

## *Northanger Abbey* – Reading Novels

if a rainy morning deprived [Catherine and Isabella] of other enjoyments, they [...] shut themselves up, to read novels together. Yes, novels; (36)

I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding [...] Alas! if the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? [...] our foes are almost as many as our readers. [...] ‘I am no novel reader—I seldom look into novels—Do not imagine that *I* often read novels—It is really very well for a novel.’—Such is the common cant. —‘And what are you reading, Miss—?’ ‘Oh! it is only a novel!’ replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. —‘It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda;’ or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language. (36-7)

“Have you ever read Udolpho, Mr. Thorpe?”

“Udolpho! Oh Lord! not I; I never read novels; I have something else to do.”

Catherine, humbled and ashamed, was going to apologize for her question, but he prevented her by saying, “Novels are all so full of nonsense and stuff; there has not been a tolerably decent one come out since Tom Jones, except the Monk; I read that t’other day; but as for all the others, they are the stupidest things in creation.”

“I think you must like Udolpho, if you were to read it; it is so very interesting.”

“Not I, faith! No, if I read any it shall be Mrs. Radcliff’s; her novels are amusing enough; they are worth reading; some fun and nature in *them*.”

“Udolpho was written by Mrs. Radcliff,” said Catherine, with some hesitation, from the fear of mortifying him.

“No sure; was it? Aye, I remember, so it was; I was thinking of that other stupid book, written by that woman they make such a fuss about, she who married the French emigrant.”

“I suppose you mean Camilla?”

“Yes that’s the book; such unnatural stuff!” (47)

They determined on walking round Beechen Cliff, that noble hill [...]

“I never look at it,” said Catherine, as they walked along the side of river, ‘without thinking of the south of France.’

“You have been abroad then?” said Henry, a little surprized.

“Oh! no, I only mean what I have read about. It always puts me in mind of the country that Emily and her father travelled through, in the ‘Mysteries of Udolpho.’ But you never read novels, I dare say?”

“Why not?”

“Because they are not clever enough for you—gentlemen read better books.”

“The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has no pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid. I have read all Mrs. Radcliff’s works, and most of them with great pleasure. The *Mysteries of Udolpho*, when I had once begun it, I could not lay down again; —I remember finishing it in two days—my hair standing on end the whole time.”

“Yes,” added Miss Tilney, “and I remember that you undertook to read it aloud to me” [...]

“I am very glad to hear it indeed, and now I shall never be ashamed of liking *Udolpho* myself. But I really thought before, young men despised novels amazingly.

[...] I myself have read hundreds and hundreds.” (102-3)