine which Catherine Morland lacks: "her taste for drawing was not superior; though whenever she could obtain the outside of a letter from her mother, or seize upon any other odd piece of paper, she did what she could in that way, by drawing houses and trees, hens and chickens, all very much like one another" (Austen, 6).

The heaping contrast between Emmeline and Catherine's drawing abilities is very direct. It is evident that Catherine had very little knowledge of drawing either but still made an effort to draw, similarly to Emmeline's efforts. However, Emmeline drew precise drawings like she had knowledge and Catherine drew basic items that all looked very similar to one another. This makes Emmeline's abilities seem natural and therefore even more praisable than Catherine's. Furthermore, it can be argued that Catherine's dedication with regards to her lack of talent could make Catherine seem more heroic than Emmeline, in a more realistic sense as well.

Another traditional literary representation of the sentimental heroine is Elizabeth Harvey's Louisa. Her musical accomplishments would have stood out against Catherine Morland's. The sentimental heroine character of Louisa is set up to reach what could be deemed near perfection with her musical abilities: "Louisa modestly took Miss Bensley's place at the harpsichord; and after a prelude, which occasioned the connoisseurs to cast upon each other very significant looks, she executed the piece with such taste and justness, as astonished the rest of the performers" (Grogan, 248). Louisa's musical abilities seem to be purposefully and straightforwardly described to a positive extreme by the heroine's narrator as the narrator goes so far to explain that Louisa not only played on the same level as a connoisseur, but the connoisseurs that viewed her performance were "astonished". In contrast, Catherine Morland's narrator goes out of her way to point out her lack of success in music by once again describing her abilities similarly to how her drawing abilities are outlined, as if she were a very small, incompetent child: "Her mother wished her to learn music; and Catherine was sure she should like it, for she was very fond of tinkling the keys of the old forlorn spinnet" (Austen, 6). The simple "tinkling" of keys can not be compared to Louisa's ability to play the harpsichord. Here,

Catherine is explained as even less of a heroine as she compared to a child looking at music as something of less importance and credibility than the art sentimental heroine Louisa sees it to be. Furthermore, it may prove helpful to explain the importance of music and women in the nineteenth century: “Of all the luxuries available to the middle class in nineteenth-century England, the piano was perhaps the most significant in the lives of women; it was not only an emblem of social status, it provided a gauge of a woman’s training in the required accomplishments of genteel society” (Burgan, 51). The word “required” shows that playing the piano was a concrete expectation of “accomplishments” of young women in the nineteenth century. One more sentimental heroine Jane Austen read of was Helen Maria Williams’ Julia, whose liking for small animals contrasted Catherine’s disinterest in the subject. Austen’s narrator points out that Catherine “greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush” (Austen, 6). Austen’s narrator refers to these activities as “the more heroic enjoyments of infancy” to further define the sentimental heroine characteristics of the time, which Helen Maria Williams’ Julia did possess and to point out that once again, Catherine lacked these heroic interests (Austen, 6). In Contrast, Julia “acquires her capacity for social connection and her attitude of care towards the vulnerable from her grandfather [...] recommending tenderness to animals” (Williams, 16). It is evident that caring for young animals is a crucial part of being a young woman as it allows them to learn how to care and become in touch with their maternal instinct which Catherine does not seem to hold interest in.

Given the direct differences between the sentimental heroines of Jane Austen’s time described above and Jane Austen’s own heroine Catherine Morland, it is evident that Jane

Austen had to have been familiar with the sentimental heroine and therefore had motive behind creating Catherine Morland so different the way she did. As critic Rebecca West explains that “everywhere it was pretended that women were heroines”, it is important to focus on the word “pretended”, as sentimental heroines of the time were perfect to an unrealistic extent and Jane Austen most likely picked up on it and used Catherine Morland as satire against this model of a sentimental heroine. One example of a sentimental heroine of the time who could be examined to further outline the seemingly purposeful contrast who also embodies traits of the sentimental heroine is Emily St. Aubert from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Catherine’s favorite novel, which she reads voraciously. Unlike Catherine Morland’s narrator, the narrator in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* seems to favor Emily St. Aubert as a heroine. Early on in the novel, the narrator explains characteristics of the sentimental heroine of Austen’s time by explaining the room in which Emily St. Aubert spends her time “Adjoining the eastern side of the greenhouse, looking towards the plains of Languedoc, was a room, which Emily called hers, and which contained her books, her drawings, her musical instruments, with some favourite birds and plants” (Radcliffe, 10). From the description of Emily’s room alone, three major characteristics of the sentimental heroine emerge which Catherine Morland lacks: drawing ability, musical ability, and a liking for plants or small animals. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen’s narrator explains Catherine’s lack of interest in plants: “Indeed she had no taste for a garden; and if she gathered flowers at all, it was chiefly for the pleasure of mischief—at least so it was conjectured from her always preferring those which she was forbidden to take ” (Austen, 5-6). Not only does Catherine lack this sentimental heroine’s trait, but Austen’s narrator emphasizes the lack when she notes that Catherine causes mischief by picking flowers she is not supposed to pick. Austen’s narrator also

emphasizes Catherine's distaste of music: "Her mother wished her to learn music; and Catherine was sure she should like it, for she was very fond of tinkling the keys of the old forlorn spinnet, so at eight years old she began. She learnt a year and could not bear it" (Austen, 6). In contrast to Emily St. Aubert's possession of multiple musical instruments, Austen depicts Catherine Morland to look less heroic by having no desire to learn music. Austen's narrator also points out her lackluster drawing ability: "Her taste for drawing was not superior; though whenever she could obtain the outside of a letter from her mother, or seize upon any other odd piece of paper, she did what she could in that way by drawing houses and trees, hens and chickens, all very much like one another" (Austen, 6).

Not only do Emily St. Aubert's heroic mental attributes outshine Catherine Morland's, but Emily also fits the role of a sentimental heroine in terms of her physical attributes as well. Ann Radcliffe's narrator in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* explains Emily St. Aubert's beauty, which comes from her mother: "In person, Emily resembled her mother; having the same elegant symmetry of form, the same delicacy of features, and the same blue eyes, full of tender sweetness. But, lovely as was her person, it was the varied expression of her countenance, as conversation awakened the nicer emotions of her mind, that threw such a captivating grace around her" (Radcliffe, 14). The description the narrator includes of Emily St. Aubert's physical characteristics is so long that it seems to be of major importance to her character as a heroine. The narrator also includes poetry to heighten Emily's physical description as well: "Those tend'rer tints, shun the careless eye, / And, in the world's contagious circle, die" (Radcliffe, 14). Like Emily St. Aubert, Charlotte Smith's physical description of Emmeline was also much longer than Catherine Morland's: "her figure was elegant and graceful; somewhat exceeding the

middling height. Her eyes were blue; and her hair brown [...] there was a sweetness in her countenance when she smiled, more charming than the effect of the most regular features could have given. Her countenance, open and ingenuous, expressed every emotion of her mind: it had assumed rather a pensive cast; and tho' it occasionally was lighted up by vivacity, had been lately frequently overclouded; when the sufferings of her only friend called forth all the generous sympathy of her nature” (Smith, 11). The physical description of Emmeline is very similar to that of Emily St. Aubert in that the narrators focus on the beauty of their eyes and takes the length of the description so far as to explain that they both had sweet but varied countenances. Unlike Catherine, both sentimental heroines’ physical descriptions are also connected to the capacity of their minds, as both narrators make it a crucial point to explain that their countenances expressed the varied emotions of their minds. In contrast, *Northanger Abbey*’s narrator takes a lot less time describing her physical characteristics: “She had a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour, dark lank hair, and strong features; so much for her person, and not less unpropitious for heroism seemed her mind” (Austen, 5). Furthermore, as Emily St. Aubert’s character points out that she got her beauty from her mother, Catherine’s narrator describes her entire family as plain, saying “the Morlands had little other right to the word [fine], for they were in general very plain” (Austen, 5). Along with this unflattering description of the way Catherine looks, the narrator very straightforwardly points out that these physical traits, along with the traits of her mind, are not fit for those of a heroine. The traits that are praised by the narrator in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* are precisely those traits that the narrator of *Northanger Abbey* singles out as missing in Catherine. This novel could thus very well be directly tackling the concept of the sentimental heroine and especially the role’s overbearing and unrealistic

expectations. Critic Julia Kavanagh notes that Jane Austen's heroines "are not such as to charm away our hearts or fascinate our judgement", which seems to be a more realistic approach to creating a young lady character (Kavanagh, 254). Perhaps Jane Austen meant to make her heroines unappealing in hopes to redefine the sentimental heroine's unrealistic expectations that were set forth by Emily St. Aubert's narrator and Emmeline's narrator. Within the pages of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's narrator even explains: "Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature was to be looked for" (Austen, 137). Austen's narrator directly explains that although Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was charming, Emily St. Aubert's character was not a realistic outline of human nature in its most realistic and natural identity.

Just as the narrator's seeming dismissal of Catherine as lacking the perfect beauty of both person and mind that traditional sentimental heroines possessed, the narrator also points out other seeming negative characteristics that most sentimental heroines would have possessed, like Catherine "never could learn or understand anything before she was taught" (Austen, 6). This also directly contrasts another description of Charlotte Smith's Emmeline: "Emmeline had a kind of intuitive knowledge; and comprehended everything with a facility that soon left her instructors behind" (Smith, 8). As it is explained that Catherine could never learn anything on her own without a teacher, it is also explained that Emmeline had such a natural realm of knowledge, she could learn so fast and so successfully that she would actually go so far as to pass her teachers.

However, as for Catherine, one could also argue that her naivete is natural for someone her age and experience and it does not hinder her from learning and demonstrating age-appropriate application of ideas later. Contrary to the critics quoted above, it can be argued

that Catherine Morland does not let her naivete hinder her self-improvement , but she is a heroine who actually uses her imagination to reach selfhood and achieve a stronger hold on reality, which could arguably set her above other heroines. As for Catherine's imagination and interest in the gothic novel, it is quite obvious in the text that Catherine becomes more aware of her reality. Critic Rebecca West says "For in learning to handle the fictions of the Gothic world Catherine comes to recognize the other fictions which haunt her life" as Austen's narrator straightforwardly states: "The anxieties of common life began to succeed to the alarms of romance" (Austen, 138). The narrator also provides simple, ordinary every-day life examples of the notions Catherine had regarding her common life: "Her desire of hearing from Isabella grew every day greater. She was quite impatient to know how the Bath world went on, and how the rooms were attended; and especially was she anxious to be assured of Isabella's having matched some fine netting-cotton, on which she had left her intent; and of her continuing on the best terms with James" (Austen, 138). It is evident Catherine has reached personhood because she is so concerned about the people in her life and the relationships she has formed with them.

As Catherine stands out against the heroines described above, it could also be argued that she could have been seen as a feminist as a young girl as she challenged gender normalities of the early nineteenth century. Austen's narrator very clearly points out Catherine's attributes that tended to be more present in young boys of the time: "She was fond of all boys' plays, and greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush" (Austen, 6). Not only does this once again set Catherine apart from other sentimental heroines of the time, but it redefines the heroine in terms of gender norms. It seems as though Austen is

trying to make a feminist point by packing so many girlish traits which Catherine lacks into one sentence. Austen's narrator goes as far as to refer to the games she plays as if they are possessions of "boys", solely belong to boys, and merely exist for boys to play. Furthermore, the narrator lists several activities young girls would have been more drawn to and points out that Catherine preferred a game in which boys played over the latter activities young girls were accustomed to. The word "heroic" once again appears as the narrator describes the feminine activities in which Catherine lacks interest in, which shows that these expected gender norms are strong defining characteristics of the heroine which Catherine also lacks. As young girls in their femininity like Emily St. Aubert embraced their confinement, Austen's narrator also points out that Catherine Morland indeed felt the opposite: "She was moreover noisy and wild, hated confinement and cleanliness, and loved nothing so well in the world as rolling down the green slope at the back of her house" (Austen, 6). As Emily St. Aubert embraces her femininity and very much admires the room in which she practices her music and drawing, Catherine Morland would much rather neglect this confinement and push the boundaries of set feminist traits and go so far as to play in mud and be dirty. Not only did she neglect confinement and cleanliness, but she "hated" it. She completely opposed these universal characteristics that girls were expected to possess. Austen's narrator uses diction and includes the word "heroic" once again to explain how her boyish traits are not only unfit for a young lady but are also unfit for a heroine: "it was not very wonderful that Catherine, who had by nature nothing heroic about her, should prefer cricket, base ball, riding on horseback, and running about the country at the age of fourteen, to books- or at least books of information-for, provided that nothing but useful knowledge could be gained from them" (Austen, 7). The narrator once again points out that her

liking for boys games like cricket and baseball are “not very wonderful” because she is a young girl and is breaking gender norms of the time, which also seems to make her less of a heroine by means of the way the narrator describes it. Furthermore, the narrator points out that she had nothing heroic about her, especially in regards to the description she uses pointing out Catherine’s liking for activities that were common among boys. The narrator points out that instead, as a young girl, Catherine should be reading books filled with information.

Ironically, the books Catherine reads could be an example of the confinement that Jane Austen’s narrator refers to as well that Catherine “hates”. These books are works “heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives” (Austen, 7). In other words, Austen’s narrator is explaining that young heroines must read creditable texts to learn and help them through difficult challenges and experiences in their lives, like “From Pope, she learnt to censure those who: ‘bear about the mockery of woe’”, which means to ignore and be able to censure people who tend to possess negative attitudes (Austen, 7). Being a very direct and concrete lesson, this shows how concrete the expectations of heroines were and these types of readings could be considered as more confinement in Catherine’s mind, which is why she breaks the norms which girls her age were commonly expected of fulfilling. Although the narrator emphasizes these boyish and unheroic traits in a negative connotation, it could be argued that this makes Catherine a strong feminist character who has the courage to stand out among young girls her age by challenging gender role expectations. By viewing these boyish traits in a negative way, Catherine’s actual heroic characteristics are undermined.

As Catherine's strong feminist character is overlooked, so is her strong sense of self in a complicated world. Critic Sheila J. Kindred's article "From Puppet to Person: The Development of Catherine's character in the Bath Chapters of *Northanger Abbey*", defines Austen's novel as bring "about the initiation and education of a young woman on the threshold of a complex adult world" (Kindred, 186). Kindred views the novel as a realistic interpretation of the way a young girl matures and learns. She explains that Catherine Morland has achieved "personhood" which she defines as having the capacity to be autonomous in thought and action and to achieve a sense of identity and self-worth. One particular definition which Kindred provides for "personhood" explains that by acting autonomously, this person must have the ability to form, review, and revise judgments about the characters of others to determine their worth. It could be argued that Catherine Morland actually achieves "personhood" through the use of her imagination as it allows her to become more in touch with her concept of reality.

In Catherine Morland's defense of her imagination, Juliet McMaster argues that Catherine may have a suggestible mind, but her absorption in gothic novels saves her from a worse fate by providing her with a stronger grasp of reality. McMaster views Catherine's vivid response to her reading as her "imaginative awakening and her means of growth" (McMaster, 24). She believes that the gothic novel has given Catherine fuller access to her own experience, deepened her consciousness, and refined her awareness. After Catherine Morland falsely suspects General Tilney of killing his wife in Chapter twenty-five, her progression really shows and she finds herself becoming more realistic in understanding the terms of her imagination: " Her thoughts being still chiefly fixed on what she had with such causeless terror felt and done, nothing could shortly be clearer than that it had been all a voluntary, self-created

delusion” (Austen, 137). It is made evident that Catherine is well aware of her follies and accepts the notion that her craving for fear and use of her imagination did cause her trouble. The fact that her thoughts were “chiefly” fixed on the harm she had caused shows the extent of her selfhood and her ability to be rational as well. Her ability to distinguish between reality and imagination proves that she is not as naive as people assume her to be. Furthermore, her lapse of imagination helping her progress as an individual is explained by Austen’s narrator: “Her mind made up on these several points, and her resolution formed, of always judging and acting in future with the greatest good sense, she had nothing to do but to forgive herself and be happier than ever” (Austen, 138). This shows that her sense of what is okay and what is not has become stronger and more accurate. She also speaks of judgment here, which shows she has achieved an aspect of Sheila J. Kindred’s definition of “personhood”. After her realization in this chapter, it is also clear that she becomes more in touch with reality and “the anxieties of common life began soon to succeed to the alarms of romance” (Austen, 138). By finally surrendering to the truth that her wild assumptions came from her mere use of imagination, Catherine becomes more immersed in her everyday life. As she stops worrying so much about the faults of her imagination, she begins allowing herself to acknowledge the hardships of everyday life.

As Austen is breaking ground with this type of a heroine who learns and tightens her grasp on reality from her imagination, Catherine Morland could also be deemed very useful in an attempt Austen could have been making to break typical gothic convention as her imagination inspired by the gothic actually helps her maturation. Pici also points out that “perhaps the best example of this fragmented inconsistency between expectation and reality

involves Catherine's perceptions of the General. While not the murderer Catherine had at first suspected him of being, General Tilney does indeed turn out to be a cruel, contemptible man who ends up banishing his guest from Northanger" (Pici, 42). In other words, Catherine was right about General Tilney's character even if she went too far with the assumption that he must have murdered his wife. Catherine is able to form sound judgements about others through the help of the gothic novel. Although her imagination may have taken it too far, her judgement on being suspicious of General Tilney's character ended up becoming justified by the text when he kicked Catherine out of his home with no money or support. She may have very well been subconsciously trying to convince herself to steer clear of General Tilney because she had a bad feeling about him. Critic A. Walton Litz explains this notion further: "General Tilney's actual abuse of Catherine is as bad in its way as anything she has imagined, and her flight from Northanger Abbey, alone and outcast, is an event straight from the Gothic repertory" (Litz, 271). Catherine's instincts about General Tilney were right and the way he treated her could actually be viewed as a real-life gothic event.

Before concluding, it is important to recall the negative criticisms listed and refuted in the beginning of the essay and ask why the narrator introduces Catherine in the seemingly negative ways described above. By believing these seemingly negative claims, readers and critics are overlooking what Jane Austen might have really been trying to do with this character. Austen is not actually shaming Catherine Morland, but is instead satirizing sentimental heroines in order to challenge the gothic convention where the events that take place are commonly unrealistic and unlikely. Furthermore, by seemingly undercutting Catherine as a heroine, Jane Austen's attempt to create a more realistic heroine is also

overlooked. Once these points in the novel are viewed past their literal sense, perhaps Jane Austen as an author could be viewed as a proto feminist, a person in a philosophical tradition anticipating modern feminist concepts, who lived in an era when the term "feminist" was unknown, that is, prior to the 20th century, before gender norms were ever outwardly challenged, anticipated the feminist movement that arose later. The narrator makes it very clear that at the time *Northanger Abbey* was written, gender roles were very standardized and were not yet outwardly challenged. Jane Austen could also be seen as a realist, or a person who tends to view or represent things as they really are, as she seems to also attempt to redefine the gothic novel in a satirical way that actually find a median between the supernatural, unrealistic gothic, and something fear-evoking that could happen in real life, like General Tilney throwing Catherine out on the street on her own. Critic Janine Barchas provides an argument that Jane Austen even plays with conventions in *Northanger Abbey* that characterize the realist genre: "Austen plays confidently with the tantalizing tension between truth and invention that characterizes the realist novel" (Barchas, 32).

Perhaps as Jane Austen realizes the unrealistic expectations of sentimental heroines, reaching near perfection in drawing and music, she uses Catherine Morland as an attempt to redefine the sentimental heroine as a more realistic heroine. Perhaps Jane Austen had a preference for realism over things that are unrealistic and could have been arguing from a feminist angle that young girls should not be held to such high expectations and such strictly enforced value sets. Unlike the critics who viewed Catherine in a negative light, Critic Margaret Oliphant captured a more deserved description of Catherine Morland in a way Jane Austen would have meant for her to be captured: "Such a picture of delightful youth,

simplicity, absurdity, and natural sweetness, it is scarcely possible to parallel. Catherine Morland, with all her enthusiasm and her mistakes, her modest tenderness and right feeling, and the fine instinct which runs through her simplicity, is the most captivating picture of a very young girl which fiction, perhaps, has ever furnished” (Oliphant, 257). More realistically than a sentimental heroine, Catherine encompasses both simplicity as well as absurdity, possesses right feeling but also makes mistakes. As Jane Austen sets up her heroine in *Northanger Abbey* by breaking gender norms and unrealistic norms that defined the sentimental heroine, she creates a heroine who may not be perfect, but who is strong-willed, sensible, and intelligent, and who is also believable in all that she is.

Although *Northanger Abbey*’s narrator seems to undercut Catherine, it is evident that Jane Austen had motive behind creating an imperfect heroine. In regards to Austen’s latest heroine Charlotte in her last novel *Sanditon*, Austen writes: “I make no apologies for my heroine’s vanity. If there are young ladies in the world at her time of life more dull of fancy and more careless of pleasing, I know them not and never wish to know them” (Austen, *Sanditon*, 38). She does not apologize for the condition of her heroines, no matter how unattractive their characteristics may seem. She even goes so far as to explain that if there were any young ladies at the time who differed from her own heroine, she would not want to know them. She has no interest in another type of young girl. She knows the idea of perfection is unrealistic. In an honest personal letter addressed to her niece Fanny Knight, Austen straightforwardly discusses her voices of the notion of perfection: “Pictures of perfection make me sick and wicked” (Austen, Letter LXXXIV). Perhaps this is why Jane Austen creates Catherine as her heroine in *Northanger Abbey*, meaning to make her heroine

unappealing in hopes to redefine the sentimental heroine's unrealistic expectations that were set forth at the time.

Works Cited

- Austen, Jane. "Letter LXXXIV." Letter to Fanny Knight. March 23, 1816. *Pemberly.com*.
- Austen, Jane, and Claire Grogan. *Northanger Abbey*. Peterborough, Ont., Broadview Press, 2002.
- Austen, Jane. *Sanditon*. Ulysses Press, 2009.
- Barchas, Janine. "The Real Bluebeard of Bath: A Historical Model for *Northanger Abbey*." *Persuasions*, no. 32, 2010, pp. 115-134. *JASNA*.
- Burgan, Mary. "Heroines at the Piano: Women and Music in Nineteenth-Century Fiction." *Victorian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Social, Political, and Cultural Studies*, 1986, pp. 52-76.
- Fleishman, Avrom. "The Socialization of Catherine Morland." *ELH*, vol. 41, no. 4, 1974, pp. 649-667. *JSTOR*. Doi: 10.2307/2872726.
- Glock, Waldo S. "Catherine Morland's Gothic Delusions: A Defense of *Northanger Abbey*." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1978, pp. 33-46. *JSTOR*. doi: 10.2307/1347760.
- Howells, W D. "Jane Austen's Emma Woodhouse, Marianne Dashwood, and Fanny Price." *Heroines of Fiction*, vol. 1, Harper and Brothers, New York, London, 1901.
- Kavanagh, Julia. "Small Vanities and Small Falsehoods." *Northanger Abbey*. Ed. Susan Fraiman. London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004. Pp. 253-257.

Kindred, Shiela J. "From Puppet to Person: The Development of Catherine's Character in the Bath Chapters of *Northanger Abbey*." *Persuasions*, vol. 20, 20 Nov. 1998, pp.

196–206. *JASNA*.

Litz, A Walton. "Jane Austen: The Juvenilia." *Persuasions*, vol. 9, 1987, pp. 59–63. *JASNA*.

Litz, A Walton. "Regulated Sympathy in *Northanger Abbey*." *Northanger Abbey*. Ed. Susan Fraiman. London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004. Pp. 264-277.

McMaster, Juliet. "'A Surmise of Such Horror': Catherine Morland's Imagination." *Persuasions*, no. 32, June 2010, pp. 15–27. *JASNA*.

Mudrick, Marvin. "The Literary Pretext Continued: Irony Vs. Gothicism." *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, Princeton University Press, 1952, pp. 37–59.

Oliphant, Margaret. "Exquisite Derision." *Northanger Abbey*. Ed. Susan Fraiman. London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004. pp. 257-258.

Pici, Nick. "A Heroine's Visions Undermined: Expectation, Disillusionment, and Initiation in *Northanger Abbey*." *Persuasions*, vol. 20, 1998, pp. 38–43. *JASNA*.

Radcliffe, Ann Ward, and Bonamy Dobrée. *The Mysteries of Udolpho: a Romance Interspersed with Some Pieces of Poetry*. London, Oxford U.P., 1966.

Smith, Charlotte. *Emmeline: the Orphan of the Castle*. Peterborough, Ont., Broadview Press, 2003.

Sturrock, June. *Jane Austen's Families*. Anthem Press, 2013.

West, Rebecca. "The Feminism of Jane Austen." *Northanger Abbey*. Ed. Susan Fraiman. London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004. pp. 259.

Williams, Helen Maria. *Julia*. London, Pickering & Chatto, 2010.

