



The Heroines

Eileen Favorite

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Although a true lover of books, Anne-Marie Entwhistle prefers not to read to her spirited daughter, Penny, especially from the likes of "Madame Bovary," "Gone With the Wind," or "The Scarlet Letter." These novels, devoted to the lives of the Heroines that make them so irresistible, have a way of hitting too close to home -- well, to the Homestead actually, where Anne-Marie runs the quaint family-owned bed and breakfast. In this enchanting debut novel, Penny and her mother encounter great women from classic works of literature who make the Homestead their destination of choice just as the plots of their tumultuous, unforgettable stories begin to unravel. They appear at all hours of the day and in all manners of distress. A lovesick Madame Bovary languishes in their hammock after Rodolphe has abandoned her, and Scarlett O'Hara's emotions are not easily tempered by tea and eiderdowns. These visitors long for comfort, consolation, and sometimes for more attention than the adolescent Penny wants her mother to give.

Knowing that to interfere with their stories would cause mayhem in literature, Anne-Marie does her best to make each Heroine feel at home, with a roof over her head and a shoulder to cry on. But when Penny begins to feel overshadowed by her mother's indulgence of each and every Heroine, havoc ensues, and the thirteen-year-old embarks on her own memorable tale.

Eileen Favorite's lively, fresh, and enormously entertaining novel gives readers a chance to experience their favorite Heroines all over again, or introduces these fictional women so beguilingly that further acquaintance will surely follow. Narrated by the courageous and irreverent Penny, "The Heroines" will make book lovers rejoice.

The Heroines Details

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From Reader Review The Heroines for online ebook

Ladygwen says

A Christmas gift from Miss B....It's an odd book, the fantasy clash of literature famous heroines appearing in an everyday bed and breakfast...set in the USA 70s. It has all the marks of the 70s, the pot, the psych and the drugs, Nixon and Watergate. It is literally a clash, which I found disconcerting, but I know that if that background wasn't there, there would be nothing, and the book would fall apart. I called Penny's parentage well before she knew it herself, found it odd how she kept referring to her mother during the several chapters of back story about her...I did like the characters they mentioned; it was clear the author did her research (Scarlett fears for Beau!) It almost reads like fanfiction, which is funny, of the author-insertion variety, which is invariably dreadful.

"Never before had a man leapt from the pages of a book to recapture a Heroine. Deirde was so depressed-crying all the time and monopolizing Mother's attention- she must have come from some awful romance. Only a cheap book would have a binding too weak to hold back a stereotype like this guy."p7

Rachel says

It is 1974, and thirteen-year-old Penny is living with her mother in their small bed and breakfast in rural Illinois. Penny longs to read, but her mother has disallowed it and she can't understand why -- until the heroines from all sorts of famous works start magically coming to life and visiting the bed and breakfast. Their lives intersect with Penny's in unexpected ways, and through these intersections Penny must learn about what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a literary heroine, and how to make the choices necessary to become the woman you need to be.

Okay, that all sounds great, right? The basic premise is extraordinary, but the execution is miserable. The literary figures come and go too quickly to be woven effectively into the story, and Penny's teen angst seems darker than necessary. Instead of growing as a character, Penny just... whines. Even the glimpses into the different parts of her life don't do much to help the character evolve. Ultimately, Penny turns out to be as flat as the literary figures with whom she interacts -- which is a shame, given that the characters had such richness in their original stories.

This novel offers decent "fluff" reading, and is a reasonable book for middle- or high-school readers who may be newly acquainted with some of the literary figures Favorite introduces to the story. But for the avid reader or lover of classic literature, this novel is sure to disappoint. The premise promises so much, but falls far short of its lofty goals.

Bethany says

Audrey Niffenegger's review on the front of this book is very apropos.

"Quirky: adolescent angst meets metaphysics, screwball-comedy trysts with the underpinnings of reality. It's funny and tender; it's a chance to see Scarlett O'Hara and Emma Bovary off duty."

This was a fun book to read - one of those read-it-in-one-day books.

This book really gives you a little look at what it would be like if heroines from books suddenly appeared in your home.

Nina says

This book has a much rawer style than my usual choices, but I will say I thoroughly enjoyed it, reading the last two-thirds in one sitting. The plot barreled down a road I did not expect--a welcome surprise--and while the heroines of famed literature don't play nearly as big a part in the book as the awkward, painfully realistic adolescent narrator Penny and her down to earth mother, I forgave the author that decision when

*****SPOILER*****

Heathcliff of *Wuthering Heights* appeared as a--surprisingly believable--love interest. Utterly awesome. For a story that shows the reader everything from puberty crazed teenagers in 1970s suburban bedrooms to Valium-armed nurses in a questionable mental hospital, it's nice to end with a troubled, handsome anti-hero running through a stormy wood! Penny's dubious march on into adulthood after everything she's experienced only makes the book more believable, something I never thought I'd say about a story that mixes modern life with classical drama. After reading *The Heroines*, I feel like my own imagination just got a bit more interesting.

Sarah says

I lack the verbal skills to make you, the reader, fully comprehend the twitching heap of nerdy glee to which I was reduced by the sheer potential of this premise: rural bed and breakfast, in which dwells a female narrator steeped to the ears in puberty rage (and her mother), is visited periodically by heroines of classic literature, each on brief hiatus from the climax of her drama.

If you, like me, squealed and opened an Amazon.com window upon reading that, if you have already begun to consider how to rearrange your life and work around giving this concept room to breathe, if you're feverishly asking yourself (as you seriously consider paying for overnight or at least two-day shipping) whether Jane Eyre appears, or Francie Nolan, or Dorothea Brooke, or ooooh maybe Jo March, I must stop you to say: if you are thinking any of these things, you can write it better yourself. National Novel Writing Month is in November. Go. Make it happen. And if you can manage to avoid foreshadowing done with black Sharpie, idiotic Irish dialect, ridiculous mental hospital interludes, anything dramatic happening on horseback, capitalizing words for no reason, awkward and implausible edits to *Wuthering Heights*, and, for God's sake, force fields -- if you can avoid just generally making me sad -- then go ahead and send me what you got. Because *it coulda been a contender!*

Amanda says

Sometimes a clever conceit should remain just that--a conceit. Because no matter how you try to develop it, it will never be as as wonderful as the idea itself. Trying to build upon it and give it complexity strips it of its fanciful "What if?" brilliance and plummets it back to earth. And so we have *The Heroines*, a novel built around one of the most wonderful ideas I've ever encountered--what if the heroines from famous novels

needed a respite from the tragedies of their own storylines--and yet promptly clustermugs the whole thing.

Basically, I feel as though I was sold a false bill of goods. The novel purports to be about a bed and breakfast that attracts the heroines of famous novels. Deirdre of the Sorrows, Franny Glass, Daisy Buchanan, Anna Karenina, Hester Prynne, and Catherine Earnshaw have all signed the guest book and checked in for a few days of freedom from the misery of their lives. This is what I wanted to read about--how the heroines come to be at the bed and breakfast and how they interact with a modern world. I expected quirky, witty, and humorous. What I got was dark, disjointed, and ordinary. Instead of focusing on the heroines (who are little more than footnotes), the novel focuses on Anne-Marie Entwhistle and her daughter, Penny. Anne-Marie and Penny run the bed and breakfast and, unfortunately, the novel chooses to focus on their problematic relationship as a result of Penny's coming of age. WTF? Scarlett O'Hara's pounding on the door and instead of focusing on that, a pedestrian mother/daughter conflict is the subject of the book? And that is, in essence, the root source of my disappointment with the book. When heroines do (very briefly) make an appearance, they are flat, one-dimensional versions of their colorful, complex selves. Hester sets about sewing an A on the front of her dress and throwing just enough "thou" into her dialogue to make her seem authentic; Scarlett wakes in the middle of the night to pull down the curtains (for dressmaking purposes, of course) and try to steal the sweet potatoes; Deirdre constantly weeps. They read as caricatures of themselves.

As for the plot, Penny is rebelling by going out into the nearby woods despite her mother's rule against doing so. While there she meets and falls in lust with the Irish King of Ulster, Connor (better known as Conchobar in the original Deirdre mythology), who has followed Deirdre into our time. Through a muddled turn of events, Penny is locked up in a psych ward and we have to read about her "it's-all-so-unfair!" experiences there. After finally breaking free, Penny returns to the woods with Connor, during which some awkward sexual awakening occurs and Penny is going through withdrawal from the meds given to her in the psych ward. She spends her days smoking pot while Connor hunts deer and builds huts. Aaannnnndddddd that's pretty much it. Basically, there's just enough inexplicable tragedy and unresolved longing in Penny's life to make one wonder if Penny is herself a heroine (a thought which Penny also considers).

Then we have a peculiar shift in narrative and we go back in time to when Penny's mother was a young woman. A point of contention between Penny and her mother has always been the void that is Penny's father. Penny knows that her mother became pregnant out of wedlock, decided to keep the baby against the wishes of her parents, and that her father died in a car accident. Penny's mom is mum on the details of who Penny's father was and what, exactly, was the nature of their relationship. This part of the narrative answers all of the questions Penny has regarding her father. I won't reveal any more here as to do so would be to spoil the ending, but this story line was the best in the book and took about 10-15 pages. The payoff was not worth the other 200+ pages through which I had to drag myself.

The story could have been saved if the characters had been more likable, the heroines had made more frequent (and more satisfying) appearances, or if the story hadn't been so self-aware of how clever it was being with all of its metaphysical musings on the nature of "heroines" and storytelling itself.

Cross posted at [This Insignificant Cinder](#) and at [Shelf Inflicted](#)

megan says

I am giving this book 2 stars mainly because the idea was so wonderful--a bed and breakfast where heroines of classic literature come for a respite from their plotlines--but the execution just left me kind of "meh". I

think it tried to be too many things--a book about coming of age, a book about literature, a book about mothers and daughters---and not one of those themes really melded well with another. There was also a lot of odd lusting from the main character, Penny--a 13 year old girl who has not yet developed. Anyway. That's that. Check it off my list.

If you are interested in books about literary characters in a different setting, I would recommend the Thursday Next series by my Jasper Fforde over the Heroines.

Sarah says

meh... Interesting concept... but failed to meet it's potential.
Kept me sane during snow-day 6 though, so an extra star for that.

Megan says

I loved the cover of this novel, so I guess it was predetermined that I would be disappointed by the book. That's what I get for picking out books based on covers

Kristy Miller says

If you are interested in this because love fiction/real life cross-over stories, such as the works of art written by Jasaper Fforde, do yourself a favor and skip this one.

Penny's mother has had book heroines popping in and out of her life since she was a child. Now she runs a bed and breakfast outside Chicago, where Heroines often come to escape the woes of their stories. Dealing with the emotionally wrought heroines doesn't leave much time for Penny, who is thirteen and wants some of her mother's attention. When a villain follows a heroine out of her story Penny decides to help him. But in her prolonged absence her mother calls the police. Not being able to tell the police the truth about the man in the woods her daughter saw, she goes along with them as they make her go through a rape kit, and then commit Penny to a psych ward for her "wild tales" of a Celtic king.

And that's where I gave up. There is no joy in this story. It is not well written, and I have no sympathy for any of the characters. After you've read Fforde this just can't compare.

Sue says

This book began with such promise. A lively adolescent girl growing up in her mother's bed and breakfast, which just happens to be a favorite destination of literary heroines escaped from their novels for a little R & R -- what a delightful premise! (Hmmm . . . a premise with promise.) BUT, for me, the story fell flat.

When I try to analyze why it did so, I come to the conclusion that the author tried to write two different types of books at one time, and it just didn't work. When Penny (the aforementioned lively adolescent) encounters a studly hero in the woods outside her home searching for his runaway heroine, the story is silly and quirky. But when she is then committed to the local adolescent psychiatric unit for unwisely telling her tale, the story becomes disturbingly dark and realistic. Then, once the studly hero breaks her out of the funny-farm pokey, we're right back to silly and quirky. It was just too much for my poor brain to take. I couldn't decide if I was reading a light, charming fantasy or an exposé of drug and insurance abuses in the mental health industry.

I do hope that this author tries again. Her actual writing is quite good, and the story is very readable. It's just that it should have been two stories (in perhaps two entirely different genres) rather than one.

Marsha says

What if your favorite heroines from literature made an appearance in real life? Would it be fun, hobnobbing with them or an utter nightmare?

Being the inverse of the Thursday Next novels, Ms. Favorite adroitly brings the protagonists from some favorite old classics into the real world and shows how one woman and her curious daughter deals with them. These aren't just heroines; these are heroines in need of rescue or at least a respite from the perils given to them by their authors. They cannot be saved but perhaps they can get a breather from their lives.

But removing any character from a story carries its own risks and Ms. Favorite shows that in a very credible fashion.

Faith-Anne says

I was really excited to read this book, but it contained too much 'angst-ridden teenage rebellion', sexuality, & drug use for me to really enjoy the story. The book couldn't make up its mind whether it was metafiction or mother-daughter drama. The heroines didn't play as big a role as I had hoped. How could someone as fiery as Scarlett O'Hara be relegated to one chapter? If you're looking for wonderful metafiction, try reading Jasper Fforde.

Awwwtrouble says

Wow. huh. I almost never read books with only a two-star rating, and after this one I think I should make it a policy. Like all the other reviewers, I was sucked in by an intriguing premise that the author couldn't - or didn't really want to - sustain. What if heroines from the great stories took respite for a little while in an isolated inn? What would their presence do? Clever idea, but too bad it turned into a teenage psych ward and lots of 70s teenage angst that really made little sense. (I read the first 50 pages and then stalled over how unappealing this was, but then decided to soldier through).

Britt says

Awesome idea. Terrible execution. It is just a mess. The writing is awful. I almost didn't make it through the first paragraph. It is much darker than I thought it would be, which is not bad in itself. The darkness didn't really do anything to me emotionally though. I didn't care about the characters at all. Also, the Heroines the novel is named after are underutilized. I thought it would be a story about what all the heroines got up to at the B&B, why they came, etc., but it was more the narrator occasionally telling us random stories about some of the heroines that came to the B&B. I would have liked to have seen more of the heroines and had them play a more central role. And the end is way too abrupt and easy and predictable. The author just kind of throws it at you in her attempt to scramble away from this mess as quick as she can. I think the idea has a lot of potential, but we hardly got to know any of the characters in this book.
