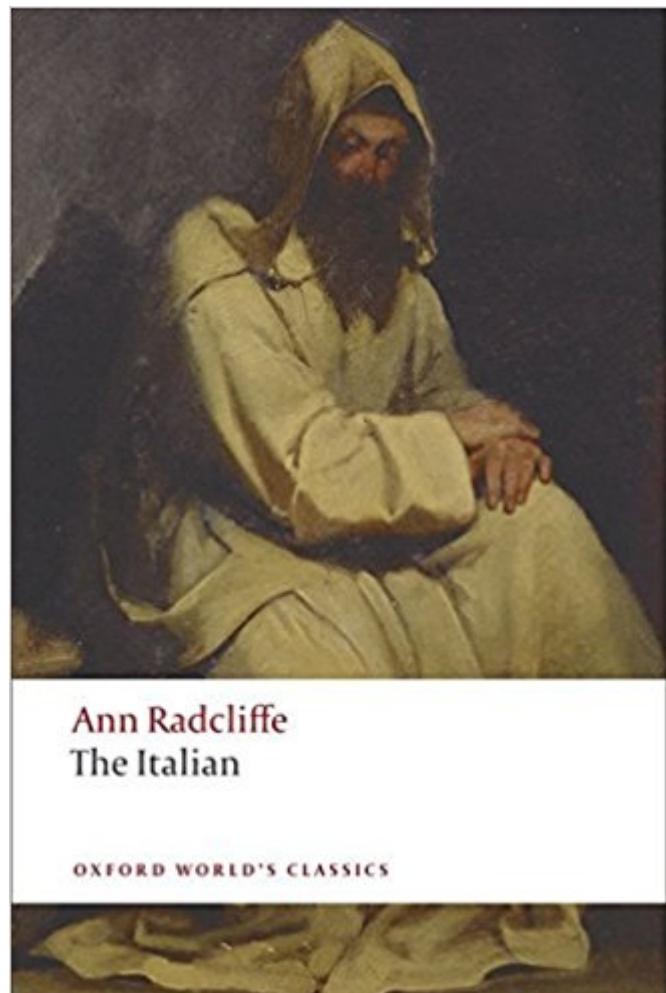


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The Italian (Oxford World's Classics)



Synopsis

First published in 1797, *The Italian* is one of the finest examples of Gothic romance. The fast-paced, narrative centres on Ann Radcliffe's most brilliant creation, the sinister monk Schedoni, whose past is shrouded in mystery. From the novel's opening chapters the reader is ushered into a shadowy world in which crime and religion are mingled. In the church of Santa Maria del Pianto in Naples, Ellena Rosalba and Vincentio di Vivaldi first meet; but their love is ill-omened. Leagued against them are the proud and ambitious Marchese di Vivaldi and her confessor Father Schedoni. When Ellena vanishes on the death of her guardian, Vivaldi sets out in pursuit of her across the mountainous regions of southern Italy before himself falling prey to the Holy Inquisition. This revised and expanded edition explores the novel in the context of British attitudes to Italy and Roman Catholicism in the late eighteenth century with close attention to the novel's style and form.

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Customer Reviews

I read this book in Japanese translation years ago, and recently read it again in the original language in order to write a paper. And I can say, both times the book gave me a good, healthy

amount of thrill and joy. Published in 1796, "The Italian" became an instant success, cementing the fame of Ann Radcliffe among the literary circle. Her name has been already well-known with her previous work "The Mysteries of Udolpho" two years before, but in my book this follow-up is better than the other. Of course, it depends on your view which is superior, but it is commonly agreed that Ann Radcliffe's position in the history of English literature is secured by those two Gothic classics, which clearly gave inspiration to Jane Austen, who wrote the joyful "Northanger Abbey." The story is rather simple in the beginning. It tells of a romantic love of young dashing nobleman Vivaldi in Naples, who falls in love with a girl Ellena. But his plan of marriage is soon interrupted by the vicious monk Schedoni. Then ensue abduction, murder (attempted or not), and the Inquisition. There are lots of suspense, terror, and thrill that come from the fluent narrative of Radcliffe, who knows how to engage the readers' attention. (And thankfully, "The Italian" is free from any lengthy poems that are found aplenty among "Udolpho.") To be sure, the third part of the book is damaged by its too complicated relations between characters, and too rapid pen of the author to wrap up the events with rational explanations about the mysterious things in the first part of the book, but the whole book manages to sustain our interest to the end. Radcliffe's effusive descriptions of landscapes (with a little sentimental touch) found in "Udolpho" are gone (but not completely), and the plot is tightly knit so that we can enjoy the fast-paced adventure of the hero and the heroine. The best part of the book is, probably, the middle section where the hero, with his comic relief side-kick, tries to escape from the sinister convent where the heroine is confined to be forced to take a veil. It's a real page-turner which would put many of today's bestselling authors to deserved shame. One of the best Gothic novels ever written, "The Italian" is still a gripping tale. Most regrettable thing is that the author Radcliffe stopped writing totally after this book for the rest of her life (she died in 1823). Considering the fact that she had never been to Italy (she travelled abroad only once, in Netherland and Germany), and that her sublime landscapes are proof of her amazingly imaginative power, her early retirement should be lamented by all of us. But we must be content with what is left. Enjoy this one. THE PENGUIN EDITION published in 2000 has 10 pages of excerpts from contemporary reviews, which would help readers with academic purpose.

First published in 1797, this was the culmination of Ann Radcliffe's writing career. She was seen as the darling of the Gothic mode, which we would probably put into the genre of "thrillers" or "horror". All the appropriate dungeons are here, the hint of demonic influence, the separation of star-struck lovers, revenge, the searching of dark ruins, and the diabolical and angelic facets of the Church. Radcliffe does go deeper than that though through her paced plotting and the limited use of

sentimentality that destroyed so much of writing back then. The gothic novel would run out its course eventually, but had a great effect on the talent of its day. Keats, Byron, and Shelley all owe at least some of their subject matter and modes of expression to Radcliffe. Well, back to the novel itself. The story opens in the year 1764 in Naples, Italy as a group of English tourists are visiting a church. They notice a diabolical looking man who they are informed can never leave the safety of the church walls because he is an assassin. The place is his last sanctuary from those who wish to kill him. Of course the group asks to hear the tale of the assassin and *The Italian* begins. The story opens as a young nobleman named Vincentio di Vivaldi spots the beautiful but common Ellena Rosalba during church service and falls in love with her. From this Dantesque beginning we are led into a Romeo and Juliet scenario in which Vivaldi begins to woo her without the approval of his parents. Then we have the appearance of a cowled priest who appears to warn Vivaldi of future events before they happen. Vivaldi chases him a couple of times but all he ever finds is thin air. As the book continues, Vivaldi's mother will stop at nothing to keep her son from marrying his one true love. I didn't have too much hope that I would like this book when I picked it up, having given up on reading a similar work called *Melmoth the Wanderer* by Charles Maturin. I was very impressed with Radcliffe though. She stayed away from sentimentality and none of the characters was a caricature. They all seemed like deeply drawn personalities. The book had a real modern feel to it, probably because she modeled her stuff on Shakespeare, the most advanced writer of any age. The "thriller" aspects were quite good too. I found myself desperately wanting to turn the page before I had even read it to know what would happen next. *Ann* is a writer I will go back to and read again.

I had never heard of Ann Radcliffe until I read *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austin. *Northanger Abbey* is a parody that "makes fun" of the gothic type novels that were popular at that time. Ann Radcliffe and some of her writings are mentioned by name in *Northanger Abbey*. So...off I went to find out more about Ann and get one her novels. *Ann* was really the first gothic writer and set the scene for the other gothic writers that followed her in the late 1700's and early 1800's. Another reviewer accuses her of copying the novel *The Monk* - but it is actually the opposite. The author of *The Monk* copied her! Anyhow... I loved this book! Vivaldi and Ellena fall in love but Vivaldi's mother is against the match because Ellena is not from a "proper" family. The mother and a monk initiate a plot to keep them from marrying each other. I don't want to say much more, because there are so many interesting plot twists that I don't want to give anything away. It is a great story line that keeps you guessing. There is romance, suspense, mystery, intrigue, evil villains, evil plots, creepy landscapes, and more! It is a long book that took me several weeks to read but was more than worth my time!

I have just finished "The Italian" by Ann Radcliffe. I wish this woman were still alive to write about more memorable characters, like Vivaldi, Ellena, Shedoni and Spalatro. A wonderfully wielded story with romance and edge of your seat adventure through the Italian hills and vales of Naples in the late 1700's. Plot twists and scary evil, deceitful goings on. You feel sorry for the couple torn asunder by the machinations of a haughty mother, and in the end you even feel sorry of the villains because they too realize (however late) that what they did was wrong. I only hope I can find another story like this soon.

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