In *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen parodies the literary devices employed in the gothic novels that were popular at the time she wrote this novel. In addition to parodying the gothic novel, however, Austen also parodies the heroic journey as it is found in epic tales. The story of Catherine Morland contains a Departure (ix), an Initiation (ix), and a Return (ix), which are the three parts of the “Adventure of the Hero” (ix) as it is defined by Joseph Campbell in *Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

Catherine Morland’s Departure (ix), which is a separation from home and family for the purpose of the adventure, is set when Mr. Allen, a friend of the Morlands, is ordered to bath for health reasons. The narrator describes Mrs. Allen’s invitation to Catherine as follows, “His lady, a good humoured woman, fond of Miss Morland, and probably aware that adventures will not befall a young lady in her own village, she must seek them abroad, invited her [Catherine Morland] to go with them” (Austen *Northanger Abbey* 41-2). This invitation will take Catherine out of the neighborhood in which she has grown up, away from her parents and into the city of Bath of six weeks.

It is with this invitation that the parody begins, but the Departure does occur. Leaving is an adventure of sorts for her as Catherine is going beyond the bounds of her experience but what she finds on her trip is hardly what she expects. The narrator describes the travel to Bath as being, “performed with suitable quietness and uneventful safety” (Austen *Northanger Abbey* 43). Miss Morland was expecting more from a trip that is supposed to be the highlight of her young life, but there is nothing more exciting
than her chaperone losing a pair of shoes along the way. Thus Catherine Morland comically begins her epic adventure to the city of Bath.

With her arrival in Bath, Catherine moves into the Initiation (ix) portion of her journey. It is in the Initiation (ix) that the hero/heroine is tried and test and faces the challenges that allow him/her to achieve the ends of the adventure and to grow and develop from what they were before the adventure began. Catherine’s trials include the false friendship of Isabella, heartache and uncertainty over her relationship with Mr. Tilney, and fending off the advances of the impetuous John Thorpe. The height of her trials comes when she is invited to leave Northanger Abbey in the following manner, “Tomorrow is fixed for your leaving us, and not even the hour is left to your choice; the very carriage is ordered, and will be here at seven o’clock, and no servant will be offered you” (Austen Northanger Abbey 217). She is cast off from those that she has been visiting and had thought herself higher in their regard. Catherine instead returns home, unescorted to share the tales of her time in Bath with her family.

Catherine’s Return (ix) is not her return home. The Return is meant to be triumphant, with the adventure completed and peace following. Her return occurs with her reversal of fortunes, “Henry and Catherine were married, the bells rang, everyone smiled” (Austen Northanger Abbey 240). Her Return and the ultimate fulfillment of her quest is her marriage to Mr. Tilney, which is an excellent connection for Miss Morland and her family. Thus in brief, Northanger Abbey does indeed parody not only the gothic novel but the heroic epics as well in combining the hero’s journey with Miss Morland’s tale, a tale of a heroine to whom nothing of consequence happens and is ultimately a story of un-epic proportions.
Bibliography