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## BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Nature and the Female Gothic in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

Příroda a ženská gotika v románu *Záhady Udolfa* od Ann Radcliffe

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato práce zkoumá propojení přírody a ženské gotiky v románu *Záhady Udolfa* od Ann Radcliffe. Práce je rozdělena do dvou hlavních částí: teoretické a praktické.

Teoretická část se zaměřuje na postavení žen ve společnosti 18. století a klíčové aspekty gotické literatury, jako jsou její prostory, včetně přírody a architektury. Dále jsou rozebrány aspekty ženské gotiky, které zdůrazňují společenský útlak žen.

Praktická část zkoumá, jak příroda, v rámci žánru ženské gotiky, odráží životy a konflikty ženských postav, jako je útlak, posilování jejich postavení, a snahy nalézt vnitřní klid ve společnosti dominované muži. Zvláštní pozornost je věnována hlavní hrdince Emily, přičemž jsou zohledněny i další postavy, aby byly zdůrazněny různé aspekty a kontrasty v díle.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

*Záhady Udolfa*, Ann Radcliffe, gender, ženská gotika, příroda

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the connection between nature and the Female Gothic genre in Ann Radcliffe's novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. The thesis is divided into two main parts: theoretical and practical.

The theoretical part examines the position of women in 18th-century society and key aspects of Gothic literature, such as its spaces, including Gothic nature and architecture. The role of the Female Gothic themes, which emphasise the societal oppression of women, is also examined.

The practical part analyses how the natural world, in the Female Gothic framework, reflects the lives and struggles of the female characters, such as oppression, empowerment, and the search for emotional release within a male-dominated society. Special attention is given to the protagonist, Emily, while also considering other characters to emphasise different aspects and highlight contrasts in the narrative.

## **KEYWORDS**

*The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Ann Radcliffe, the Female Gothic, gender, nature

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## Introduction

The works of Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), a British novelist, significantly contributed to Gothic literature. Her portrayal of supernatural elements (which are rationally explained at the end of her novels), natural environments, and Gothic heroines has attracted readers since her time. Radcliffe lived more than 200 years ago when social norms were much stricter for women than today. Men dominated society, and women were considered inferior to them. Radcliffe's portrayal of these norms reflects the gendered struggles women faced and their agency within the Gothic narrative. Gothic works written by women about heroines navigating patriarchal society would later be classified as the Female Gothic.

The thesis analyses *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, one of Radcliffe's most admired works. It interested me because the protagonist, a young female named Emily, loves nature, which is vividly depicted throughout the novel. I am fond of nature as well, and just like Emily, I find comfort and solace when surrounded by it. Reading the novel made me want to better understand the meaning behind its frequent descriptions of nature.

This thesis aims to analyse how the portrayal of nature in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* reflects women's lives in a male-dominated society. With a focus on Gothic nature and the Female Gothic, the thesis explores how the natural world mirrors women's emotions and offers them comfort during their hardships.

The thesis's theoretical part outlines women's position in society in the 18th century. Its focus on marriage and education reveals the limited agency women had. It then presents Gothic literature and its key aspects, especially the symbolism of natural spaces and architecture, and explains why they are important for *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. In the following chapter, the Female Gothic genre is introduced, focusing mainly on the theory of Ellen Moers (1928-1979), an American scholar who coined the term. Her ideas are a crucial contribution to understanding the female struggles within the novel. She discusses the oppressed heroine and how her experience is shaped by the loss of her parents, especially her mother. She also examines women's activities, such as walking and traveling, and how these are portrayed within the Female Gothic genre. However, scholars like Ellen Ledoux and Ann Williams offer new perspectives on how women engage with the Gothic genre and how it reflects their agency and struggles beyond the scope of the Female Gothic.

The practical part analyses *The Mysteries of Udolpho* through the lens of the Female Gothic, with a particular focus on nature. Through key moments in the novel, it aims to analyse how the female struggles are closely connected to the depiction of nature. The analysis also focuses on other themes important for the female-nature relationship, such as how the relationship with nature defines other characters in the novel. It explores how nature reflects Emily's emotions (a central theme in Gothic literature) and how it offers her solace, a recurring motif in Radcliffe's works.

## **Theoretical part**

### **1 Position of women in society in the 18th century**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The 18th century was a period of significant social, political, and intellectual transformation. Yet, men and women were not socially equal. Many writers, primarily men, emphasised intellectual differences between the sexes, seeing women as intellectually inferior. As a result, men dictated social laws, and women were subjected to them. Their roles were expected to stay within the domestic sphere. As Bridget Hill argues in *Eighteenth-century Women* (1984), women's role was to listen rather than speak. A woman's social status was, therefore, dependent on men and marriage. Her family often determined her future early in childhood, prioritising securing a good marriage over her education.

In the following chapters, we will explore women's education and marriage, focusing on selected thinkers, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Blackstone, and Mary Wollstonecraft, whose opinions were very influential on the period and reflected in the fiction literature.

#### **1.2 Education**

Many 18th-century writers who discussed girls' education believed that women were intellectually inferior to men. This conviction shaped their views on female education. This belief was not held by men alone – many women of the time also accepted it, either because they truly believed it or due to societal expectations. Women were often described as having superficial minds, incapable of sustained focus or logical reasoning (Hill).

Another 18th-century scholar who discussed the position of women in society was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a French philosopher of Swiss origin. His thoughts were highly influential, mainly in the development of politics, society, and education. While many of his ideas were modern and influential in development of Romanticism, his views on women's education were conservative. In his work *Émile, Or on Education* (1762), he argues that women's primary purpose of education is to be useful to men, which severely limited their opportunities at that time.

In *Émile*, Rousseau presents his ideas on how children should be educated to become morally and intellectually independent individuals. The book is structured as a guide to the education of a fictional boy, Émile, describing his development and education from infancy to adulthood. Rousseau dedicates an entire chapter to women's education, beginning with a claim that a man should not be alone and, therefore, needs a companion, a woman. In Rousseau's theory, a woman's education should only be designed for the benefit of her husband: to make her a good companion, please him, and be useful to him. This is what she should be taught since her childhood. (259-263) Marriage is the only goal of a woman's education because "*on marriage depends the destiny of life*" (298). Throughout *Émile*, Rousseau frequently describes women as docile, weak, and passive.

Rousseau's ideas were both accepted and criticised. One of his critics was the English writer Mary Wollstonecraft. With many books defending women's rights in the late 18th century, she is now regarded as one of the earliest feminists. Wollstonecraft opposed Rousseau's view on female education in her most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). She criticises Rousseau and advocates for social and educational equality for women. Wollstonecraft uses reason to oppose his opinions and asks for equal rights for men and women. Like Rousseau, she emphasises the importance of education but rejects the idea that women should only be educated to please men. (Moers 151)

In *A Vindication of the Rights of a Woman*, Wollstonecraft argues that if women are not educated equally to men, knowledge will not progress. Therefore, education must be common to every person (12). She acknowledges that men have a natural advantage in physical strength but insists that intellectual abilities should be cultivated equally in both sexes (53). Wollstonecraft not only criticises Rousseau but also challenges the broader gender conventions of the time, particularly the expectation that women should preserve their beauty by remaining physically restrained and confined to a sedentary life while men enjoyed the fresh air outside (59). This women's movement will be discussed further in the thesis.

### 1.3 Marriage

Marriage in the 18th century was often influenced by financial considerations rather than personal choice. Marriage was seen as a way to secure wealth, property, and social status, and parents typically did not consider their daughters' consent. Arranged marriages, often contracted when a girl was very young, frequently led to unhappiness due to a lack of compatibility between the husband and wife. (Hill) Despite this, marriage was considered the most important achievement in a woman's life.

Within marriage, women were socially regarded as inferior. This status is reflected in William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769). Blackstone argues:

*"By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything."* (ch. 15)

This statement underscores women's subjection to their husbands as if this is every woman's life goal. Blackstone describes marriage as one person; conversely, there are clear inequalities between the couple. Women's disabilities are supposed to protect them. This law, therefore, means that a woman in marriage stops existing as an individual.

The notion of marriage in the 18th century illustrates patriarchal structures and is portrayed in Radcliffe's work, which will be discussed later.

## 2 Gothic literature

### 2.1 Introduction

The term Gothic was introduced by Horace Walpole in the second edition of his novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1765). In this edition, Walpole added the subtitle *A Gothic Story*, which led to the novel being widely recognised as the first Gothic novel. (Clery 21) Walpole was the first to combine a mysterious atmosphere, medieval architecture, and supernatural elements. This work set the foundation for Gothic fiction and influenced writers such as Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, and Mary Shelley. (Hughes 185)

In 1826, Ann Radcliffe further contributed to Gothic literary theory with her essay *On the Supernatural in Poetry*, where she distinguished between two types of fear in Gothic literature: terror and horror. Radcliffe argued that terror stimulates the mind by sparking imagination, using wild landscapes, shadowy figures, and mysterious sounds to create fear. In contrast, horror is more immediate and paralyzing, directly exposing the reader to fear. She believed that terror was more effective in Gothic fiction because it deeply engages the mind and emotions. This distinction was one of the first critical insights into Gothic literature and has influenced many writers.

Although both Walpole and Radcliffe were critically acclaimed in the 18th century, Gothic literature was often seen as challenging the dominant Enlightenment ideals of order, reason, and uniformity. The genre's emphasis on supernatural elements, fear, and chaos opposed the Enlightenment's rational ideas, leading to early rejection of the genre. Gothic fiction frequently explored social transgression and radicalism themes, questioning conventional values such as virtue, propriety, and domestic order. As a result, it was often considered low-quality writing. (Botting 14) However, a closer analysis reveals that Gothic writers, including Ann Radcliffe, used Gothic elements to convey a deeper meaning. Radcliffe's use of these elements played a crucial role in shaping the narrative that brought attention to societal norms.

In the following chapters, we will explore how women's position in society was reflected in Gothic literature, particularly through Radcliffe's works. Furthermore, we will examine the key Gothic elements, focusing on nature, the sublime, Gothic architecture, and

the uncanny. These elements will provide insight into how Gothic fiction uses emotion and atmosphere to engage the readers and convey a deeper meaning, and they will also be applied to Radcliffe's works to demonstrate how she uses them.

## **2.2 Position of women in society reflected in Gothic literature**

Gothic literature reflects, among other things, the societal constraints placed upon women during the 18th century – such as restricted education, patriarchal marriage structures, and the general subordination of women. As women struggled for agency in society, Gothic narratives exaggerated these struggles by placing female characters in terrifying, often restrictive spaces. This genre offered a powerful outlet for expressing the experiences of women in a patriarchal society. As Juliann Fleenor explains:

*"...whenever women reach back to find a literary form to convey protest, or rage, or terror, or even humor, they find the Gothic. It seems that the Gothic form allows us – as readers and writers – to express conflict for which patriarchy has had no name." (28)*

Writers like Ann Radcliffe created stories about distressed heroines typically subjected to the control of oppressive male figures. Radcliffe's position in literary history – as the highest-paid novelist of her generation and one of the most celebrated women writers of the 18th century – deserves to be understood within the framework of feminist literary criticism. However, critics often focus more on figures like Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, or Charlotte Brontë. (Norton x) Still, Radcliffe's work questions power, gender, and autonomy. Her works can be read as critiques of patriarchal authority, challenging the idea of the docile 18th-century woman (Ty qt. in Norton xi).

The portrayal of entrapped female protagonists in Gothic settings would later be classified as the Female Gothic. Although this concept will be explored in more depth later in the thesis, it is important to acknowledge that authors like Ann Radcliffe used Gothic elements – such as isolated castles and sublime landscapes – not only to create suspense but also to emphasise women's struggles for agency in a patriarchal society, and mirror their emotional states.

## 2.3 Nature as symbolic space

Nature plays a crucial role in Gothic literature, functioning not only as a setting but as an active force that shapes the atmosphere, evokes emotions – from fear to freedom, refuge, or solace, and reflects the characters' psychological states.

Gothic fiction flourished during the Romantic period when nature held great significance. However, its portrayal varied across genres and writers. Unlike some Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth, who saw nature as a source of beauty and harmony, Gothic writers often depicted it as wild, mysterious, and even alienating. (Hughes and Smith 2) Its vastness and unpredictability strengthened feelings of isolation, danger, or the supernatural. Gothic settings, such as dark forests, enormous mountains, and eerie landscapes, heightened the genre's unsettling atmosphere.

Ann Radcliffe also uses nature to convey unsettling feelings. However, unlike some Gothic portrayals, her depiction of nature is not solely wild and mysterious. She also presents it from a picturesque perspective and highlights its idyllic qualities. Nature becomes a space of freedom and personal reflection, offering emotional comfort in moments of distress. As Lisa Kröger (who offers an ecological reading of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*) notes, Radcliffe often places nature in contrast to the city, which she presents as corrupt or artificial. Characters can reconnect with themselves and find a sense of peace only when immersed in the natural world. (Kröger 18-20) This relationship with nature, as a source of solace and a reflection of moral and emotional states, will be further explored in the following chapters.

### 2.3.1 The natural sublime

A central concept linked to Gothic nature is the sublime, an aesthetic theory that invokes grandeur, awe, and fear (Hughes 145). The sublime is found particularly in vast and overwhelming landscapes that contrast with the harmony of the picturesque. For instance, craggy, mountainous landscapes – especially the Alps – evoke terror and wonder in the viewer, offering a sense of infinity and immense power beyond human comprehension (Botting 2-3).

Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Inquiry Into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) identifies two key elements of the sublime: vastness and infinity. Immense landscapes evoke awe and terror, exerting a powerful effect on the human mind. Rough, uneven terrains, such as jagged mountains or towering cliffs, are more sublime than smooth, polished surfaces because they convey wildness and power. Similarly, seemingly endless landscapes – like the horizon or the vast sea – create a sense of overwhelming scale beyond human comprehension. This vastness provokes both wonder and fear, a sensation Burke calls "delightful horror" – the simultaneous experience of terror and fascination (97-101). The sublime also reminds characters of their smallness and fragility in contrast to nature's immensity (Hughes 145).

Another aspect of the sublime is its mirroring of the human mind. The vastness of nature's sublime landscapes reflects the depths of human emotion. (Botting 27) For instance, elements like a raging storm or a vast sea reflect feelings of fear, anxiety, or longing that the characters experience. This connection between nature and human perception was crucial in shifting how the sublime was viewed. Earlier thinkers, such as Thomas Burnet in *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1684), described mountain ranges as "*scars upon the Earth, inflicted by the Great Flood as divine punishment.*" (Garrard 63) Gothic literature transformed these landscapes into objects of admiration. Their irregularity and grandeur were no longer seen as deformities but as sources of pleasure, terror, and wonder, reflecting the psychological complexity of Gothic characters. (Botting 25)

Ann Radcliffe applies Burke's ideas on the sublime, particularly through her contrast between the beautiful and the sublime in nature. Pastoral, harmonious environments – valleys, farmlands, and pastures – offer solace and symbolise peace, while sublime landscapes – mountains, crags, and precipices – evoke both terror and awe through their vastness. In this way, nature in Radcliffe's works serves a dual role: it reflects the characters' emotional states and offers an escape from the oppressive structures surrounding them. Because the primary threat in her works comes not from the wilderness but from men, her heroines seek refuge in nature, which she portrays as pure and protective, shielding them from the corruption and greed of civilisation. In this way, nature is a source of fear and a sanctuary that restores the heroine's hope. (Heathcoat 204-205) This perspective aligns with

Radcliffe's latitudinarian religious views, emphasising nature as proof of divine order. Like the Latitudinarians, Radcliffe presents the natural world as fascinating and a space for contemplation and spiritual connection. (Mayhew 8)

The concept of the sublime also sometimes extends to architecture and even to extraordinary human qualities such as heroism or resilience (Hughes 145). However, this study will focus especially on the natural sublime, as it is central to Radcliffe's depiction of nature as both a source of fear and awe.

The following chapter will explore another space crucial for Gothic literature: architecture. Its oppressive structures often contrast with the natural environment and play a crucial role in the narratives.

## 2.4 The symbolism of architecture

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, nature often represents awe and freedom, while Gothic architecture evokes the opposite: fear and repression.

Gothic stories are often set within castles, abbeys, or churches – buildings that evoke a sense of barbarity, superstition, and fear. Often seen as relics of the past, these structures symbolise a return to old fears, political instability, and societal changes. Within these buildings, the past haunts the present, with the architecture serving as a symbol of unresolved anxieties, including gender roles, family dynamics, and industrialisation (Botting 2). The mysterious atmosphere of these places enhances the unsettling mood crucial to the genre.

Over the past twenty years, feminist critics have read Gothic buildings as symbols of how women were imprisoned in their homes (Ledoux, *Defiant Damsels* 1). These structures symbolise their oppression under male dominance and reflect the daily struggles of women longing for freedom. However, Gothic architecture also presents a paradox: while it entraps Radcliffe's heroines, it also enables them to move and explore freely – something society does not always allow (Moers 128-129). This contrast is especially evident in Gothic works written by women, where the setting often reflects the heroine's inner struggles. In

Radcliffe's novels, architecture shows how heroines are both repressed and liberated, revealing women's complex relationship with control and freedom.

#### **2.4.1 The uncanny**

The idea of Gothic architecture as both safe and imprisoning ties to its uncanny nature. The uncanny arises when something familiar is displaced or subtly altered, creating an unsettling feeling. As Sigmund Freud explains in his essay *The Uncanny* (1919), the uncanny can emerge when familiar spaces become distorted or unsettling. The uncanny nature is found even in the most familiar places. (Hughes 151)

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily's home – the castle – embodies this effect through features like hidden passageways, labyrinthine corridors, and concealed chambers, which disrupt the sense of security that a home should provide. This instability of her home reflects the heroine's emotional state and underlines her limited control over her environment. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, this tension between internal and external spaces is amplified by the symbolic contrast between nature and architecture – a theme explored in the next section.

### **2.5 The contrast of spaces**

The contrast between expansive, liberating nature and oppressive architecture is a theme in Radcliffe's works. The heroine's brief moments of freedom in nature stand in contrast to the interiors of the Gothic castle, where her safety is constantly threatened. This dynamic heightens the heroine's internal conflict – she longs for the liberation and serenity nature offers but is forced to stay within the oppressive architectural spaces.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for instance, the castle of Udolpho is both a place of fear and imprisonment, while the surrounding landscapes – whether sublime or picturesque – provide moments of freedom and refuge.

## 3 The Female Gothic

### 3.1 Introduction

The Gothic genre, traditionally focusing on mysterious and supernatural events, often explores themes of power, control, and fear. However, Gothic works written by women often carry specific elements that differentiate them from male-written Gothic literature. The Female Gothic focuses on women's experiences within the dark Gothic plots (Moers 90-91). Ellen Moers, in her work *Literary Women*, where she defines the Female Gothic genre, emphasises women's inner worlds, their struggles for freedom, and the oppressive structures that control them. She shows how women, often trapped or isolated in domestic spaces, navigate their fears and desires while they challenge the patriarchal forces that have power over them.

This image of women as trapped or ghost-like figures resonates with what Mary R. Beard terms the "haunting idea" in *Woman as a Force in History* (1945) – the belief that women have historically been represented as passive beings without agency, buried within male-dominated structures. Beard rejects this view and argues that women deserve recognition for their contributions beyond childbirth. She insists that women have played equally significant roles in shaping history (87). This metaphor of the woman as a buried or spectral figure is also important to the Female Gothic. Similarly, Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith, in *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (2009), compare men's domestic spaces, such as their houses and beds, to graves, where women are metaphorically buried alive. (Wallace and Smith 28-29)

In this way, the Female Gothic becomes not only a genre of fear but a reaction to the historical and social oppression of women.

In the following text, we will further explore the themes of the Female Gothic through key authors like Ann Radcliffe and critical studies such as Ellen Moers' theories.

## 3.2 Aspects of the Female Gothic

Ellen Moers was the first scholar to focus on Gothic works written by women. In her work *Literary Women* (1976), she introduced the term Female Gothic, defining it as Gothic literature written by women. These works include elements of fear and the supernatural – typical for the Gothic genre – but are explored from a female perspective, often emphasising women's oppression, fear, and isolation (Moers 90). Moers discusses writers such as Jane Austen, Ann Radcliffe, and Mary Shelley, identifying Radcliffe as a pivotal figure in shaping a new direction for Gothic literature.

According to Ellen Moers, Radcliffe's protagonists embody a dual role. As Moers states, "*Ann Radcliffe firmly set the Gothic in one of the ways it would go ever after: a novel in which the central figure is a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine*" (91). This duality, where the heroine is both victimised and resilient, is central to the Female Gothic tradition. Moers explains key aspects of the Female Gothic in Radcliffe's work, emphasising the oppressed heroine, her mother's absence, and the metaphor of the heroine's movement through indoor and outdoor spaces – concepts that will be explored further.

### 3.2.1 The absence of the mother

The absence of the heroine's mother is one of the most important elements in the Female Gothic. Moers argues that the loss of the maternal figure often heightens the heroine's vulnerability, leaving her exposed to external dangers, particularly from patriarchal authority figures. Without maternal guidance and protection, the heroine must navigate a world where male figures can either protect or dominate her, which reinforces themes of female autonomy and entrapment. The mother's absence is a narrative device that drives the heroine into a struggle for independence, forcing her to fight threats posed by male dominance. (Moers 134-135) As Moers observes, Radcliffe's works exemplify this pattern, where the heroine is often without a maternal figure and must fight against patriarchal structures.

### 3.2.2 Women's oppression

In her work *The Female Gothic* (1983), Juliann Fleenor further emphasises that the Gothic genre serves as a protest against patriarchal rules, highlighting women's entrapment (13). However, these entrapments also become a source of strength for female characters. The heroine often appears in oppressive situations in many Gothic narratives, including *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. For instance, the heroine is often imprisoned in a castle. While facing daily anxieties and fears, she finds that this situation and setting ultimately strengthen her. Through her struggles, the heroine confronts her fears and weaknesses, which helps her develop a sense of control and the strength to resist the forces that oppress her (Ledoux, *Was there ever a 'Female Gothic'?* 331).

### 3.2.3 The metaphor of walking

Moers also explores the theme of women walking alone outdoors (and engaging in outdoor activities in general), symbolising female independence. Before a girl becomes a woman, activities such as walking, running, climbing, battling, and tumbling are considered normal. However, for adult women in the 18th century, such behaviors were seen as unusual, as women were expected to be more restrained. Moers uses the word "tomboy" – the young girl who rejects traditional femininity by engaging in more active, "boyish" behaviour. Although the term is sometimes used mockingly, Moers sees the placement of the tomboy in women's literature as something to be proud of. This behavior not only symbolises female independence but also represents a form of rebellion against societal norms. (Moers 130)

The theme of women walking outdoors appears not only in Radcliffe's works but also in those of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Jane Austen, and Charlotte Brontë, marking it as a feminist act (Moers 130). Moers also argues that just as Mary Wollstonecraft emphasises the thinking woman as an expression of female selfhood, Radcliffe employs the figure of the traveling woman to convey a similar idea (126).

### 3.2.4 Traveling heroism

Female Gothic heroines are constantly on the move, whether through landscapes or corridors of the Gothic castle. Moers distinguishes between two types of travel: outdoor and indoor.

Since women in the 18th century had limited travel opportunities, Radcliffe provided them with the chance to explore the world. Outdoor travel in her works is typically forced upon the heroines (often kidnapped by villains), reinforcing their fears. Unlike traditional male travel narratives, where men explore the world freely, Radcliffe's heroines travel under external pressures, highlighting the constraints imposed on women. This movement, however, allows them to discover the world in a socially acceptable way while remaining within societal norms. Thus, travel in Radcliffe's books is linked to fear rather than freedom. (Moers 126-128)

Indoor travel, however, was a more acceptable form of movement for a woman in the 18th century. With its hidden chambers and haunted passageways, the Gothic castle became a space where heroines could move independently and freely without a chaperone and stay respectable. However, this movement through the eerie settings challenged the heroine's mental and physical strength, facing external threats and internal fears. (Moers 126-129)

## 3.3 New approaches to the Female Gothic

Ellen Moers laid the foundation for feminist criticism in Gothic literature with her definition of the Female Gothic. Since its introduction, the concept has been widely discussed and expanded, but some scholars have questioned its scope. In *Defiant Damsels* (2011) and *Was There Ever a 'Female Gothic'?* (2017), Ellen Ledoux critiques the focus on Ann Radcliffe and argues that the understanding of the Female Gothic has been overly simplified. She questions why critics continue to concentrate on female victimisation, even though Radcliffe's texts present a more complex portrayal of women. According to her, the genre is not only about victimised heroines but also about women's engagement with the Gothic in more complex ways (Ledoux, *Was There Ever a 'Female Gothic'?* 333).

This perspective highlights that the Female Gothic is not a fixed category but evolves with shifting historical and critical interpretations. While Moers' theory provides an essential foundation for understanding the intersection of gender and Gothic, Ledoux urges a more complex exploration of the Female Gothic.

In her work *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995), Anne Williams challenges Ellen Moers' definition of Gothic as simply about fear. Williams argues that Moers' view oversimplifies the complexity of Gothic texts, especially those written by women (Williams 11). According to her, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the heroine's journey is shaped by nature's duality as beautiful and sublime. This portrayal of female-nature connection reflects the struggles of women in Gothic literature, highlighting both their strength and the societal expectations that constrain them. Williams also emphasises nature's parental role in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, when the heroine's emotions and understanding of the world are shaped by her experiences in nature through its beauty and fear. (Williams 84) Williams' point of view, therefore, encourages us to interpret Radcliffe's work as an interaction between beauty, fear, and gender.

These perspectives suggest that the Gothic, particularly in works by women, should not be seen as a fixed category but as a dynamic concept. While Moers' theory provides a foundation for the Female Gothic, these newer perspectives invite us to explore the Female Gothic in more complex ways. Ledoux's critique of the focus on women's victimisation and Williams' challenge of reducing Gothic to mere fear and emphasising nature open new perspectives for analysing how women engage with the Gothic genre and how it reflects their agency and struggles.

## **Practical part**

### **4 Nature and the Female Gothic in *The Mysteries of Udolpho***

#### **4.1 Introduction**

*The Mysteries of Udolpho*, written by Ann Radcliffe, is a representative example of Gothic literature, blending mystery and supernatural elements and exploring female agency. Set in late 16th-century France and Italy, the novel follows the journey of Emily St. Aubert, a young woman whose life is shaped by personal loss, oppressive circumstances, and self-discovery. After the death of her mother, Emily begins a journey to Italy with her father, Monsieur St. Aubert. However, the journey is affected by his declining health. Following his death, Emily falls under the control of her guardian, Madame Cherone, who later marries the cruel Signor Montoni. Montoni disapproves of Emily's relationship with Valancourt, a young and caring man, and instead attempts to force her into marriage with Count Morano, who appears to be wealthy. Under Montoni's authority, Emily is taken to his remote castle of Udolpho in the Italian Apennines, where she faces his manipulation.

Throughout the novel, nature plays a crucial role in shaping Emily's emotional journey. It serves as a force that influences the heroine's experiences. Radcliffe's portrayal of the natural world mirrors Emily's psychological state, shifting between calmness and menace. Nature also serves as a sanctuary, reinforcing Emily's sense of freedom and confinement within the walls of Udolpho.

The practical part of this thesis will examine how Radcliffe's depiction of nature highlights Emily's life in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* through key moments in the novel. Chapter 5.2 will explore these themes through the lens of the Female Gothic theory, reflecting women's oppression and resilience. Chapter 5.3 will further investigate nature's significance for the female experience, and it will also consider other characters to illustrate how nature reflects their emotional journeys. Motifs such as nature as a solace, as a spiritual force, and the ways a character's connection with nature defines them will be used, drawing on Lisa Kröger insights, though adapted to a feminist focus.

## 4.2 Aspects of the Female Gothic and natural elements in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

In the following subchapters, we will examine how Radcliffe's portrayal of nature interacts with key aspects of the Female Gothic as defined in the theoretical part. Particular attention will be given to Emily as the oppressed heroine. Themes such as the absence of parents, women's oppression, walking, and traveling heroism will be explored through their connection to nature. Emily's relationship with the natural world will be contrasted with other novel characters to emphasise how nature functions.

### 4.2.1 Absence of parents in relation to nature

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the absence of Emily's parents plays a crucial role in shaping her perception of the challenges she faces later. Emily grew up as an only child, surrounded by the love of her parents and the beauty of nature. She and her parents often wandered through the landscapes of their home, La Vallée. Her father is portrayed as the ideal man – wise, kind, and morally strong. He teaches Emily to value pastoral simplicity, which makes her value a peaceful life in harmony with nature. Through him, she learns to see nature not only as something beautiful but also as a source of moral and emotional strength.

Emily's mother dies early in the novel, leaving her in the care of her father. However, his health soon deteriorates, and before his passing, he gives Emily a life lesson, warning her against excessive sensibility:

*"...in our passage through this world, painful circumstances occur more frequently than pleasing ones, and since our sense of evil is, I fear, more acute than our sense of good, we become the victims of our feelings unless we can in some degree command them."* (Radcliffe 110)

He also advises her that true happiness is not found in fleeting emotions but in a stable mind. Even after his death, his teachings remain with Emily as she faces the dangers imposed by Madame Montoni and Signor Montoni. She tries not to give in to excessive sensibility during difficult times, just as her father advised. Instead, she finds strength and

solace in the tranquillity and innocence of the natural world. Her deep connection to nature becomes an important part of her identity, providing her a sense of stability and inner peace. Without her father's physical presence, nature takes on a parental role, offering her guidance, comfort, and a silent yet stable form of protection. Just as a parent provides security, the natural world – particularly the landscapes of La Vallée – acts as Emily's source of stability, reminding her of the values instilled by her father. When she gazes upon the mountains, forests, or sunsets, it is as though nature itself continues his legacy.

Emily continues to seek comfort in nature as if it still carries the presence of her father. Her observations of nature often remind her of him and bring her feelings of melancholy. Such a situation occurs when Emily stays in Venice at Signor Montoni's property with Madame Montoni and their friends. Feeling uncomfortable in their company and worried about her future, as she is being forced to marry Count Morano, for whom she has no feelings. In this moment of helplessness, she seeks comfort in watching the sun sink below the horizon. Just as she once found joy in nature with her father, she now turns to it in solitude, searching for its peace and familiarity:

*"She remembered her many happy evenings, when with St. Aubert she had observed the shades of twilight steal over a scene as beautiful as this, from the gardens of La Vallée, and a tear fell to the memory of her father."* (Radcliffe 266-267)

Without her parents' protection, Emily is more vulnerable to external threats. However, nature becomes her refuge, offering her strength in moments of hardship. In this way, it takes on a parental role as it guides and protects her when she needs it the most.

#### **4.2.2 Women's oppression reflected in nature and the Gothic castle**

In the novel, female oppression is deeply reflected in the physical settings, especially in the castle of Udolpho. The castle represents the patriarchal power embodied by the novel's villain, Montoni. He is a powerful and cruel man who isolates Emily and Madame Montoni in Udolpho, using fear and authority to take their freedom. His control over them flourishes inside its walls. When Emily first sees Udolpho, she is overwhelmed by its presence:

*"Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni's; for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the gothic greatness of its features, and*

*its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object.*" (Radcliffe 288-289)

The impressive structure is not only a symbol of Montoni's power but also a place of Emily's confinement. Udolpho is dark and decaying, which mirrors Montoni's cruelty and the oppression Emily experiences inside later in the novel. The castle's "mouldering walls of dark grey stone" contrast the the beauty of nature, which represents hope and freedom.

This unsettling feeling inside Udolpho, Emily's home, connects to the uncanny, where home becomes a source of fear and distress. Home, traditionally associated with female care, is twisted into a space of distress, embodied by the Gothic castle. This way, the novel suggests that the home, under male control, can become a tool of dominance.

In contrast, nature functions as a space untouched by Montoni's control, temporarily allowing Emily moments of peace and agency. Whether in the landscapes she observes from her window or in her solitary walks, she regains some inner strength. Nature does not confine her – instead, it offers her a sense of belonging. Through this contrast between the castle and natural environments, the novel shows that despite oppression, there are ways for women to resist the forces that seek to control them.

#### **4.2.3 Walking and the natural landscapes**

Emily's love for walking in nature is expressed early in the novel:

*"It was one of Emily's earliest pleasures to ramble among the scenes of nature; nor was it in the soft and glowing landscape that she most delighted; she loved more the wild wood-walks, that skirted the mountain; and still more the mountain's stupendous recesses, where the silence and grandeur of solitude impressed a sacred awe upon her heart, and lifted her thoughts to the God of Heaven and Earth."* (Radcliffe 19)

This passage emphasises Emily's preference for solitude in nature and the wild, remote landscapes, where she finds emotional comfort and spiritual upliftment. However, Emily's solitary walks are met with disapproval from her aunt, Madame Cheron. While staying with her in France, Emily walks alone in the gardens. Upon her return, her aunt questions her: *"Whither have you been rambling so early?"* and adds, *"I don't approve of these solitary*

walks" (Radcliffe 158-159). This reprimand highlights the societal expectation that women should not walk alone and shows the tension between Emily's desire for independence and the restrictions placed on her by society. These rules feel particularly stifling to Emily, as they conflict with her need for autonomy.

In this context, Emily's walk becomes an act of reclaiming her agency. Walking alone in nature offers her an escape from the limits of her new life under her aunt's guardianship. It serves as a personal rebellion and a way to break free from the constraints placed on women. This early disapproval foreshadows how walking will continue to represent both personal reflection and defiance in the novel. Through her walks, Emily finds space to process her emotions and assert independence.

Walking is also a means for her to spend time in nature:

*"She was particularly fond of walking in the woods, that hung on a promontory, overlooking the sea. Their luxuriant shade was soothing to her pensive mind, and, in the partial views, which they afforded of the Mediterranean, with its winding shores and passing sails, tranquil beauty was united with grandeur."* (Radcliffe 672-673)

Here, the beauty of the landscape serves as a source of solace for Emily. On her walks outside, she admires the views, which positively influence her emotional state. Her preference for the luxuriant shade of the woods, winding shores, and passing sails highlights her deep appreciation for beauty. This makes the act of walking a complex process – a process of emotional relief and aesthetic admiration.

#### **4.2.4 Traveling heroism and the natural landscapes**

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, travel plays an important role in Emily's journey. However, unlike traditional male travel narratives, her movement is often dictated by external forces rather than personal desire. Radcliffe's heroines engage in two types of travel: outdoor and indoor. Emily's journeys across landscapes are closely tied to her emotions, while her movement through enclosed spaces, such as the castle of Udolpho, tests her mental resilience.

Throughout the novel, Emily's travels are shaped by fear rather than adventure. She journeys from France to Italy with her ill father, then back to La Vallée after his death. Under Montoni's power, she is taken to Venice and later to Udolpho, where she becomes imprisoned. Each of these journeys is accompanied by vivid descriptions of the landscape, which mirror Emily's emotional state – switching from awe to anxiety. The landscapes along the way reflect Emily's inner turmoil and reinforce the sense that her travels are not motivated by exploration but by outside forces beyond her control.

Emily's forced journey from Venice to Udolpho marks a crucial moment where Montoni's will entirely dictates her movement. As they depart, Emily is filled with unease, contemplating Montoni's true intentions:

*"It appeared, upon calmer consideration, that Montoni was removing her to his secluded castle, because he could there, with more probability of success, attempt to terrify her into obedience; or, that, should its gloomy and sequestered scenes fail of this effect, her forced marriage with the Count could there be solemnized with the secrecy, which was necessary to the honour of Montoni."* (Radcliffe 285)

Emily's journey from Venice, a place of relative openness, to the isolated Udolpho emphasises how travel does not bring her freedom but instead leads to greater confinement. Her unease deepens as the landscape changes – first through the waters of the Venetian lagoon, then across the Italian countryside, and finally into the dark, towering Apennines. The transition from lively surroundings to wild, untamed nature mirrors her growing sense of entrapment.

As the travelers ascend into the Apennines, Emily observes the landscapes:

*"The gloom of these shades, their solitary silence, except when the breeze swept over their summits, the tremendous precipices of the mountains, that came partially to the eye, each assisted to raise the solemnity of Emily's feelings into awe."* (Radcliffe 285)

The vast and sublime landscape enhances Emily's growing terror, as the towering cliffs and shadowy forests seem to enclose her. Rather than bringing her freedom, the landscape symbolises her imprisonment. The sublime in this context amplifies Emily's terror.

Once trapped at Udolpho, Emily's longing for freedom intensifies:

*"Emily threw her veil over her and went down to walk upon the ramparts, the only walk, indeed, which was open to her, though she often wished that she might be permitted to ramble among the woods below, and still more, that she might sometimes explore the sublime scenes of the surrounding country. However, as Montoni would not suffer her to pass the gates of the castle, she tried to be contented with the romantic views she beheld from the walls." (Radcliffe 361)*

This passage highlights how Montoni controls Emily's movements. While she longs to explore the vast landscapes beyond the castle, she is forced to remain within its walls. The contrast between the open, sublime scenery and her physical confinement highlights the limitations imposed on women in the 18th century, where even their freedom of movement was dictated by male authority. For Emily, travel is not a journey of freedom but a struggle against imprisonment.

A contrast to outdoor travel is Emily's movement within the castle itself. As she wanders through Udolpho's passageways and chambers, she encounters unsettling noises and strange figures. Her fascination with the black veil illustrates this mixture of terror and curiosity:

*"But a terror of this nature, as it occupies and expands the mind, and elevates it to high expectation, is purely sublime, and leads us, by a kind of fascination, to seek even the object, from which we appear to shrink." (Radcliffe 314)*

Unlike outdoor travel, which exposes Emily to external dangers, indoor travel is more psychological – it forces her to confront the unknown phenomena within the castle. At the same time, her movement within Udolpho separates her from nature. In contrast to the open landscapes that reflect her emotions, the castle's dark corridors and chambers sever her connection to the natural world and reinforce her isolation. Even when she gazes from the ramparts at the vast scenery outside, the landscape remains unreachable, emphasising nature as a symbol of lost freedom.

While her movement within the castle allows for some independence, it remains confined within an enclosed and controlled space. This contrast between indoor and outdoor

travel highlights that, whether inside or outside, Emily's journey is defined by restriction rather than liberation.

Ultimately, travel in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* tests Emily's courage but does not grant her autonomy. Instead, it reinforces the theme of restricted freedom, where a heroine's journey becomes a struggle for survival within the confines of a patriarchal world.

### **4.3 Nature as a reflection of female experience**

In continuation of the themes explored in the previous subchapters, where nature's role in shaping the experiences of the oppressed heroine was discussed, this section will further examine how nature functions as a reflection of female emotional and spiritual experiences in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

We will explore how the characters' connection with nature defines their personalities, especially Emily's, whose feelings of fear, sadness, and hope are reflected in the natural world around her. This chapter will also highlight how nature not only reflects these emotions but also provides solace and spiritual meaning, serving as a source of comfort and reflection for her. By analysing how nature interacts with the characters' emotional journeys, we will expand on nature's importance in the female experience within the novel.

#### **4.3.1 Connection with nature as a definition of character**

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, nature is an important indicator of a character's moral and emotional depth. Those who cultivate a deep appreciation for nature are portrayed as virtuous and sensitive, while those who neglect or exploit it often embody corruption or cruelty.

Emily's upbringing in harmony with nature under the guidance of her father shapes her into an ideal heroine. From an early age, her deep connection to the natural world nurtures her sensitivity, imagination, and resilience. Her intelligence, virtue, and emotional depth are tied to her appreciation of the natural world. The peaceful landscape of La Vallée reflects the goodness of its inhabitants and emphasises the idea that harmony with nature signifies moral virtue. St. Aubert, who once led a more worldly life before choosing the simplicity of nature, embodies this philosophy. His outlook on life influences Emily's

education, teaching her to love poetry and see nature not only as a source of beauty but also as a moral guide. Through her bond with nature, Emily becomes more thoughtful and finds comfort in the landscape, even during difficult times. Even after her father's death, nature becomes a lasting symbol of their bond, offering Emily a sense of protection and spiritual connection.

Valancourt, the man Emily truly loves, is initially depicted as a character in harmony with nature, emphasising his kind and sensitive nature. Early in the novel, St. Aubert observes that *"This young man has never been at Paris,"* noting Valancourt's untainted character, which is free from the corrupting influence of city life (Radcliffe 56). Valancourt's innocence and idealism are evident in his enthusiasm for nature and his sincere and genuine emotions. St. Aubert values Valancourt's ability to appreciate the beauty of nature without being tainted by worldly distractions (Radcliffe 62). His natural, open connection with the world reflects this innocence, and his character mirrors the natural beauty around him. His just feelings make him an ideal companion for Emily, who shares his respect for the natural world. Their common love for nature shapes their innocence.

However, after moving to Paris, Valancourt becomes absorbed in the city's excess and begins to lose touch with the natural world that once defined him. The shift marks a moral decline as he becomes distracted by the excitement of Parisian life. Valancourt, in his new environment, is drawn into the luxury of Parisian society, where he experiences a loss of balance. The passage *"He fled into solitude, and there the image of Emily met him and revived the pangs of love and despair"* (Radcliffe 368) illustrates how his break from nature leads him to seek escape in other things. As he focuses more on the material world, he loses the peace that nature once gave him.

Montoni, in contrast, has no relationship with nature. His world of power, control, and ambition is untouched by nature's sensitivity and virtue. While Emily's home, La Vallée, is peaceful and beautiful, Montoni's castle, Udolpho, is located far away from civilisation, reinforcing Montoni's isolation. His disregard for nature underscores his emotional and moral corruption, as his character thrives in an environment of isolation and dominance rather than harmony and introspection.

### 4.3.2 Nature as a reflection of emotions

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, nature reflects Emily's emotional state, especially her internal conflicts, isolation, and the oppressive situations she faces.

At the novel's beginning, Emily's life at La Vallée is mirrored by the surrounding natural beauty, reflecting her contentment and emotional balance. The idyllic landscape, characterised by gentle hills, a peaceful river, and olive plantations, serves as a calm space, allowing Emily to feel safe and loved by her parents. Here, nature reflects Emily's happiness and emotional stability.

However, when Emily arrives at Udolpho, the landscape changes dramatically. The peaceful surroundings of La Vallée are replaced by rugged mountains, dark forests, and frequent storms at Udolpho. This oppressive nature reflects Emily's growing anxiety and fear. The wild scenery symbolises her loss of control as she becomes trapped in Montoni's power. As Radcliffe writes, "*The extent and darkness of these tall woods awakened terrific images in her mind, and she almost expected to see banditti start up from under the trees*" (Radcliffe 289). Here, nature not only mirrors Emily's emotions but also contributes to them. The dark forests intensify her fear and isolation.

Storms are frequent in the novel, often aligning with Emily's fears and anxieties. For example, the storm during her aunt's death symbolises the chaos Emily feels as she faces grief and uncertainty. As the storm rages outside, Emily's anxieties about the future mirror the violent weather, heightening her sense of entrapment (Radcliffe 470).

After her aunt dies, Emily keeps watch over her body during a violent storm. The storm outside intensifies her fear and grief. She "*compelled herself to watch during the night, by the body of her deceased aunt,*" while the "*tremendous storm [...] shook the air*" (Radcliffe 470). The storm's violence reflects her emotional distress and intensifies her sense of isolation and helplessness. Later, when Emily leaves Udolpho and stays with the Villefort family in France, her melancholy deepens. She longs for Valancourt, whom she had rejected because of his seemingly bad reputation, and only feels isolated. While walking through a forest with a view of the Mediterranean, the peaceful landscape intensifies her sadness. The "luxuriant shade" of the trees and the "winding shores" of the sea highlight her emotional

distance instead of offering comfort. She encounters a rustic seat in the woods and a ruined watchtower, symbolising her search for peace. The contrast between the peaceful environment and her inner grief illustrates how nature not only mirrors but contributes to Emily's emotions, especially her solitude and melancholy. (Radcliffe 672-673)

### 4.3.3 Nature as a source of solace

*"Emily lost, for a moment, her sorrows in the immensity of nature."* (Radcliffe 287)

One of nature's most important roles in Emily's life is offering her solace. It often serves as a refuge from her distress, bringing her comfort – whether through her solitary walks, nature's connection to her home, the inspiration it gives her to write poetry, or reflections on its beauty and spiritual importance.

Unlike the dark, enclosed spaces of Udolpho, where she feels trapped, the natural world represents freedom and emotional resilience. This way, nature is portrayed as a healing force for Emily. Outside, on her walks, she appreciates its sublime beauty. The fresh air and vast landscapes provide her with a sense of peace, giving her inner strength and a temporary escape from her struggles. In moments of distress, nature provides her with a sense of stability – something constant in contrast to the chaos under Montoni's power.

Because she cannot leave Udolpho, Emily tries to calm her mind at least by observing the landscapes from her window: *"...and, determined to enjoy this respite from actual misfortune, tried to dismiss thought, took her instruments for drawing, and placed herself at a window, to select into a landscape some features of the scenery without"* (Radcliffe 348). Here, Emily tries to escape her anxious thoughts by turning to drawing, a peaceful and creative activity. She looks out the window and hopes to focus on the beauty of nature instead of her problems. Even when viewed from a distance, nature becomes a source of strength and a reminder of freedom.

Much of Emily's emotional relief comes from thoughts of her home, La Vallée, and its picturesque beauty, which she associates with safety and peace. Remembering La Vallée, with its familiar landscapes and the memories of her family, allows her to distance herself

from Udolpho and regain a sense of security, at least to some extent, while trapped under Montoni's power. However, these thoughts also bring her melancholy, reminding her of everything she has lost. Her longing for home and the past contributes to the novel's Gothic atmosphere, emphasising themes of isolation and loss. Emily also connects nature with Valancourt and often thinks of him when observing it, which deepens her emotional connection to the landscape.

Beyond being a source of solace, nature also manifests God's presence in Emily's life. When surrounded by nature, she experiences a deep spiritual connection:

*"Thus she endeavoured to amuse her fancy, and was not unsuccessful. The breezy freshness of the morning, too, revived her. She raised her thoughts in prayer, which she felt always most disposed to do, when viewing the sublimity of nature, and her mind recovered its strength."* (Radcliffe 307)

Emily finds comfort in nature partly because she associates it with divine protection. In the novel, nature is a source of beauty, emotional refuge, and spiritual sanctuary. Through its vastness, Emily senses the presence of something greater than herself. This idea is portrayed earlier in the novel through her father, St. Aubert, who also perceives nature as a spiritual force:

*"All nature seemed to have awakened from death into life; the spirit of St. Aubert was renovated. His heart was full; he wept, and his thoughts ascended to the Great Creator."* (Radcliffe 56)

Here, nature has a transcendental quality – it becomes a space where both Emily and her father feel closer to God.

During her journey to Italy, Emily is anxious about the upcoming marriage with Count Morano. As she departs from Venice with Montoni, Emily looks upon the Adriatic Sea. The view of the vast sea offers a sense of peace, even though she feels unsure about her future. The fading view of Venice and its palaces reflects her sense of separation from the life she once knew. However, Emily finds comfort in the changing landscape. As she sits alone near the stern of the vessel, looking toward the distant shores, her thoughts shift to ancient Greece:

*"...as her eyes glanced over the Adriatic, towards the opposite shores, which were, however, far beyond the reach of sight, she thought of Greece, and, a thousand classical remembrances stealing to her mind, she experienced that pensive luxury which is felt on viewing the scenes of ancient story..."* (Radcliffe 263-264)

The "pensive luxury" refers to the bittersweet feeling Emily experiences as she thinks about the ancient civilisations of Greece, which once used to be luxurious but now exist only in stories. This mixture of beauty and sadness mirrors her situation as she longs for her past life. In this moment, nature not only calms her fear about the future but also awakens her creativity. She writes a poem about Troy, illustrating how nature enables her to express her emotions.

When Montoni sends Emily to Tuscany, she stays in a cottage away from Udolpho, where she finds comfort in the open, peaceful landscape. The surroundings are warm and open, in contrast with Udolpho's oppressive atmosphere, which allows her to feel calmer and more hopeful. When she wakes up the first morning there, she appreciates the softness of the landscape with its golden light, gentle hills, elegant villas, vineyards, and flowers.

*"Beneath the dark and spreading branches, appeared, to the north, and to the east, the woody Apennines, rising in majestic amphitheatre, not black with pines, as she had been accustomed to see them, but their loftiest summits crowned with antient forests of chesnut, oak, and oriental plane."* (Radcliffe 518)

This description of the Tuscan landscape, with its warm scenery and woody Apennines, contrasts with the landscape around Udolpho, where the black pines create a sense of darkness and fear. This change in surroundings offers Emily a chance to recover from her time at Udolpho:

*"... and to her this spot was a bower of sweets, whose charms communicated imperceptibly to her mind somewhat of their own serenity."* (518)

Here, nature provides Emily with a temporary escape from her suffering and helps her regain a sense of peace.

Similarly, Lady Blanche Villefort, who later becomes Emily's friend, finds comfort and inspiration in nature. She often goes on walks and admires its beauty. Like Emily, nature

inspires her to write poetry. She finds joy in watching the Mediterranean Sea, the vast mountains, and observing wildlife. Her appreciation for nature connects her to Emily on a deeper level. Their bond over nature helps to build a meaningful connection between them, which highlights nature's ability to unite individuals.

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore how the portrayal of nature in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* reflects women's lives in a male-dominated society. Drawing on Ellen Moers' theory of the Female Gothic, key themes such as women's oppression, the absence of parents, and the symbolism of women's movement were analysed. Additional moments where nature plays a vital part in Emily's life were also explored. Throughout the novel, nature has a dual role: as discussed in the theoretical part, it offers solace and mirrors Emily's emotional state.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, nature provides comfort for Emily in multiple forms. Through memories of her parents and Valancourt, solitary walks, or contemplations of its beauty. It often takes on a parental role and supports her when she lacks guidance or reliable authority. This aligns with the Female Gothic theme of the absent mother. In the analysis, however, particular focus was placed on the absence of both parents.

Additionally, nature brings Emily calmness and inspiration. It stimulates her creativity, especially in writing poetry, and offers her a spiritual connection. The presence of God manifested in nature becomes a source of strength and protection.

Emily's connection to nature was formed in childhood and helped cultivate her sensibility and imagination. This was encouraged by her father, who is portrayed as a thoughtful, sensible character connected to the natural world. His character contrasts that of Montoni, whose detachment from nature reflects his controlling and oppressive personality. This contrast underlines the importance of male influence in Emily's life, showing that while not all male figures are negative, their impact on her is significant. Valancourt's temporary loss of connection with nature in Paris also reflects a spiritual and emotional detachment, while Montoni's complete disconnection reinforces his position as a threatening figure.

Nature also enables Emily to build relationships beyond her family. It connects her to Lady Blanche, which shows nature's ability to unite women with similar values and perspectives. Emily's love for Valancourt is also grounded in their shared appreciation of the natural world. Characters who maintain a positive relationship with nature are portrayed as virtuous, and Emily's ability to form bonds with them further illustrates the power of the natural world.

The motif of nature mirroring emotions is evident in how natural surroundings change throughout the novel. In the beginning, when Emily lives peacefully with her parents at La Vallée, nature is calm and picturesque. In contrast, her arrival at Udolpho is accompanied by threatening landscapes that mirror her growing fear. However, Emily still admires the landscapes around Udolpho, as they symbolise freedom in contrast to the oppression she experiences inside the castle. The frequent storms at Udolpho reinforce her sense of entrapment.

Another key area of interest was the role of Emily's movement throughout the novel, considered from the perspective of the Female Gothic. While her walks are often set in calm, beautiful natural settings that reflect her inner peace and sense of agency, her long-distance travels are surrounded by dark and chaotic natural landscapes, mirroring Emily's unease and loss of control. A woman walking alone outside is socially less acceptable, which contributes to Emily's feelings of restriction.

In conclusion, the Female Gothic offers valuable insight for understanding women's struggles (such as societal oppression, women's physical movement, and the experience of navigating life without parental support). However, when examined through a broader Gothic perspective with an emphasis on nature, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* reveals a more complex portrayal of women's lives and struggles.

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## **Declaration on the use of artificial intelligence tools**

Artificial intelligence tools, specifically ChatGPT and Grammarly, were used in this thesis to support the expression of my ideas, ensure grammatical correctness, and improve stylistic quality of the text. The content, analysis, and interpretations are entirely my own.