
Antifeminism in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*

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Abstract

There was a plethora of suffrage and women's rights movements in late nineteenth-century Europe. One of them was the feminist movement. Women's rights cover a wide range of concerns, including the ability to vote, hold public office and own property, get equal income and education, be treated fairly in marriage, and take time off to care for a child. In addition, they discussed how to protect women from sexual assault, sexual harassment, and domestic abuse while simultaneously ensuring that they have access to safe, legal abortions. Jane Austen included a specific argument in her work *Northanger Abbey*.

Keywords & Phrases: Antifeminism, matrimony, suffrage, love, women's right, Jane Austen.

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* is one of her works. *Northanger Abbey* was Jane Austen's first work that she had planned to publish, although she had initially titled it *Susan*. Austen wrote the work in 1803 as a satire of the

fashionable gothic novels of the day, but it wasn't published until after her death in 1817. The story of *Northanger Abbey* revolves around the loves and losses of its unlikeliest heroine, seventeen-year-old Catherine Morland, who is experiencing life away from her home for the first time and learning to deal with the complexity of both the world and love. Jane Austen's criticism of young ladies who place an unhealthy emphasis on externals like wealth and social standing is played out in her novels set in the wealthy English resort town of Bath, where the Austens spent some time. Catherine believes that one should pursue happiness, but not at the expense of one's integrity. Book I is the first half, while Book II is the second. Both the setting and the tone of the two books are very different from one another. Feminism is broadly seen as the fight against patriarchy in all its forms. Here, we shall use Chris Weedon's definition of patriarchy.

Patriarchal describe structures of authority in which men's interests are prioritized above those of women. The internalized standards of feminism are one manifestation of these power relations, but others include the sexual division of labour and the social

organization of procreation. The social connotations of biological sexual distinctions are the foundation upon which patriarchal authority relies (1997: 2).

Feminist authors often sought to challenge the stereotype that women were intellectually and physically inferior to men. The biblical passages below provide the religious justification for the concept of masculine superiority:

In the same way that women are not of men but rather men are of women, men were not made in God's image but rather women were made for men. Submit yourselves, wives, to your own husbands, as to the Lord (1 Peter XI, 8, 9).

Because "the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church and he saves the body." As stated in (Ephesians 5:22-4)

The word "antifeminism" entered usage only after the term "feminism" became commonly used. Feminism and antifeminism are, to put it bluntly, at odds with one another. Both feminism and anti-feminism discuss women's roles in the workplace, the family, society, and culture. Both feminism and antifeminism advance complex political, social, and cultural agendas. It is not uncommon for antifeminists to parody feminists by attacking similar ideas and methods. Antifeminist depictions of women as the weaker sex in literature and other cultural expressions have contributed to their exploitation and demotion. Nowadays, being a housewife and mother comes with the job description for any woman.

In her work *Northanger Abbey*, Austen depicts this problem by showing how women are expected to perform the traditional roles of housewife and child caretaker. Like the things Mrs. Morland hopes to instill in her children and herself taught them. Children are not ready to learn independently, as evidenced by the statement. Their mother is their primary educator.

Due to her lack of focus and sometimes idiocy, she was never able to pick up new information or skills on her own. After three months of lessons, all she could do was recite the "Beggar's Petition," and Sally, the youngest of her sisters, could do it better. (1:6)

Antifeminism, at its core, is opposed to all forms of feminism. This hostility has taken many forms throughout history and various cultures. Strides toward gender equality have been met with a lot of debate in published works. There are many different settings in which the terms "misogyny" and "antifeminism" are used to either criticize or defend women. "Anti-feminist writing is not simply a matter of men who are uncomfortable with women," says Hope Phyllis Weissman. Any portrayal of a woman that seeks to mould her into masculine ideas of femininity, whether humorous or not, is problematic. Some of the most pervasive and harmful antifeminist preconceptions about women's virtue praise masculine ideals of physical attractiveness.

To paraphrase the Feminist Dictionary: "[t]he views that women do not have the same moral and legal rights

as men, or the same social position and opportunity." Austen addresses his problem in the story as well. It's reflected in the novel's treatment of women's rights. Housewives like Mrs. Morland, Mrs. Allen, Catherine Morland, Isabella Thorpe, and Eleanor Tilney have no authority in any realm, legal or moral. But on the other hand, there was Mr. Morland, a clergyman; James Morland, Catherine's older brother, who attended Oxford; Henry Tilney, a quirky 26-year-old well-read clergyman; General Tilney, a stern and retired general; Frederick Tilney, an army officer who uses his good looks to his advantage by pursuing flirtations with attractive women; and Mr. Allen, a father figure for Catherine.

Antifeminist thinkers agree on one point: women and men are wired differently from birth to be spouses and parents. Among its tenets is the belief that wives and mothers should put their own needs last. This is due to the fact that society benefits from having women take on a more subservient, domestic role. Both Mrs. Moreland and Mrs. Allen in *Northanger Abbey* adhere to these standards as spouses and mothers. They are always helping their spouses and children since they are both wives and moms. They're always worried that their girls won't find good husbands. As antifeminists explain women's motivations, it's clear that they're more focused on home life. It was evident in the exchange between the women: Dress, balls, flirtations, and quizzes came up in conversation, all topics that are known to have a significant impact on the

development of instant rapport between young women. (4:25)

At the end of the book, the women of Austen's world accept their subordination to their male counterparts by entering marriage, demonstrating one of the problems in her society: by the time she was 19, the woman was a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a hamlet, and she was forced to open herself up to new attachments and responsibilities.

Whether it be marriage, the polarity between the sexes, love, attraction, or as a sexual object, *Northanger Abbey* explores the sustainability of relationships between a man and a woman in which the woman plays a submissive position. The wives and mothers who have always put their families first are people like Mrs. Morland, Mrs. Allen, and Mrs. Thorpe. They have always been on board with this. They're content serving as spouses and moms at the moment. They make for devoted and interesting wives and moms. They take great pride in doing a fantastic job and clearly enjoy doing it. They prioritize their kids' happiness above anything else. Mrs. Moreland's love for her daughter is illustrated through a scene in the book: Mrs. Morland was a loving mother who wanted her kids to succeed in life, but she spent so much time sleeping in and teaching them that she didn't have much time for anything else. (1:7)

Valerie Sanders argues that the primary tenet of antifeminism is the concept that women were made (by 'God'

or 'Nature') primarily for the roles of spouses and mothers. Similarly, in *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen included Valerie Sanders's opinions. No female character in the book has an outside job. All of them stay at home and take care of their families, spouses, and children.

Mary Astell writes that males shouldn't pressure women into marriage in *Some Reflections Regarding Marriage* (1700). She believes that women should have the same freedom as men to choose whether to get married, and that single women should prioritize their education above starting a family. Wollstonecraft, like other feminists, argues for women's suffrage. There is a distinction, to be sure. The traditional roles of a husband and wife are for the man to pay financially for his wife and for the wife to make their house comfortable for him. (10:73)

Women such as Mona Caird, Emma Goldman, Winifred Harper Cooley, and Simone de Beauvoir fought for the right to marry on equal terms with men. They believe that women should have equal rights in marriage to those enjoyed by males. Therefore, women should be given the option to remain single or to marry. She equates marital commitment with sexual exploitation. Feminists equate marriage with prostitution, which is why they are against the institution of marriage in general; nevertheless, in this work, Austen shows that all the female characters end up getting married. There is nothing in the book that may be interpreted as Austen's opposition to marriage. Like near the end of Catherine

Morland's story, when she finally ties the knot with Henry Tilney. What marriage means to Austen is revealed in the following passage: Everyone was happy because Henry and Catherine were married, and the bells didn't have to stop ringing because of the terrible delays caused by the General's Cruelty. This all happened within a year of their first encounter. (31:248)

Mary Wollstonecraft, J. S. Mill, Virginia Woolf, and Simone de Beauvoir are just a few of the feminist activists who fought for women's equal access to property ownership. They reasoned that if women had equal property rights, males would no longer be able to hold them in servitude. However, Jane Austen did not believe that women should have the same legal rights as males when it came to property ownership. This is the case, for instance, with one of the female protagonists in *Northanger Abbey*. Sally or Sarah is Catherine Morland's acquaintance who is also struggling financially. She must rely on her dad for money: Her father handed her 10 guineas and promised she could have more whenever she needed money, rather than an infinite order on his banker or a hundred-pound bank note. (2:11)

Mary Wollstonecraft, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, and Gayle Rubin are just a few of the many feminists who have spoken out against patriarchy for restricting women's agency. They believe that patriarchy is used to suppress women and prevent them

from achieving full equality in male-dominated societies. For this reason, women must be liberated from patriarchal norms. On the other hand, Jane Austen fully embraces patriarchy. She doesn't argue that women are constrained by patriarchy. The male breadwinner runs the show at *Northanger Abbey*. True property owners are men. For instance, Mr. Morland passes away early in the narrative. He was the patriarch of the house. But once he passes away, Mrs. Morland will be responsible for the children and the household. She's a lady and a mother, and she gives her everything to her kids. She was not coerced by any male relative or acquaintance. Equally, both Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Thorpe enjoyed considerable autonomy in carrying out their responsibilities. No one in their family is the alpha guy. The patriarch of the family may be a man, but that doesn't mean the women are being oppressed. Women can pick their own partners and lifestyles without restriction. They can choose to do anything from dance

to play a game. They can pursue any occupation that piques their interest. Catherine Morland, for instance, satisfies her passion for reading by doing it. She finds out about the gothic novel *Mysterries of Udolphoby* Ann Radcliffe from her acquaintance Miss Isabella.

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