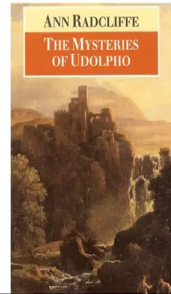


**The Popular Gothic Novel**  
**Professor Dr. Divya A**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**  
**Lecture 7**  
**Gothic Castle, Gothic Energy, Gothic Sensibility**

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## Week 2: The Mysteries of Udolpho



LECTURE 2B: GOTHIC CASTLE, GOTHIC ENERGY, GOTHIC  
SENSIBILITY

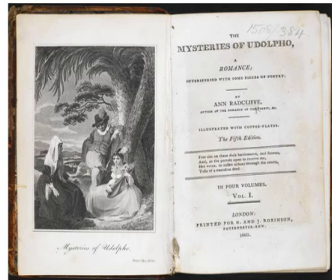


Hello, and welcome to this lecture on The Mysteries of Udolpho. In today's session, we will be continuing the discussion of the gothic castle and we will also be talking about gothic energy and gothic sensibility.

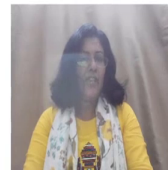
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## The Mysteries of Udolpho



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



The image on the slide is the title page to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. And on that title page, there is a poetic fragment. There are four lines of poetic words and let us see what those lines are about. “Fate sits on these dark battlements and frowns. And as the portals open to receive me, her voice, in sullen echoes through the courts, tells of a nameless deed.”

So it is very, very suggestive.. So it seems to kind of invite the reader and it is inviting not just the reader, but also the character. So it could be the voice of several people. It could be of Emily St. Aubert who seems to kind of look at these battlements, Udolpho’s battlements and imagine fate as a character sitting on top of it and frowning, it is not an invitation, it is not a pleasing invitation for the guest. It is frowning on the guest and the battlements are dark.

And we should also remember that the reference to battlements immediately suggests that the structure is of a castle, of a fortress. So fate sits on these dark battlements and frowns, and as the portals open to receive me and as the gates open to receive the guest, the visitor her voice, fates voice in sullen echoes, not in pleasing tones, in sullen, sulking, displeased echoes talks of a nameless deed. It is so horrifying, either it could be so

horrifying that it cannot be named or it is full of suggestive meaning. So the deed, the evil deed is kind of not very clear, it is obscure. So that deed is going to be told in these pages. So it is immediately very, very alluring. It is attracting, it is attracting the reader. So that is how this novel opens.

So, right at the beginning of this novel, the castle is poetically and eerily introduced. Eerily introduced, the castle in itself becomes an object which contains that story which is to be told and it is full of nameless horror, horror that cannot be named or horror which is not yet understood but will be introduced pretty soon.

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## The Mysteries of Udolpho

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•Setting: France and Italy in late 16<sup>th</sup> century

•Main Character: Emily St Aubert, a beautiful and moral young woman

•Villain: Montoni, Emily's aunt's husband

(Montoni is violent, cruel, locks up Emily and his wife in the castle)



I am reminding you of some of the key points about this novel. It is set in France and Italy in the late 16th century, which means it is not in the here and now for Radcliffe's contemporary readers. It is in the past. The main characters are Emily St. Aubert, a beautiful and moral young woman who is persecuted by this villain Montoni, who is husband of Emily's aunt under whose care Emily is living.

So, of course, if you remember the previous lectures, you would know that Montoni is violent, cruel and locks up both Emily and his wife, the aunt, in the castle and he wants the

property of his wife to be given to him. So those are the circumstances of this novel which we should remember.

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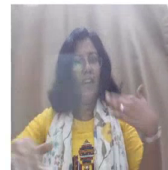
## Castle of Udolpho

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"two round towers, crowned by overhanging turrets, embattled, where, instead of banners, now waved long grass and wild plants, that had taken root among the mouldering stones, and which seemed to sigh, as the breeze rolled past, over the desolation around them"

*(The Mysteries of Udolpho)*



So how does the castle look like? It has two round towers and by the way, I am quoting from the novel. So this is how the castle is described to the reader. It has “two round towers crowned by overhanging turrets, embattled, where instead of banners now waved long grass and wild plants that had taken root among the mouldering stones, which seem to sigh as the breeze rolled past over the desolation around them.”

So, if you look at this description, you immediately get the sense of the castle, an ancient crumbling castle. It has those really scary structures of towers and turrets. But instead of banners which kind of advertise or tell the viewer that, it is still flourishing and powerful, now instead of that we have grass and wild plants. Wild plants, not any kind of creeper which is beautiful, it has wild plants, and that is symbolic. The fact that these structures are overtaken by unsavory figures who do not deserve to be ruling these castles, so those kinds of characters have become the lords of these places.

So that is kind of symbolically indicated through the reference to wild plants which had taken root among the mouldering stones. So stones which are kind of crumbling, which is not thriving, which is not polish. And in fact, the stone seem to sigh. The structures themselves seem to kind of bemoan the fact that they have come to this state of repair,

moral and spiritual dismay. It is kind of a dismay that you can sense from the stones about the fact that these structures have fallen into bad times because of these wild lords and they seem to sigh as the breeze roll past over the desolation around them. So it is desolate. The atmosphere is desolate.

So it is not just physical decay that you can sense, the physical decay of castles with its mouldering stones and all these wild plants overtaking lots of weeds. That is the idea we should have, the weeds kind of ruining the good vegetation. So that has happened in the case of the castle of Udolpho. And the structure itself seems to be moaning, bemoaning and moaning over the state into which this castle has fallen and there is desolation everywhere around it. It is not a landscape which is thriving, which is kind of enjoying the bounty of nature quite the opposite.

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## Gothic Energy of the Castle



'The interior of Udolpho is a maze of dimly lit corridors, murky recesses, and obscure stairways. This darkness only exacerbates Emily's condition, for Udolpho's gloom completely baffles perception. In such complete obscurity the imagination is cut loose from all governing images, moral or otherwise'.

Source: (Poovey, 1979, p. 320)

Image source: <http://jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol31.no1/duquette.html?>



Now, let us talk about the energy of the castle. What kind of emotions do the castle evoke in the mind of the people passing through it? And in fact, “the interior of Udolpho is a maze of dimly lit corridors, murky recesses, and obscure stairways. This darkness only exacerbates Emily's condition for Udolpho’s gloom completely baffles perception. In

such complete obscurity, the imagination is cut loose from all governing images moral or otherwise.”

You can sense from this kind of criticism by Mary Poovey, that the castle is creating a particular effect through its very presence on the mind of the characters. So, let us first look at the characteristics of the castle, the interior of the castle. It is a maze, it is labyrinthine, it is dimly lit, it is not well lit, it is in darkness, semi-darkness. And murky, again very strange, slightly scary, obscure, passageways are there and the stairways are also in obscurity. It is not well lit.

So, if the stairways are obscure, it causes extra dread and you climb up, you would like to get a sense of what is above you or when you climb down, you would like to get a sense of a visibility of the things below you and that is not the case with the interior of the castle of Udolpho.

So the dim light causes havoc in the minds of the person who is passing through it and this kind of darkness exacerbates, says Mary Poovey. It could have increases. It worsens Emily's condition who is already kind of slightly terrified about the castle. For Udolpho gloom the bleakness, the darkness is kind of beyond any kind of proper perception, any kind of visibility and in this kind of obscurity, the imagination of Emily runs right, its cut loose, she says.

The imagination is not governed, controlled, managed by any kind of reason or any kind of moral compass, any kind of moral guide. It seems to be cut off from it, because the mind is flooded by all kinds of images and you cannot completely call those images moral. So that seems to be the impact of the castle. That is the evil energy, if you want to put it that way, the dark energy, the negative energy of the castle which seems to kind of rake up, suppressed, repressed, feelings.

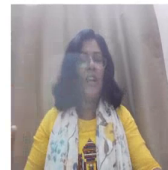
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## Gothic Energy of the Castle



'Aroused yet unguided, its innate susceptibility becomes an aggressive force, rushing to fill the void with its own projected images, creating, in effect, an external "reality" as idiosyncratic as the psyche itself. Just beyond the responsiveness of feeling, Radcliffe warns, there lurks this completely amoral, uncontrollable force: "the wild energy of passion, inflaming imagination, bearing down the barriers of reason and living in a world of its own"'

Source: (Poovey,1979, p.320)



Further, on the gothic energy of the castle. So what happens when you are inside such conditions in the castle of Udolpho. The castle in itself the passages, the nature of this dark interior space kind of becomes an aggressive force. So it seems to have a particular susceptibility that it provokes from the person who was passing through it, the guest who was kind of walking in the insides of the castle.

So "aroused it and guided, its innate susceptibility becomes an aggressive force rushing to fill the void with its own projected images, creating in effect an external reality as idiosyncratic as the psyche itself." It is a wonderful piece of criticism, because it is very suggestive in itself. Because if you look at these ideas, what Poovey is suggesting is that the very energy of the castle seems to create images, projected images, which become almost a reality.

So the space seems to act with a life of its own. The space becomes a beam of its own and it is very bizarre set of images. And that element of the bizarre that you see inside the interiors of the castle has a parallel in the interiors of the psyche. So you can see the kind of really potent force that the castle becomes in its orchestration of these strange images.



So just beyond the responsiveness of feeling, Radcliffe warns, there lurks this completely amoral, uncontrollable force, the wild energy of passion, inflaming imagination, bearing down the barriers of reason and living in a world of its own. So, Poovey argues, the critic Poovey argues that within the interiority of the castle, there is hidden this amoral force, which is uncontrollable and that force is this wild energy of passion and this passion, this human passion or you can call it the desire, is kind of arousing the imagination and it is kind of suppressing, bearing down, forcing down the barriers of reason, which will put in blockage in the mind of the person.

So those barriers are being oppressed by this passion that you can find inside the castle. And in this, passion has a life of its own, a space of its own, and that is the interiority of the castle of Udolpho.

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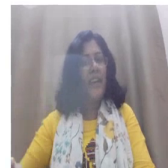
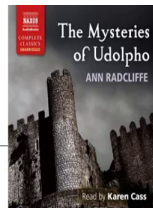
## Gothic Castle and Desire

'Like many women novelists of this period, Radcliffe is

using the spectral arena of the Gothic castle to dramatize the eruption of psychic material ordinarily controlled by the inhibitions of bourgeois society. It is revealing that Radcliffe explicitly links this "energy" with "passion," for Emily's response, like those of her numerous sisters, enacts what we now think of as the see-saw of liberated desire and repression.'

Source: (Poovey,1979, p. 321)

Image source: <https://naxosaudiobooks.com/mysteries-of-udolpho-the-unabridged/>



Now, we are quite clear at this point through the comments of the critic that the castle stands for a particular kind of feeling, a particular kind of emotion. Poovey calls it the passion and Radcliffe calls it the wild energy and let us call it by its name which is desire. And Poovey further goes on to argue that "like many women novelists of this period,

Radcliffe is using the spectral arena of the gothic castle to dramatize the eruption of psychic material ordinarily controlled by the inhibitions of bourgeois society.”

So, what she is trying to explain in this comment is that, Radcliffe is staging those energies, those passions which are controlled through inhibitions by the bourgeois society, by civilized society. So what is being controlled and repressed and ordered and managed is erupting on the gothic stage through the nature of the interiority of the castle. The physical interiority is kind of home to the psychological eruption of uncontrolled emotions.

So Poovey goes on to argue that it is revealing that Radcliffe explicitly links this energy with passion for Emily's response like those of her numerous sisters, enacts what we now think of as the see-saw of liberated desire and repression. So, she is very, very clear in this belief that Radcliffe is kind of referring to passion, the sexual passion through the word energy in the castle, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in the novel and within the castle. So it just this symbolic passion which is kind of coming to play through the representation of the spatial effects, the shadows and the darkness and the obscurity, the murky recesses are representations, psychic representations, spatial representations of passion.

And the reference to the numerous sisters here are, is not a reference to the sisters, the real sisters in the fiction of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, it refers to other gothic heroines, all of them seem to go through this kind of experience and which is a kind of a see-saw. This experience is see-saw, because desire becomes liberated in a way when they kind of go through such murky interior spaces and the repressed emotion seem to come to the surface, but then they kind of also, at some point, they suppress such kind of liberated desire.

So that see-saw of emotions, desire and repression, the tension between the two emotions come to full play in the setting of the gothic castle. It is fantastic comment, a fantastic argument which kind of lays bare the intentions of the author Radcliffe.

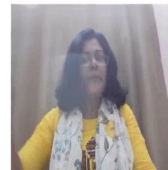
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## Gothic Castle and Desire



'Vacillating between curiosity and fear, Emily is bold enough to explore the castle's darkest recesses, but when she imagines a corpse "crimsoned with human blood," she retreats from confrontation by fainting. Again, she boldly lifts the forbidding veil of an ominous painting, but falls senseless to the floor before she can identify its contents. Within Udolpho, desire wrestles with dread, even though the heroine is too discreet to recognize the sexual component of her energy'.

(Poovey,1979,p. 321)



So, there is a kind of a vacillation between curiosity and fear. There is a vacillation between desire and repression. So that is kind of illustrated through several incidents in this novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. So, “vacillating, debating between curiosity and fear, Emily is bold enough to explore the castle’s darkest recesses.” So she is courageous to kind of explore the passages and this kind of critical commentary that we have seen from Mary Poovey tells us that this exploration is in itself an exploration of desire on the part of the heroine. So on a larger scale, we can see her as symbolically breaking away from the repressed regulations of the bourgeois society.

However, she is also constantly aware of her breakaway, a way of her stepping the bounds of the society. Therefore, she quickly comes back to what is expected of her and that kind of coming back within the bounds of society is expressed physically through her fainting fits. So, for example, when she imagines cops crimsoned with human blood, she retreats from confrontation by fainting. She does not actually go and take a good look at it properly, so she avoids that kind of meeting.

So when she does that, it becomes kind of a symbolic repression on her part. The fainting makes her come within the rules and regulations of society. If you apply the critical commentary of Mary Poovey, that is the kind of interpretation you can come to.

Again, once again, she tries breaking away. She “boldly lifts the forbidding veil of an ominous painting, but falls senseless to the floor before she can identify its contents.” So this is this grappling with curiosity and fear between passion and repression within, between the rules set by society and of the desire to break from them. So the fate, the fainting fate of Emily St. Aubert become symbolic of that caught between these two modes, these two emotions.

“Within Udolpho, desire wrestles with dread, even though the heroine is too discreet to recognize the sexual component of her energy.” So, we can obviously see that there is a kind of a grappling with, a fighting with fear and the fear is kind of an expression of sexuality, it is a fear of sexuality, but she does not realize that. Emily St. Aubert does not realize that what she is dreading is a sexual experience.

So there are layers. The key point to understand here is that, there are layers. So the fear, the gothic fear in such narratives is a fear of physical harm that is one meaning, the literal meaning, the meaning that you can take at face value, a fear of assault, sexual assault, bodily assault, so that is one fear. But symbolically when the heroine is curious as to the contents of gothic castle and tries to explore them, it becomes a sexual exploration and she does not kind of fully go through with her desire, with her curiosity. She stops and faints and becomes a resistance, repression on her part.

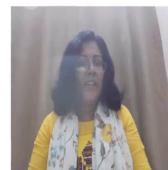
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## Castle of Udolpho



'Within Udolpho Emily is totally helpless: Montoni dictates her confinement and her virtual isolation. But the external tyranny is, on the surface at least, less oppressive than the terror generated by Emily's own undisciplined imagination. There is, as time will tell, nothing supernatural in Udolpho's winding corridors, but there are evil agents; and Emily's overly sensitive imagination, deprived of external guides, all too readily converts the unnatural into the supernatural. Thus Radcliffe's first critique of sensibility focuses squarely on the imagination itself'.

Source: Mary Shelley, 1870, p. 210



What we also need to understand is that in the castle of Udolpho Emily St. Aubert is totally helpless. She is completely vulnerable, because Montoni dictates her confinement and her isolation, so he is the lord of that castle. He is the lord of all the women who are in that place. He literally incarcerates his wife and Emily. But the external tyranny is on the surface at least less oppressive than the terror generated by Emily's own undisciplined imagination.

There is, as time will tell, nothing supernatural in Udolpho's winding corridors, but there are evil agents and Emily's overly sensitive imagination deprived of external guides also readily converts the unnatural into the supernatural. This Radcliffe's first critique of sensibility focuses squarely on the imagination itself.

So, lots of interesting points that are raised by this critic here. One is that, yes, of course, Montoni is terrible. He is a cruel villain and the women suffer under his hands that is external tyranny. The second point, she wants us to remember is that there is another kind of terror which is greater than the external tyranny which is the tyranny that Emily imagines when she is caught in the insides of the castle. So, that terror is brought upon

herself, brought upon Emily by herself because of her undisciplined imagination, uncontrolled imagination, the imagination running riot, as I said earlier.

So that is prompted by Emily's own sensibility. She has nobody to guide her. So everything dark and mysterious, everything unnatural, being imprisoned in a castle is unnatural. So everything unnatural has taken a supernatural overtone in Emily's wild imagination. And as Poovey points out, she quickly turns everything unnatural into the supernatural. So what is being critiqued here is not just Montoni's cruelty and villainy that is very, very transparent and everybody can easily condemn it.

There is also a subtle kind of criticism ongoing, which is a criticism of Emily's boundless imagination, which is prompted by her sensibility. So sensibility is also critiqued and sensibility is brought upon by imagination. So imagination is also being critiqued. So this is what this critic Poovey brings to the fore in her reading of the castle of Udolpho and it is a valid reading.

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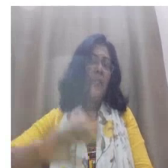
## Time of the Story

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'Udolpho is nominally set in 1584, 210 years prior to its publication, but, as is common in Gothic fiction, the use of the past is more atmospheric than historical'

Source: (Albright, 2005, 50)



Now, let us look at the concept of time of the story. We should remember that the story is set around 1584 in the 16th century, almost 210 years before the publication of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe. But we should also remember that in gothic fiction, the

past is almost atmospheric. It is an effect rather than a fact, historical fact. So there is a kind of effect sought by Radcliffe in her work which she believes that she can get by setting the story in this point of time. So time is crucial in a larger sense, in a broader sense, rather than in a specific sense. I will explain what that mean in a short while.

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## Time of the Story



'In fact, the discourses contained in the novel involve, not late sixteenth- century, but late eighteenth- century issues, such as sublimity, sensibility and taste, and the characters drink coffee and use dinner forks nearly a century before either practice was introduced to western Europe'

Source: (Abright, 2005, p.50)



This is what it is. The story contains discourses. Discourses refers to discussions of subjects, not pertaining to the 16th century in which the story is set, but the story's concerns are the concerns of late 18th century, the period to which this novel belongs in a literal sense, the period to which Radcliffe belongs. It's contemporary, because its concerns are also, its discourses are also contemporary such as sublimity, what does it mean for a landscape to be sublime. Sensibility, what is sensibility? How much sensibility should you possess? What is the right sensibility? And tastes, what is good moral artistic taste?

In fact, a lot of discussion in the novel pertains to the idea of taste and Aubert falls, Emily St. Aubert falls in love with Valancourt because she sees that he has similar taste and appreciating the landscape. So, all these are some of the concerns, central concerns of the

novel and the characters drink coffee, use dinner forks. In fact, nearly a century before either practice was introduced to Western Europe.

So, drinking coffee, dinner forks were not done in that period largely, but it happens in the story. So you can see, but you can see that the effect of the story being set in the 16th century is atmospheric. She wants to evoke the idea of ancient past, ancient time.

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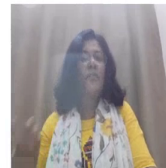
## Temporality and sublimity



To an eighteenth-century reader, however, these crumbling old castles and their dusty apartments ...encode discourses ...on temporality and sublimity.

Source: (Albright, 2005, p. 55)

Image source: <http://literaryrambler.blogspot.com/2014/03/book-review-secrets-of-udolpho-by-ann.html>

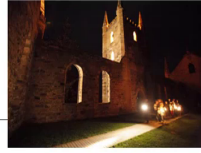


So we need to talk about temporality, the idea of time and sublimity. To an 18th century reader, these crumbling old castles and their dusty apartments, which we can see in the castle of Udolpho, in the castle of Montoni, these are used by Radcliffe to talk about a particular time in a larger, broader sense and she believes that such crumbling castles evoke ideas of the sublime, a particular sense of awe and dread are prompted by these images.

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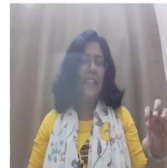
## Ancient Time



'The human life that is associated with the castle is also old: As Emily "gazed with awe upon the scene ... an ancient servant of the castle appeared"'.  
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Source: (Abright, 2009, p. 55)

Image source: <https://historiesofemtion.com/2015/10/28/some-stories-last-more-than-a-lifetime-emotions-temporality-and-the-ghost-tours-of-port-arthur-tasmania/>



So what we really need to understand is that ancient time is referenced through these castles. The human life that is associated with the castle is also old. That is what we should really kind of understand as Emily “gazed with awe upon the scene, an ancient servant to the castle appeared.” So you can see the quotation, the words in double quotation are from the text, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

So the servant is also ancient just as the castle is ancient. So what Radcliffe wants to impress upon us is that, that is the past that you are reading, that is the past that you are looking at and the castle embodies the past, its servants embody that. And you do not belong to that past, you are in the present and there is a chasm between the two, there is a tension between the two.

Thank you for watching. I will continue in the next session.