

**The Mysteries of Udolpho**  
**Professor Dr. Divya A. Dohss**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**

**Lecture 9**

**Gothic Domesticity and Patriarchy**

(Refer Slide Time: 0:30)

# Week 2: The Mysteries of Udolpho



LECTURE 2D: GOTHIC DOMESTICITY AND PATRIARCHY

LECTURE BY DR DIVYA A. DOHSS, IIT MADRAS

Image source: [https://bcc-cuny.digication.com/english\\_department\\_faculty\\_lecture\\_series/Urda](https://bcc-cuny.digication.com/english_department_faculty_lecture_series/Urda)



Hello and welcome to this video, lecture video on The Mysteries of Udolpho. In this session, I am going to talk about gothic domesticity and the nature of patriarchy that is found in gothic genre, especially in relation to The Mysteries of Udolpho.

(Refer Slide Time: 0:30)



The Gothic and the family unit

NPTEL

'the narrative is a powerful argument against the oppressiveness of the patriarchal family unit, providing a catalogue of the latter's sins against the individual and her understandable wish for personal growth and emotional fulfilment'.

Source: (Gin, 2008, p.107)

What is the structure and nature of the family unit and the gothic fiction in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. The narrative is a powerful argument against the oppressiveness of the patriarchal family unit. In other words, the unit, the family unit in this gothic novel is patriarchal in nature, and the patriarchy is represented by count Montoni, not by Emily's father, precisely. It is Count Montoni who really very potently represents the oppressive nature of patriarchy in this novel. And it provides a catalog of the latter's sins against the individual and her understandable wish for personal growth and emotional fulfilment.

So if you look at the character of Montoni, it can also be characterized as sinful, the sins against Emily and her aunt who is his wife. So it is a catalog. Count Montoni's character is a catalog of sins against the individual and the individual here in this critique is, of course Emily. And this individual Emily, desires for personal growth and fulfilment, emotional fulfilment and that is denied by Count Montoni.

In other words, the family unit represented by the family of Count Montoni is oppressive and that is responsible for the unhappiness caused in Emily St. Aubert, the heroine of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. So the family does not come off very well in this novel in relation to Count Montoni.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:29)

The House of Incarceration

"The family unit becomes a prison for the two women, with Montoni the equivalent of their jailer, stipulating their living conditions, deciding where they will reside and preventing them from having any meaningful connection with others outside his circle".

Source: (Shel, 2008, p.107)

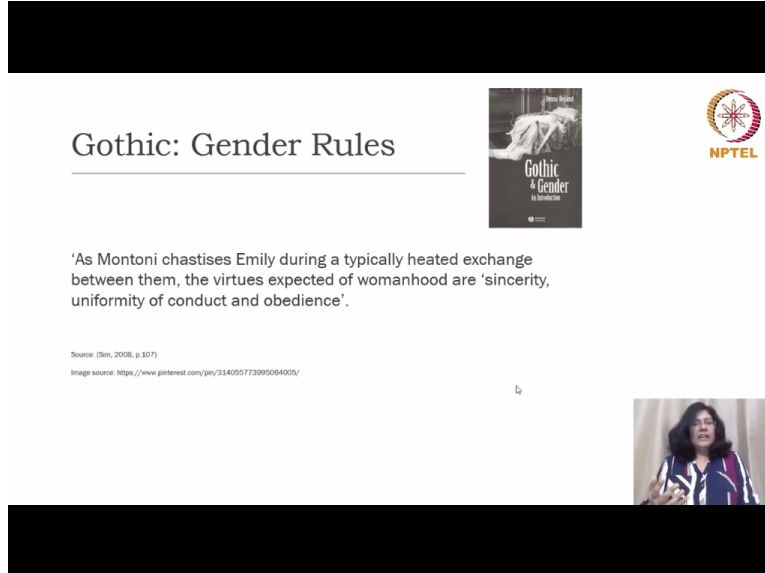
Image source: [https://www.getty.org/052400/431888402img-17#metasdata\\_photo\\_credit](https://www.getty.org/052400/431888402img-17#metasdata_photo_credit)

NPTEL

So the family unit or the family house, because the novel is kind of centred around that key evil castle of Udolpho, it becomes a prison. It becomes a prison for two women. With Montoni, the equivalent of their jailer and he decides, he stipulates their living conditions. He decides where they will reside and he prevents them from having any kind of meaningful connection with anybody outside his circle.

So you can very clearly see how this domestic setup, how this domesticity becomes a structure of imprisonment for Emily and her aunt, the wife of Count Montoni and the “father figure”, becomes the jailer of the daughter and his wife, the wife of Count Montoni.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:28)

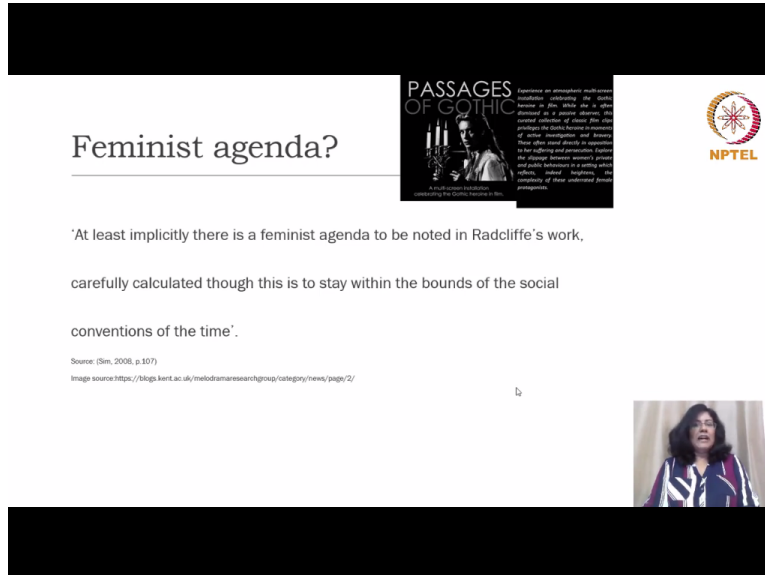


The slide features a black header bar at the top. Below it, the title "Gothic: Gender Rules" is centered in a serif font. To the right of the title is a small image of a book cover titled "Gothic & Gender" and the NPTEL logo. Below the title, a quote reads: "'As Montoni chastises Emily during a typically heated exchange between them, the virtues expected of womanhood are 'sincerity, uniformity of conduct and obedience'." Below the quote, there is a small source citation: "Source: (Sim, 2008, p.107)" and "Image source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/31405773985064005/>". In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair wearing a blue and white patterned shirt, speaking. A black footer bar is at the bottom of the slide.

You can also see the nature of gender regulations prevalent largely in the late 18th century through the narrative of this novel. So in the kind of confrontation between Count Montoni and Emily, we get to see that Emily is expected to behave in a particular way. So as Montoni chastises, scolds reprimands Emily during a heated conversation between them the virtues that are expected of Emily and of womanhood in general are sincerity, uniformity of conduct and obedience.

Obedience, most importantly, she is expected to obey the head of the household and the head of the household here is Count Montoni, in whose house, she is residing for protection, and that is an irony in itself, because the family that is supposed to kind of safeguard her, fails her in this set of circumstances.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:43)



The slide features a black header bar at the top. Below it, the title "Feminist agenda?" is centered in a white serif font. To the right of the title is a book cover for "PASSAGES OF GOTHIC" by Ann Radcliffe, which shows a woman in a dark, gothic setting. Further right is the NPTEL logo, a circular emblem with a star-like pattern and the text "NPTEL" below it. The main body of the slide contains text in a white serif font, followed by a small source citation and an image source link. At the bottom right, there is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a blue and white patterned top, speaking. The slide is framed by black bars at the top and bottom.

Feminist agenda?

At least implicitly there is a feminist agenda to be noted in Radcliffe's work, carefully calculated though this is to stay within the bounds of the social conventions of the time'.

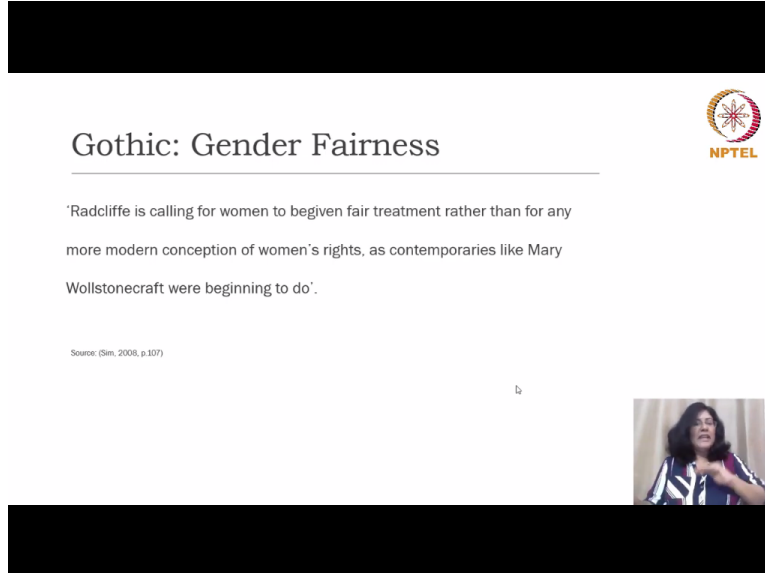
Source: (Sim, 2008, p 107)

Image source: <https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/melodiamresearchgroup/category/news/page/2/>

Is there a feminist agenda in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe. At least implicitly in a subtle manner, there is a kind of a feminist agenda, which can be noted in Radcliffe's work.

And this agenda does not make the heroine kind of step outside the conventions of society, but within the regulations, within the expected tradition. She somehow tries to assert her individuality, assert her personality and get a measure of freedom. So the heroine stays within the bounds of social conventions of the time. She does not break away from them, but she is able to attain self-governance to a certain extent.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:35)




**Gothic: Gender Fairness**

'Radcliffe is calling for women to be given fair treatment rather than for any more modern conception of women's rights, as contemporaries like Mary Wollstonecraft were beginning to do'.

Source: (Sim, 2008, p.107)


b



This novel seems to argue for fairness in terms of gender relation. So Radcliffe seems to be subtly, seems to be implicitly argued for a fair treatment. And that kind of demand for fairness in treatment to women resonates with the work of women such as women writers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, who also kind of wrote for women's rights, wrote demanding gender fairness at that point of time.

So we can see a kind of a resemblance between Mary Wollstonecraft and Radcliffe in certain respects in this regard. And in the gothic fiction, in the world of fiction, especially in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, we can see how the heroine's resistance to Count Montoni becomes a resistance to the oppression of patriarchy.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:39)




## The House: The Whole Existence

"Birgitta Berglund argues, paraphrasing Byron, that it is not a man's love but his house that proves "a woman's whole existence" in late eighteenth-century England: "Since women's lives were much more confined than men's, since women inhabited the houses that were owned and controlled by men, since for the middle-class women who wrote novels in the eighteenth century there was simply no existence outside the home, it is not surprising to find that women writers are more concerned than men with the image of the house" (p. 14).

Source: Birgitta Berglund, *Woman's Whole Existence: The House as an Image in the Novels of Ann Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen*, Lund: Lund University Press, 2003.

Source: <https://www.jhu.edu/article/100207/summary>



The house is an interesting structure in this novel as in many other gothic fiction. The house is important because the house seems to embody or contain the whole experience for women who are largely confined within households. So let us see what this critic has to say. Birgitta Berglund argues paraphrasing Byron, summing up Byron's words "that it is not a man's love, but his house that proves a woman's whole existence."

So the house is important, because it is in that house, the whole existence of womanhood is manifest. She is found within the house. And that gives her identity. And in the late 18th century, England, women's lives are much more confined than men's and women inhabited the houses that were owned and controlled by men.

So that property was owned by men largely. And the middle class women who wrote fiction during that period, wrote novels confined within domesticity. And therefore, you can see a lot of representation of the nature and structure of the domestic setup, the domestic edifice. So it is not surprising to find that women writers are more concerned than men with the image of the house. So house is an image, which is very powerful, which is very recurrent and that house has a lot of symbolic connotations depending on the nature of the emotions that are orchestrated that are at play in that particular House.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:25)

The House and The Master

'One of Radcliffe's main themes, says Berglund, is "that houses reflect their owners, and thus bear witness not only to their taste, but ... to their characters and dispositions as well"' (p. 32).

Source: Dagitta Berglund, Woman's Whole Existence: The House as an Image in the Novels of Ann Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen, Lund: Lund University Press, 1993.  
Source: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/400307/summary>  
Image source: [http://www3.efe.hu/courses/materials/16th%20Century%20Gothic\\_and\\_Beauty\\_chapter27.pdf](http://www3.efe.hu/courses/materials/16th%20Century%20Gothic_and_Beauty_chapter27.pdf)

The Gothic World

NPTEL

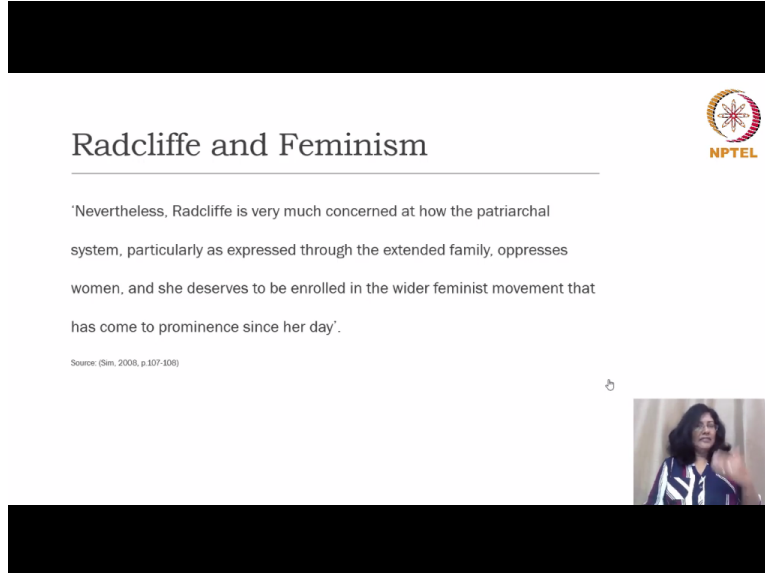
So it becomes very clear that the house, since it belongs to the master, somehow seems to kind of represent the master as well and his nature. So one of Radcliffe's main themes, according to the critic Berglund is that houses reflect the owners, that is the character of the owners and thus they witness, not only to their taste, the taste of the master, but to the characters and dispositions as well. So this idea that the house represents the character of the owner, the people who are living inside it is a very common trope. And we also see this kind of come to greater heights.

This kind of idea being represented more thoroughly, more fully later in Jane Austen, as well, especially in *Pride and Prejudice* where the house comes to kind of stand for Darcy himself, because the house is full of generosity to the people who are dependent or who are inhabitants of it. So there is a kind of a direct correlation between the character of the master and the nature of the household with regard to this kind of structure.

So the point that I am trying to indicate here is that, with *Pride and Prejudice*, it is a more positive connotation ultimately. But here, the connotations are negative. So, the castle of Udolpho becomes representative of Count Montoni and his evil. So the castle in itself kind of contains a lot of dark energy as well.




(Refer Slide Time: 10:06)



**Radcliffe and Feminism**

Nevertheless, Radcliffe is very much concerned at how the patriarchal system, particularly as expressed through the extended family, oppresses women, and she deserves to be enrolled in the wider feminist movement that has come to prominence since her day.

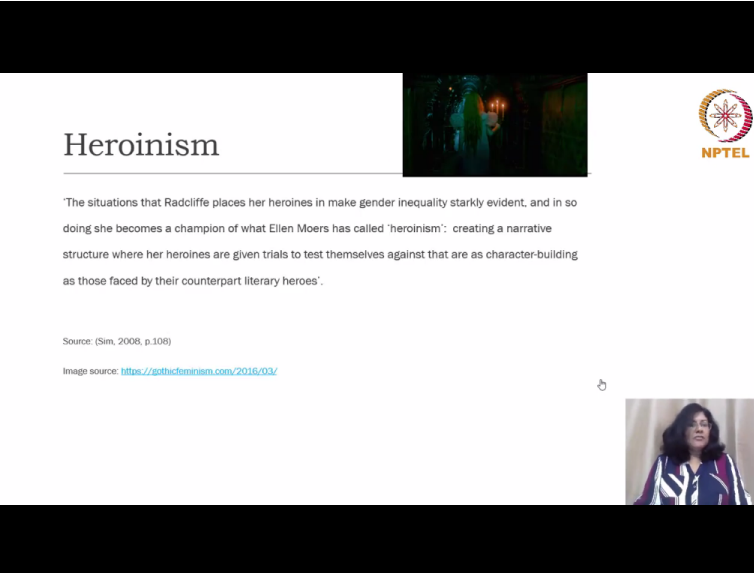
Source: (Sim, 2008, p.107-108)



What is the kind of feminism that can be deduced in Radcliffe's works? Radcliffe of course is very much concerned at how the patriarchal system, especially as represented in the extended family, which is the case in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* with Emily being forced to live with her aunt and her husband. How that kind of extended family unit becomes oppressive to women. And therefore by recording this fact, and by kind of fictionalizing this idea very, very powerfully and very, very powerfully Radcliffe, the writer kind of wins a place in the wider feminist movement that has come to prominence since her day.

So she can be labeled a feminist because of her very empathetic representation of the oppressive nature of patriarchy as represented in *Count Montoni* and his family structure, which is *Udolpho*, the castle of *Udolpho*.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:14)



The slide features a title 'Heroinism' in a serif font. Below the title is a quote: "The situations that Radcliffe places her heroines in make gender inequality starkly evident, and in so doing she becomes a champion of what Ellen Moers has called 'heroism': creating a narrative structure where her heroines are given trials to test themselves against that are as character-building as those faced by their counterpart literary heroes". The source is cited as (Sim, 2008, p.108) and the image source as <https://gothicfeminism.com/2016/03/>. There is a small video player showing a woman speaking, and a small inset image of a woman in a blue and white striped shirt.

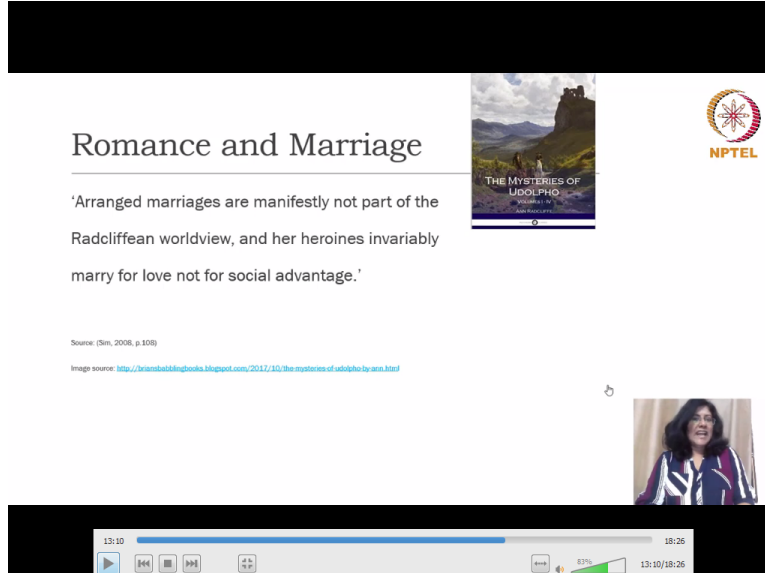
What is Heroism and how do we kind of approach this idea in relation to Radcliffe and her work. The situations that Radcliffe places her heroines in make gender inequality starkly evident. So the position of the heroines in gothic fiction tell us that it is a highly unfair to women.

And when she does it, she is making a statement. And when the heroines kind of resist the unfair state of play that is offered to them in such fiction, they are kind of accruing to themselves the title of heroism. So they become heroic in their own right in the work that they find themselves in.

So Radcliffe is creating a narrative structure where the heroines, like the heroes are given tests and trials of their morals, which become as character building, as it does for the heroes in male centred works of the 18th century and the 19th century.

So the counterpart, she does what the male counterpart does. So she becomes, she kind of wins the title heroism. So the point is that this is a heroine centric narrative. And this heroine centric narrative kind of is as legitimate as a hero centric novel. Therefore there is a kind of a subtle argument for gender equality in gothic fiction written by women.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:10)



The screenshot shows a video player interface. The main content area has a white background with the title "Romance and Marriage" in a serif font. Below the title is a quote: "'Arranged marriages are manifestly not part of the Radcliffean worldview, and her heroines invariably marry for love not for social advantage.'" To the right of the text is a book cover for "THE MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO" by Ann Radcliffe. In the top right corner is the NPTEL logo. At the bottom right is a small video feed of a woman with dark hair wearing a blue and white striped shirt. Below the main content is a video player control bar showing a progress bar at 13:10, a volume icon at 83%, and a timestamp of 13:10/18:26.

## Romance and Marriage

'Arranged marriages are manifestly not part of the Radcliffean worldview, and her heroines invariably marry for love not for social advantage.'

Source: (Sim, 2008, p.108)

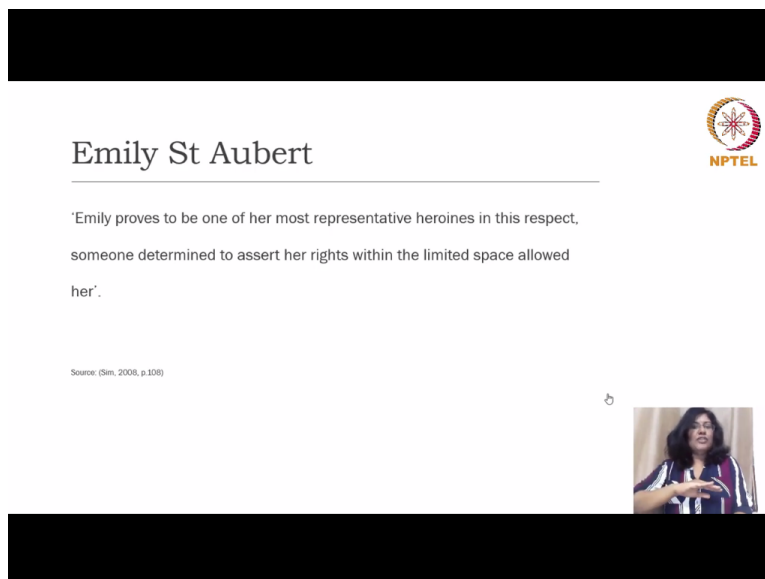
Image source: <http://www.babblingbooks.blogspot.com/2017/10/the-mysteries-of-udolpho-by-ann.html>

NPTEL

13:10 18:26 83% 13:10/18:26

In terms of romance and marriage, we understand that arranged marriages are not part of the Radcliffean worldview. So at the end of the tale, we see that Emily is not forced into an arranged marriage. She is not forcibly married off to anybody and she chooses her marital partner. So Emily, Radcliffe's heroines invariably married for love and not for social advantage of a property. So that is pretty clear in Radcliffe in romances.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:45)



The screenshot shows a video player interface. The main content area has a white background with the title "Emily St Aubert" in a serif font. Below the title is a quote: "'Emily proves to be one of her most representative heroines in this respect, someone determined to assert her rights within the limited space allowed her'." To the right of the text is the NPTEL logo. At the bottom right is a small video feed of the same woman as in the previous slide. Below the main content is a video player control bar showing a progress bar at 13:45, a volume icon at 83%, and a timestamp of 13:45/18:26.

## Emily St Aubert

'Emily proves to be one of her most representative heroines in this respect, someone determined to assert her rights within the limited space allowed her'.

Source: (Sim, 2008, p.108)

NPTEL

13:45 18:26 83% 13:45/18:26

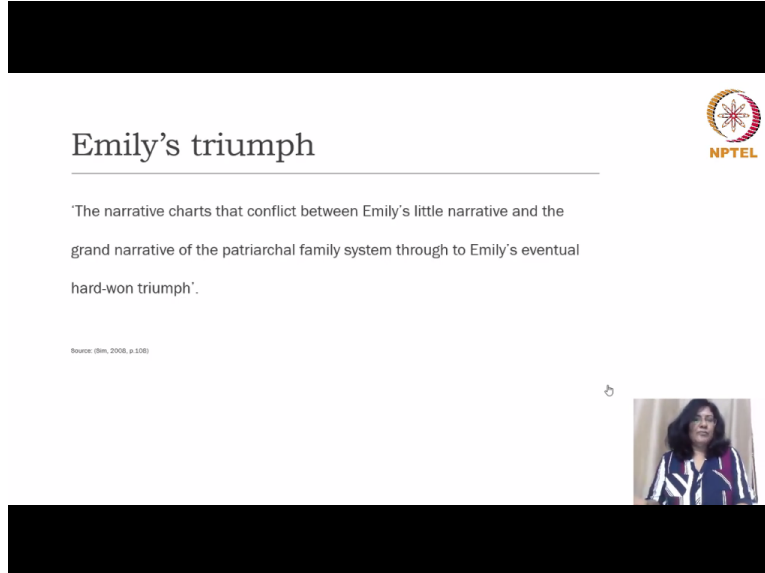
In terms of Emily St. Aubert in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, she is most representative in terms of Radcliffean heroines in this respect. And in fact, she is someone who is determined to assert her rights within the limited space, the limited domain that's been given to her. So in that regard, Emily kind of represents the spirited heroines of Radcliffe.

In fact, if you look at the nature of her resistance, even the claim that she has an existence outside of the family unit is in itself a subversive, that in itself becomes a powerful statement against the status quo of patriarchy to argue that she has individual needs and desires. And she has her own particular worldview as to what kind of satisfies her emotionally. All these kinds of faith, belief system is subversive to the patriarchal worldview.

To reach that stage of resistance, Emily has to develop considerable inner resources. So the novel becomes a kind of means, kind of a large landscape, a symbolic landscape, which she has to traverse to kind of gain those inner resources. And most often, she has to kind of build herself spiritually in a stronger manner in the teeth of opposition from her guardian.

So we got to remember that the aunt initially resisted her engagement to Valancourt. In fact, she was responsible for her in breaking up that engagement with Valancourt. So we need to remember that the guardians, the guardians of Emily, the aunt and count Montoni are extremely not beneficial to the happiness of Emily in this novel. So, the claim to individuality on the part of this young female becomes a resistance to the state of school.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:52)



The slide features a black header bar at the top. Below it, the title "Emily's triumph" is displayed in a serif font, followed by a horizontal line. The main text reads: "The narrative charts that conflict between Emily's little narrative and the grand narrative of the patriarchal family system through to Emily's eventual hard-won triumph". A small source note at the bottom left states "Source: (Ibsen, 2008, p.108)". In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair wearing a blue and white striped shirt. To the right of the main text, the NPTEL logo is visible, which consists of a circular emblem with a star-like pattern and the text "NPTEL" below it.

The Mysteries of Udolpho charts, maps, plots, the conflict between Emily's little narrative, the individual narrative, the young woman's narrative of fulfilment of emotional fulfilment and the grand narrative of patriarchal family system represented by Count Montoni. And we realized that in this conflict between the small system of Emily and the large patriarchal system, family system of Montoni, Emily eventually triumphs. She does get her hard won triumph at the end of the day.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:24)

## Female Bildungsroman



'The Mysteries of Udolpho traces the course of Emily's life from child-hood to young adulthood, and we observe her develop into a sensitive and eminently sensible young woman with the courage to resist the many pressures exerted on her by patriarchy'.

Source: (Sim, 2008, p.108)

Image source: <https://www.nature.com/articles/341599-017-0018-z>



We can also see this novel as a female Bildungsroman, this gothic fiction is a female Bildungsroman, that kind of charts the trajectory of Emily St. Aubert. And it is quite very clear in the novel too that this traces, the story traces the course of Emily's life from childhood to young adulthood, and we see her develop into a sensitive, very mindful and resourceful and sensible young woman who has the right measure of sentimentality. And she also possessed courage to resist the many pressures exerted on her by patriarchy, by the family unit, which is detrimental to her happiness and emotional fulfilment. And that family it is represented by Count Montoni, the evil Count.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:13)

## Emily St Aubert



'She faces a series of trials which strengthen her character and resolve, and by the novel's conclusion she is a notably self-possessed individual with a keen sense of moral virtue: a model of how one should conduct oneself socially in a world full of hypocrisy and corruption'.

Source: (Sim, 2008, p.108)

b



Emily does face series of trials, which strengthened her. So this novel becomes a process of strengthening Emily's character and resolve, and it makes her immensely resourceful. And at the end, by the novel's conclusion, she is very, very self-possessed. She is an individual with a keen moral virtue.

She knows what is right and wrong. She knows the right kind of sensibility. And she knows how to conduct oneself socially in a world, which is full of hypocrisy and corruption. And that is represented by Montoni once again, the hypocrisy, the way in which he kind of masks his emotions in order to get what he wants from a situation and the way in which he is corrupt and pushes everybody to give up their property so as to expand himself.

So in this corrupt world, Emily kind of manages to teach herself, she is basically self-taught. And this narrative trajectory gives her that space to grow into a sensible young woman.

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