

Chapter III

An Account of 2 typical novels :

- a) The Castle of Otranto.
- b) The Mysteries of Udolpho.



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A

The Castle of Otranto.

At the turn of the century readers were eager to shiver, and required little more of their thrillers than that they should afford the pleasantly painful stimulation of synthetic fear. In the words of Michael Sadleir they:-

"Listen gleefully to the hurricane without : they even peep between the shutters at the storm or rush into the rain and back again; but all the time they knew themselves for safe, and whether they play at running risks of physical catastrophe or of moral degradation, they enjoy the game because it is a game....."

Such readers are too unsophisticated to demand the illusion of reality. That was why the Gothic fiction was extremely popular at that time.

Horace Walpole's Castle of Otranto is one of the earliest and most famous of the gothic novels, a literary type characterized by supernatural occurrences ^{and} a mysterious or sinister atmosphere. Those supernatural occurrences do not excite much horror and dread in the modern reader, for they are patently tricks of the author to create interest. Yet The Castle of Otranto is of particular interest to the student of literature for its technique and style.

An ancient prophecy has said that "the castle and lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it." ¹ Manfred, Prince of Otranto, perhaps in fear of this,

1. Horace Walpole's Castle of Otranto, Chap I p.109, Shorter Novels of the Eighteenth Century by J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd.

plans to marry his young sickly son, Conrad, with the Marquis of Vicenza's daughter. On Conrad's wedding day, it appears that the bridegroom is missing. After looking for him for a short while, an attendant comes to announce the death of the heir to the Castle. Every heart is struck with terror by a sight of a gigantic helmet, "a hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, ^{and} shaded with a proportion-₁able quantity of black feathers," crushing the poor young prince to death in the court-yard. Manfred, very disappointed in what has happened, orders his men to take care of Isabella, the beautiful bride of his son.

In the courtyard, among senseless guests, a young peasant, whom rumour has drawn here from a neighbouring village, notices that the miraculous helmet, is exactly like that on the figure in black marble of Alfonso the Good, one of their former princes, in the church of St. Nicholas. At these words, Manfred is very angry and commands his attendants to seize him; and more angry he is when he knows that the helmet is missing from Alfonso's statue. He accuses the young peasant of being a magician who has committed this crime :-

"Villain ! monster ! sorcerer ! 'Tis thou hast
done this ! 'Tis thou hast slain my son!"²

Therefore, the young peasant is locked up on a charge of murdering the heir to Otranto. And that evening Manfred sends for Isabella. He informs her that he intends to divorce his wife so that he himself may marry Isabella and

1. Ibid p.110

2. Ibid p. 112

have another male heir. Frightened, Isabella runs away and loses herself in the passages beneath the castle. There she meets Theodore, who helps her to escape through an underground passage to a nearby church. Manfred, searching for the girl, meets the young man and accuses him of aiding her. As he is threatening Theodore, servants rush up to tell the prince of a giant sleeping in the great hall of the Castle. When Manfred returns to the hall, the giant has disappeared.

The following morning Father Jerome comes to inform Manfred and his wife that Isabella has taken sanctuary at the altar of his church. Sending his wife away, Manfred calls upon the priest to aid him in divorcing his wife ^{and} marrying Isabella. Father Jerome refuses, warning Manfred that heaven would take revenge on him for having such thoughts. The priest unthinkingly suggest that Isabella might be in love with the handsome young peasant who has helped in her escape.

Manfred, enraged by these ideas, confronts Theodore. Although the young man does not deny having aided the princess, he claims never to have seen her before. Manfred is very angry and orders him to the courtyard to be executed, and Father Jerome is called to give absolution to the condemned man. But when the collar of the lad is loosened, the priest discovers the birthmark which proved the young peasant to be Father Jerome's son, born before the priest had entered the church. Manfred offers to stay the execution if the priest would deliver Isabella to him. At that moment the sound of trumpets is heard at the gates of the Castle.

The trumpet signals the arrival of a herald from the knight of the Gigantic Sabre, champion of Isabella's father, the rightful heir to Otranto. Greeting Manfred as a usurper, the herald demands the immediate release of Isabella and the abdication of Manfred, or else the satisfaction of mortal

combat. Manfred invites the Knight of the Gigantic Sabre to the castle, hoping through him to get permission to marry Isabella and keep the throne. The Knight enters the castle with five hundred men at arms and a hundred more carrying one gigantic sword.

After a feast, during which the strange knight keeps silence and raises his visor only to pass food into his mouth, Manfred broaches the question of marrying Isabella, telling the knight that he wishes to marry again to ensure himself an heir. Before he has finished, Father Jerome arrives with the news of Isabella's disappearance from the church. After everyone had gone to look for Isabella, Matilda, Manfred's daughter, assists Theodore to escape from the castle.

In the forest Theodore meets Isabella once more ^{and} promises to protect her. Shortly after they meet the Knight of the gigantic Sabre. Fearing the Knight means harm to Isabella, the young man overcomes him in the combat. Then the Knight reveals to Isabella that he is her father in disguise. Therefore, they all return to the castle. There Isabella's father confides to her that he has discovered the gigantic sword in the Holy Land. It is a miraculous weapon, for on the blade it was written that only the blood of Manfred could atone for the wrongs committed on the family of the true ruler of Otranto. Manfred returns to the Castle, where he finds Theodore dressed in armour. It seems to Manfred that the young man resembles the prince whose throne Manfred has usurped.

Manfred still hopes to marry Isabella, and he craftily wins her father's consent by betrothing that nobleman to Matilda. At this point, a nearby statue drips blood from its nose, an omen that disaster would follow the proposed marriage. Manfred sees only two courses open to him. One is to surrender all claims to Otranto; the other is to go ahead with his plan

to marry Isabella. In either case it appears that fate is against his success. Nor does a second appearance of the giant in the castle ease the anxiety he feels. When news of the giant comes to Isabella's father, he decides not to court disaster for himself by marrying Matilda or by permitting Manfred to marry his daughter. His resolution is increased when a skeleton in the rags of a hermit calls upon him to renounce Matilda.

Hours later, Manfred is told that Theodore is with a woman in the chapel. Jealously, he goes to the chapel and stabs the woman, who is his own daughter, Matilda. Over the body of Matilda, Theodore announces that he is the true ruler of Otranto. Suddenly, there appears the giant form of the dead Prince Alfonso, who proclaims Theodore to be the true heir. Then he ascends to heaven where he is received by St. Nicholas.

The truth is now made known. Theodore is the son of Father Jerome, then Prince of Falconara, and Alfonso's daughter. Manfred confesses his usurpation and he and his wife enter neighbouring convents. Theodore marries Isabella and rules as the new Prince of Otranto.

The Castle of Otranto in itself is a very poor novel, but it is a very important one because it was the first of an extraordinarily prolific line. Walpole explains that his object is to blend two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern, so that the best of each may be retained in a fiction at once new and exciting. The old romances have suffered from their inherent improbabilities, while the modern novel was cramped by too strict an adherence to common life. In The Castle of Otranto he congratulates himself that he had reconciled the two.

The starting point of the tale was a dream. One night Walpole had a queer dream in which the hall staircase of his pseudo - Gothic Strawberry Hill was blended into memories of an ancient college at Cambridge and suddenly a gigantic hand in armour appeared on the banister. This apparition provided him with his central theme. Walpole uses the supernatural element lightly, servants are frightened by mysterious appearances and strange noises; the shadow of a gigantic apparition plays perpetually over the castle.

"Manfred rose to pursue her (Isabella), when the moon, which was now up and gleamed in at the opposite casement, presented to his sight the plumes of the fatal helmet, which rose to the height of the windows, moving backwards and forwards in a tempestuous manner, and accompanied with a hollow and rustling sound."¹

On one occasion Manfred is trying to force Isabella to accept him:

"distracted between the flight of Isabella, who had now reached the stairs and yet unable to keep his eyes from the picture, which began to move, (Manfred) had, however, advanced some steps after her, still looking backwards on the portrait, when he saw it quit its panel, and descend on the floor with a grave and melancholy air."²

And the account of the events following Matilda's death can hardly win our belief:

"A clap of thunder at that instant shook the castle to its foundations; the earth rocked, and the clank of more than mortal armour was heard behind."

Similarly sensational to the point of ridiculousness is the following:

" The moment Theodore appeared, the walls of the castle behind Manfred were thrown down with a mighty force, and the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude, appeared in the centre of the ruins.

'Behold in Theodore the true heir of Alfonso!' said the vision and having pronounced those words, accompanied by a clap of thunder, it ascended solemnly towards heaven, where the clouds parting asunder, the form of St. Nicholas was seen, and receiving Alfonso's shade, they were soon wrapt from mortal eyes in a blaze of glory."¹

Walpole's hero and heroine tend to be perfect human beings whose minds are pure and whose conduct is irreproachable, His hero, being a very handsome young man, is brave, gentle, gallant and grateful to the one who helps him :-

" I am, indeed, unhappy, and I know not what wealth

1. Ibid p. 190.

is; but I do not complain of the lot which Heaven has cast for me. I am young and healthy and am not ashamed of owing my support to myself; yet think me not proud, or that I disdain your generous offers. I will remember you in my orisons, and I will pray for blessings on your gracious self and your noble mistress—if I sigh, lady, it is for others, not for myself¹".

'There is something of the self-conscious 'man of sensibility' here.

Once when he wants to help Isabella out of the subterranean passage, the princess refuses modestly; he insists : -

"I will never quit you, until I have placed you in safety—nor think me, princess, more generous than I am; though you are my principal care"²

Isabella is a courageous and virtuous young lady, a model of decorous behaviour. Even when in danger, she insists on preserving the proprieties :

"Alas, what mean you, sir ? Though all your actions are noble, though your sentiments speak the purity of your soul, is it fitting that I should accompany you alone in these perplexed retreats? Should we be found together, what would a censorious world think of my conduct?"³

1. & 2. Ibid: p. 131

3. Ibid : p. 159.

He also excels in creating an exceptionally wicked villain, Manfred, who all through the story displays nothing but villainy, wickedness and cruelty. After his son's death on the wedding day, the consolation he gives to his son's bride is more or less unexpected :-

"Dry your tears, young lady! —You have lost your bridegroom. Yes, cruel fate! and I have lost the hopes of my race! But Conrad was not worthy of your beauty!"

" Think no more of him, he was a sickly, puny child; and Heaven has perhaps taken him away, that I might not trust the honours of my house on so frail a foundation. The line of Manfred calls for numerous supports. My foolish fondness for that boy blinded the eyes of my prudence—but it is better as it is. I hope, in a few years, to have reason to rejoice at the death of Conrad"¹

Isabella does not quite understand what he means and she says she is really sorry for Conrad's fate. Even that she still regards Manfred and Hippolita, his wife as her parents. Manfred is terribly angry at the name of his wife. He tells her not to mention it anymore, but when Isabella forgets what he has told her, he gets more angry and this time his wickedness is revealed :-

"I desired you once before not to name that woman:

from this hour she must be a stranger to you, as she must be to me :- in short, Isabella, since I cannot give you my son, I offer you myself"¹

The worst thing he has done comes from his jealous wrath when he hears that there is a man and a woman in St. Nicholas's church. Angrily and jealously he presumes that it is Theodore, the young peasant, and Isabella his son's bride. He goes straight to the place and stabs the woman who unfortunately is discovered later to be his own daughter Matilda. He would be the most hateful husband and unpardonable father if he still existed.

In spite of spectres and noises and secret passages and the paraphernalia of terror the Castle of Otranto is totally devoid of atmosphere, and the effect is amusing rather than frightening. No attempt is made to suit the language to the supposed period of composition and the style is stilted and often ridiculous. The book was widely read and enjoyed, no doubt, it was received indulgently as a curious freak of fancy from one not much given to such eccentricities. Perhaps it was accepted in the same spirit of indulgence as its author's architectural extravaganza - Strawberry Hill — the eccentric caprice of a man wealthy enough to give rein to his humours. Yet Walpole was undoubtedly right in recognizing a public demand for more imagination and emotional freedom in creative literature. Within a generation the limitations of the merely possible were to give way to a riotous excess of fancy.

1. Ibid : pp. 115.



B

The Mysteries of Udolpho

It is perhaps not altogether wise to judge the greatness of an author by the pleasure he or she affords the readers, "but the invention of a story, the choice of proper incidents, the ordonnance of the plan, occasional beauties of description, and, above all, the power exercised over the reader's heart by filling it with the successive emotions of love, pity, joy, anguish, transport, or indignation, together with the grave, impressive moral resulting from the whole, imply talents of the highest order, and ought to be appreciated accordingly", Mrs. Barbauld remarks,¹ and the works of Mrs. Radcliffe reveal all these, together with a conscious craftsmanship and a structure of high quality.

The Mysteries of Udolpho is the most famous of the Gothic novels extremely popular at the end of the Eighteenth Century. The mysterious elements of the story are always explained in some natural way, for Mrs. Radcliffe was too much of an eighteenth-century rationalist to succumb completely to the supernatural. The characters in the book are stilted both in action and conversation. Mrs. Radcliffe was at her best when describing scenery, such as the rugged Pyrenees and Apennines, or when describing an atmosphere of suspense in creating her effects of terror.

The story which is set in the sixteenth century, opens with a delightful account of the house of the St. Auberts in Gascony. After the death of his wife, Monsieur St. Aubert, a French aristocrat, takes his daughter, Emily, on a trip in the Pyrenees Mountains. High on a mountain road, the St. Auberts meet a young nobleman dressed in hunting clothes. He is Valancourt,

1. Preface to The British Novelists (1810)

the younger son of a family with which Monsieur St. Aubert is acquainted. Joining the St. Auberts on their journey, the young man soon falls in love with eighteen - year - old Emily St. Aubert and she also falls in love with him.

Soon afterwards M.St. Aubert becomes desperately ill and dies in a cottage near the Chateau - Le - Blanc, ancestral seat of the noble Villeroi family. After her father's burial at the nearby convent of St. Clair, Emily returns to her home at la Vallée and promptly burns some mysterious letters which her father has requested her to destroy. With the letters she finds a miniature portrait of a beautiful unknown woman. Since she has not been told to destroy the portrait, she takes it with her when she leaves La Vallée to stay with her aunt in Toulouse. Valancourt follows her to Toulouse. After some remonstrance, the aunt gives her permission for the young couple to marry. Then a few days before the ceremony, the aunt marries Signor Montoni, a sinister Italian, who immediately forbids his niece's nuptials. To make his refusal doubly positive, he takes Emily and her aunt to his mansion in Venice.

There Emily and Madame Montoni find themselves in unhappy circumstances, for it soon became apparent that Montoni has married in order to secure for himself the estates of his new wife and her niece. When he tries to force Emily to marry a Venetian nobleman, Count Morano, Emily is in despair. Suddenly, on the night before the wedding Montoni orders his household to pack and leave for his Castle at Udolpho, high in the Apennines.

When the party arrives at Udolpho, Montoni immediately begins to repair the fortifications of the castle. Emily does not like the dark, cold, mysterious castle from which the previous owner, Lady Laurentini, has disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Superstitious servants claim that apparitions flit about the halls and galleries of the ancient

fortress.

Soon after Montoni and his household have settled themselves, Count Morano attempts to kidnap Emily. Foiled by Montoni who wounds him severely in a sword fight, Morano threatens revenge.

A few days later Montoni tries to force his wife to sign over her estates to him. When she refuses, he causes her to be locked up in a tower of the Castle. Emily tries to visit her aunt that night, but terrified at finding fresh blood on the tower stairs, she believes her aunt murdered.

Ghostly sounds and shadows about Udolpho begin to make everyone uneasy. Even Montoni, who has organized a band of marauders to terrorize and pillage the neighbourhood, begins to believe the castle is haunted. Emily hears that several hostages have been taken. She is sure that Valancourt is a prisoner because she has heard someone singing a song he has taught her and because one night a mysterious shadow has called her by name. Her life is made one long torment by Montoni's insistence that she signs away her estates to him, lest she suffer the same fate as her aunt.

The aunt has not been murdered, as Emily finds out through her maid, but has become so ill because of harsh treatment that she has died and has been buried in the chapel of the Castle.

Morano makes another attempt to steal Emily away from the castle, this time with her assistance, as she is now afraid for her life. But Montoni and his men discovered the attempt in time to seize the abductors outside the castle walls. Shortly afterward Montoni sends Emily away, after forcing her to sign the papers which give him control of her estates in

France. At first she thinks she is being sent to her death, but Montoni sends her to a cottage in Tuscany because he has heard that Venetian authorities are sending a small army to attack Udolpho and seize him and his bandits. His depredations have caused alarm after the villas of several rich Venetians had been robbed.

When Emily returns to the castle, she sees evidence that there has been a terrible battle. Emily's maid and Ludovico, another servant, disclose to Emily on her return that a prisoner who knows her is in the dungeons below. Emily immediately guesses that the prisoner is Valancourt and makes arrangements to escape with him. But the prisoner turns out to be M. Du Pont, an old friend of her father. Emily, M. Du Pont, the girl's maid, and Ludovico make their escape and reach Leghorn safely. There they take a ship for France. Then a great storm drives the ship ashore close to the Chateau-Le-Blanc, near which Emily's father has been buried.

Emily and her friends are rescued by M. Villefort and his family. The Villeforts have inherited the chateau and are attempting to live in it, although it is in disrepair and said to be haunted. While at the chateau Emily decides to spend several days at the convent where her father is buried. There she finds a nun who closely resembles the mysteriously missing Lady Laurentini, whose portrait Emily has seen at the castle of Udolpho.

When Emily returns to the chateau she finds it in a state of turmoil because of weird noises that seem to come from the apartments of the former mistress of the chateau. Ludovico volunteers to spend a night in the apartment. Although all the windows and doors are locked, he is not in the rooms the next morning. When the old caretaker comes to tell Emily

this news, she notices the miniature Emily has found at la Vallée. She says the miniature is a portrait of her former mistress, the marquise de Villeroi. More than that, Emily herself closely resembles the portrait.

Meanwhile Valancourt reappears and once again makes plans to marry Emily, but M.Villefort tells her of gambling debts the young man has incurred and of the wild life he has led in Paris while she has been a prisoner in Italy. Because of that report Emily refuses to marry him. She returns in distress to her home at La Vallée to learn that Montoni has been captured by the Venetian authorities. Since he has criminally secured the deeds to her lands, the court now restore them to her, and she is once again a young woman of wealth and position.

While Emily is at La Vallée, the Villefort family makes a trip high into the Pyrenees to hunt. Almost captured by bandits, they are rescued by Ludovico, who has so inexplicably disappeared from the Chateau. He has been kidnaped by smugglers who have used the vaults of the chateau to store their treasure, and he reveals that the noises in the chateau have been caused by the outlaws in an effort to frighten away the rightful owners.

Informed of what has happened, Emily returns to the chateau to see her friends. While there, she again visits the convent of St. Clair. The nun whom she has seen before and who resembles the former mistress of Udolpho, is mortally ill while Emily is at the convent. On her deathbed the nun confesses that she is Lady Laurentini, who had left Udolpho to go to her former lover, the Marquis de Villeroi. Finding him married to M.St. Aubert's sister, she ensnared him once more and made him an accomplice in her plot to poison his wife. When the Marquis, overcome by remorse, fled to a distant country and died there, she retired to the convent to expiate her sins.

Emily's happiness is complete when M. Du Pont, who has escaped with her from Udolpho, proved that Valancourt has gambled only to secure money to aid some friends who were on the brink of misfortune. Reunited, they are married and go to La Vallée, where they live a happy, tranquil life in contrast to the many strange adventures which have separated them so long.

The debt of fiction to Mrs. Radcliffe was immense and her popularity was enormous. She was one of the most successful of the many women who tried their hands at the Gothic novel. She excelled in natural description; her power to create atmosphere was at that time masterly; she might indeed be said to have been the first to introduce scenery for its own sake into the novel. But she made no attempt to convey a historically realistic picture, and although her novels are set in the past she is content to use the language of a sensitive and cultivated eighteenth-century writer. In any case realism was hardly to be expected of an author who was entirely unfamiliar with the way of living of the people she described. Her ideas of monastic life bear vivid witness to Protestant naïveté, while her condottieri, banditti, inquisitors and the rest owe everything to imagination. She had never experienced violence of any kind and it is not surprising that to a modern reader her threats and daggers are too literary to carry much conviction. But they satisfied an age that had surrendered its credibility to German Romanticism, with its goblins, Gothic castles, haunted forests and other bewitching improbabilities.

Mrs. Radcliffe excelled in the use of setting to evoke atmosphere and possessed considerable talent for the invention of tricks. For instance, in Castle Udolpho there was a haunted chamber in which hung a large picture, covered by a heavy black veil. Unspeakable horror was supposed to seize upon anyone

who dared to draw back the veil, so nobody did. Nobody but our heroine, Emily:

"Emily passed on with faltering steps ; and having paused a moment at the door before she attempted to open it, she then hastily entered the chamber, and went toward the picture, which.....hung in a dark part of the room. She paused again, and then with a timid hand lifted the veil; but instantly let it fall—perceiving that what it concealed was no picture, and before she could leave the chamber she dropped senseless on the floor"¹.

Only at the very end of the book is it revealed to the reader that what caused Emily such terror was a w~~ax~~en image made to resemble a human body in a state of decay. It seems that an earlier Marquis of Udolpho, guilty of excessive pride, had been condemned by the church to the penance of contemplating this image during several hours of every day, and that on his death he had bequeathed it to his successors.

Mrs. Radcliffe's Mysteries of Udolpho represents from every point of view a kind of early Romanticism, inferior both in the moral substance and in the artistic value of the contents, but allied by virtue of certain deeper analogies to those early efforts in verse which revealed the original genius of Wordsworth and Coleridge. The reason is that it adds to the elements already in evidence a new resource of inspiration rich in powerful and subtle effects: the search for terror and, on a wider scale, the probing of the mysterious. And here we have a case of natural sequence in moral evolution. A feeling

1. Mrs. Ann Radcliffe : The Mysteries of Udolpho p.252.

of wonder mingled with terror provides a new thrill which, in reality, owes its origin to the cultivation of certain other emotions; the need for it is naturally created by the merging of sentimentalism and fancy. The basis for the novel of terror is a mood in which the power of imagining is brought to bear most closely on that of feeling, after the latter has been led by frequent exercise to crave for refined satisfactions.

To explain away the supernatural is an unpardonable error, if the feeling of dread which the artist wishes to evoke demands a belief in the supernatural. When once the reader has been undeceived, that is to say, enlightened, it is a more difficult and even impossible task to create again in the course of a novel, or series of novels, the atmosphere of illusion. And this is a danger which Mrs. Radcliffe fails to elude. With infinite trouble she labours to piece together the threads of dark intrigues, utilizing the resources of underground passages, secret doors, rusty daggers, and ethereal music, but to us of today all these material factors, with their laborious fragility are something more than merely unconvincing: they are a source of annoyance, and have a deadening effect upon the whole work.

But at the same time Mrs. Radcliffe had a vague intuitive sense of an art whose subtle spell is potent only when life, in all its actuality, merges into the uncertain region of disquieting possibilities. Besides their artificial plots, her novels have an atmosphere, in which her gift for intense and delicate suggestion finds ample scope. As each story unfolds itself, there is the constant feeling that not only the scenic descriptions, but the general happenings, together with the indefinable sense of apprehension which the writer can so skillfully impart, all combine to suggest that our convictions are not rigidly limited by material existence, and that what has

seemed hitherto to be definite is now a flowing, floating symbol of uncertainty. Such a feeling—which is really a great innovation in English Literature—does not necessarily imply belief in the supernatural. The familiar aspect of things in general has now acquired a mysterious colouring, a vague sense of impending change which excites the nervous emotion of the reader; and this is the so - called "thrill" in the novels of Mrs. Radcliffe, which was the secret of her great success among her contemporaries. Even today its fascination has not entirely lost its magic power.

Two further examples will suffice to show Mrs. Radcliffe's technique, in the creation of an atmosphere of apparently inexplicable terror which, however, is explained away, sooner or later, in a rational manner. The first comes from Chapter XIX :

" A return of the noise again disturbed her; it seemed to come from that part of the room which communicated with the private staircase, and she instantly remembered the odd circumstance of the door having been fastened, during the preceding night, by some unknown hand. Her late alarming suspicion concerning its communication also occurred to her. Her heart became faint with terror. Half-raising herself from the bed, and gently drawing aside the curtain, she looked towards the door of the staircase; but the lamp that burnt on the hearth spread so feeble a light through the apartment, that the remote parts of it were lost in shadow. The noise, however, which she was convinced came from the door, continued. It seemed like that made by the drawing of rusty bolts, and often ceased, and was then renewed

more gently, as if the hand that occasioned it was re-
-trained by a fear of discovery. While Emily kept her
eyes fixed on the spot, she saw the door move, and then
slowly open, perceived something enter the room, but the
extreme duskiness prevented her distinguishing what it
was. Almost fainting with terror, she had yet sufficient
command over herself to check the shriek that was escaping
from her lips, and letting the curtain drop from her
hand, continued to observe in silence the motions of the
mysterious form she saw. It seemed to glide along the
remote obscurity of the apartment, then paused, and, as
it approached to be a human figure. Certain remembrances
now struck upon her heart, and almost subdued the feeble
remains of her spirit; she continued, however, to watch
the figure, which remained for some time motionless;
but then, advancing slowly towards the bed, stood silently
at the feet where the curtains, being a little open, allowed
her still to see it; terror, however, had now deprived her
of the power of discrimination, as well as of that of
utterance."¹

The figure turns out to be Count Morano. It is charac-
-teristic of Mrs. Radcliffe's delicacy that when Emily springs
out of bed, she should be decently clad. She is wearing her
dress, "Which surely a kind of prophetic apprehension had
prevented her, on this night, from throwing aside."

The next passage comes from Chapter XXVI. Emily has
been left alone in a locked chamber of a tower :

1. Ibid pp. 264 - 265

"When her spirit had overcome the first shock of her situation, she held up the lamp to examine if the chamber afforded a possibility of an escape. It was a spacious room, whose walls, wainscoted with rough oak, showed no casement but the grated one which Emily had left, and no other door than that by which she had entered. The feeble rays of the lamp, however, did not allow her to see at once its full extent; she perceived no furniture, except, indeed, an iron chair fastened in the centre of the chamber, immediately over which, depending on a chain from the ceiling, hang an iron ring. Having gazed upon these for some time with wonder and horror, she next observed iron bars below, made for the purpose of confining the feet, and on the arms of the chair were rings of the same metal. As she continued to survey them, she concluded that they were instruments of torture; and it struck her that some poor wretch had once been fastened in this chair, and had there been starved to death. She was chilled by the thought; but what was her agony when, in the next moment, it occurred to her that her aunt might have been one of these victims, and that she herself might be the next! An acute pain seized her head, she was scarcely able to hold the lamp, and looking round for support, was seating herself, unconsciously, in the iron chair itself: but suddenly perceiving where she was, she started from it in horror, and sprung towards a remote end of the room. Here again she looked round for a seat to sustain her, and perceived only a dark curtain, which descending from the ceiling to the floor, was drawn along the whole side of the chamber. Ill as she was, the appearance of this curtain struck her, and she paused to gaze upon it in wonder and apprehension.

It seemed to conceal a recess of the chamber; she wished, yet dreaded, to lift it, and to discover what it veiled; twice she was withheld by a recollection of the terrible spectacle her daring hand had formerly unveiled in an apartment of the castle, till, suddenly conjecturing that it concealed the body of her murdered aunt, she seized it in a fit of desperation, and drew it aside. Beyond appeared a corpse stretched on a kind of low couch, which was crimsoned with human blood, as was the floor beneath. The features, deformed by death, were ghastly and horrible, and more than one livid wound appeared in the face. Emily, bending over the body, gazed, for a moment, with an eager, frenzied eye; but, in the next, the lamp dropped from her hand, and she fell senseless at the foot of the couch."¹

The atmosphere is skilfully evoked, even to the grim touch of humour when Emily finds herself seated in the torture chair. And we, as well as Emily, shudder in anticipation of what the curtained recess will reveal. Two chapters later, we learn that Emily's aunt is lying ill in another part of the castle, and that the dead body was that of some anonymous person killed during a recent affray and awaiting burial.

The following passage describes Emily's first sight of the Castle of Udolpho :

"Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni's: for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the Gothic

1. Ibid. Vol. II pp.17 - 18

greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object. As she gazed, the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendour. From those, too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiness of evening. Silent, lonely, and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all who dared to invade its solitary reign. As the twilight deepened, its features became more awful in obscurity; and Emily continued to gaze, till its clustering towers were alone seen rising over the tops of the woods, beneath whose thick shade the carriages soon after began to ascend."¹

The passage shows how well Mrs. Radcliffe could write, within the narrow conventions of this sort of novel. Her subject matter is, so to speak, prescribed in advance: a Gothic castle, at sunset; on the brow of a precipice. The keywords are prescribed in advance, too: melancholy (used of Emily's feelings and of the purple colour of early twilight) Gothic, mouldering walls, gloomy, sublime, (also used twice in this short passage) splendour, silent, lonely, awful, obscurity, the thick shade of the trees. In fact the passage, at the present time, strikes us as an accumulation of clichés.

Yet, first of all, the writing must have seemed fresher and more original to Mrs. Radcliffe's contemporaries. And, even today, we have to admit that her handling of the clichés

1. Ibid. Vol I. p.230

is quite nimble: she stitches the words together with considerable grace and indeed with a good deal of taste. We may find her way of writing 'old-fashioned' and heavy in its choice of words but we have to admit that it is decent.

The following extract suggests that Emily bears a general resemblance to the Wordsworthian heroine, the young girl bred in and moulded by surroundings of natural beauty. It also shows how Mrs. Radcliffe's taste for nature was not confined to strictly Gothic purposes, not limited to the evocation of gloom and melancholy foreboding.

"It was one of Emily's earliest pleasures 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, and lifted her thoughts to the God of Heaven and Earth. In scenes like these she would often linger alone, wrapt in a melancholy charm, till the last gleam of day faded from the west; till the lonely sound of a sheep - bell, or the distant bark of a watch-dog, were all that broke the stillness of the evening. Then, the gloom of the woods; the trembling of their leaves, at intervals, in the breeze; the bat, flitting in the twilight; the cottage-lights, now seen and now lost—were circumstances that awakened her mind into effort, and led to enthusiasm and poetry."¹

1. Ibid. Vol I p.6.

Finally, here is part of the justly famous description of the journey across the Pyrenees. It is a fine sustained piece of word-painting, vivid and convincing and fresh in its details, which is certainly unequalled elsewhere in the literature of terror. St. Aubert's tears, which remind us of 'sensibility' fiction, would perhaps be rather regrettable, were it not that St. Aubert has recently lost his wife and is in a frail state of health. Wordsworth himself would have been proud to have achieved this description of mountain scenery at its grandest and wildest.

" From Beaujeu the road had constantly ascended, conducting the travellers into the higher regions of the air, where immense glaciers exhibited their frozen horrors, and eternal snow whitened the summits of the mountains. They often paused to contemplate these stupendous scenes, and, seated on some wild cliff, where only the ilex or the larch could flourish, looked over dark forests of fir, and precipices where human foot had never wandered, into the glen—so deep, that the thunder of the torrent, which was seen to foam along the bottom, was scarcely heard to murmur. Over these crags rose others of stupendous height and fantastic shape; some shooting into cones; others impending far over their base, in huge masses of granite, along whose broken ridges was often lodged a weight of snow, that trembling even to the vibration of a sound, threatened to bear destruction in its course to the vale. Around, on every **side**. far as the eye could penetrate, were seen only forms of grandeur—the long perspective of mountain tops, tinged with ethereal blue, or white with snow; valleys of ice, and forests of gloomy fir. The serenity

and clearness of the air in these high regions were particularly delightful to the travellers; it seemed to inspire them with a finer spirit, and diffused and indescribable complacency over their minds. They had no words to express the sublime emotions they felt. A solemn expression characterized the feelings of St. Aubert; tears often came to his eyes, and he frequently walked away from his companions. Valancourt now and then spoke, to point to Emily's notice some feature of the scene. The thinness of the atmosphere, through which every object came so distinctly to the eye, surprised and deluded her, who could scarcely believe that objects which appeared so near were in reality so distant. The deep silence of these solitudes was broken only at intervals by the scream of the vultures seen towering round some cliff below, or by the cry of the eagle sailing high in the air; except when the travellers listened to the hollow thunder that sometimes muttered at their feet. While, above, the deep blue of the heavens was unobscured by the lightest cloud, half-way down the mountains long billows of vapour were frequently seen rolling, now wholly excluding the country below, and now opening, and partially revealing its features. Emily delighted to observe the grandeur of these clouds as they changed in shape and tints, and to watch their various effect on the lower world, whose features, partly veiled, were continually assuming new forms of sublimity."¹

1. *Ibid.* Vol I pp. 43-44



ศูนย์วิทยทรัพยากร
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