

In a brilliant parody of the Gothic novel Jane Austen jokes about the differences between men and women, claiming that the former read history and the latter only novels. The novel mentioned above is *Northanger Abbey*, and the young heroine affected by reading novels is Catherine Morland. Albeit she enjoys reading novels and in particular Gothic novels, she is still somewhat ashamed of her taste in literature. However, her embarrassment decreases when she hears that the object of her adoration is also greatly fond of Mrs. Ann Radcliffe's writing: "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."¹ Austen's tone is only gently mocking her heroine's taste in literature, on the contrary she acknowledges the genius of Ann Radcliffe and other great novelists of the time. Indeed, if her sarcasm is targeted against anyone, it would be against the literary critics and the general population who discarded the Gothic novel as a trifling genre read by women.

It is striking since Gothic novels are not exactly what could be called a proper reading for young women. The novels portray all types of violence and cruelty, they tell stories of incest, unbelievable brutality, and horrors. In the case of Ann Radcliffe some of the horrors and supernatural events are explained away, however all the afore mentioned elements are present even if only insinuated. What is particularly disturbing is that the characters who suffer the most are the female heroines, and indeed the Gothic novel is about "a maledominant world full of terrors for every female."² Nevertheless, or perhaps precisely because of this the Gothic novel has been closely tied to female readership. The reason behind this is that despite all the difficulties that the heroine encounters, in the end it is a story of her journey of coming into some power and property.