



The Female Reader in the English Novel: From Burney to Austen

Joe Bray

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This book examines how reading is represented within the novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Contemporary accounts portrayed the female reader in particular as passive and impressionable; liable to identify dangerously with the world of her reading. This study shows that female characters are often active and critical readers, and develop a range of strategies for reading both texts and the world around them. The novels of Frances Burney, Charlotte Smith, Mary Hays, Elizabeth Inchbald, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen (among others) reveal a diversity of reading practices, as how the heroine reads is often more important than what she reads. The book combines close stylistic analysis with a consideration of broader intellectual debates of the period, including changing attitudes towards sympathy, physiognomy and portraiture.

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