

The Mysteries of Udolpho

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The Mysteries of Udolpho, by Ann Radcliffe, was published in the summer of 1794 by G. G. and J. Robinson of London in 4 volumes. Her fourth and most popular novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* follows the fortunes of Emily St. Aubert who suffers, among other misadventures, the death of her father, supernatural terrors in a gloomy castle, and the machinations of an Italian brigand. Often cited as the archetypal Gothic novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* plays a prominent role in Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey*, in which an impressionable young woman, after reading Radcliffe's novel, comes to see her friends and acquaintances as Gothic villains and victims with amusing results. According to Radcliffe's contract for the book, which is housed at the University of Virginia Library, she was paid £500 for the manuscript.^[1]

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Plot introduction

The Mysteries of Udolpho is a quintessential Gothic romance, replete with incidents of physical and psychological terror; remote, crumbling castles; seemingly supernatural events; a brooding, scheming villain; and a persecuted heroine. Radcliffe also added extensive descriptions of exotic landscapes in the Pyrenees and Apennines. Set in 1584 in southern France and northern Italy, the novel focuses on the plight of Emily St. Aubert, a young French woman who is orphaned after the death of her father. Emily suffers imprisonment in the castle Udolpho at the hands of Signor Montoni, an Italian brigand who has married her aunt and guardian Madame Cheron. Emily's romance with the dashing Valancourt is frustrated by Montoni and others. Emily also investigates the mysterious relationship between her father and the Marchioness de Villeroi, and its connection to the castle Udolpho.

Plot summary

Emily St. Aubert is the only child of a landed rural family whose fortunes are now in decline. Emily and her father share an especially close bond, due to their shared appreciation for nature. After her mother's death from

The Mysteries of Udolpho, A Romance; Interspersed with Some Pieces of Poetry

THE
MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO,
A
ROMANCE;

INTERSPERSED WITH SOME PIECES OF POETRY.

BY
ANN RADCLIFFE,
AUTHOR OF THE ROMANCES OF THE FOREST, &c.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

For fix on thine dark settlements, and frowns,
And, as the portals open to receive me,
Her voice, in fallen echoes through the woods,
Tells of a wretched deed.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR G. G. AND J. ROBINSON,
PATERNOSTER-ROW,
1794.

Title page from first edition.

Author	Ann Radcliffe
Country	England
Language	English
Genre(s)	Gothic novel
Publisher	G. G. and J. Robinson
Publication date	1794
Media type	Print (Hardcover), 4 volumes
ISBN	NA

a serious illness, Emily and her father grow even closer. She accompanies him on a journey from their native Gascony, through the Pyrenees to the Mediterranean coast of Roussillon, over many mountainous landscapes. During the journey, they encounter Valancourt, a handsome man who also feels an almost mystical kinship with the natural world. Emily and Valancourt quickly fall in love.

Emily's father succumbs to a long illness. Emily, now orphaned, is forced by his wishes to live with her aunt, Madame Cheron, who shares none of Emily's interests and shows little affection to her. Her aunt marries Montoni, a dubious nobleman from Italy. He wants his friend Count Morano to become Emily's husband, and tries to force her to marry him. After discovering that Morano is nearly ruined he brings Emily and his wife to his remote castle of Udolpho. Emily fears to have lost Valancourt forever. Morano searches for Emily and tries to carry off her secretly from Udolpho. Emily refuses to join him because her heart still belongs to Valancourt. Morano's attempt to escape is discovered by Montoni, who wounds the Count and chases him away. In the following months Montoni threatens his wife with violence to force her to sign over her properties in Toulouse, which upon her death would otherwise go to Emily. Without resigning her estate Madame Cheron dies of a severe illness caused by her husband's harshness. Many frightening but coincidental events happen within the castle, but Emily is able to flee from it with the help of her secret admirer Du Pont, who was a prisoner at Udolpho, and the servants Annette and Ludovico. Returning to the estate of her aunt, Emily learns that Valancourt went to Paris and lost his wealth. In the end she takes control of the property and is reunited with Valancourt.

Characters in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

Emily: Much of the action takes place from her point of view. She is unusually beautiful and gentle with a slight, graceful figure, fond of books, nature, poetry, and music. She is described as extremely virtuous, obedient, resourceful, brave, sensitive, and self-reliant.

St. Aubert: Emily's father, who dies early in the novel while he, Emily, and Valancourt are travelling. He warns Emily on his death bed to not become a victim of her feelings but to acquire command over her emotions. His unaccountable relationship with the Marchioness de Villeroy is one of the novel's central mysteries.

Valancourt: The younger brother of the Count Duvarney, Valancourt forms an attachment to Emily while traveling with her and her father through the Pyrenees. He is a dashing, enthusiastic young man with a noble character, on furlough from the army when he meets Emily. St. Aubert considers Valancourt a desirable match for Emily, though Valancourt lacks wealth.

Madame Cheron: St. Aubert's sister and Emily's aunt. Madame Cheron is a selfish, worldly, vain, wealthy widow living on her estate near Toulouse when Emily becomes her ward after St. Aubert's death. She is contemptuous and cold, even cruel, to Emily at first, and thinks solely of herself: but near her death, when Emily patiently and selflessly aids and comforts her, she softens slightly towards her.

Montoni: The prototypical Gothic villain. Brooding, haughty, and scheming, he masquerades as an Italian nobleman to gain Madame Cheron's hand in marriage, then imprisons Emily and Madame Cheron in Udolpho in an attempt to acquire control over Madame Cheron's fortune. He is cold and often cruel to Emily.

Count Morano: Introduced to Emily by Montoni, who commands that she marry Morano. Emily refuses but Morano continues to pursue her in Venice and later Udolpho. When Montoni finds out that Count Morano is not as rich as he hoped, he abruptly withdraws his support from Count Morano's suit, and thus Count Morano attempts to abduct Emily by force twice, though both attempts fail.

Annette: A maid who accompanied Madame Cheron from France. Annette is inclined to exaggeration and

superstition, and is talkative, but she is faithful, affectionate and honest. She is in love with Ludovico.

Ludovico: One of Montoni's servants. He falls in love with Annette and provides assistance to Emily. He is more sensible than Annette, and is both brave and quick thinking.

Cavigni, Verezzi, and Bertolini: Cavaliers and friends of Montoni. Cavigni is sly, careful, and flatteringly assiduous. Verezzi is a "man of some talent, of fiery imagination, and the slave of alternate passions. He was gay, voluptuous, and daring; yet had neither perseverance or true courage, and was meanly selfish in all his aims." Bertolini is brave, unsuspecting, merry, dissipated, and of extreme extravagance; his free flightiness to Emily distresses her.

Orsino: An assassin described as the "chief favourite of Montoni". He is cruel, suspicious, relentlessly vengeful, and merciless.

References in other works

- *The Mysteries of Udolpho* plays a small part in Tom Stoppard's play *Arcadia*, as one of its characters describes a garden as worthy of *Udolpho* (Faber and Faber edition, page 13).
- Henry James mentions the "mystery of Udolpho" in *The Turn of the Screw*, at the beginning of Chapter IV: "Was there a 'secret' at Bly — a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement?"
- *The Veiled Picture; or, The Mysteries of Gorgono*, published in 1802, is a chapbook edition of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. It preserves most of the characters and plot elements from *Udolpho* but dispenses with details and descriptions.
- There is also a mention of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*, where a vital element in Claggart's and Billy Budd's relationship is "assumed...in its very realism as much charged with that prime element of Radcliffian romance, the mysterious, as any that the ingenuity of the author of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* could devise."
- Dostoevsky makes a reference to *Udolpho* in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dmitri's defense lawyer Fetyukovich tells the jury that the crime committed was not as one might find in 'The Castle Udolpho', implying that it was firmly based in fact.
- The novel plays a role in C. Northcote Parkinson's *The Devil to Pay*, set in 1794. In it the young lieutenant who is the hero has been plunged into local intrigue when he accepts the command of a small revenue cutter on the Isle of Wight. The niece of a local landowner rumored to own several smuggling vessels flirts with him, and mentions her enjoyment of Mrs Radcliffe's recent novel. The lieutenant reads it and records his impressions.
- The novel is referenced multiple times in Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey*.
- In 2007, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was published as a graphic novel in a volume of the *Gothic Classics: Graphic Classics* series.^[2] This new graphic series attests to the lasting legacy of Translation In The Eighteenth Century Gothic Novel.
- The castle is referenced in the introduction of "Waverley" by Walter Scott.

Notes

1. ^ Webber, Caroline. "The Mysteries of Udolpho" (<http://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=110>) . *The Literary Encyclopedia*. 11 October 2008. Accessed 25 March 2009.
2. ^ Pomplun, Tom: "Gothic Classics: Graphic Classics Volume 14". Eureka Productions, 2007.

External links

- *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3268>) at Project Gutenberg
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