

MMES  
MADRID MASTERS IN ENGLISH STUDIES  
UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID

***GOTHIC BOURNES***

**THE PROVENÇAL TALE**  
**(aka THE CASTLE OF HOSPITALITY;**  
**OR, THE SPECTRE)**

**By Ann Radcliffe**

**(1794)**

TRANSCRIPTION BY

**Manuel Aguirre**

**EDITING GOTHIC TEXTS**  
**SEVENTH SERIES, 2020**  
**Nº 3**

THE MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO,  
A ROMANCE;  
INTERSPERSED WITH SOME PIECES OF POETRY.  
BY  
ANN RADCLIFFE,  
AUTHOR OF THE ROMANCE OF THE FOREST, ETC.  
IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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

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VOLUME I.

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

(from Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* , vol. IV, chapter VI, pp. 552-57)

Source text:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3268/3268-h/3268-h.htm>

Ludovico, meanwhile, in his remote chamber, heard, now and then, the faint echo of a closing door, as the family retired to rest, and then the hall clock, at a great distance, strike twelve. 'It is midnight,' said he, and he looked suspiciously round the spacious chamber. The fire on the hearth was now nearly expiring, for his attention having been engaged by the book before him, he had forgotten everything besides; but he soon added fresh wood, not because he was cold, though the night was stormy, but because he was cheerless; and, having again trimmed his lamp, he poured out a glass of wine, drew his chair nearer to the crackling blaze, tried to be deaf to the wind, that howled mournfully at the casements, endeavoured to abstract his mind from the melancholy that was stealing upon him, and again took up his book. It had been lent to him by Dorothée, who had formerly picked it up in an obscure corner of the Marquis's library, and who, having opened it and perceived some of the marvels it related, had carefully preserved it for her own entertainment, its condition giving her some excuse for detaining it from its proper station. The damp corner into which it had fallen had caused the cover to be disfigured and mouldy, and the leaves to be so discoloured with spots, that it was not without difficulty the letters could be traced. The fictions of the Provençal writers, whether drawn from the Arabian legends, brought by the Saracens into Spain, or recounting the chivalric exploits performed by the crusaders, whom the Troubadors accompanied to the east, were generally splendid and always marvellous, both in scenery and incident; and it is not wonderful, that Dorothée and Ludovico should be fascinated by inventions, which had captivated the careless imagination in every rank of society, in a former age. Some of the tales, however, in the book now before Ludovico, were of simple structure, and exhibited nothing of the magnificent machinery and heroic manners, which usually characterised the fables of the twelfth century, and of this description was the one he now happened to open, which, in its original style, was of great length, but which may be thus shortly related. The reader will perceive that it is strongly tinctured with the superstition of the times.

#### THE PROVENÇAL TALE

"There lived, in the province of Bretagne, a noble Baron, famous for his magnificence and courtly hospitalities. His castle was graced with ladies of exquisite beauty, and thronged with illustrious knights; for the honour he paid to feats of chivalry invited the brave of distant countries to enter his lists, and his courts were more splendid than those of many princes. Eight minstrels were retained in his service, who used to sing to their harps romantic sections, taken from the Arabians, or adventures of chivalry that befel knights during the crusades, or the martial deeds of the Baron, their lord;—while he, surrounded by his knights and ladies, banqueted in the great hall of the castle,

where the costly tapestry, that adorned the walls with pictured exploits of his ancestors, the casements of painted glass, enriched with armorial bearings, the gorgeous banners, that waved along the roof, the sumptuous canopies, the profusion of gold and silver, that glittered on the sideboards, the numerous dishes, that covered the tables, the number and gay liveries of the attendants, with the chivalric and splendid attire of the guests, united to form a scene of magnificence, such as we may not hope to see in these *degenerate days*.

“Of the Baron, the following adventure is related. One night, having retired late from the banquet to his chamber, and dismissed his attendants, he was surprised by the appearance of a stranger of a noble air, but of a sorrowful and dejected countenance. Believing, that this person had been secreted in the apartment, since it appeared impossible he could have lately passed the ante-room, unobserved by the pages in waiting, who would have prevented this intrusion on their lord, the Baron, calling loudly for his people, drew his sword, which he had not yet taken from his side, and stood upon his defence. The stranger slowly advancing, told him, that there was nothing to fear; that he came with no hostile design, but to communicate to him a terrible secret, which it was necessary for him to know.

“The Baron, appeased by the courteous manners of the stranger, after surveying him for some time in silence, returned his sword into the scabbard, and desired him to explain the means, by which he had obtained access to the chamber, and the purpose of this extraordinary visit.

“Without answering either of these enquiries, the stranger said, that he could not then explain himself, but that, if the Baron would follow him to the edge of the forest, at a short distance from the castle walls, he would there convince him, that he had something of importance to disclose.

“This proposal again alarmed the Baron, who could scarcely believe, that the stranger meant to draw him to so solitary a spot, at this hour of the night, without harbouring a design against his life, and he refused to go, observing, at the same time, that, if the stranger’s purpose was an honourable one, he would not persist in refusing to reveal the occasion of his visit, in the apartment where they were.

“While he spoke this, he viewed the stranger still more attentively than before, but observed no change in his countenance, or any symptom, that might intimate a consciousness of evil design. He was habited like a knight, was of a tall and majestic stature, and of dignified and courteous manners. Still, however, he refused to communicate the subject of his errand in any place, but that he had mentioned, and, at the same time, gave hints concerning the secret he would disclose, that awakened a

degree of solemn curiosity in the Baron, which, at length, induced him to consent to follow the stranger, on certain conditions.

“ ‘Sir knight,’ said he, ‘I will attend you to the forest, and will take with me only four of my people, who shall witness our conference.’”

“To this, however, the Knight objected.

“ ‘What I would disclose,’ said he, with solemnity, ‘is to you alone. There are only three living persons, to whom the circumstance is known: it is of more consequence to you, and your house, than I shall now explain. In future years, you will look back to this night with satisfaction or repentance, accordingly as you now determine. As you would hereafter prosper—follow me; I pledge you on the honour of a knight, that no evil shall befall you;—if you are contented to dare futurity—remain in your chamber, and I will depart as I came.’”

“ ‘Sir knight,’ replied the Baron, ‘how is it possible, that my future peace can depend on my present determination?’”

“ ‘That is not now to be told,’ said the stranger. ‘I have explained myself to the utmost. It is late; if you follow me it must be quickly;—you will do well to consider the alternative.’”

“The Baron mused, and, as he looked upon the knight, he perceived his countenance assume a singular solemnity.”

[Here Ludovico thought he heard a noise, and he threw a glance round the chamber, and then held up the lamp to assist his observation; but, not perceiving any thing to confirm his alarm, he took up the book again and pursued the story.]

“The Baron paced his apartment, for some time, in silence, impressed by the last words of the stranger, whose extraordinary request he feared to grant, and feared, also, to refuse. At length, he said, ‘Sir knight, you are utterly unknown to me; tell me yourself,—is it reasonable, that I should trust myself alone with a stranger, at this hour, in a solitary forest? Tell me, at least, who you are, and who assisted to secrete you in this chamber.’”

“The knight frowned at these latter words, and was a moment silent; then, with a countenance somewhat stern, he said,

‘I am an English knight; I am called Sir Bevys of Lancaster,—and my deeds are not unknown at the Holy City, whence I was returning to my native land, when I was benighted in the neighbouring forest.’

“ ‘Your name is nor unknown to fame,’ said the Baron, ‘I have heard of it.’ (The Knight looked haughtily.) But why, since my castle is known to entertain all true knights, did not your herald announce you? Why did you not appear at the banquet, where your presence would have been welcomed, instead of hiding yourself in my castle, and stealing to my chamber, at midnight?’

“The stranger frowned, and turned away in silence; but the Baron repeated the questions.

“ ‘I come not,” said the Knight, ‘to answer enquiries, but to reveal facts. If you would know more, follow me, and again I pledge the honour of a Knight, that you shall return in safety.—Be quick in your determination—I must be gone.’

“After some further hesitation, the Baron determined to follow the stranger, and to see the result of his extraordinary request; he, therefore, again drew forth his sword, and, taking up a lamp, bade the Knight lead on. The latter obeyed, and, opening the door of the chamber, they passed into the anti-room, where the Baron, surprised to find all his pages asleep, stopped, and, with hasty violence, was going to reprimand them for their carelessness, when the Knight waved his hand, and looked so expressively upon the Baron, that the latter restrained his resentment, and passed on.

“The Knight, having descended a stair-case, opened a secret door, which the Baron had believed was known only to himself, and, proceeding through several narrow and winding passages, came, at length, to a small gate, that opened beyond the walls of the castle. Meanwhile, the Baron followed in silence and amazement, on perceiving that these secret passages were so well known to a stranger, and felt inclined to return from an adventure, that appeared to partake of treachery, as well as danger. Then, considering that he was armed, and observing the courteous and noble air of his conductor, his courage returned, he blushed, that it had failed him for a moment, and he resolved to trace the mystery to its source.

“He now found himself on the heathy platform, before the great gates of his castle, where, on looking up, he perceived lights glimmering in the different casements of the guests, who were retiring to sleep; and, while he shivered in the blast, and looked on the dark and desolate scene around him, he thought of the comforts of his warm chamber, rendered cheerful by the blaze of wood, and felt, for a moment, the full contrast of his present situation.”

[Here Ludovico paused a moment, and, looking at his own fire, gave it a brightening stir.]

“The wind was strong, and the Baron watched his lamp with anxiety, expecting every moment to see it extinguished; but, though the flame wavered, it did not expire, and he still followed the stranger, who often sighed as he went, but did not speak.

“When they reached the borders of the forest, the Knight turned, and raised his head, as if he meant to address the Baron, but then, closing his lips in silence, he walked on.

“As they entered, beneath the dark and spreading boughs, the Baron, affected by the solemnity of the scene, hesitated whether to proceed, and demanded how much further they were to go. The Knight replied only by a gesture, and the Baron, with hesitating steps and a suspicious eye, followed through an obscure and intricate path, till, having proceeded a considerable way, he again demanded whither they were going, and refused to proceed unless he was informed.

“As he said this, he looked at his own sword, and at the Knight alternately, who shook his head, and whose dejected countenance disarmed the Baron, for a moment, of suspicion.

“ ‘A little further is the place, whither I would lead you,’ said the stranger; ‘no evil shall befall you –I have sworn it on the honour of a knight.’

“The Baron, re-assured, again followed in silence, and they soon arrived at a deep recess of the forest, where the dark and lofty chesnuts entirely excluded the sky, and which was so overgrown with underwood, that they proceeded with difficulty. The Knight sighed deeply as he passed, and sometimes paused; and having, at length, reached a spot, where the trees crowded into a knot, he turned, and, with a terrific look, pointing to the ground, the Baron saw there the body of a man, stretched at its length, and weltering in blood; a ghastly wound was on the forehead, and death appeared already to have contracted the features.

“The Baron, on perceiving the spectacle, started in horror, looked at the Knight for explanation, and was then going to raise the body and examine if there were yet any remains of life; but the stranger, waving his hand, fixed upon him a look so earnest and mournful, as not only much surprised him, but made him desist.

“But, what were the Baron’s emotions, when, on holding the lamp near the features of the corpse, he discovered the exact resemblance of the stranger his conductor, to whom he now looked up in astonishment and enquiry? As he gazed, he perceived the countenance of the Knight change, and begin to fade, till his whole form gradually vanished from his astonished sense! While the Baron stood, fixed to the spot, a voice was heard to utter these words:—”

[Ludovico started, and laid down the book, for he thought he heard a voice in the chamber, and he looked toward the bed, where, however, he saw only the dark curtains and the pall. He listened, scarcely daring to draw his breath, but heard only the distant roaring of the sea in the storm, and the blast, that rushed by the casements; when, concluding, that he had been deceived by its sighings, he took up his book to finish the story.]

“While the Baron stood, fixed to the spot, a voice was heard to utter these words:—

“ ‘The body of Sir Bevys of Lancaster, a noble knight of England, lies before you. He was, this night, waylaid and murdered, as he journeyed from the Holy City towards his native land. Respect the honour of knighthood and the law of humanity; inter the body in christian ground, and cause his murderers to be punished. As ye observe, or neglect this, shall peace and happiness, or war and misery, light upon you and your house for ever!’

“The Baron, when he recovered from the awe and astonishment, into which this adventure had thrown him, returned to his castle, whither he caused the body of Sir Bevys to be removed; and, on the following day, it was interred, with the honours of knighthood, in the chapel of the castle, attended by all the noble knights and ladies, who graced the court of Baron de Brunne.”

Ludovico, having finished this story, laid aside the book, for he felt drowsy, and, after putting more wood on the fire and taking another glass of wine, he reposed himself in the arm-chair on the hearth. In his dream he still beheld the chamber where he really was, and, once or twice, started from imperfect slumbers, imagining he saw a man’s face, looking over the high back of his arm-chair. This idea had so strongly impressed him, that, when he raised his eyes, he almost expected to meet other eyes, fixed upon his own, and he quitted his seat and looked behind the chair, before he felt perfectly convinced, that no person was there.

Thus closed the hour.