

The Mysteries of Udolpho



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"Mrs. Radcliffe wrote six novels; The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne (1789), A Sicilian Romance (1790), The Romance of the Forest (1792), The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794), The Italian (1797), and Gaston de Blondville, composed in 1802 but first published posthumously in 1826. Of these Udolpho is by far the most famous, and may be taken as a type of the early Gothic tale at its best. It is the chronicle of Emily, a young Frenchwoman transplanted to an ancient and portentous castle in the Apennines through the death of her parents and the marriage of her aunt to the lord of the castle -- the scheming nobleman, Montoni. Mysterious sounds, opened doors, frightful legends, and a nameless horror in a niche behind a black veil all operate in quick succession to unnerve the heroine and her faithful attendant, Annette; but finally, after the death of her aunt, she escapes with the aid of a fellow-prisoner whom she has discovered. On the way home she stops at a chateau filled with fresh horrors -- the abandoned wing where the departed chatelaine dwelt, and the bed of death with the black pall -- but is finally restored to security and happiness with her lover Valancourt, after the clearing-up of a secret which seemed for a time to involve her birth in mystery. Clearly, this is only familiar material re-worked; but it is so well re-worked that Udolpho will always be a classic. Mrs. Radcliffe's characters are puppets, but they are less markedly so than those of her forerunners. And in atmospheric creation she stands

preeminent among those of her time." -- H. P. Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror In Literature"

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