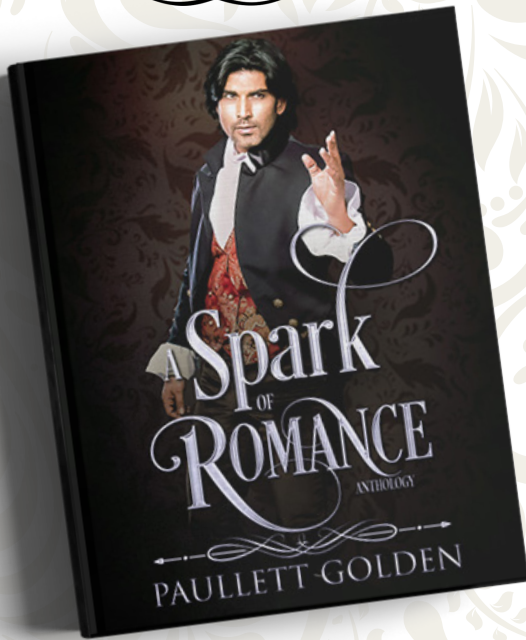


A Spark  
OF  
ROMANCE  
ANTHOLOGY



Book Club Kit

PAULETT GOLDEN



## Dear Reader,

Thank you for choosing *A Spark of Romance* for your book exploration needs, be it to enliven your book club experience, share a buddy read with friends, broaden your professional development, engage students in a classroom, or otherwise. This book club kit will guide your group experience. Use what serves you, skip what doesn't, and be inspired to delve into other explorations that might be sparked by the kit's content.

This novel was reader inspired. Initially, the heroine and hero's romance was intended to be implied only within *A Touch of Romance*. In *Touch*, we see them becoming acquainted, and in the end, Alistair declares his love for her. What I had not anticipated was readers loving Alistair and Isobel in *Touch* more than the main couple in that novel! I received ample enough fan mail wanting more of this pair to prove their story needed to be written. Since their affection had already been established, it seemed fitting not to focus their story on courting each other rather the gothic adventures of Isobel's imagination during courtship since their first attraction in *Touch* was over gothic novels.

The plot, when first drafted, dipped into *being* a gothic romance, but after much revision of that plot, I decided it would be more in keeping with the series as a lighthearted gothic-satire akin to *Northanger Abbey*, where the elements are presents, but the story itself remains a romance.

Something to mull over is the attraction between Alistair and Isobel. While they first bond over a shared love for gothic novels, what is it that will keep their love strong? What is it they each love in the other?

I hope this kit will offer the opportunity to open conversation and stir creativity.

Cheers!

*Paullett xx*

## Isobel's Farmhouse

The inspiration for Isobel's farmhouse was primarily Blakesley Hall, although there were aspects of Churché's Mansion incorporated in my design of her home. The home we see in *Spark* and the real inspiration of Blakesley Hall have ample differences in features and floor plan. A few gems they share are the long gallery, the high ceiling of the dining room, the discovered painted wall in one of the bedrooms, and the small study overlooking the front door. I used more of Blakesley's interior and Churché's exterior when designing her house.

Blakesley Hall is beautifully preserved as a museum of Tudor life and architecture, one that can be toured in person and even through online videos. I recommend watching some of the walkthrough videos to get a feel for Isobel's life in the farmhouse.

# Inspiration for Houses

Both Isobel's farmhouse and Mr. Trowbridge's house are based on real homes, although I took ample liberty with floor plans and features to fictionalize them and personalize them to the plot and characters. The coach house we see referenced in the final chapter is not based on a specific coach house conversion, but I was inspired by a combination of unconverted Georgian coach houses, as well as modern conversions that show the potential for the space and existing floor plan.

There are *many* different styles, just as many as there are regions in India. I've selected nine draping styles to spotlight, but there are certainly more than these.

Let's explore these styles, and then we'll look at step-by-step instructions as to how Leila might have draped her Bengali saree — have a scarf handy so that you might try it yourself!



This resource provides virtual tours of the lower and upper floors. Should the link not remain viable, a quick search online will help discover similar resources and walkthroughs:

<https://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/blakesley-hall/360-tour-of-blakesley-hall>

A few resources to enjoy images and details, hoping the links remain viable, include:

- ♥ <https://www.theoldrectory.com/>
- ♥ <https://content.knightfrank.com/property/cho180148/brochures/en/cho180148-en-brochure-7898fc7d-82df-44d2-9fbf-1459e0d5317c-1.pdf>
- ♥ <https://www.historichouses.org/house/the-old-rectory/history/>

## Mr. Trowbridge's House

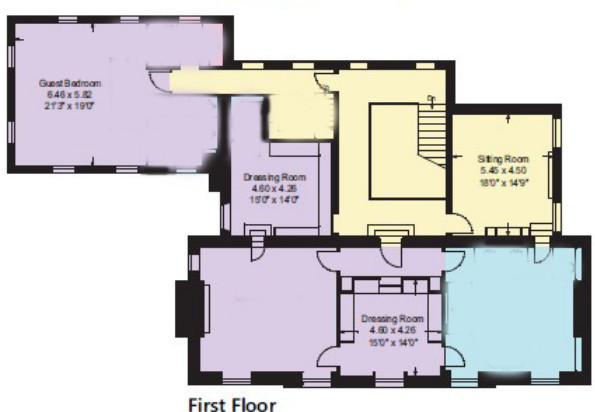
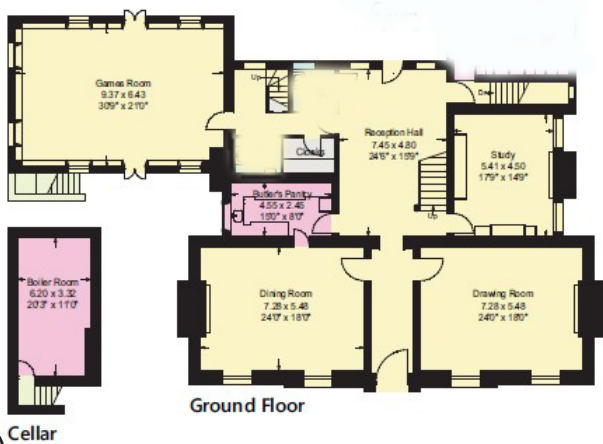
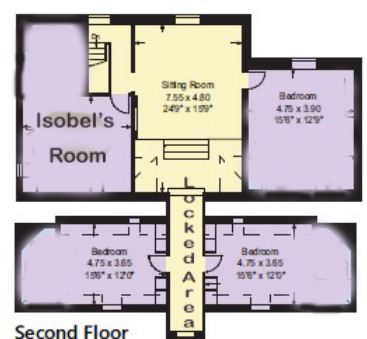
The inspiration for Mr. Trowbridge's house is exclusively The Old Rectory in Burghfield. While I took the liberty of making changes to the grounds, floor plan, and history, the location in Burghfield, the Cedar of Lebanon tree, and the bones of the house are in keeping with this Grade II Georgian home. Interestingly, there are two "old rectories" near Reading, both in or near Burghfield, one being a wedding venue which is more apt to show in search results, and one a private home, which is the one I used, so hopefully the image gallery and links provided will help identify which one was used as inspiration.

This floor plan is a modified version of the real floor plan of The Old Rectory. This is *not* accurate as to how Mr. Trowbridge's house is laid out in *Spark*, but it is this plan that inspired my design of the fictional floor plan, from the locations of the rooms, the second-floor-only access by way of the servant stairs, the location and possible layout of the locked area and its access to the stairs by Isobel's room, etc. When reading, you should be able to spot the differences in layout and features while also seeing how and why this floor plan inspired the fictional version.



Inspiration  
~  
Old Rectory

This floor plan is a modified version of the real floor plan of The Old Rectory. This is *not* accurate as to how Mr. Trowbridge's house is laid out in *Spark*, but it is this plan that inspired my design of the fictional floor plan, from the locations of the rooms, the second-floor-only access by way of the servant stairs, the location and possible layout of the locked area and its access to the stairs by Isobel's room, etc. When reading, you should be able to spot the differences in layout and features while also seeing how and why this floor plan inspired the fictional version.



Cellar

As long as the links remain viable, these are a couple of the inspirations for my final vision (but what is your final vision?):

♥ <https://www.realhomes.com/completed-projects/real-home-explore-a-18th-century-converted-coach-house>

♥ <https://tombayley.com/project-spotlight-georgian-coach-house-by-homes-gardens/>

## Coach House

Georgian coach houses, also called carriage houses and coachman houses, were nearly exclusive to stately homes, as they served as a status symbol of wealth since only those with wealth could afford to own carriages — much less buildings to house them. The grander and wealthier the estate, the larger and more ornate the coach house. Some coach houses of the era were impressively grand, not only in size but in architectural design, providing a perfect foundation for a conversion into a family home.

While we don't see the final conversion in the story, my vision for the final home includes stately home grandeur but with the uniqueness the coach house floor plan would offer. There are ample examples of conversions that fueled my imagination as to what Isobel and Alistair might have wanted for their "dream" home. As to any accuracy of someone converting a coach house into a livable home *during* the Georgian era — pure fiction.

Georgian coach houses *were* homes, the coachman and sometimes other staff living upstairs in the first-floor quarters while the carriages and tack were stored below on the ground floor. Depending on how large the coach house and complex, the horses could be stabled in the coach house, as well, or they could have separate stables altogether. Given coach houses were already designed as living quarters, it is not a stretch of imagination to consider what a conversion would have been at the time for a gentry family. It would not have taken a great deal of reworking to turn it into a comfortable family home. That said, with a culture based on status, it would have been unthinkable to convert the family's garage into a family home, no matter how luxurious the final version, so however grand, however expansive, no one would have done it. But that's the joy of fiction, right?

When imagining what Isobel sees when she first arrives at the coach house, you can go as quaint or as grand as you would like. Take, for example, the Waddesdon Manor stables. If you search for images, tours, and floor plans of it, the stables and complex are remarkably expansive, and the end result would be akin to a Moroccan Riad or Mediterranean home with central courtyard. My inspiration was more modest than that, but only *you* can decide what Isobel and Alistair chose.

While I'm not satisfied with any of the links for Middleton Coach House, which has been converted into a lodge and restaurant, if you image search it, you'll find some great photos of the various rooms and spaces, all ripe for Isobel and Alistair inspiration.

## History & Features of Georgian Coach Houses:

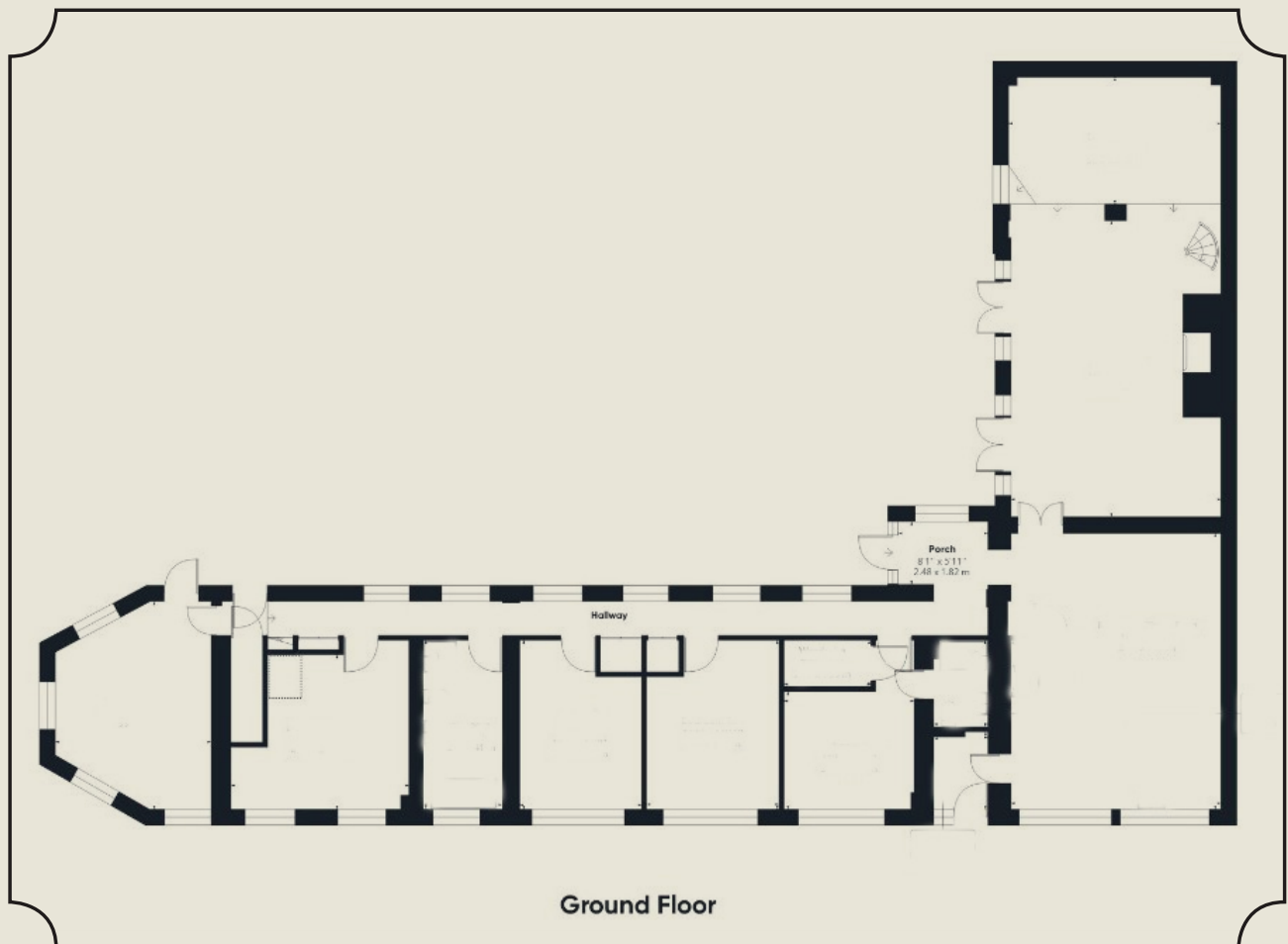
Georgian coach houses were considered architectural masterpieces, serving not only the purposes of being the estate garage, but also reflecting the grandeur and design of the stately home to which it belonged. The façades were often as grand and as elegant in ornamentation as the stately home, such as Palladian columns, intricate carvings, decorative cornices, etc. The interior could range from utilitarian brick and stonework to opulent, all with soaring ceilings and timber beams, inglenook fireplaces, showcase looseboxes, and more, ripe for landowners to tour their guests through the coach house with as much pride as their own home.

The building of coach house began in the Georgian era, so the structures were not merely an outbuilding to house the carriage, coachman, and more, rather a demonstration of all that Georgian architecture, wealth, status, and culture had to offer. The location differed from estate to estate, depending on the size, needs, and preferences of the estate owner at time of build. If you were to look at the stable block at Ormesby Hall, for instance, you would see how close it is situated to the house, but not all estates favored having the carriages and horses so nearby. Some were so close as to be connected to the main house by way of courtyard or colonnade.

The features of a Georgian coach house are what give it that Isobel and Alistair splendor:

- ♥ **Grand façade:** These were showpieces, not a wooden barn or small garage. These were designed with grand proportions, featuring arched openings for carriages to ride through, a design feature often repeated for windows and doorways. Pediments and decorative cornices added elegance.
- ♥ **Greek Revival:** Pilasters and columns were popular choices to reflect the style of the stately home.
  - ♥ **Ornamentation:** No coach house was complete without intricate moldings, carvings, motifs, and detailing that decorated both interior and exterior.
  - ♥ **Arches:** The arched entrances are the centerpiece of the coach house, which is not only part of the grand façade but also a key element in and of itself.
  - ♥ **Courtyard or Colonnade:** Most coach houses were not a single building, rather had one or more wings to form a courtyard, the wings typically serving as stables to keep the carriages and tack separate from the horses. The courtyard was often large enough to be used as a training ground and warm-up area for horses, not to mention large enough for carriages to turn as needed. Not all had colonnades, but these were popular features, which were little more than a covered walkway to connect to the estate's house.
  - ♥ **Roofline:** Coach houses usually feature at least one inglenook fireplace, its chimney visible from the roofline. The roof is usually steep and sloping, and sometimes features dormer windows for the first floor living quarters.
  - ♥ **Layout:** The floor plan of an unconverted coach house is usually living quarters on first floor, and storage on ground floor. The ground floor storage consists of an impressively large and high-ceilinged carriage storage area, enough room for at least one stately coach, but depending on the wealth of the owner, likely room for several – the grand arch is what distinguishes the carriage entrance. In addition, there are a series of smaller rooms for storage, workshops, offices, repairs and cleaning, and more. Some of the wealthier coach houses even featured stag parlors for the gentlemen to view horse dressage from inside luxurious comfort.

This is a basic floor plan for the ground floor of a Georgian coach house with one central block and one wing. There would, of course, be another story above with additional rooms for living quarters, but the ground floor alone gives a great idea of how the coach house could become a family home without much manipulation of the existing structure. The room designations are blank for you to decide how you might arrange things for Isobel and Alistair – and remember, no need to use any of the spaces for sleeping quarters since those would be upstairs. In terms of space, the entire coach house would likely be around 4,000 square feet, give or take. The size varies from estate to estate to some being around 7,000 square feet and others a mere 2,000. Much depended on how many carriages the owner anticipated owning, as well as how many horses if the stables were included in the coach house design. It's shocking to imagine the *garage* as being something like 7,000 square feet of livable space when the average, middle-income, modern family home is approximately 2,000, but do bear in mind the function of these coach houses, the size of a large carriage and smaller gigs, as well as the size of the actual stately home, which would be somewhere around 24,700 square feet.



The following are exterior and interior inspirations for what Isobel might have seen at first visit compared to how it might look post-conversion. These are collages of many different coach houses, not the same one.





# Activities

The following activities are ways to engage your creativity. Some activities are better suited for book clubs, others for classrooms, and so forth. Enjoy the choices that best suit your group or be inspired to design your own activity.

Proceeding the list of activities is a “Learn & Apply” that offers the chance to craft something alongside a brief tutorial.

## Writing

- ♥ Select a scene from the novel in which you wish to change the choices made by the hero and/or heroine. Either outline what the characters could have done differently and how that would have then altered the story or rewrite the scenes to have the characters make alternative choices.

## Design

- ♥ Create one or more memes and quote images by selecting quotes from the book that resonated with you.

## Music

- ♥ Create one or more memes and quote images by selecting quotes from the book that resonated with you.

## Movies

- ♥ Create a mood board for the movie or series based on the novel. The mood board can include the casting choices (especially for the hero and heroine), the fashion choices, the setting locations, important scene inspiration, soundtrack ideas, etc.

## Researching

- ♥ After considering the information on Gothicism in the Learn & Apply section, see if you can list all the elements and themes used in Spark. Once the list is complete, mull over which type of Gothicism was most influential.
- ♥ Mercury was prescribed to Eleanor not only to treat morning sickness but also melancholy. What were some of the common reasons Mercury was prescribed to patients, and what were the treatment methods, ie blue mass, calomel, quicksilver, etc.?
- ♥ Conduct your own research on the role of settlement governors in West Bengal for the East India Company and the change of title to province governor.
- ♥ Consider investigating landownership of the Georgian era – how would Alistair’s property ownership in England be different from his estate in India, and how would either of these be different from a British aristocrat’s entailed holdings?
- ♥ In honor of Isobel’s love for reading gothic novels, consider choosing one of the novels of the time to read or research.

# Learn & Apply Activity

## Learn and Apply Activity



Isobel's understanding of Gothicism would have differed from our own understanding of the genre. The Gothic genre can be separated into 3 periods: Pre-Radcliffe, Post-Radcliffe, and Victorian. These categories are not "official," simply used for our purposes with this Learn and Apply Activity since we're framing this from Isobel's understanding of the genre – what came before Radcliffe, how the genre is viewed now that Isobel has read Radcliffe, and then what comes after her time that was influenced by Radcliffe and the early Gothic works. In literature studies, you'll find the Gothic eras called many things, such as "Early Gothicism," "Rise of Gothicism," etc., but regardless of title, the sentiment and characteristics remain the same.

We'll cover the basics of what distinguishes the three eras, and then you'll want to try your hand at crafting a plot featuring a Gothic atmosphere. You'll be able to mix and match to create the plot for endless fun, incorporating a combination of all eras or being true to one era. While the activity is *only* to mix and match the plot based on the elements, don't hesitate to take this further by crafting a short story or longer based on your plot features.

## Learn

### Pre-Radcliffe Gothicism:

The Gothic novel was a response to the Age of Enlightenment. The Enlightenment encompassed a great many things, but our key points are to do with scientific discovery and reason. In literature, philosophy, and beyond, there was a push that *sense* (good judgement, prudence) overruled *sensibility* (emotionality, sympathy). Reason, rationality, and logic should drive us. We should never be ruled by our emotions. And yes, the "romantic era" that followed the Enlightenment was in direct opposition and response to this focus on reason over emotion, but we'll focus on what this meant for Gothicism in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

During the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we see two sentiments collide to create the Gothic genre. As you might know, the Regency era of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

obsessed over Classic Greek *everything*, from architecture to fashion. Well, in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the obsession was similar but to do with the Germanic Goths. The Gothic embodied everything the Enlightenment fought against, and thus we see this fascination with all things Gothic. To those in the Enlightenment, the Germanic Goths embodied the essence of the Middle Ages, that dark and chaotic time full of barbarism, heathenism, and superstition. Rather than look at that with disdain, the people were truly fascinated and drawn to it as a reaction to the stiff upper lip of the Enlightenment.

When culture wanted reason, the people desired an emotional outlet instead, anything *irrational* and *unreasonable*. Thus the birth of the Gothic novel, which invited the collapse of reason into a world of fantasy, superstition, supernatural, emotion, and mayhem.

In 1764, Horace Walpole wrote what's considered to be the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*. All that is Gothic literature began here. It defined the characteristics and elements of the early Gothic literature era.

When we think of Gothicism *before* Radcliffe, then we should be thinking of horror meets fantasy. The main characters are not battling a "villain" rather they're battling the supernatural, haunted by ghosts, vampires, demons, anything that is otherworldly, fantastical, and spiritual. This is not man against man but man against demon. THIS is what defines the early Gothic novels, the Pre-Radcliffe literature.

The more exaggerated and bizarre, the better, such as ghosts stepping out of paintings, suits of armor coming to life, djinn granting wishes for immortality and omnipotence, potions that give unlimited power, fountains cursed never to satiate thirst, etc. The genre was not horror for horror's sake, rather it opposed the Enlightenment by abandoning reason, questioning human nature, exploring the unknown, and experiencing the range of emotions being suppressed by the Enlightenment.

What distinguishes the Gothic novels of this era is quite different from what we see with Radcliffe and after. To understand what comes after and why, it's important to see what was considered Gothic pre-Radcliffe, and to see what Isobel would have understood as Gothic since she would have been reading the pre-Radcliffe books as her primary source of the genre. As an added bonus to your reading and Gothic experience, consider reading *A Touch of Romance*, the book before *Spark*, to see what all Isobel crafts when it comes to poems and plays, as she incorporates many of the early Gothic elements in those works.

### The elements and themes of Pre-Radcliffe Gothic novels:

#### ♥ Structure and Writing Characteristics

- ♥ Impassioned language, exaggerated to induce panic and terror
- ♥ Emphasis on setting and the mood inspired by the setting

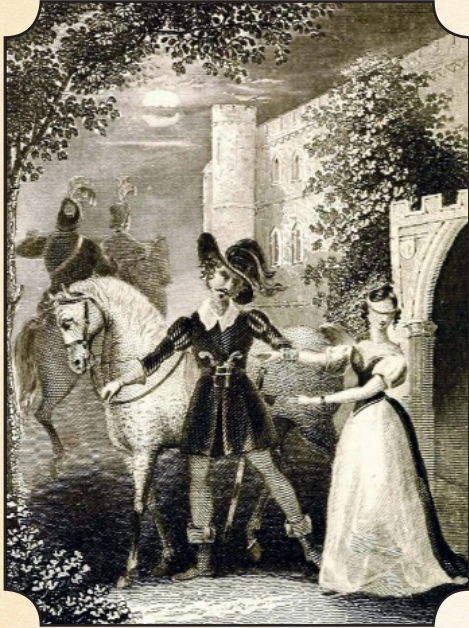
## ♥ Elements

- ♥ Supernatural
- ♥ Ghosts and hauntings and the early concepts of vampires
  - A note on vampires: in 1748, the German poet Ossenfelder wrote an erotic poem called "The Vampire." This was the first time the word appeared and would not reappear until decades later.
  - In 1773, Bruger wrote *Lenore* which represented Death as a vampire, but the word "vampire" was not directly used.
- ♥ Apparitions, namely of the past, such as an ancestor
- ♥ Occult
- ♥ Omens and curses
- ♥ Djinn, demons, magic wielders
- ♥ Fires
- ♥ Flickering candles, especially if they extinguish at a frightening moment
- ♥ Faust and Melmoth-like figures
- ♥ Burials, claustrophobia, coffins, crypts, death
- ♥ Evil potions
- ♥ Dark forests
- ♥ Sweeping landscapes described in detail
- ♥ Echoes and silences that seem unnatural
- ♥ Writing on tombstones or walls, hidden letters discovered, bonus if the writing is illegible
- ♥ Ominous weather, especially storms
- ♥ Graveyards and gloomy houses
- ♥ Body doubles
- ♥ Discovery of family ties, the more obscure the better
- ♥ Inanimate objects coming to life
- ♥ Sleeplike and deathlike trances

## ♥ Themes

- ♥ Poisoning
- ♥ Nocturnal dreams and landscapes
- ♥ Unrest
- ♥ Turbulent culture and setting
- ♥ Foreign settings with exoticism and unexplored territory

## Post-Radcliffe Gothicism:



The Gothic boom occurred in the 1790s, all because of Ann Radcliffe. She redefined Gothicism and influenced the plot and characteristics of all books to publish in the genre from this point forward. Rather than looking to the otherworldly for the villainy, such as ghosts and demons, she created *realism* within the genre, where the villains were real people, perhaps your neighbor!

We still see elements of early Gothicism, such as the supernatural, the verisimilitude, the sensibility, etc. but the main characters are not battling ghosts and demons, rather flesh and blood villains out to steal their property, name, virtue, and so forth. Many of the elements carried over from the early period are transformed by Radcliffe, such as the supernatural – rather than what the character experiences being truly

supernatural, the character will *think* it's supernatural only to realize it is manmade. A ghostly figure could turn out to be a person's shadow. A ghostly moan could turn out to be a person in a hidden room being held captive.

By making the horror *real*, it created a different reading experience, one that made her stories almost believable. Unlike with the early Gothicism, where the main characters were predominantly men, Radcliffe focused on women. The most common plot was to do with a damsel in distress being held captive by a malevolent and irredeemable villain. The villains were as bad as bad gets, no remorse for their actions, no humanity within, pure villains out to get what they want and thus the more difficult to defeat. There was almost always a hero, who made it his mission to rescue the damsel. European characters were common as either villain or hero (or both) to add an "exotic" flavoring for the readers who wished to live vicariously through the stories, not to mention it was easier to believe some of another culture could be the hero or villain than one's on friend, family member, or neighbor.

Radcliffe's inducement of terror and horror is based not on terror or horror itself but on what is perceived as horror conjured in one's *imagination*. The early Gothic novels considered the supernatural to be horrific, and thus we battled demons and ghosts – real horrors. Radcliffe considered our own imagination to be more horrific, and thus we battle our own fears. Rather than have a ghost appear on scene to haunt us, she might have us hear sounds to make us *think* it's a ghost, and thus we are driven to terror by our imaginings only, for in the end we discover there never was a ghost, only a leaky roof, but our imagination did all the work to create the fear.

As aforementioned, women play a critical role in Radcliffe's newly defined Gothic genre. While the women are often the damsels in distress, she does not portray them as being *weak*, rather as strong enough mentally, physically, and emotionally to withstand whatever the villain does, and potentially comes to her own rescue, even while the hero

is working hard to find her and save her. The women in her stories can overtake villains, outrun villains, and outthink villains. It is usually the woman in the story who solves the mystery.

In the list of elements, you'll see an overlap with early Gothicism, but pay close attention to the differences: supernatural is now *real*, women play critical role, Catholicism is the new "barbarism" as opposed to the Middle Ages' Germanic Goths, and more.

### The elements and themes of Radcliffe & Post-Radcliffe Gothic novels:

#### ♥ Structure and Writing Characteristics

- ♥ Impassioned language, exaggerated to induce panic and terror
- ♥ Emphasis on setting and the mood inspired by the setting

#### ♥ Elements

- ♥ Supernatural and paranormal *rationalized*
- ♥ Foreshadowing
- ♥ Villains and damsels
  - Damsel in distress
  - Damsels held captive
  - Damsels terrorized by noblemen/aristocrats
  - Women rendered powerless
  - Women suffering at the hand of a powerful and malicious male villain
  - Women discovering the mystery and saving themselves
  - Women pursued by hero and villain
  - Dissolute noblemen
  - Autocratic and authoritarian villains
  - Heroes are in love with damsel
  - Hero bests villain while damsel solves mystery and escapes
- ♥ Secret wives and children
- ♥ Sex-crazed villains
- ♥ Madhouses, asylums, and institutions
- ♥ Atmospheric elements to induce fear or premonition
  - Fires
  - Flickering candles, especially if they extinguish at a frightening moment
  - Burials, claustrophobia, coffins, crypts, death
  - Dark forests
  - Echoes and silences that seem unnatural but will be *rationalized*

- Ominous weather, especially storms
- Graveyards and gloomy houses, especially castles
- ♥ Sweeping landscapes described in detail
- ♥ Abbies, priest holes, monasteries (anything related to Catholicism)
- ♥ Priests

#### ♥ Themes

- ♥ Guilt or shame
- ♥ Poisoning
- ♥ Nocturnal dreams and landscapes
- ♥ Unrest, be it political, social, or otherwise
- ♥ Turbulent culture and setting
- ♥ Dramatic settings, usually something familiar, such as Scottish Highlands, Italy, etc., but with an emphasis on the “eerie,” such as mists and fog, insurmountable mountains, etc.
- ♥ Madness or emotional distress
- ♥ Oppression and loneliness, especially with women and at the expense of a male villain

## Victorian Gothicism:



Victorian Gothicism overlaps with the Post-Radcliffe Gothicism since many of the influential Victorian Gothic novels were written on the cusp of the Victorian era, and those after Queen Victoria’s coronation were heavily influenced by this new Gothicism Radcliffe had created.

Victorian Gothicism incorporates many of the same elements but provides its own twists based on the rise of science, industrialism, and assembly and child labor. In a way, we see a resurgence of the supernatural elements of the early Gothic novels, such as with the fascination of vampires, but the novels of this era predominantly reflect the “real” villain Radcliffe established over the demonic villain. The “real” villain of Victorian Gothicism, however, is *not* the malicious and corrupt evildoer, rather the villain is an anti-hero, a genuine person we at first sympathize with who has, because of his own delving into human nature, psyche, science, or circumstance, has become monstrous, literally or figuratively.

The spiritualism movement popularized in this era influenced the writing, as well, such as mediums, hypnosis, talking in tongues, and so forth. We see within Victorian Gothic novels the familiar themes of damsels, villains, atmospheric castles and settings, but the Victorians situate everything within *our own daily world*, be it the workplace, the

moors, the city streets, or otherwise, showing us the terror within our backyards rather than an exotic landscape far away. Much of the themes we see are social activism and social commentary loosely disguised as horror fiction. Even the use of vampires is social commentary instead of the inducement of terror based on the unknown and paranormal. Nearly all elements of the novels are based in fact, be it people, events, or objects.

Interestingly, the role of the woman changes from Radcliffe's strong but distressed damsel to a woman haunted or driven insane by society or societal elements. Often featured in these novels are the "woman in black," the "woman in white," the mournful widow, the virginal bride, the sexually repressed woman, and the victim of oppression, medicine, or science.

### The elements and themes of Victorian Gothic novels:

#### ♥ Structure and Writing Characteristics

- ♥ Realism combined with the abomination of nature
- ♥ Emphasis on relatable and recognizable settings

#### ♥ Elements

- ♥ Anti-hero
  - Complex villains
  - Sympathetic villains
- ♥ Science experiments and medical treatments
- ♥ Villains that reflect social commentary
  - Vampires
  - Humanoid monsters
  - Men with monstrous traits
  - Mad scientists
  - Autocratic and authoritarian villains
- ♥ Women influenced by evil
  - Women poisoned, hypnotized, or drugged into comply
  - Women sympathetic to villain's plight
  - Women seduced by villain
  - Women terrorized by monster
- ♥ Monsters
  - Humanized monsters (man created)
  - Human monsters (the monster within)
- ♥ Madhouses and institutions
- ♥ Sweeping landscapes described in detail



♥ Atmospheric elements to make even the most grotesque horror believable, relatable, and recognizable within ourselves, within society, and within our surroundings

- Fires
- City streets
- Burials, claustrophobia, coffins, crypts, death
- Moors
- Workhouses
- Ominous weather, especially storms
- Graveyards and gloomy houses, especially castles

♥ Themes

- ♥ Passionate romance leading to tragedy
- ♥ Romantic love affairs filled with sorrow
- ♥ Drug use for medicinal purposes, hallucinogenic purposes, recreation, and hypnosis, eg:
  - Absinthe
  - Opium
  - Mercury
  - Laudanum
- ♥ Nocturnal dreams and landscapes
  - Often induced by spiritual persuasion or drug use/poisoning
- ♥ Child labor, abuse, and abduction
- ♥ Gritty settings, usually something familiar, but described with added dinginess, detail, breadth, oppression, gloom and darkness, and filth to create a sense of isolation, danger, and hopelessness
- ♥ Madness, emotional distress, helplessness
- ♥ Oppression and loneliness, especially when battling one's own inner weaknesses

## Apply

Elements, themes, and structures previously mentioned have been combined in the “Apply” section without the distinction of era. The name of the game is to devise your own Gothic story by selecting 1-3 elements from each column. Once elements are selected, brainstorm the story’s main plot. The fun can end here, or you can take this a step further to *write* your Gothic story, either as a short story, an oral story shared with your companions, or a lengthier fiction.

Gothic Plot Generator			
Villains	Elements (atmosphere, themes, setting, etc.)	Locations/Setting	Conflicts
Anti-hero	Apparitions	Italy	Damsel held captive
Vampire	Tight spaces – castle stairs, coffins, tunnels	France	Damsel falls for villain
Ghost	Graveyard/Catacombs	Austria	Hero or damsel induced into sleeplike state
Monster	Poisons/Medicine	Asia	Hidden/secret person
Human turned monster	Nightmares	Middle East	Power granted, be it immortality, beauty, ability, or otherwise
Nobleman	Dingy streets	Scotland	Man vs Man, Man vs Beast, Man vs Self, Man vs Supernatural, or Man vs Nature
Husband or betrothed	Madness/Institutions	England	Revenge
Father figure	Storms	Mountains	Guilt or remorse drives decisions
Scientist	Hero	Workhouses or laboratories	Scientific discovery causes chaos
Physician	Fires	Castles	Star-crossed lovers
Foreign Diplomat	Candles	Moors	Romance ends in tragedy
Foreign Royal	Damsel	Cityscapes	Long-lost relative is discovered or a catalyst
Occultist	Genealogical discoveries	Greece	Hero must make a sacrifice
Demon	Curses and omens	Monastery/Abbey	Estate or family name is at risk
Self	Body doubles	Forests	Personal weakness turns sinister
Faust-like figure	Discovered documents	Otherworld (Hell, Heaven, Purgatory, River Styx, etc.)	Hidden location is discovered

**Hero/Damsel Name & Details:**

**Villain Type, Name, & Details:**

**Conflict:**

**Gothic Era:**

(Early, Radcliffe, Victorian, or Combo)

**Location/Setting:**

**Atmospheric Elements:**

**Theme, Central Message, or Moral:**

**Complete the following:**

\_\_\_\_\_ [the protagonist] wants \_\_\_\_\_ [what's the goal/need] but \_\_\_\_\_ [what gets in the way?], and so \_\_\_\_\_ [how does the protagonist proceed?].



# Discussion Questions



- 1 What short-term and long-term effects do you think the Mercury had on Eleanor, could the loss of her baby have been due to the Mercury prescription?
- 2 How would you describe Alistair? How does his character grow and develop throughout the story?
- 3 Alistair's dream is to become an English gentleman. Based on the views of the time of what qualifies someone to be a gentleman, what would it take for Alistair to achieve his goal?
- 4 What themes did you see in the story, either well developed or nuanced?
- 5 Was Alistair too quick in forgiving Isobel after her accusations of his father?
- 6 It's implied in the story that the people living in West Bengal would hold those who work for the East India Company in high respect while those living in England would look down on anyone earning a salary as a Company man. Were these perceptions accurate for the time or fictionalized?
- 7 Mr. Trowbridge voices a negative impression of women reading gothic novels. What were the common views of the time of women reading novels, of gothic novels, and of women reading gothic novels?
- 8 If you've read the previous novels, did you enjoy the cameos or find them too brief? If you've not read the previous novels in the series, were there any characters you would like to read about in their own story?
- 9 Which challenges do you think will be the most difficult for Isobel and Alistair to overcome in the future, be it social, financial, romantic, or even ethnic?
- 10 Do you think Isobel's impressions of the "ghost" and her reactions were influenced by her gothic novels, or would she have reacted and thought similarly regardless?
- 11 How did Alistair's heritage and upbringing affect his views and reactions throughout the story, if at all?
- 12 Who were your favorite and least favorite secondary characters, and why? How did those characters help drive the story and/or the romance of our lead characters?
- 13 Were there characteristics about Isobel that helped you resonate with her? Were there any characteristics or actions that made Alistair swoon-worthy?
- 14 What was your impression of Isobel's mother, and do you think Mrs. Lambeth will wish to be involved with her daughter in the future, especially after securing Alistair's hand in marriage?

15 What was your impression of Eleanor and her choices to remain hidden away while Mr. Trowbridge entertained guests?

16 Do you feel they were too forgiving of Mr. Trowbridge and Eleanor's secret?

17 What was your impression of Mr. Trowbridge and Shahrazad's marriage?

18 If the novel were to become a movie or series, what plot points and themes are the most important to keep, and what could hit the cutting room floor or would be too challenging to film?

19 What was your favorite scene in the novel? Least favorite scene?

For additional information about the Georgian era, fashion, etiquette, and more, consider exploring the author's research blog: <https://www.paullettgolden.com/bookresearch> Within this blog, you'll find posts about literary societies of the time, both writing groups and literary salons, two features in *A Spark of Romance*.



# About the Author



## Inviting Pullett Golden

If you would like to engage Pullett Golden as a keynote speaker, workshop facilitator, etc., interview her, or invite her for a booksigning or book reading, please visit the presenter section of her website: [www.pullettgolden.com/presenter](http://www.pullettgolden.com/presenter).

For recent interviews visit: [www.pullettgolden.com/interviews](http://www.pullettgolden.com/interviews)

## Book Boxes

For those engaging Pullett Golden as a guest speaker, virtually or in-person, a specialty book box may be sent to the group (be it a club, classroom, or otherwise) with book swag, such as bookmarks for the group readers, autographed bookplates, one autographed copy of the book, and other thematic goodies ranging from tea leaves to poetry pocketbooks, all inspired by the book of discussion.

## About Pullett Golden

Celebrated for her complex characters, realistic conflicts, and sensual portrayal of love, Pullett Golden writes historical romance for intellectuals. Her novels, set primarily in Georgian England, challenge the genre's norm by starring characters loved for their imperfections and idiosyncrasies. The writing aims for historical immersion into the social mores and nuances of Georgian England. Her plots explore human psyche, mental and physical trauma, and personal convictions. Her stories show love overcoming adversity. Whatever our self-doubts, *love will out*.

Paullett Golden completed her post-graduate work at King's College London, studying Classic British Literature. Her Ph.D. is in Composition and Rhetoric, her M.A. in British Literature from the Enlightenment through the Victorian era, and her B.A. in English. Her specializations include creative writing and professional writing. She has served as a University Professor for nearly three decades and is a seasoned keynote speaker, commencement speaker, conference presenter, workshop facilitator, and writing retreat facilitator.

As an ovarian cancer survivor, she makes each day count, enjoying an active lifestyle of Spartan racing, powerlifting, hiking, antique car restoration, drag racing, butterfly gardening, competitive shooting, and gaming. Her greatest writing inspirations, and the reasons she chose to write in the clean historical romance genre, are Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and Elizabeth Gaskell.

