
Ghosts in the Garden: Ann Radcliffe and Tolstoy's *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*

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In a draft of *War and Peace*, Tolstoy mentions Ann Radcliffe as one of several writers whom he connects nostalgically with a bygone age:

I write of a time which is still linked to ours by a chain of reminiscences, [of which the elusive character, smell, and sound, joining with the particular charm of the past and of childhood, is so sweetly familiar to us]¹ about a time when our mothers danced matraduras and minuets in dresses with short waists by the light of wax and scented candles, and went into raptures over the novels of mme Redcliff² and mme Suza, and knew the speeches of Racine, Boileau, and Corneille by heart, while our fathers went into raptures over the ideas of Rousseau and Voltaire. (PSS 13:75)

Radcliffe forms a part of “the particular charm of the past and of childhood”; her Gothic novels inspire a feeling of tenderness.

For Tolstoy, as for many other nineteenth-century writers, Radcliffe has maternal associations.³ In the passage above, her works are adored by mothers, who read them while their husbands read Rousseau. The exception is H el ene in *War and Peace*, who exhibits a telling lack of appreciation for Radcliffe. Her unhappy husband complains, in another draft, “I’ve never seen her pick up a book. Once, without her father knowing, I gave her la Nouvelle H elo ise. She says it’s boring, Radcliffe is boring, Ad ele de S enange is boring” (PSS 13:230). In scorning Rousseau, along with Radcliffe and Souza, H el ene turns away from the books that “our fathers” and “our mothers” delighted in. H el ene’s aversion to Radcliffe further

establishes her as Tolstoy’s Anti-Mother. It only makes sense that H el ene, who adamantly refuses to bear Pierre’s children, would reject the literature of motherhood, as well as motherhood itself.

In 1903, in his “Reminiscences,” Tolstoy again links Radcliffe with memories of his childhood. He describes his older brother Nikolenka, who, at the age of ten or eleven, had such an imagination, “that he could tell fairy tales, or stories with ghosts, or humorous stories in the spirit of m-me Radcliff, without stopping or stuttering, for hours at a time, and with such an air of surety in the reality of what he was saying, that you would forget that it was invention” (PSS 34:385-6). Immediately after this, Tolstoy goes on to tell of Nikolenka Tolstoy’s idea of the game of “ant brothers,” in which a secret that could end all unhappiness and hatred was written on a green stick buried in the Zakaz forest. The motherless Tolstoy brothers, even without the stick, would huddle together under a shawl draped over two chairs, in mutual love and tenderness. For Richard Gustafson, this image serves as the emblem of Tolstoy the Resident (as opposed to Tolstoy the Stranger), and his longing for universal belonging, unity, and love (Gustafson 8-12).

Tolstoy calls Radcliffe “humorous,” which may seem an unusual characterization of Radcliffe’s work. Dostoevsky, recalling his childhood experience of Radcliffe, writes, “During the long winter evenings, before I could read, I would listen, agape and rooted to the spot with delight and terror, as my parents read, at bedtime, the novels of Radcliffe; I would then rave deliriously about them in my sleep” (PSS 5:46, translation in Miller). Unlike little Fedia Dostoevsky, who listens with horror to Radcliffe’s stories,⁴ Tolstoy recalls her as humorous and unthreatening, as something connected with his mother, his older brother, and his game of universal love.⁵

While Tolstoy may have found Radcliffe’s works consoling, their content is disturbing; they are deeply concerned with violence, fear, repressed memory, and loss of identity.⁶ Tolstoy recognized both aspects of Radcliffe’s works in using *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as a subtext for *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*.⁷ Tolstoy’s panegyric of childhood bliss has, in fact, a great deal in common with Radcliffe’s novel of terror. Radcliffe’s novels are not only read by “our mothers,” they are also to a large extent *about* mothers—especially dead or

missing mothers.⁸ In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* alone, there are, by my count, six dead or dying maternal figures. Radcliffe, then, is connected both with the mother, and with the death of the mother; throughout Tolstoy's life the name "M-me Radcliff" carries associations of both love and loss.⁹

Although in the final edition of the trilogy, Radcliffe's name is never mentioned, her image lurks beneath the novel's surface. A direct reference to Radcliffe occurs in the first draft of *Boyhood*. When Nikolenka's grandmother overcomes her grief at her daughter's death enough to allow her grandchildren to visit her, they find her consoling herself with Ann Radcliffe:

She would sit in her large Voltaire armchair, playing patience or listening to an old novel by M-me Radcliffe, which, as she wished, Mimi or P. V. would read to her. It was clear from her face that the stories with ghosts and horrors interested her very little, and that her thoughts were far in the past. I can't believe that she really liked the work of M-me Radcliffe, although she assured us that a more pleasant book does not exist. It just seems to me that the even tone of a voice reading out loud inclined her to daydreaming. Almost everything reminded her of Mama. (*PSS*, 2:262)

Despite the narrator's dismissal of Radcliffe as uninteresting, this passage reveals some of the vital ways in which Radcliffe's work forms a subtext for *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, *Youth*. Radcliffe is read to a maternal figure, and she is associated with the death of Nikolenka's own mother. Radcliffe's novels are filled with horrors and ghosts, and yet the sound of them read out loud is comforting. In the final version of the novel, Radcliffe carries the same associations of comfort and terror, of both the living and the murdered mother.

The skeleton of a Gothic plot lies buried under the narration of the Irten'evs' apparently idyllic family life. A time-honored Gothic motif is that of a woman being locked up, often by her husband, and forced to live in utter isolation.¹⁰ In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for example, the heroine's aunt refuses to resign her estate to her husband, Montoni, who, as a punishment, locks her in a turret, where she eventually sickens and dies. Nikolenka, in relating the circumstances of his mother's life

and death, sets her up as another such Gothic victim: she, too, is neglected and economically exploited by her husband. In *Childhood*, the first image of Nikolenka's mother is of her staring distractedly into space, spilling water from the samovar. Her husband is in the next room, appropriating the proceeds from her estate, to be used instead on his own estate. He is also planning to go to Moscow, taking his sons, and leaving his wife behind. Nikolenka's grandmother describes her daughter as being all but held captive by Irten'ev:

She would probably have come [to Moscow] if she were free to do what she wants [. . .] it seems to me that all these excuses are just so that *he* can live here alone, run around from club to club, go to dinner parties and do God knows what, and she doesn't suspect a thing. You know how angelically good she is—she trusts *him* in everything. He assured her that the children needed to be brought to Moscow, while she should stay in the village alone with a silly governess—and she believed him. (*PSS* 1:56)

Natalia Irten'eva's mother has been affected by her reading of Gothic novels. In an earlier edition of the novel she listens to Radcliffe while thinking about her dead daughter; here, she interprets her daughter's life as that of a character in a Radcliffe novel. In her version of the story, Irten'ev abandons his wife and absconds with her sons to Moscow, where he sleeps with other women and gambles away his wife's money. Nikolenka's grandmother, as well as, less overtly, Nikolenka himself, reads Natalia Irten'eva's life as that of a Gothic victim.¹¹

The adult Nikolenka, in describing his father, states bluntly and coldly, "The two chief passions of his life were cards and women: he had won several million rubles in the course of his life and had had affairs with innumerable women of all classes" (*PSS* 1:28). The narrator does not pursue the obvious implication, that Nikolenka's father was unfaithful to his mother. The issue is, however, subtly explored in the perceptions of Nikolenka the child, who filters his vague knowledge of his mother's unhappiness and his father's infidelity through the prism of a Radcliffe novel. Nikolenka begins, perhaps under the influence of his grand-

mother, to regard his mother as a Radcliffean martyr, and to suspect that his father is not far removed from the gambling, philandering, villainous Montoni.

After his mother dies of a fever, Nikolenka goes in alone to look at her corpse:

Everything strangely blended together: the light, the brocade, the velvet, the big candlesticks, the pink pillow trimmed with lace, the frontlet, the cap with ribbons, and something else transparent and wax-colored. I stood on a chair to look at her face, but where her face used to be I saw the same pale-yellowish transparent object. I couldn't believe that that was her face. I began to look at it steadily, and little by little began to recognize in it the sweet familiar features. I shuddered with horror when I became convinced that it was she; but why were the closed eyes so sunken? why that terrible paleness, and a blackish dot on one cheek under the transparent skin? (PSS 1:84-5)

Nikolenka begins to remember his mother as she was when she was alive, and is eventually caught up in a paroxysm of love: "Finally my imagination tired, and stopped deceiving me; my awareness of reality also disappeared, and I became oblivious of everything. I don't know how long I remained in that state. . . ." Nikolenka uses the same language to describe his reverie that a Gothic heroine would use to describe a faint: as Radcliffe has it, "Blanche neither saw, or heard any more: her head swam, her sight failed, and she became senseless" (Radcliffe 615).¹²

In *Udolpho*, the heroine Emily looks behind a black curtain and sees something so horrible that she loses consciousness. The reader is left, for several hundred pages, to guess what was behind the veil; dark hints are cast that it could be the body of Laurentini, the former owner of Udolpho, whom Montoni, Emily's uncle, is suspected of having murdered.¹³ It is also implied that Laurentini could be Emily's mother. Only at the end of the novel do we learn the truth:

. . . there appeared [...] a human figure of ghastly paleness, stretched at its length, and dressed in the habiliments of the grave. What added to the horror of the spectacle was, that the face appeared partly decayed and disfigured by worms [. . .] Had [Em-

ily] dared to look again, her delusion and her fears would have vanished together, and she would have perceived, that the figure before her was not human, but formed of wax. (Radcliffe 662)¹⁴

After having seen what she believes to be a corpse, Emily stumbles away to her room, where "Horror occupied her mind, and excluded, for a time, all sense of past, and dread of future misfortune" (Radcliffe 249). In both novels, then, the protagonist is confronted with something that may or may not be his or her mother, that is pale and waxen, whether literally or figuratively, and that has a rotting face. In both cases the protagonists lose consciousness and awareness of time.

Nikolenka's discovery of his mother's corpse is paralleled by a similarly Radcliffean confrontation with materials that imply sexual impropriety on the part of his father. Both Emily and Nikolenka disobey their father's commands, and are led to a forbidden discovery. On his deathbed, Emily's father instructs her to destroy some letters hidden in his office, and by no means to read them.

By the directions which [her father] had given her, she readily found the board he had described [. . .]. She distinguished also the line he had mentioned, and, pressing it as he had bade her, it slid down, and disclosed the bundle of papers [. . .]. With a trembling hand she removed them, replaced the board, paused a moment, and was rising from the floor, when, on looking up, there appeared to her alarmed fancy the same countenance [of her dead father, whom she had imagined earlier] in the chair. The illusion, another instance of the unhappy effect which solitude and grief had gradually produced upon her mind, subdued her spirits; she rushed forward into the chamber, and sunk almost senseless into a chair. Returning reason soon overcame the dreadful, but pitiable attack of imagination and she turned to the papers, though still with so little recollection, that her eyes involuntarily settled on the writing of some loose sheets, which lay open; and she was unconscious, that she was transgressing her father's strict injunction, till a sentence of dreadful import awakened her attention and her memory together. She hastily put the papers from her; but the words, which had roused equally her curiosity and terror, she could not dismiss from her thoughts. (Radcliffe 103)

Nikolenka, similarly, through accident and curiosity discovers his father's moral culpability. Sent by his father to retrieve a silver bonbon holder, and expressly prohibited from touching anything else, Nikolenka decides to see if one of the keys given him will open a briefcase on his father's desk.

My attempt met with complete success: the briefcase opened, and I found a whole pile of papers in it. Curiosity so convincingly advised me to find out what those papers were, that I didn't manage to listen to the voice of my conscience, and began to look at what was in the briefcase.....

The childish feeling of unconditional respect for all elders, and especially Papa, was so strong in me, that my mind unconsciously refused to draw any conclusions from what I saw. I felt that Papa should live in a completely different world—beautiful, out of my reach, and beyond my comprehension, and that to try to fathom the secrets of his life would be something like heresy on my part. (*PSS* 2:45)

Both heroes “transgress their fathers’ strict injunction,” and read something unspecified, that they ought not to have read, and that hints at sexual impropriety.

Furthermore, Nikolenka sees with “horror” that his “little key” has broken off in the lock, thus standing as proof of his misdeed. The passage recalls, then, not only *Udolpho*, but also the proto-Gothic story of Bluebeard, who gives his wife his keys, but forbids her from opening one of the rooms. The blood-spattered key serves as proof that she has been unable to restrain her curiosity, and has discovered the decapitated bodies of Bluebeard's previous wives.¹⁵ Nikolenka, with the image of the damaged key, hints at the story of Bluebeard; his ellipsis implies that his discovery was too horrible to be articulated. Whatever it was that Nikolenka found in the briefcase (love letters, perhaps?¹⁶), he relates its discovery in subtly, but fiercely accusing terms, by borrowing details of plot and narration from *Udolpho* and “Bluebeard.” For Nikolenka at that moment, his father is Bluebeard, and the hacked-up body of his mother is locked up in that briefcase. His father's infidelities to his wife's memory amount to murder in Nikolenka's eyes.¹⁷

Soon after having read this incriminating evidence, Nikolenka is punished for hitting St. Jerome by being locked in a storage closet. He begins to daydream, and one of the first things he imagines is that he is not his father's son. Emily St. Aubert does much the same thing, although she does not express it as a wish:

[Emily] wished more earnestly than before to know the reasons, that made him consider the injunction [of burning the papers] necessary, which, had her faith in his principles been less, would have led to believe, that there was a mystery in her birth dishonorable to her parents, which those manuscripts might have revealed. (Radcliffe 650)

Indeed, as Nikolenka's narrator tells us, such a belief would be tantamount to heresy. Both heroes protest that they do *not* have any doubts about their fathers' morality (this is, of course, in itself a tacit accusation) and then express, either in fear or in fantasy, the idea that they are not their parents' children.

Radcliffean moments in *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, *Youth* can be quite frightening. They ought to seem out of place in a work that proclaims itself to be a celebration of childhood as a time of innocence and unconditional love. In *Childhood* in particular, as Andrew Wachtel says, the apparent “single overarching message” is that “childhood is an essentially happy period” (Wachtel 44). Or, as the narrator puts it, “Happy, happy, irretrievable time of childhood! How could one not love and cherish its memories? These memories refresh and elevate my soul and are a source of my greatest pleasures” (*PSS* 1:43). And yet, from the very beginning of his happy, happy *Childhood*, and continuing on through *Boyhood*, Nikolenka casts himself in the role of a Gothic heroine, and plays out the horrors of *Udolpho*: My father locks up my mother and lets her die. My father is not a good man. My father is not my father.

Childhood's internal contradiction is not as odd as it might seem. Gothic novels themselves tend to rely on a similar blend of horror and nostalgia. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* begins its tale of murder and deception with a quotation from Thomson, extolling the wonders of “home . . . the resort/Of love, of joy, of peace and plenty,/ Where,

supporting and supported, polished friends / And dear relations mingle into bliss" (Radcliffe 1). Emily's childhood home of La Vallée is idealized, in opposition to the gloomy and treacherous castle of Udolpho. But the contrast between the two estates is merely superficial: as Claudia Johnson points out, "Udolpho stimulates Emily's imagination not because it is different from the coziness of La Vallée, but rather because it is disturbingly similar to it: the nakedness of the violence she witnesses there bears a disturbing resemblance to the murder and betrayal she fears at home and dares not articulate" (Johnson 110). Bruno Bettelheim remarks on the tendency, in fairy tales as well as in children's imagination, to cope with anger toward the mother by thinking of her as two people—the loving Good Mother, and the cruel Bad Mother, or step-mother (Bettelheim 66-70). The text of *Udolpho* makes many such distinctions—the good mother Mme St Aubert versus the bad Laurentini; the good father St. Aubert versus the bad Montoni;¹⁸ the good estate of La Vallée versus the bad estate of Udolpho. And yet, as Johnson and others argue, St. Aubert is in some ways disturbingly similar to Montoni, and La Vallée and Udolpho are essentially the same place.¹⁹ *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth* never makes such a split. Irten'ev is simultaneously Good Father and Bad Father; loving, yet vaguely Montoni-like. The idealized estate of Petrovskoe, where Nikolenka's "dear relatives mingle into bliss," is also the resting place for his *dead* relative, and some sinister family secrets.

Youth is free from any Radcliffian motifs—in part because the period of youth is straightforwardly described as almost completely unhappy. Radcliffian motifs are unnecessary, as there are no repressed miseries to be subtly revealed. Furthermore, Nikolenka is no longer reading Radcliffe. He now reads Eugene Sue, Alexandre Dumas, Paul de Kock, and other "various 'Mysteries'" (*PSS* 2:171). The word "Mysteries" recalls, of course, Eugene Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris* and Paul Feval's *The Mysteries of London*. It also, however, recalls Ann Radcliffe, who is no longer on Nikolenka's reading list—nor does she belong there. Sue, Dumas, and de Kock are more concerned with detailing masculine power and adven-

ture than with exploring female suffering. Nikolenka tells us that he gains his knowledge of "*comme il faut*" from these novels—a masculine idea, connected with his father, and alien to Tolstoy's conception of the firmly maternal Radcliffe.²⁰ *The Three Musketeers*, for example, condones actions that are horrific sins in a Radcliffe novel—drinking, gambling, adultery, and wife-murder.

The Gothic elements of *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth* are not immediately obvious, in part because of the trilogy's emotional tone, which is quite different from that of Radcliffe's novels. Radcliffe was greatly influenced by Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, in which the sublime is defined as follows:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime* [. . .]. When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience. (Burke 36-7)

The sublime is opposed to the beautiful, "that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love" (Burke 83). Although something beautiful can arouse our love, according to Burke, the sublime stirs in us the strongest emotions of which humans are capable.

Radcliffe incorporated the aesthetic of the sublime into her novels with great effect. The narration seems to luxuriate in horrific events, prolonging them for as long as possible. In fact, the very reading of a Gothic novel is an exercise in the sublime; we are delighted by watching the heroine's terrors, and participating in them from a safe and comfortable distance. Description of the scenery privileges the sublime over the beautiful; we are told that Emily loves

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. (Radcliffe 6)

Tolstoy, in appropriating the Gothic, turns its aesthetics upside-down. Rather than refining upon and developing the idea of the sublime, as does Dostoevsky,²¹ he seems to rely on an aesthetic where the most powerful emotions are connected with the beautiful—in other words, with affection and closeness, rather than with terror and pain. When Nikolenka looks at his dead mother in her coffin, his moment of epiphany comes *after* he has overcome his horror.

For a time I lost the awareness of my own existence, and experienced some kind of elevated, ineffably sweet and sad pleasure. Perhaps, flying off to a better world, her beautiful soul looked back sadly at the world where she was leaving us; she saw my grief, had pity on it, and, on the wings of love, with a heavenly smile of pity, came down to earth to comfort and bless me. (PSS 1:85)

Emily goes to burn her father's letters after his death, and almost faints from terror when she imagines his ghost. Nikolenka, on the other hand, expresses a flood of affection and longing at the thought of his mother returning to him after her death. Both heroes respond to the image of the dead parent with equal emotional force—Emily with the force of terror and the sublime; Nikolenka with that of love and the beautiful.

In the letter she writes to her husband before her death, Nikolenka's mother asks, "Will my love for you and the children end with my life? I understand that this is impossible. I won't be with you, but I am absolutely sure that my love will never leave you" (PSS 1:80). Natalia Savishna gives a more literal version of this idea, telling Nikolenka that his mother's spirit will stay in the house for forty days before ascending to heaven. Nikolenka is deeply comforted by this thought. For him, unlike for Emily, there is nothing frightening in the prospect of being haunted by his mother. The idea is beautiful, not sublime; she is a ghost of love, rather than of terror.

The description of the scenery in *Childhood*,

Boyhood, *Youth* also elevates the beautiful over the sublime. On the journey back to Moscow after his mother's death, Nikolenka travels through a horrific rainstorm.

The lightning flashes as if in the carriage itself, blinding me and illuminating for an instant the gray canvas and braid, and the figure of Volodia, huddled in the corner. At that second, right above my head, sounds a magnificent rumble, which, as if rising higher and higher and expanding wider and wider in a gigantic spiral, gets gradually stronger and becomes a deafening crash, making me involuntarily shudder and hold my breath. The wrath of God! how much poetry there is in that thought of the common people! [. . .] My alarmed sensations of gloom and fear grew stronger in me with the intensity of the storm, but when the magnificent moment of silence came that usually precedes a burst of thunder, these feelings increased to such a pitch that, if this state of things had continued another quarter of an hour, I'm sure I would have died from agitation. (PSS 2:10)

At that moment "some sort of human creature" comes stumbling up, asking for money and thrusting his stump of a hand into the carriage. "Words cannot express the feeling of cold horror that overcame my soul at that moment. A shiver ran through my hair, and my eyes fixed on the beggar with the senselessness of fear." Certainly, the description of the storm approaches the Burkean sublime. The narration asks the reader to take delight in the terrors of the storm and the "poetry" of the idea of "God's wrath." But Nikolenka's fright is quickly overcome by emotions that are beautiful rather than sublime. The beggar disappears, after a servant throws him a coin; the storm dies down, the sun comes out and "my soul smiles, just like refreshed and rejoicing nature."

The smell of the forest after a spring thunderstorm, the smell of birch trees, violets, rotten leaves, mushrooms, and wild cherry, is so charming, that I can't sit still in the chaise. I jump off the footboard, run to the bushes and, though raindrops shower over me, tear off wet branches of blooming wild cherry, beat myself in the face with them and delight in their wonderful smell. Ignoring even the fact that huge lumps of mud are sticking to my

boots, and my stockings are already soaked, I run up through the mud to the window of the carriage. "Liubochka! Katenka!" I shout, handing in some branches of wild cherry. "Look, how pretty!" (PSS 2:12)

In this scene, as well as in Nikolenka's scene of contemplation over his mother's corpse, initial feelings of horror are overcome by beauty and love. The reader, it would seem, is to understand that Nikolenka's terror during the storm is less important than his joyful communion with the wild cherry blossoms, just as his initial fear of his mother's body is less important than the wave of love that follows it. In each case, fear is the vanquished emotion, while love and tenderness triumph.²²

But the triumph of love and tenderness is mixed at best; it carries with it other, less joyful implications. The storm takes place during the journey back to Moscow, right after Nikolenka's mother's death. The beggar serves both as a reminder of the loss of the mother, and an ominous foreshadowing of more loss to come. In the next chapter after the storm, Nikolenka accuses Katenka of having become estranged from the rest of the family, and is astonished to hear her sensible reply, "We won't always live together, after all [. . .] You are rich—you have Petrovskoe; we're poor—my mama doesn't have anything at all" (PSS 2:15). Nikolenka is shocked to hear this, since "as I understood it then, only beggars and peasants could be poor." The beggar, with his horribly missing hand, is a walking symbol of loss.²³ Nikolenka's family is far from stable; by the end of *Boyhood* he has lost his mother, Natalia Savishna, Karl Ivanych, and his grandmother, not to mention the augured loss of Katenka. Nikolenka would like to believe that only beggars are poor; such specters of loss can be bought off with a coin, and kept from haunting his family. But Nikolenka realizes that Katenka's problem is unsolvable. He understands that he cannot share Petrovskoe with her, as he can share a coin with a beggar. Thus, despite the victory of the wild cherry, the image of loss embodied by the beggar's missing hand presents a problem that Nikolenka is unable to solve.

Tolstoy's elevation of the beautiful over the sublime is not a superficial preference of the happy

to the sad. Rather, the triumph of love and tenderness in the trilogy is also the triumph of inconsolable grief. Nikolenka's experiences of intense love are always connected with the death of his mother. He experiences a flood of affection while standing over her corpse, while fantasizing about her angel in the storage room, and after being confronted with the beggar who embodies her loss. The longest such moment takes place before the death of his mother, in the chapter "Childhood," when Nikolenka is about to leave her for Moscow. The narrator relates the joys of childhood—joys which seem oddly connected with loss. He tells of how, as he squints at his mother with sleep-filled eyes, her image gradually becomes wonderfully tiny, "but I move, and the charm is broken. I narrow my eyes, turn about, and try in every way to bring it back, but in vain." The joys of childhood, then, begin with the disappearing mother, who grows gradually smaller and is finally gone.

Nikolenka's mother tells him, later in the chapter,

"Make sure you always love me, and never forget. If your mother isn't here any more, you won't forget her? You won't forget, Nikolenka?" And she kisses me even more tenderly.

"Enough! Don't even say that, sweetie, darling!" I shout, kissing her knees, and tears stream down my face—tears of love and delight. (PSS 1:44)

In this chapter, the narrator mourns the loss of his "happy happy irretrievable time of childhood." And yet the time of childhood, as he describes it here, is itself filled with a rapturous mourning for the foreshadowed loss of the mother. Grief and joy—"tears of love and delight"—are inseparable here as in the novel as a whole. Nikolenka finds something charming, though heartbreaking, in the idea of the loss of his mother, and her gradually shrinking image.

Radcliffe, then, is important to *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth* on the level of plot, and for other reasons as well. Tolstoy uses oblique references to *The Mysteries of Udolpho* to hint at the skeletons hidden in the closets of the Irten'ev household. He also uses *Udolpho* as a framework, within which Nikolenka can understand his mother's death. Rather than reveling in the sublime horrors of the

Gothic novel, Tolstoy concentrates on beautiful emotions, that are themselves based in the ultimate horror of the death of the mother. Radcliffe relies on Burke's claim that, "at certain distances and with certain modifications" we find the ideas of pain and danger to be delightful. Likewise, at a certain distance, and with certain modifications, Nikolenka as narrator delights in the ideas of grief and loss, finding in them an odd sort of comfort.²⁴

Notes

1. The phrase in brackets was crossed out.
2. Tolstoy only rarely spelled Radcliffe's name correctly; in quoting him, I have preserved his various misspellings. He also, of course, misspells Souza in this passage.
3. Keats, for example, in a letter to George and Georgiana Keats, refers to his "fine mother Radcliff" (Keats 2:62). Walter Scott, although Radcliffe's contemporary and an admirer of her work, describes her novels as "the fare of the nursery" (Scott 119).
4. Of course, Dostoevsky, as well as Tolstoy, connected Radcliffe with his childhood and his parents. However, Dostoevsky's recollection of Radcliffe emphasizes her scariness, which Tolstoy never even mentions.
5. Radcliffe's novels, and Gothic novels in general, lend themselves easily to a particular sort of parody, of which *Northanger Abbey* is the most famous. In this novel, as well as in Eaton Barret's *The Heroine* and Anne Fuller's *The Convent*, the humor centers on the fact that the heroine insists on interpreting prosaic reality as if it were a Gothic novel. (See DeLamotte [178-9] for a discussion of *The Heroine* and *The Convent*.) Thus, Catherine in *Northanger Abbey* decides that, since Henry Tilney's father is fussy and unpleasant, he must be a murderer—a conclusion that would make sense in the context of a Gothic novel, but is ridiculous in Austen's contemporary English setting. It is possible that Nikolenka Tolstoy was improvising a similar sort of "humorous story in the spirit of m-me Radcliffe." If my guess is right, then there is a link between Nikolenka Tolstoy and the Nikolenka of *Childhood*, in that both knew how to read the outside world as if it were a Radcliffe novel—though in Nikolenka Irten'ev's case, the effect is far from humorous.
6. For a discussion of some of these themes, see, for example, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (154-61) on the intricacies of identity in the Gothic; Ann Williams on "the Female Gothic" as a genre which both explores and represses the horrors of the patriarchal familial system (37-48); and Claudia Johnson on the validity of male versus female suffering in *Udolpho* (95-115).
7. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to the trilogy as one novel, rather than three. *Youth* figures little in my argument, for reasons I will discuss later.
8. See Hugh McLean's article "The Case of the Missing Mothers," on *War and Peace*, and Pierre and Prince Andrei's mysteriously absent mothers.
9. Radcliffe's importance for Tolstoy does not end with *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, *Youth*; the influence of the Gothic is apparent also in Tolstoy's late writings.
10. In Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, Agnes the nun is punished for having gotten pregnant by being locked in a dungeon "with no companion but religion." In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine becomes convinced that Mr. Tilney has locked up his wife, whom everyone believes to be dead. In *Jane Eyre*, the locked-up woman is Jane's double, the first Mrs. Rochester.
11. This helps to explain why she leaves all of her property to her granddaughter Liuba, and yet makes Prince Ivan Ivanych, rather than Irten'ev, the executor of the estate. Nikolenka's grandmother understands that, like Montoni, Irten'ev is not to be trusted with the estates of his dependents.
12. Radcliffe's grammar and punctuation may seem quirky to a modern reader. She habitually writes "neither . . . or" instead of "neither . . . nor," and her use of commas can sometimes seem overenthusiastic. In quoting her, I have preserved her original wording and punctuation.
13. Catherine Morland, in *Northanger Abbey*, enthuses, "While I have *Udolpho* to read, I feel as if nobody could make me miserable. Oh! the dreadful black veil! My dear Isabella, I am sure there must be *Laurentina's* skeleton behind it" (Austen 25).
14. Perhaps Nikolenka's initial refusal to recognize his dead mother comes from his having read Radcliffe, and

learned from her that a corpse is not always a corpse? Catherine Morland, an overly fervent reader of the Gothic, refuses to believe in Mrs. Tilney's death: "Were she even to descend into the family vault where her ashes were supposed to slumber, were she to behold the coffin in which they were said to be enclosed—what could it avail in such a case? Catherine had read too much not to be perfectly aware of the ease with which a waxen figure might be introduced, and a suppositious funeral carried on" (Austen 153).

15. Anne Williams reads "Bluebeard" as what she calls "achieved Gothic." Though predating the Gothic tradition by about a hundred years, having been published in 1697, "Bluebeard," Williams claims, embodies some of the major principles of Gothic conventions (Williams 38-48).

16. Anna, when still living with Karenin, keeps her love letters from Vronsky locked in a briefcase. Perhaps Irten'ev did the same.

17. Bruno Bettelheim, in his analysis of "Bluebeard," suggests that the story's central metaphor is one of sexual betrayal. He goes on to say that "to the child, I believe part of the attraction of the story is that it confirms his idea that adults have terrible sexual secrets" (Bettelheim 299-303). For Anne Williams, the dismembered bodies in the forbidden room represent "patriarchy's dirty secret" of mistreated women (Williams 38-48). Though Williams polemicizes with Bettelheim, I find that their interpretations complement, rather than contradict each other.

18. In much of the writing on *Udolpho*, Montoni is referred to as a "demon lover" figure, who sexually menaces the heroine. Although there is a sexual energy in Montoni, he spends most of the novel completely ignoring the heroine, except when he is trying to get money from her. Rather, I would identify Montoni as being primarily an image of the Bad Father—he ignores Emily, punishes her unjustly, sells her hand in marriage to the highest bidder, and at one point, when she refuses to resign the estate she has inherited from her aunt, he withdraws his protection from her, so that the thugs of the castle are free to harass her without fear of any repercussion. His cruelty, then, is more than anything in his coldness and neglect. As for the primary sexual aggressor in the novel—I would identify that as being the castle Udolpho itself.

19. See DeLamotte (166-176), as well as Johnson (99-

110).

20. Note that it is Irten'ev who first approaches the idea of "*comme il faut*," at the ball in *Boyhood*, when he hisses at his son, "Il ne fallait pas danser, si vous ne savez pas!" Later, Nikolenka includes excellent dancing and excellent French in his list of "*comme il faut*" attributes. There is something disturbing in Nikolenka's obsession with the paternal rules; when combined with his no longer reading Radcliffe, it begins to imply that he *has* in fact forgotten his mother, as she so often begs him not to. He says himself, "If I had had a brother, a mother or a father, who was not *comme il faut*, I would have said that it was too bad, but that I could have nothing in common with them." Certainly, Irten'ev and Volodia are at the height of elegance—but Natalia Irten'eva seems somewhat too tolerant of her social inferiors to be perfectly *comme il faut*. One wonders, therefore, whether Nikolenka's preoccupation with this idea does not imply a rejection of her, in favor of his father.

21. See Robin Miller's article, "Dostoevsky and the Tale of Terror." Miller begins by noting some of the themes Dostoevsky borrowed from the Gothic novel, such as the tragic hero-villain, the fatal woman, the mixture of slapstick comedy with narrations of horrific events, and the juxtaposing of the beautiful and the terrible. She suggests that Dostoevsky is particularly innovative in adding a moral, religious element to the idea of the sublime, and thus raising "to a metaphysical level this Gothic tendency to mix the beautiful with the sublime."

22. Compare this with another carriage scene, in *The Italian*. The heroine, Ellena, has been abducted by masked ruffians. Looking out at the grandeur of the scenery, she muses, "If I am condemned to misery, surely I could endure it with more fortitude in scenes like these, than amidst the tamer landscapes of nature!" (Italian, 62). When the road passes over a waterfall, she is so filled with "dreadful pleasure" that she forgets her fear, remembering it only when the carriage passes into a "sunshine landscape." Thus, for Ellena, not only is the sublime more powerful than the beautiful, but it is more comforting as well.

23. Dismembered body parts—hands in particular—often carry this sort of meaning in Tolstoy. See in particular *War and Peace*: Nikolai Rostov, in the epilogue, refers to his infant son as a "lump of flesh." Later, talking to his wife, he says "I don't love you. Do

I love my finger? But just try cutting it off!" Platon Karataev's father uses the same metaphor; he expresses his grief at Platon's having to be conscripted, and says he loves all his children equally: "No matter which finger you bite, it still hurts." In a family made up of lumps of flesh, the loss of a member is an act of violence against the family. With the loss of Platon, and the foreshadowed death of Princess Mary, the family is maimed, like the handless beggar in *Boyhood*. Finally, Anatole's amputated leg is a punishment for his attempt to maim the Rostov family with the seduction and ruin of Natasha. Of course, the amputation is a castration scene, but it is also a representation in physical terms—the only terms Anatole can understand—of the depth of his meditated sin, and the devastating loss the Rostov family almost underwent.

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