

Review #35 : *Northanger Abbey* (2007)

Felicity Jones and J. J. Feild



After 20 years with the horrible 1987 version as the only adaptation of *Northanger Abbey*, many fans were eagerly anticipating the new 2007 version. I was a little nervous about Andrew Davies writing the script, given his tendency to sex things up, but the cast looked really good. And then I saw it...

THE BAD

Suffice it to say — I was totally right ! Most of the cast *was* really good... but it was really sexed up. Most of this was in the form of Catherine's dreams, but there was something else too. One scene in particular was just plain wrong ! Why, Andrew Davies, why ? He seemed to interpret the story to be Catherine's sexual awakening. Sorry, I didn't see any of that in the book — it was a comedy ! This version has funny moments too, but it's really all the sexed up scenes that bothered me...

THE GOOD

Felicity Jones as Catherine Morland looks perfect for the part. She is sweet and innocent in some ways, but in others Andrew Davies had to ruin her. Like the 1987 Catherine, she is

constantly having lurid dreams and nightmares. However they are nothing Jane Austen would have written about ! In one she is taking a bath and Henry gets her to stand out of the tub, naked, in front of him. This scene was cut from the PBS version. She also seems initially displeased to hear that Henry is a clergyman — I guess that profession isn't sexy enough for her ? I thought that was weird. She does read *Udolpho* in Jane Austen's novel but then Isabella gets her to read *The Monk*. This book was mentioned by John Thorpe very briefly in the novel, but it was not something appropriate for a girl like Catherine to read. Part from this sexing up, I actually like what they did with her character. **She is represented as a charming, nice witted girl, and she has great chemistry with Henry** — so you can see why he fell in love with her...

J. J. Feild as Henry Tilney is... more than perfect. I absolutely love him as Henry ! I like him even more than the book character. He has such a beautiful deep voice and always seems to have a twinkle in his eye as he teases Catherine or Mrs. Allen. He is a bit more flirtatious with Catherine, as in you can tell that he is romantically interested in her. In one scene he even refers to John Thorpe as his rival +++

Sylvestra Le Touzel as Mrs. Allen was *much better* than as Fanny Price in the old version of *Mansfield Park*, that's for sure ! She plays a really good, flighty Mrs. Allen and is actually the right age for the part. Mr. Allen had a few nice comedic moments as well...

Carey Mulligan as Isabella Thorpe is quite good. Unfortunately her necklines are always a bit too low — they obviously wanted the audience to know that she was not innocent like Catherine. I didn't think it was necessary, because her acting does the trick well enough ! We could tell that she was obviously sly and artificial, yet not so obviously evil that Catherine wouldn't be fooled by her. What I really did not like was stupid Andrew Davies deciding to make her sleep with Captain Tilney, thinking that he would marry her if she did. *What?* Hello! Isabella in the book is not a dumb bimbo who gets carried away by her passions. She is a devious gold-digger who sets her sights on Frederick as James' fortune does not live up to her expectations. But she would *never* compromise her chances of making a good match by sleeping with him! What if she got pregnant ? What if someone found out ? She knew she would be a ruined woman and all hopes of a good marriage after that would be lost... Andrew Davies, for shame!



Final Thoughts

Northanger Abbey manages to hit the high points of Austen's novel, retaining its sometimes comic feel and satisfying, romantic ending. The costumes are lovely and the scenes sumptuous with period details abounding. There are numerous country dances and a variety of Regency pastimes portrayed. All in all, while not a definitive portrayal of Jane Austen's first novel, it remains a delightful way to spend an hour and a half. The timeless romance of the story is left intact and the acting well above the average in a TV movie.



'Felicity Jones was just about perfect as Catherine' said Davies 'and J. J. Field made a very persuasive Henry Tilney.' Few would disagree with that ! +++