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Meta-Analysis of Lilly's Diary Entries

Jane Austen is one of the most influential writers from the 18th century. She wrote around six finished novels that focus on British middle-class life, societal norms and marriage through the use of irony, realism and humor in her writing style. Her novels are considered to be timeless as, even two centuries later, they are still very well accepted and critiqued around the world by scholarly institutions and avid readers. Jane Austen's first completed novel was *Northanger Abbey*, written in 1803 but it was finally published only after her death in 1817. *Northanger Abbey* revolves around the protagonist Catherine Morland and her journey of better understanding the world around her. A lot of Catherine's assumptions about the world are inspired from her love for Gothic romance novels, especially *Mysteries of Udolpho*. Through the novel she very innocently, though portrayed humorously by Austen, struggles to find genuine happiness that is not derived from social acceptance or wealth as opposed to other women who surround her. Most of Jane Austen's works, including *Northanger Abbey*, have seen numerous adaptations through different genres, styles and changes to adapt to modern times. In this class we have discussed several adaptations of *Northanger Abbey* both through film (*Northanger Abbey* 2007 film) and writing (Val McDermid *Northanger Abbey*).

My project is based on an adaptation of *Northanger Abbey* where we walk through the life of Lilly Garland, an international student at UW, by reading her diary entries from her first

few weeks of college. The use of diary entries to describe Lilly's life felt like an ideal genre choice since diaries mostly tend to be a very personal account of the author, allowing free amalgamation of the countless thoughts and feelings onto a paper. Through this adaptation, I try to highlight various similarities that still exist between the 18th century and today in terms of greed for social acceptance, monetary gains and awareness. However, since the diary entries are written in a modern setting at a university campus, they also highlight how similar social values still exist but come into life very different forms because of how the society has modernized over the years. In a glimpse - Lilly Garland has just arrived to Seattle from India to attend a four year college program. She was brought up in a completely different environment and way of living and most of her understanding of the western culture and society comes from either watching popular TV shows (such as Friends) or reading modern romance novels. Through these diary entries, we try to explore how Lilly attempts (and often fails) to understand her new friends and the American culture.

Catherine in *Northanger Abbey* is depicted as a protagonist who lacks awareness of the real motifs and intentions of people around her and always seeks the best in them. There could be many reasons for such qualities which could be broadly attributed to lack of exposure to 'real' people and their drama, in addition to being consumed by Gothic novel for the most part of her free time. Through Lilly's diaries we see that she describes herself to be an immigrant, more independent and present-day version of Catherine Morland. While Lilly is not on a quest to find the love of her life when she moves to Seattle, she shares a common lack of experience in understanding people while trying to make new friends. In contrast, however, this lack of real life experience arises not only from her over-involvement in TV shows and novels but more

importantly from her cultural differences. When we read this from Lilly's perspective it becomes easier for the present-day readers to connect with her as compared to Catherine in NA who reflects this in a much more 18th century British style which is harder to relate to. As we read the diary entries, we see that Lilly gets really happy when she realizes that she has finally made her first true friend at the UW. She takes no time in attributing her friendship to a character from the TV show Friends, from which most of her perceptions about friendships in the US comes from. She looks forward to meeting her again and really values the things Zoey gets excited about, without going a step further to try and understand the real motive behind Zoey's excitement. Through this we can see how some character traits in people remain by-large the same through the course of history but change in style of portrayal.

In many different instances throughout Northanger Abbey we see Catherine struggle to understand why some people, especially Isabella, would react to situations a certain way. We saw Isabella as a character who tried to manipulate situations around her to get what she wanted. For instance, she became really close friends with Catherine in order to possibly get closer to her brother James. And when James asked Isabella for a dance after another, she would act nice to Catherine but still leave her by herself in the ballroom at most times. Drawing a comparison to Lilly's diary entries we can clearly see that Zoey gets really excited about the fact that she would make friends with a UW Basketball player, which could be seen equivalent to marrying to a man of a higher class social class or wealth. Being friends with Henry would not only let Zoey get associated with a famous UW student but also give her access to bigger friend circles and parties in and around campus. Lilly, completely unaware of Zoey's real motives, innocently agrees to introduce Zoey to Henry. This lack of reading between the lines comes back to hit Lilly in the

back when the three of them meet for a cookie baking session. At that point, Zoey completely flips character and starts trying to connect with Henry no matter what. During this, Zoey says things that Lilly found extremely rude (SpongeBob reference) considering she had only seen and thought of her as a very amicable and sweet person. In fact Lilly goes on to blame herself for this situation thinking that it is her who doesn't fully understand the American culture and maybe Zoey was not trying to be rude to her.

Through this adaptation, we can compare and contrast a lot of the themes picked up by *Northanger Abbey*. This adaptation goes a step further by pulling in the perspectives of an immigrant that is less experienced in the new city she has moved to. It also shows light on how introductions differed back in the 18th century and the present day. Instead of having a very formal introduction necessary before a young man and woman could talk or dance, here we see how meeting someone you know is just an invitation apart. All Zoey had to do was to invite them both to her dorm room for a planned activity. This contrasts a lot of societal norms back in 18th century to those present in third world countries like India even today, on how young individuals had to know their limits and expectations from the society before they could act upon any gesture of love or friendship. We also see and discuss a lot human behaviour is driven by the desire to attain something of a higher standing than their own, for which people can go very far without thinking about the consequences it would have on other people around them.

Works Cited

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