

ANN RADCLIFFE

THE MYSTERIES
OF UDOLPHO



THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

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*The Mysteries of
Udolpho*

Edited with an Introduction by

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THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

THE MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO

ANN RADCLIFFE was born in London in 1764. Her father was in trade, but a great part of her youth was passed in the society of wealthy relatives in easy circumstances. At the age of twenty-three she married William Radcliffe, who later became proprietor and editor of the *English Chronicle*.

Her talents as a novelist were first recognized in 1790 with the publication of *A Sicilian Romance*, which Sir Walter Scott considered to be the first modern English example of the poetical novel. However, her fame rests on her *Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Italian* (1797, a romance of the Inquisition). She also wrote *An Italian Romance* (1791).

Mrs Radcliffe's method, which found a number of imitators, was to arouse terror and curiosity by events apparently supernatural. Many of her books were translated into French and Italian.

After 1797 she wrote very little. For the last twelve years of her life she suffered from spasmodic asthma, and succumbed to a sudden attack in 1823.

BONAMY DOBRÉE was an eminent scholar of English Literature, specializing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He was Professor of English at the Egyptian University in Cairo and at Leeds University. Among his publications are *English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century 1700-1740* (OUP, 1959), *Sarah Churchill* and *The Lamp and the Lute*. Frederick Garber is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Washington.

INTRODUCTION

FOR some years after its publication in 1794—one may hazard fifty years—*The Mysteries of Udolpho* was a ‘must’, or in the phrase of today, ‘required reading’, for anybody who had any pretence at all to being a person of education, or culture, or even of popular reading habits. Unless you were familiar with it you would not, for instance, understand what Catherine Morland meant when she said of General Tilney that he had ‘the air and attitude of a Montoni’. Though *Northanger Abbey* was written in 1798, the allusion was considered fresh enough when it was published in 1818. On 14 March of that year Keats wrote to Reynolds: ‘... I am going into scenery whence I intend to tip you a Damosel Radcliffe—I’ll cavern you, and grotto you, and waterfall you, and wood you, and immense-rock you, and tremendous sound you, and solitude you.’ When in 1840 Thackeray published *A Shabby Genteel Story*, he asked his readers the question (Chapter V): ‘Had Caroline read of Valancourt and Emily for nothing?’ He must have been confident that all his readers would pick up the reference.

The instances given above may to some degree indicate why this book was so enormously popular for so long; it ran into a number of editions,¹ being last edited by Austin Freeman in 1931, the most recent reprint appearing in 1962. The reasons for its immediate vogue, and its continuation as a moderately popular book, are that it was at once a ‘horror novel’ and a ‘novel of sentiment’, both these aspects of our emotional existence having a perennial appeal. Moreover, as Keats’s letter stresses, Mrs. Radcliffe wrapped these themes about with such an abundant eider-down of ‘the picturesque’ as to make them still more acceptable to the appetites of her day, infused with a lyrical sense heightened by the poems she interspersed—‘all pleasing, but, rather monotonous’, according to Coleridge—usually written by her talented heroines to enhance the effect of, as a rule, contemplative moments.

¹ Twice printed in 1794, again in 1795, 1800, 1803; in Mrs. Barbauld’s collection in 1810, and Scott’s in 1821. There were other editions before that of 1832, notably two printings in 1823. Even after 1860 editions appeared—in 1870, 1877, 1882, 1891, &c.; it was translated into French in 1808, and again reprinted in 1864, 1869, and 1874. For full details see *A Gothic Bibliography* by Montague Summers.

Horror has been endemic in literature ever since *Ædipus* or the Minotaur. There is abundance of it in Elizabethan drama; one thinks of *The Duchess of Malfi* or, for that matter, *Titus Andronicus*. It is not so evident in the later seventeenth century, but it began to creep back early in the eighteenth with 'graveyard poetry', while Gray, in *The Progress of Poets*, wrote lines which Coleridge quoted as a heading to his review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (*Critical Review*, Aug. 1794).

Thine too these golden keys, immortal Boy!
This can unlock the gates of Joy;
Of horror that, and thrilling Fears,
Or ope the sacred source of sympathetic Tears.

Sentiment also had been pervasive since the time of *Daphnis and Chloe*, while scenery had long been recognized as material for lyric poetry, and even of the early romances. But these elements acquired a particular point when absorbed into the novel (as distinguished from the older romance), since in the early masters of the novel, Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, devoted to realistic pictures of society, they had been, if not absent, of no great structural importance. Thus certain elements essential to an excited response were missing: but the ground was volcanically broken by the appearance of *The Castle of Otranto* at the end of 1764,¹ the year in which Ann Ward, later Radcliffe, was born. Into this pioneer work, the first 'Gothic' novel, Horace Walpole wove most of the main elements of this form of fiction, notably the supposedly Gothic castle, with its subterranean passages, the supernatural events, the lonely heroine and the elderly aristocratic villain, heartlessly domineering. Sentiment was brought out more strongly in Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), though this had had its precursor in *Tristram Shandy* some eleven years earlier, just as horror had been adumbrated in Smollett's *Ferdinand Count Fathom* of 1753. As to romantic scenery, this had been growing in popularity ever since the days of Thomson (whom Mrs. Radcliffe often quotes in epigraphs to her chapters, invariably spelling his name Thompson), who had hoped to convert into poetry

Whate'er *Lorrain* light-touch't with softening hue,
Or savage *Rosa* dash'd, or learned *Poussin* knew,

the picturesque becoming a fashionable craze culminating in Repton's treatise on landscape gardening in 1803.

¹ Claims have been made for Thomas Leland's *Longsword, Earl of Salisbury*, 1762. These may be pedantically justified, but the work made little impact.

But whatever gave rise to the fashion—causes and influences and borrowings can be pursued and argued about and doubtfully proved to the great content of the genealogically minded—a great spate of what should be called romances rather than novels flooded the flourishing circulating libraries of the latter part of the eighteenth century.¹ The most notable of these are the works of Clara Reeve, whose *The Champion of Virtue: A Gothic Story* was published in 1777, to be reissued in the next year as *The Old English Baron*; and the tales of Sophia and Harriet Lee. Most of the titles were soon forgotten, many disappearing completely. Saintsbury was sceptical as to the very existence of the works recommended by Isabella Thorpe when suggesting to Catherine Morland what she might read after *Udolpho*. Montague Summers, however, succeeded in unearthing the bulk of *Castle of Wolfenbach*, *Clermont*, *Mysterious Warnings*, *Necromancer of the Black Forest*, *Midnight Bell*, *Orphan of the Rhine*, and *Horrid Mysteries*. They were all certified to be 'horrid'; today they would be ranked as 'thrillers'. Mrs. Radcliffe began to add her quota in 1789 with *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*.

Ann Ward's father was, we vaguely learn, 'in trade', but his connexions seem to have been, rather, with the professional classes, since he was related to the well-known surgeon William Cheselden. Her mother was also connected with the medical profession, being niece to Dr. Samuel Jebb, and so cousin to the more famous Sir Richard Jebb, physician to King George III. Although the Wards do not seem to have moved in what we would call literary circles, early in life Ann met such figures as Mrs. Piozzi and Mrs. Montagu. In 1787 she married William Radcliffe, an Oxford graduate, at that time studying for the law, a profession he relinquished to become proprietor and editor of the *English Chronicle*, and later Rouge-Croix Poursuivant, and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Mrs. Radcliffe, then, began her literary career soon after her marriage, but it was a short one, ending with the publication of *The Italian* in 1797. She did, indeed, write another book, *Gaston de Blondville*, largely to commemorate the holiday jaunts she used to take with her husband, especially to St. Albans and Kenilworth, but she did not complete it to her satisfaction, and it was not published till 1826, three years after her death, which occurred on 27 February 1823. She never entered the literary life, preferring to live quietly at home, writing by her fireside, not enjoying very good health, suffering severely from

¹ For a full account see Tompkins, Varma, or Renwick, see Bibliography.

spasmodic asthma. Her life was so uneventful that one of her admirers, Christina Rossetti, who wanted to write her biography, had to abandon the idea for want of material.

Mrs. Radcliffe came in, as will have been seen, on the full tide of the sentimental and terror romance, being immediately popular for the simple reason that her writing was so much better than that of her immediate predecessors, especially perhaps on the 'picturesque' side, in regard to which De Quincey referred to her as 'the great enchantress of that generation' (*Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, Masson, iii, p. 282), and that Scott declared her to be 'the first poetic novelist' in English literature. The astonishing thing is that she wrote glamorous descriptions of the scenery in southern France and in Italy without ever having been there; and her trip abroad in 1794, which she recounted in *A Journey through Holland and the Western Frontier of Germany*, took her no further afield than the countries she named. But her descriptions, taken from other writers, and from pictures and prints, make up in splendour for what they lack in accuracy.

Neither can her history be classed as startlingly dependable, and the Italy of the time she writes about here, though radically disturbed, was not by any means the scene of little private wars that she describes. Her picture of Venice has more justification, since at the beginning of the sixteenth century it was enjoying a short period of independence. No doubt there were *banditti*, a type of confederation essential to her novels—her Sicily abounds with them—and which existed all over Europe. The coexistence of monks and nuns in the same establishment seems hardly orthodox: but these things we pass by in our very willing suspension of disbelief—for the moment.

This whole phase of romance writing is usually referred to as that of the 'horror' novel; but so far as Mrs. Radcliffe is concerned, it is doubtful how far the term is applicable. Terrors, yes; horror, no. Her contemporaries were fairly clear on the point. To give a central instance, Sergeant Talfourd in his (anonymous) introductory notice of *Gaston de Blondville* stated that 'The author of "The Monk" [Matthew Gregory Lewis] mingled a sickly voluptuousness with his terrors; and Maturin, full of "rich conceits", approached the borders of the forbidden in speculation, and the paradoxical in morals', Mrs. Radcliffe for him was impeccably innocent and delicate. Coleridge in his *Critical Review* notices (Aug. 1794: May 1798) makes the same distinction between horror and terror. It was one that Mrs. Radcliffe herself had

pondered. In a posthumous article in the *New Monthly Magazine* (vol. 7, 1826), called by its editor 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', though she herself called it 'Introduction to the romance or Phantasia which is about to follow—a dialogue between two travellers in Warwickshire', one of her travellers, Mr. W—, remarks:

They must be men of very cold imaginations with whom certainty is more terrible than surmise. Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one; and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreder evil?

Her distinction would seem to gain support from the *New English Dictionary*, where terror is defined as 'intense fear, fright, or dread', while horror is 'compounded of loathing and fear; shuddering with terror and *repugnance*' (italics mine). We may be terrified in a thunderstorm, we are horrified by:

The worms they crept in, the worms they crept out,
They sported his eyes and his temples about.
(‘Monk’ Lewis. ‘Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogene’)

And whereas the supernatural had figured largely in the earlier romances—it is the hub of *Otranto*—Mrs. Radcliffe refused to indulge in ‘superstition’ except as an aid to the ‘thrill’ it was the object of this school (if one can call it so) to induce. Mystery, yes: where did those strange noises come from? Who made that unaccountable and lovely music? What was behind the veil? But though Mrs. Radcliffe employed ‘the superstitious’, it had to be taken exactly in that sense, for with her ‘the supernatural’, somewhat to Coleridge’s regret, was always in the end explained, either as a perfectly natural occurrence, or its manifestations deliberately produced.

In much the same way she brought what might be called common sense to the sentimental side. Certainly in this book Emily St. Aubert is sentimental enough (she faints rather too often), but the self-control she shows in her relations with Valancourt indicate an acute appreciation of the issues involved. St. Aubert gave his daughter warning enough:

‘Above all, my dear Emily,’ he said, ‘do not indulge in the pride of fine feeling, the romantic error of amiable minds. Those, who really possess

sensibility, ought early to be taught, that it is a dangerous quality, which is continually extracting the excess of misery, or delight, from every surrounding circumstance.' (Chapter VII.)

A great deal later 'she was obliged to recollect all the arguments . . . and all the precepts, which she had received from her deceased father on the subject of self-command, to enable her to act, with prudence and dignity, on this the most severe occasion of her life' (Chapter XXXIX). Thus it was not quite fair of Jane Austen to say that:

Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them, perhaps, that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for.

(*Northanger Abbey*, chapter 25.)

In the main, however, it will be agreed that the description Henry Tilney gives Catherine Morland of what to expect when they reach his home (*Northanger Abbey*, chapter 20) is in many respects a good, if sportively satirical account, of the atmosphere and goings-on to be met with in the romantic terror novel. But it will be remembered that Mrs. Radcliffe herself referred to this kind of novel as 'romance or phantasie'. It is the latter that is the exciting element—the rousing of expectation, apprehension, even of dread, the tension, the mystery, the 'pleasing horror' which romance by itself, in the ordinary meaning of the word, could not provide.

It is, of course, easy enough to make fun of this kind of fiction, especially if it is not tautened by the sense of actuality that Mrs. Radcliffe infused into it. It is as well to apply to Gothic romance what Dryden said about the heroic drama: 'Tis unjust that they who have not the least notion of heroic writing, should therefore condemn the pleasure which others receive from it, because they cannot comprehend it.' And just as the heroic play used certain selected emotions for material, so did this type of romance, enhancing the emotion by the setting—one, two, or three centuries back—of the half-ruined medieval castle, supposedly Gothic, and scenery that was striking, and usually wild. Its characters were the lonely maiden, the middle-aged villain, the young, beneficent frustrator of the villain, and the loyal feudal servant.

Mrs. Radcliffe's development was steady. Though extremely popular, running into many editions, her brief *Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789) is a mere shadow of what is to come; *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), though too absurd and 'thrilling', generates and maintains a certain excitement in the reader. There we get the

half-ruined old castle with mysterious passages; ghosts that are not ghosts, and a convent. We get the wicked older men offset by the worthy younger heroes. The scenery has not come into its full glory, though there are some splendid effects, and some vast caverns. There is some verse, but no humour whatever; and the story, which is meant to be one of just retribution, has its moral heavily stated at the end. *The Romance of the Forest* of the next year shows a great advance. Again we have the half-ruined, not castle here, but medieval abbey-house; as before a parent-less heroine, sweet and sensitive; though severely educated in an unattractive convent, who can write admirable verse, mostly descriptive of nature; while Mrs. Radcliffe's power of describing romantic scenery, forest and mountain, with thunderstorms as huge cloudy symbols of extravagant romance, all gone into raptures over wherever possible, is greatly improved. The villain is a middle-aged marquis, a ruthless murderer, and a voluptuary. All the elements of *Udolpho* are there, except the common sense; even a little humour is introduced by means of the faithful servant insisting on his own way of telling what he has to tell.

It was Walpole who had invented the stubborn, talkative servant—he pretended he had got him from Shakespeare—and he was frequently to be met in the novels of the period. Mrs. Radcliffe took her servants, of both sexes, to a higher comic point. In *Udolpho* Annette is marvellously and entertainingly garrulous, and Emily's reactions to her irrepressible flow are delightful and humane. Ludovico is similarly effusive, so much so that Annette, apparently unaware of her own talkativeness, can chaff him about it, though it may be that what we think of as chaffing may be a naïf simplicity. Poor Ludovico, captured by pirates, blindfolded, watched, never allowed out unguarded, became, he said, so weary of life that he often wished to get out of it.

'Well, but they let you talk,' said Annette; 'they did not gag you after they had got you away from the chateau, so I don't see what reason there was to be so weary of living. . . .'

It is clear that Mrs. Radcliffe knew precisely what she was doing.

It is clear too that she had a well-organized notion of structure. Scott, in his 'Memoir of Mrs. Radcliffe', prefacing vol. x of *The Ballantyne Novelist Library*, says that in common with so many novelists, including himself, she suffered 'the torment of romance writers, those necessary evils, its concluding chapters'. Yet it is remarkable, especially in *Udolpho*, how she avoids huddling up

things to bring them to a happy conclusion. All seems to have been foreseen from the beginning, and during the progress of the romance we are given hints that will lead to a neat tying-up of all the elements, even the mysterious business of Laurentini. Nor must it be thought that Mrs. Radcliffe's work, this one especially, lacks the more solid ingredients of the novel. In Chapter XXXI, for instance, there is a splendid example of the struggle of wills, while at the end of Chapter XVI we get a deliciously light satirical account of social conventions in the matter of polite conversation. Nor is character drawing unably tackled, Montoni being well figured in the first paragraph of the same chapter; and with him may be contrasted the Count de Villefort, just as Du Pont may be compared with Valancourt. In short, there is a great deal of the novel proper mingled with the pure romance, or fantasy, in which category her tales are to be classed, especially her previous ones.

In the last of her books published in her lifetime, *The Italian* (1797), she broke away still further. This is often regarded as her best book, though not the one that is best liked, the typical standpoint being that of Coleridge, who, reviewing it in the *Critical Review* of June 1798, remarked that, though he did not prefer it to *Udolpho*, he 'found that there were some scenes that powerfully seize the imagination, and interest the passions'. This is a far sterner, more concentrated, work than her previous ones. There is the villain, the lonely young woman, some striking scenery, but the lyric element is absent from this grim story of the Inquisition, and there are no verses. The characters are far more dramatized, by no manner of means to be described as 'figures in a landscape', the most striking of whom is Schedoni, whose strength can be gathered from Lord Ernle's statement in *The Light Reading of our Ancestors*, that 'Byron modelled his scowl on that of Schedoni, and *Lara* and *The Giaour* owed much to the really powerful description of that monastic villain'.

Which may bring us to the subject of Mrs. Radcliffe's influence. It is difficult to assess how far she, rather than others, affected succeeding novelists, since she marks the apogee of the romantic Gothic novel. No doubt she furthered the impetus; but after her the form became infused with real horror, the gruesome, the macabre, the infection being brought by 'Monk' Lewis from the German *Schauer-Romantik* school, producing chambers of horror. This type of 'thrill' she had by her sheer nature avoided, as Talfourd noted. But she certainly affected poets other than Byron, both Percy Bysshe Shelley, in his monstrously bad horror novels

written in his early adolescence, and Mary Shelley in her *Frankenstein*. It would seem more than likely that Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes* was coloured by memories of *Udolpho* together with the awakening to richly adorned Gothic décor through his visit to Stansted. Indeed, writing to George and Georgiana Keats on 14 February 1819 he tells them:

In my next packet . . . I shall send you the Pot of Basil, St. Agnes Eve, and The Eve of St. Mark. You see what fine Mother Radcliffe names I have—it is not my fault—I do not search for them.

In Keats's poem 'there was the solid grandeur of the ancient Gothic castle, with shadowy galleries, moonlit casements, and gorgeous apartments hung with arras glowing with medieval pageantry. The feudal life with old retainers serving an arrogant master and his carousing friends pictured in both works.' Also the lonely maiden, and even the lute left conveniently lying about to assuage the heroine's melancholy moments.¹ But, one feels, it was, rather, an overall influence that she was responsible for, and she certainly helped to smooth the road for the Waverley Novels.

Her contemporary reputation is beyond question. All the critics of her day praised her, including Coleridge, as we have seen; and this favourable attention persisted through Laetitia Barbauld's Introduction to volume xliii of *The British Novelists* (1810). She received what in those days were great sums for her books; *Udolpho* brought her £500 and *The Italian*, £600. The reaction against that kind of romance not unnaturally sprang up early, as we have seen in, for example, Jane Austen (who received £10 for *Northanger Abbey*), to whom Peacock may be later added. But the general flood of praise continued till a new phase of novel-writing, based on immediate social experience, grew up in the thirties with Dickens, Surtees, and Thackeray, the last of whom, though he could so late as 1840 assume that everybody had read *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, could write in a *Roundabout Paper* in about 1860 (no. xxiv):

Valancourt, and who was he? cry the young people. Valancourt, my dears, was the hero of one of the most famous romances which ever was published in this country. The beauty and elegance of Valancourt made your young grandmamas' gentle hearts to beat with respectful sympathy. He and his glory have passed away.

¹ See Martha Hale Shackford: '*The Eve of St. Agnes and The Mysteries of Udolpho*'. *Proceedings of the Modern Languages Association*, vol. xxxvi, 1920.

Yet not altogether. The novel that enshrines him has been reprinted more than once since then, even in this century, which testifies to a certain core of eternal truth to the emotions which resides at the heart of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, fantastic as much of it may seem.

B. D.

NOTE ON THE TEXT



THE text is taken from that of the first edition of 1794. A few obvious misprints have been put right, but otherwise the text is left untouched, even allowing a few discrepancies as illustrating the change-over in spelling conventions, e.g. doze and dose, centinel and sentinel. Mrs. Radcliffe on one or two occasions varies the spelling of Tholouse (here always kept), but she never makes it Toulouse.

The modern reader may at first feel baffled by the over-punctuation, as it will seem to him, especially in the matter of commas (of which I have dared delete two or three for the sake of the sense). For Mrs. Radcliffe the word 'that' does not exist unsupported; it is always ', that'. But the punctuation does indicate the way in which the book should be read aloud, rather stressing the parentheses, such as ', at length,' which nowadays are passed over.

It might be noted that she always spells James Thomson as *Thompson*, and this has been corrected in the text.

THE
MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO,
A
ROMANCE;

INTERSPERSED WITH SOME PIECES OF POETRY.

BY
ANN RADCLIFFE,
AUTHOR OF THE ROMANCE OF THE FOREST, ETC.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

Fate sits on these dark battlements, and frowns,
And, as the portals open to receive me,
Her voice, in fullen echoes through the courts,
Tells of a nameless deed.

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LONDON:
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