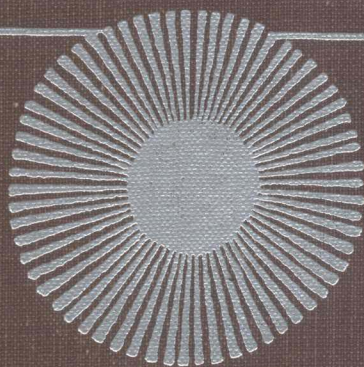


---

*The*  
CHELSEA HOUSE LIBRARY  
*of* LITERARY CRITICISM

---



*The*  
NEW MOULTON'S

---

Volume 7

HAROLD BLOOM

---

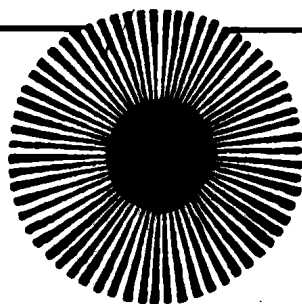
*General Editor*



---

*The*  
**CHELSEA HOUSE LIBRARY**  
*of LITERARY CRITICISM*

---



*The*  
**NEW MOULTON'S**  
**LIBRARY *of* LITERARY CRITICISM**

*Volume 7*  
*Early Victorian*

江苏工业学院图书馆  
藏书章

*General Editor*  
**HAROLD BLOOM**

1989  
**CHELSEA HOUSE PUBLISHERS**  
NEW YORK  
NEW HAVEN      PHILADELPHIA

EDITOR

S. T. Joshi

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Jack Bishop

EDITORIAL COORDINATOR

Karyn Gullen Browne

COPY CHIEF

Richard Fumosa

EDITORIAL STAFF

Marie Claire Cebrian

Stephen L. Mudd

Susanne E. Rosenberg

RESEARCH

Ann Bartunek

Anthony C. Coulter

PICTURE RESEARCH

Justine Blau

DESIGN

Susan Lusk

Copyright © 1989 by Chelsea House Publishers,  
a division of Main Line Book Co. All rights  
reserved.

Printed and bound in the United States of  
America.

3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication  
Data

The New Moulton's library of literary criticism.  
(The Chelsea House Library of literary criticism)

Cover title: The New Moulton's.

Rev. ed. of: Moulton's library of literary  
criticism.

Includes bibliographies and indexes.

Contents: v. 1. Medieval—early Renaissance.— —v. 7. Early Victorian.

1. English literature—History and criticism—  
Collected works. 2. American literature—His-  
tory and criticism—collected works. I. Bloom,  
Harold. II. Moulton's library of literary  
criticism.

PR85.N39 1985 820'.9 84-27429

ISBN 0-87754-779-3 (v. 1)

0-87754-785-8 (v. 7)

# CONTENTS

Illustrations . . . . .	vii
Ann Radcliffe . . . . .	3605
David Ricardo . . . . .	3619
Charles Robert Maturin . . . . .	3624
George Gordon, Lord Byron . . . . .	3630
Anna Laetitia Barbauld . . . . .	3666
Samuel Parr . . . . .	3672
Thomas Jefferson . . . . .	3677
William Gifford . . . . .	3685
William Blake . . . . .	3695
Dugald Stewart . . . . .	3730
Lady Caroline Lamb . . . . .	3734
William Hazlitt . . . . .	3738
Henry Mackenzie . . . . .	3762
John Trumbull . . . . .	3770
Jeremy Bentham . . . . .	3776
Philip Freneau . . . . .	3798
George Crabbe . . . . .	3805
Sir James Mackintosh . . . . .	3824
Sir Walter Scott . . . . .	3835
Hannah More . . . . .	3867
Arthur Henry Hallam . . . . .	3877
Thomas Robert Malthus . . . . .	3881
Samuel Taylor Coleridge . . . . .	3891
Charles Lamb . . . . .	3933
William Cobbett . . . . .	3959
James Hogg . . . . .	3967
Felicia Dorothea Hemans . . . . .	3980
William Godwin . . . . .	3989
James Mill . . . . .	4010
Letitia Elizabeth Landon . . . . .	4019
John Galt . . . . .	4023
Winthrop Mackworth Praed . . . . .	4034
Fanny Burney . . . . .	4039
Theodore Edward Hook . . . . .	4052
William Ellery Channing . . . . .	4056
Thomas Arnold . . . . .	4067
Noah Webster . . . . .	4072
Robert Southey . . . . .	4077
Washington Allston . . . . .	4093
William Beckford . . . . .	4097
Thomas Campbell . . . . .	4108
John Sterling . . . . .	4119
Carolina Oliphant, Baroness Nairne . . . . .	4124
Sydney Smith . . . . .	4128
Thomas Hood . . . . .	4137
John Hookham Frere . . . . .	4147
Mary Lamb . . . . .	4152
Thomas Chalmers . . . . .	4156
Isaac D'Israeli . . . . .	4162
Frederick Marryat . . . . .	4166
Emily Brontë . . . . .	4177
Maria Edgeworth . . . . .	4199
Ebenezer Elliott . . . . .	4210

Marguerite, Countess of Blessington . . . . .	4216
Hartley Coleridge . . . . .	4219
Thomas Lovell Beddoes . . . . .	4226
James Clarence Mangan . . . . .	4236
The Index to this series, <i>The New Moulton's Library of Literary Criticism</i> , appears in Volume 11.	

# ILLUSTRATIONS

David Ricardo	<i>facing page 3676</i>
Charles Robert Maturin	
George Gordon, Lord Byron	
Anna Laetitia Barbauld	
Samuel Parr	<i>facing page 3677</i>
Thomas Jefferson	
William Gifford	
William Blake	
Dugald Stewart	<i>facing page 3762</i>
Lady Caroline Lamb	
William Hazlitt	
Henry Mackenzie	<i>facing page 3763</i>
John Trumbull	
Jeremy Bentham	
George Crabbe	
Sir James Mackintosh	<i>facing page 3876</i>
Sir Walter Scott	
Hannah More	
Arthur Henry Hallam	
Thomas Robert Malthus	<i>facing page 3877</i>
Samuel Taylor Coleridge	
Charles Lamb	
William Cobbett	
James Hogg	<i>facing page 4034</i>
Felicia Dorothea Hemans	
William Godwin	
James Mill	
Letitia Elizabeth Landon	<i>facing page 4035</i>
John Galt	
Winthrop Mackworth Praed	
Fanny Burney	
Theodore Edward Hook	<i>facing page 4076</i>
William Ellery Channing	
Thomas Arnold	
Noah Webster	<i>facing page 4077</i>
Robert Southey	
William Beckford	
Thomas Campbell	
John Sterling	<i>facing page 4136</i>
Carolina Oliphant, Baroness Nairne	
Sydney Smith	
Thomas Hood	<i>facing page 4137</i>
John Hookham Frere	
Thomas Chalmers	
Isaac D'Israeli	
Frederick Marryat	<i>facing page 4226</i>
Emily Brontë	
Maria Edgeworth	
Ebenezer Elliott	<i>facing page 4227</i>
Marguerite, Countess of Blessington	
Hartley Coleridge	
James Clarence Mangan	

# ANN RADCLIFFE

1764–1823

Ann (Ward) Radcliffe, gothic novelist, was born in London on July 9, 1764, the daughter of William Ward, a London haberdasher. In 1772 her family moved to Bath, and in 1787 she married William Radcliffe, a journalist and, later, owner and manager of the *English Chronicle*. Little else is known about Ann Radcliffe's private life, despite the fact that she was for some time the most popular novelist in England. Her first two books were *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* and *A Sicilian Romance*, published anonymously in 1789 and 1790, respectively. It was her next novel, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), which first made her name known to a broad public, but her greatest success came in 1794 with the publication of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. This book was widely imitated, and among those who claimed to be influenced by it was Matthew Gregory Lewis, who introduced a new element into the Gothic genre when he mixed terror with sexual titillation in his Gothic novel *The Monk* (1797). This book infuriated Mrs. Radcliffe, who feared it would bring about the moral degradation of a genre so closely linked with her own name. Accordingly, she set herself to producing a novel which in many respects was a bowdlerized version of Lewis's, and published it in 1797 as *The Italian*.

After 1797 Ann Radcliffe published no more Gothic novels, although she was then at the height of her popularity; perhaps she no longer wished to have her name linked with a genre that had come to be associated in the public mind with scandal and insanity. Her *Poems* appeared in 1815, but in general she lived such a retired existence that rumors began to circulate that she was already dead or in an insane asylum. Radcliffe suffered in later life from asthma, and died of pneumonia on February 7, 1823. After her death T. Noon Talfourd published her final novel, *Gaston de Blondville* (1826), to which he attached a memoir.

Radcliffe also published a travel account, *Journey Made in the Summer of 1794 through Holland and the Western Frontiers of Germany* (1795), relating her only trip to the Continent; the descriptions in her novels of French and Italian landscapes are entirely based on books and pictures.

I have read some of the descriptive verbose tales, of which your Ladyship says I was the patriarch by several mothers. All I can say for myself, is, that I do not think my concubines have produced issue more natural for excluding the aid of anything marvellous.—HORACE WALPOLE, Letter to the Countess of Upper Ossory (Sept. 4, 1794)

Mrs. Charlotte Smith, Mrs. Inchbald, Mrs. Mary Robinson, Mrs. &c. &c. though all of them are very ingenious ladies, yet they are too frequently *whining* or *frisking* in novels, till our girls' heads turn wild with impossible adventures, and now and then are tainted with democracy.—Not so the mighty magician of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, bred and nourished by the Florentine Muses in their sacred solitary caverns, amid the paler shrines of Gothic superstition, and in all the dreariness of enchantment: a poetess whom Ariosto would with rapture have acknowledged, as the

La nudrita

Damigella Trivulzia al sacro speco.

—THOMAS JAMES MATHIAS, *The Pursuits of Literature* (1794), 1798, p. 58, Note

In the productions of Mrs. Radcliffe, the Shakspeare of Romance Writers, and who to the wild landscape of Salvator Rosa has added the softer graces of a Claude, may be found many scenes truly terrific in their conception, yet so softened down, and the mind so much relieved, by the intermixture of beautiful description, or pathetic incident, that the impression of the whole never becomes too strong, never degenerates into horror, but pleasurable emotion is ever the predominating result. In her last piece, termed *The Italian*, the attempt of Schedoni to assassinate the amiable and innocent Ellena, whilst confined with banditti in a lone house on the sea-shore, is wrought up in so masterly a manner, that every nerve

vibrates with pity and terror, especially at the moment when, about to plunge a dagger into her bosom, he discovers her to be his daughter: every word, every action of the shocked and self-accusing Confessor, whose character is marked with traits almost super-human, appal yet delight the reader, and it is difficult to ascertain whether ardent curiosity, intense commiseration, or apprehension that suspends almost the faculty of breathing, be, in the progress of this well-written story, most powerfully excited.—NATHAN DRAKE, *Literary Hours*, 1798–1820, No. 17

The observations of the romantic species of novel, may conclude with the writings of Mrs. Radcliffe, since those who followed her in the same path, have in general imitated her manner with such servility, that they have produced little that is new either in incident or machinery. The three most celebrated of her productions, and indeed the only ones which I have read, are the *Romance of the Forest*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and *The Italian*; or, *Confessional of the Black Penitents*.

Of this justly celebrated woman, the principal object seems to have been to raise powerful emotions of surprise, awe, and especially terror, by means and agents apparently supernatural. To effect this, she places her characters, and transports her readers, amid scenes which are calculated strongly to excite the mind, and to predispose it for spectral illusion: Gothic castles, gloomy abbeys, subterraneous passages, the haunts of banditti, the sobbing of the wind, and the howling of the storm, are all employed for this purpose; and in order that these may have their full effect, the principal character in her romances is always a lovely and unprotected female, encompassed by snares, and surrounded by villains. But, that in which the works of Mrs. Radcliffe chiefly differ from those by

which they were preceded is, that in the *Castle of Otranto* and *Old English Baron*, the machinery is in fact supernatural, whereas the means and agents employed by Mrs. Radcliffe are in reality human, and such as can be, or, at least, are professed to be, explained by natural events. By these means she certainly excites a very powerful interest, as the reader meanwhile experiences the full impression of the wonderful and terrific appearances; but there is one defect which attends this mode of composition, and which seems to be inseparable from it. As it is the intention of the author, that the mysteries should be afterwards cleared up, they are all mountains in labour, and even when she is successful in explaining the marvellous circumstances which have occurred, we feel disappointed that we should have been so agitated by trifles. But the truth is, they never are properly explained, and the author, in order to raise strong emotions of fear and horror in the body of the work, is tempted to go lengths, to account for which the subsequent explanations seem utterly inadequate. Thus, for example, after all the wonder and dismay, and terror and expectation, excited by the mysterious chamber in the castle of Udolpho, how much are we disappointed and disgusted to find that all this pother has been raised by an image of wax! In short, we may say not only of Mrs. Radcliffe's castles, but of her works in general, that they abound "in passages that lead to nothing."

In the writings of this author there is a considerable degree of uniformity and mannerism, which is perhaps the case with all the productions of a strong and original genius. Her heroines too nearly resemble each other, or rather they possess hardly any shade of difference. They have all blue eyes and auburn hair—the form of each of them has "the airy lightness of a nymph"—they are all fond of watching the setting sun, and catching the purple tints of evening, and the vivid glow or fading splendour of the western horizon. Unfortunately, they are all likewise early risers. I say unfortunately, for in every exigency Mrs. Radcliffe's heroines are provided with a pencil and paper, and the sun is never allowed to rise or set in peace. Like Tilburina in the play, they are "inconsolable to the minuet in Ariadne," and in the most distressing circumstances find time to compose sonnets to sunrise, the bat, a sea-nymph, a lily, or a butterfly.

Mrs. Radcliffe is indeed too lavish of her landscapes, and her readers have frequent occasion to lament that she did not follow the example of Mr. Puff in the play, "I open with a clock striking, to beget an awful attention in the audience—it also marks the time, which is four o'clock in the morning, and saves a description of the rising sun, and a great deal about gilding the eastern hemisphere." It must be owned, however, that the landscapes of Mrs. Radcliffe are eminently beautiful, and their only fault is their too frequent recurrence. It would perhaps have puzzled William of Wyckham to comprehend the plan of her Gothic castles, but they are sufficiently vast, intricate, and gloomy. Nor does this writer excel only in painting rural nature, the accidents of light and shade, or castles and forests, but in descriptions of the effect of music, and, in short, she is eminent for picturesque delineation in general—for every thing by which the imagination or senses are affected. I know not that a more striking portrait is any where exhibited than that of Schedoni; and the strong impression he makes on our fancy is perhaps chiefly owing to the very powerful painting which is given of his external appearance.

Of the arts of composition, one of those most frequently employed by Mrs. Radcliffe, and which also arises from her love of picturesque effect, is contrast—or the making scenes of different characters or qualities succeed and relieve each other. (< . . )

The style of Mrs. Radcliffe is not pure, and is sometimes even ungrammatical, but in general it is rich and forcible. Her poetry, like her prose, principally consists in picturesque delineation.—JOHN DUNLOP, *The History of Fiction* (1814), 1842, Vol. 2, pp. 411–14

I must say I like Mrs. Radcliffe's romances better, and think of them oftener (than Fanny Burney's);—and even when I do not, part of the impression with which I survey the full-orbed moon shining in the blue expanse of heaven, or hear the wind sighing through autumnal leaves, or walk under the echoing archways of a Gothic ruin, is owing to a repeated perusal of the *Romance of the Forest* and the *Mysteries of Udolpho*. Her descriptions of scenery, indeed, are vague and wordy to the last degree; they are neither like Salvator nor Claude, nor nature nor art; and she dwells on the effects of moonlight till we are sometimes weary of them: her characters are insipid, the shadows of a shade, continued on, under different names, through all her novels: her story comes to nothing. But in harrowing up the soul with imaginary horrors, and making the flesh creep, and the nerves thrill, with fond hopes and fears, she is unrivalled among her fair country-women. Her great power lies in describing the indefinable, and embodying a phantom. She makes her readers twice children: and from the dim and shadowy veil which she draws over the objects of her fancy, forces us to believe all that is strange, and next to impossible, of their mysterious agency:—whether it is the sound of the lover's lute borne o'er the distant waters along the winding shores of Provence, recalling, with its magic breath, some long-lost friendship, or some hopeless love; or the full choir of the cloistered monks, chaunting their midnight orgies, or the lonely voice of an unhappy sister in her pensive cell, like angels' whispered music; or the deep sigh that steals from a dungeon on the startled ear; or the dim apparition of ghastly features; or the face of an assassin hid beneath a monk's cowl; or the robber gliding through the twilight gloom of the forest. All the fascination that links the world of passion to the world unknown, is hers, and she plays with it at her pleasure: she has all the poetry of romance, all that is obscure, visionary, and objectless, in the imagination. It seems that the simple notes of Clara's lute, which so delighted her youthful heart, still echo among the rocks and mountains of the Valois; the mellow tones of the minstrel's songs still mingle with the noise of the dashing oar, and the rippling of the silver waves of the Mediterranean; the voice of Agnes is heard from the haunted tower; and Schedoni's form still stalks through the frowning ruins of Palinzi. The greatest treat, however, which Mrs. Radcliffe's pen has provided for the lovers of the marvellous and terrible, is the Provençal tale which Ludovico reads in the Castle of Udolpho, as the lights are beginning to burn blue, and just before the faces appear from behind the tapestry that carry him off, and we hear no more of him. This tale is of a knight, who being engaged in a dance at some high festival of old romance, was summoned out by another knight clad in complete steel; and being solemnly adjured to follow him into the mazes of the neighbouring wood, his conductor brought him at length to a hollow glade in the thickest part, where he pointed to the murdered corpse of another knight, and lifting up his beaver, shewed him by the gleam of moonlight which fell on it, that it had the face of his spectre-guide! The dramatic power in the character of Schedoni, the Italian monk, has been much admired and praised; but the effect does not depend upon the character, but the situations; not upon the figure, but upon the back-ground.—*The Castle of Otranto* (which is supposed to have led the way to this style of writing) is, to my notion, dry,



meagre, and without effect. It is done upon false principles of taste. The great hand and arm, which are thrust into the court-yard, and remain there all day long, are the pasteboard machinery of a pantomime; they shock the senses, and have no purchase upon the imagination. They are a matter-of-fact impossibility; a fixture, and no longer a phantom. *Quod sic mihi ostendis, incredulus odi*. By realising the chimeras of ignorance and fear, begot upon shadows and dim likenesses, we take away the very grounds of credulity and superstition; and, as in other cases, by facing out the imposture, betray the secret to the contempt and laughter of the spectators. —WILLIAM HAZLITT, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, 1818

We are disappointed in it (*Gaston de Blondville*), as we feared we should be, from the kind of notices which are met with in its praise. There is a ghost,—a true ghost, and no sham; a true knight he is, too,—but he lacks “the horrors.” He is, as it were, a daylight sort of ghost, and not “my father’s spirit in arms,” visiting the glimpses of the moon, making night hideous. Perhaps, however, we should except his first appearance, at the tomb of Geoffrey de Clinton; and his second, in the gallery, opposite the king, at the banquet. At the tournament, he is a mere parade-ghost. And the description of the tournament has this same fault, of too much getting-up; and, for the matter of that, so has Sir Walter Scott’s much-praised one, notwithstanding all its splendour. Both authors should, in courtesy, have left tournaments to old Chaucer.

The merchant, on whom the story turns, weeps, and sighs, and faints, like a very woman. Now, in those days of travel and violence, it stood one of that calling well in stead to keep good heart. It is true that he begins well: but there is in this tale a want of vividness, and stir, and spirit: the fire burnt low in which this work was forged. We are not willing, after all, to think that this tameness of which we complain was owing to Mrs. Radcliffe’s mind having lost its energy, but rather to her plan, her attempt to make fiction a vehicle for true history, instead of using history merely as a good ingredient to work into fiction, as Shakspeare and Scott have done. Any one, who is pleased with getting a knowledge of some of the dresses and ceremonies of those times in this way, will take a deeper interest in the work than we have done. For our part, we would rather dig in the dust of the old chroniclers. We knew a gentleman who never could bring himself to read Anacharsis, because he would not be *manœuvred* into knowledge, as the child is by the playing-map, and like trickery.

We must not be thought to say, that this work is without spirit and interest; we have intended to speak of it in comparison with what Mrs. Radcliffe had before done. In one respect, it is astonishingly superiour to her former works,—we mean in its style, which is simple, natural, unencumbered, and in good taste. Our only way of accounting for this is, that, feigning it to be an ancient manuscript, and adopting the antique phraseology, she insensibly expressed herself in the naked simplicity of former times. We find a like effect in Thomson’s *Castle of Indolence*.

The extracts from the *Journal* are well worth reading. How a woman of Mrs. Radcliffe’s mind could look at nature as she did, knowing that she was going straight to the inn to put it down in black and white, we cannot tell. She did it, however, and so do our lady-tourists; but our lady-tourists are not Mrs. Radcliffe. The painter sketches from nature. He tells you, “‘T is my vocation, Hal!” But the poetical mind of him who is not a painter may be said to see, and not to see; all is absorbed deeply inward, and goes in mingling with emotions,

and fancies of the brain, changing its shapes and relations in its very course. Perhaps there are not to be found in writing descriptions so minute and so true as those in this *Journal*. Light and shadow, tints of the sky, forms and hues, and positions of objects, appear to have been viewed by Mrs. Radcliffe with the minute accuracy of a painter’s eye.

There follows *Gaston de Blondville* a pretty thick volume of poetry. Remembering the specimens of Mrs. Radcliffe’s talents in this art, scattered through her novels, we went to the volume with much misgiving. We were somewhat relieved, but not well enough satisfied to persevere. There is considerable improvement in diction, and some quite pleasing passages, which come very near being what may be called good poetry. There is nothing to which that homely saying, “A miss is as good as a mile,” better applies, than to what comes under the name of second-rate poetry,—which, strictly speaking, is no poetry at all. To be sure, it may be in fashion, and be run after for a day; for the world is more quickly taken with the false than with the true, though it will not hold to it so long. The eyesight may be dazzled, and there may be a great expenditure of the vital principle in *ecstasies*; but all comes right after a while, and people learn to distinguish between poverty and simplicity, between a superflux of words, and true passion and sentiment, and rich, original thought.

We are sorry that we cannot say more for Mrs. Radcliffe’s poetry; for we would say nothing but what is well of her. There is a beauty in her mind, a gentleness, a delicacy, a retiredness in her disposition, which is wholly feminine, and which every man cannot but feel, who feels as man ought towards woman; and she who wants this disposition, though she may draw admiration, will never win and keep a true, respectful, knightly sentiment of love.—RICHARD HENRY DANA, “Radcliffe’s *Gaston de Blondville*” (1827), *Poems and Prose Writings*, 1850, Vol. 2, pp. 321–24

Mrs. Radcliffe’s heroes and lovers are perfect in their kind; nobody can find any fault with them, for nobody knows any thing about them. They are described as very handsome, and quite unmeaning and inoffensive.

Her heroes have no character at all.

Theodore, Valancourt,—what delightful names! and there is nothing else to distinguish them by. Perhaps, however, this indefiniteness is an advantage. We add expression to the inanimate outline, and fill up the blank with all that is amiable, interesting, and romantic. A long ride without a word spoken, a meeting that comes to nothing, a parting look, a moonlight scene, or evening skies that paint their sentiments for them better than the lovers can do for themselves, farewells too full of anguish, deliverances too big with joy to admit of words, suppressed sighs, faint smiles, the freshness of the morning, pale melancholy, the clash of swords, the clank of chains that make the fair one’s heart sink within her, these are the chief means by which the admired authoress of *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* keeps alive an ambiguous interest in the bosom of her fastidious readers, and elevates the lover into the hero of the fable. Unintelligible distinctions, impossible attempts, a delicacy that shrinks from the most trifling objection, and an enthusiasm that rushes on its fate, such are the charming and teasing contradictions that form the flimsy texture of a modern romance! If the lover in such critical cases was any thing but a lover, he would cease to be the most amiable of all characters in the abstract and by way of excellence, and would be a traitor to the cause; to give reasons or to descend to particulars, is to doubt the omnipotence of love and shake the empire of credulous fancy; a

sounding name, a graceful form, are all that is necessary to suspend the whole train of tears, sighs, and the softest emotions upon; the ethereal nature of the passion requires ethereal food to sustain it; and our youthful hero, in order to be perfectly interesting, must be drawn as perfectly insipid!—WILLIAM HAZLITT, "Why the Heroes of Romances Are Insipid," 1827

Miss Edgeworth would scarcely venture into the region of the picturesque, and Mrs. Radcliffe is good for nothing out of it, except, indeed, when she is in her horrors.—WILLIAM H. PRESCOTT, "English Literature of the Nineteenth Century," *North American Review*, July 1832, p. 188

We would not pass over, without a tribute of gratitude, Mrs. Radcliffe's wild and wondrous tales. When we read them, the world seems shut out, and we breathe only in an enchanted region, where lover's lutes tremble over placid waters, mouldering castles rise conscious of deeds of blood, and the sad voices of the past echo through deep vaults and lonely galleries. There is always majesty in her terrors. She produces more effect by whispers and slender hints than ever was attained by the most vivid display of horrors. Her conclusions are tame and impotent almost without example. But while her spells actually operate, her power is truly magical. Who can ever forget the scene in the *Romance of the Forest*, where the marquis, who has long sought to make the heroine the victim of licentious love, after working on her protector, over whom he has a mysterious influence, to steal at night into her chamber, and when his trembling listener expects only a requisition for delivering her into his hands, replies to the question of "then—to-night, my Lord!" "Adelaide dies"—or the allusions to the dark veil in the *Mysteries of Udolpho*—or the stupendous scenes in Spalatro's cottage? Of all romance writers Mrs. Radcliffe is the most romantic.—T. NOON TALFOURD, "On British Novels and Romances," *Critical and Miscellaneous Writings*, 1842

Mrs. Radcliffe's verses are unworthy of her romances. In the latter she was what Mr. Mathias called her, 'a mighty magician;'—or not to lose the fine sound of his whole phrase,—'the mighty magician of Udolpho.' In her verses she is a tinselled nymph in a pantomime, calling up commonplaces with a wand.—LEIGH HUNT, "Specimens of British Poetesses," *Men, Women, and Books*, 1847, p. 278

Mrs. Radcliffe, a beautiful little woman of delicate constitution and sequestered habits, as fond, as her own heroines, of lonely sea-shores, picturesque mountains, and poetical meditations, perfected that discovery of the capabilities of an old house or castle for exciting a romantic interest, which lay ready to be made in the mind of every child and poet, but which (if Gray did not put it into his head) first suggested itself to the feudal diletanteism of Horace Walpole. Horace had more genius in him than his contemporaries gave him credit for; but the reputation which his wit obtained him, the material philosophy of the day, and the pursuit of fashionable amusement, did it no good. He lost sight of the line to be drawn between the imposing and the incredible; and though there is real merit in the *Castle of Otranto*, and even grandeur of imagination, yet the conversion of dreams into gross daylight palpabilities, which nothing short of iron-founders could create—swords that take a hundred men to lift them, and supernatural yet substantial helmets, big as houses and actually serving for prisons—turns the sublime into the ridiculous, and has completely spoilt an otherwise interesting narrative. Mrs. Radcliffe, frightened perhaps by Walpole's failure (for this great mistress of Fear was too often a servant of it), went to another extreme;

and except in what she quoted from other story-tellers, resolved all her supernatural effects into common-place causes. Those effects, however, while they lasted, and everything else capable of frightening people out of their wits—old haunted houses and corridors, mysterious music, faces behind curtains, cowed and guilty monks, inquisitors, nuns, places to commit murders in, and the murders themselves—she understood to perfection. To dress these in appropriate circumstances, she possessed also the eye of a painter as well as the feeling of a poetess. She conceived to a nicety the effect of a storm on a landscape, the playing of a meteor on the point of a spear, and the sudden appearance of some old castle to which travellers have been long coming, and which they have reasons to fear living in. It has been objected to her that she is too much of a melodramatic writer, and that her characters are inferior to her circumstances; the background (as Hazlitt says) of more importance than the figures. This in a great measure is true; but she has painted characters also, chiefly weak ones, as in the querulous duped aunt in *Udolpho*, and the victim of error, St. Pierre, in the *Romance of the Forest*. It must be considered, however, that her effects, however produced, are successful, and greatly successful; and that Nature herself deals in precisely such effects, leaving men to be operated upon by them passively, and not to play the chief parts in the process by means of their characters. Mrs. Radcliffe brings on the scene Fear and Terror themselves, the grandeurs of the known world, and the awes of the unknown; and if human beings become puppets in her hands, it is as people in storm and earthquake are puppets in the hands of Nature.—LEIGH HUNT, *A Book for a Corner*, 1849, pp. 103–4

Mrs. Radcliffe's romances are, indeed, of a wholly fantastic kind of Gothic, with no whit of foundation in actual knowledge of mediæval history. Her characters are but vague melodramatic phantoms that flit through her descriptions of scenery, and serve as agents for her terrific situations. There is something like treachery also to the true theory of her style in her habit of always solving the mystery at the end by purely natural explanations.—DAVID MASSON, *British Novelists and Their Styles*, 1859, p. 187

The *Mysteries of Udolpho* is old-fashioned, but it is fine reading for those who have leisure to trace the meanderings of the threads so carefully entangled, and to follow the most ethereal of heroines through the piled-up troubles which make her reward all the sweeter when it comes: and that reward always does come. In those days novelists had a different conception of their art from that which encourages them now to leave their readers with a handful of unfinished threads to be twisted up into the web of life at their individual pleasure. Mrs. Radcliffe gives us no problems to solve, no tales to complete; that is her business, not ours. She requires nothing of us but to listen and look on, keeping all our wits about us, never knowing when a door may open which will contain the solution of the mystery, or a casket may be unlocked out of which the secret may fly. Her landscapes, even now, though literature has done a great deal since then in the pictorial art, are full of an elaborate and old-fashioned yet tender beauty. She is not familiar with them, nor playful, but always at the height of a romantic strain; not graphic, but refined and full of perception. There are scenes that remind us of the learned Poussin, and some that have a light in them not unworthy of Claude before he was put down from his throne by the braggart energy and rivalry of Turner—since when the modern spectator has scarcely had eyes for those serene horizons and gleaming moonlight seas. Perhaps of all others Mrs. Radcliffe's art is most like that of the

gentle painter whom people call Italian Wilson. There is a ruined temple in the distance, a guitar laid against a broken column; but the lights, how mellow and soft, the skies how full of tempered radiance, the pastoral valleys unprofaned by ungracious foot—full of the light that never was on sea or shore! The great feudal castle which she builds in the midst of the dewy chestnut woods has never been equalled for mystery. We lose our way in its corridors, its winding stairs, the chambers high up in the turrets, where sometimes it is a bleeding retainer, and sometimes an injured wife, who is hidden away from curious eyes. Down below, in the vaulted passages underground, quarrels and passages of arms are rife, while in her spacious chamber the heroine listens and trembles—yet when the noises cease and her fluttered spirits are somewhat recovered, can always soothe herself by playing a plaintive air upon her lute, or by taking down one of the favourite volumes of her well-chosen library, in which she finds inexhaustible solace for all the evils of life.

It is not often nowadays that we come across anything that approaches to the ethereal perfection of Emily, a being too delicate almost to have even the finest love made to her, and the very sight of whom tames the fiercest. The gloomy chieftain Montoni tries, indeed, to force her will, to make her consent to a hateful marriage, and to sign papers disposing of all her fortune; but not one of his bravoës says a word to her that is not pretty, and her “spirits” are never “fluttered” by unseemly wooings. Valancour, though he errs and goes astray, is always the most respectful of lovers; and the captive, whom she supposes to be Valancour, and who is brought out of his dungeon by her humble retainers on this mistaken idea, how devoted, how unassuming is his despairing adoration! Perhaps this is a little too fine for ordinary human nature; but it must be remembered that the school of realism and the canons of probability had nothing to do with Mrs. Radcliffe’s art. The chief distinction of her power to the more commonplace reader is the skill with which she manages her mysteries—leading us from step to step through dim corridors, by uncertain lights, which have a way of going out at the most thrilling moment, across deserted chambers, where curtains rustle and sliding panels open, and the supernatural is always feared yet always averted. She was a great deal too enlightened ever to have anything to say to a ghost. In those days the ancient love of superstition had faded, and the new groping after spiritual presences had not begun. There are a hundred apparitions in her pages, but they are all elaborately accounted for, and never turn out to be anything more alarming than flesh and blood. Sometimes the effect, so carefully worked up to, is a failure, as in the case of the mystery of the veiled recess in Udolpho, where our imagination refuses to accept as anything but a flagrant imposition and deception the waxen image of death which is supposed to shock every beholder out of his wits. But as a matter of fact, no mysterious terror which is not supernatural will stand investigation even by the most skilful hands. The reader is angry at being defrauded of his alarm, and knows that he has no right to be so frightened by anything that can be explained.

The character in these books, if it can be called character at all, is of a kind as old-fashioned as the costume. It is confined to the lovely creature who is the heroine, into whom the author throws herself as if the work were an autobiography. We doubt whether perhaps it is altogether well for fiction that Emily is so unlike the modern young woman who figures in the same position now. She who was too delicate to mention to her parents the declaration of love made to her, and who modestly shrinks from the certainty that she can be indeed the

object of such devoted affection, can scarcely be imagined of the same species as she who describes all her lover’s kisses and glories in his fondness. But Emily, though she may be very unhappy, never makes an exhibition of herself. Concealment, like a worm in the bud, preys on her damask cheek; her smile grows more and more pensive, her gentle abstraction more deep; but she neither defies the people about her, nor cries out to heaven and earth to know why she should be so miserable. She takes a walk instead, and admires the scenery, and pens a little poem expressive of the melancholy that fills her soul; or she retires to her room and finds consolation in touching a few notes of her lute. And with a being so patient, so sweet, so humble-minded, everything of course comes right in the end. Udolpho itself cannot bring her to any evil; and her erring lover is so touched by the sight of her that he mends on the moment, without an effort, and all is well. There is a vein of sense, too, running through the diaphanous delicacy of this fair creature. She will not sign those papers with which Montoni is always threatening, nor be led to believe that the voice on the battlements is that of an apparition. When she finally escapes at last, her ride through the woods is almost as inspiring as that of Mary Stuart in the *Abbot*, when she escapes from Lochleven. The picture altogether has a sort of personal attraction. There is no divided interest—everything centres in Emily; and Emily, even in the utmost flutter of her spirits, never disappoints her admirers. She is always immaculate, never too much disturbed to take down a favourite volume or pen the following verses, or be consoled by touching a few notes on the lute.—MARGARET OLIPHANT, *The Literary History of England, 1790–1825*, 1882, Vol. 2, pp. 277–82

Radcliffe’s power is required to prevent an anti-climax. This weakness is very different from that of Walpole or Reeve. They failed to excite the feeling of superstitious fear. Mrs. Radcliffe excited it, but she destroyed its effect by revealing the inadequacy of its cause. The works of Walpole, Clara Reeve, and particularly of Mrs. Radcliffe, contain very decided merits. They made a school which has found many admirers and has given a vast deal of pleasure. But the school was founded on wrong principles and could not endure. It is impossible for the mind to enjoy the supernatural while it is chained down to every-day life by realistic descriptions of scenes and persons. And it is equally impossible to permanently please by fear-inspiring narratives, when the reader is aware that all the while there is no sufficient cause for the hero’s terror.

But what Mrs. Radcliffe attempted, she carried out with a very great skill. She placed the scenes of her narratives in Sicily, in Italy, or the south of France, and made good use of the warm natures and vivid imaginations which are born of southern climates. Every aid which an effective *mise en scène* could supply to her supernatural effects was most skilfully brought into play. Lonely castles, secret passages, gloomy churches, and monkish superstitions,—all were adapted to the tale of unknown dangers and fearful predicaments which Mrs. Radcliffe had to tell. She kept up with remarkable strength a supernatural tone which insensibly aids the imagination. In her descriptions of scenery, she chose nature in its most awe-inspiring forms, and instilled into the reader’s mind the same sense of the insignificance of man, under the influence of which her heroes and heroines so continually remain.—BAYARD TUCKERMAN, *A History of English Prose Fiction*, 1882, p. 268

(. . .) Mrs. Radcliffe’s romances seemed the joint offspring of “big bow-wow” and nightmare parentage. But they too moved with sweep and power; she was strong in description and

invention; she bridged the interval between the mediæval and modern novel, and painted landscape so well that even Byron sometimes borrowed from her.—THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON, "Men's Novels and Women's Novels," *Women and Men*, 1887, p. 160

She abjured the supernatural altogether, and yet contrived to keep her readers from first to last in an atmosphere of mysterious excitement and superstitious dread. There are no supernatural agents in her tales—neither wizard nor spectre; everything that happens is carefully explained as being due to natural causes; yet we are kept in a flutter and fever of excitement as much as if evil spirits and good spirits were constantly at work around us. The situations are eerie; she puts us in scenes where we are liable to the invasion of superstitious panic, in dark forests and lonely castles, with long echoing corridors and secret passages and rooms shut up because they are believed to be haunted; she surrounds us with turbulent, desperate, unscrupulous characters. Unaccountable sounds are heard when our feelings are deeply interested in the fate of hero or heroine, voices where no speaker is visible, strains of music in lonely places where it seems all but impossible that any musician should be; there are unaccountable apparitions and marvellous disappearances. There is generally some mystery afloat; when one has been cleared up we are not suffered long to breathe freely before we are caught in the toils of another. Yet all the time only human agents are at work; there is nothing improbable except the extraordinary combination of circumstances, nothing supernatural except in the superstitious imaginings of the personages of the story. Everything that seemed as if it must be the work of spirits is carefully and fully explained as the story goes on. Mrs Radcliffe has been censured for these explanations, as if they were a mistake in point of art, destroying the illusion and making us ashamed of ourselves for having been imposed upon. This censure I can regard only as an affectation, unless when it comes from a convinced believer in ghosts. Such persons might resent the explanation as casting doubts upon their cherished belief. But for other people I can see nothing that could be gained by leaving the mysterious incidents unexplained, except by the authoress, who would undoubtedly have saved herself an immense deal of trouble if she had made free use of ghosts and other supernatural properties, whenever she required them, without taking any pains to explain how the facts occurred. I read the story myself with a double interest; I enjoy the excitement of superstitious wonder and awe while the illusion lasts, and when the mystery is cleared up, and the excitement is gently subsiding, I am in a mood to get additional enjoyment from reflecting on the ingenuity of the complication that gave to the illusion for the moment the force of truth. Yet it was no less a person than Sir Walter Scott that set the fashion of objecting to Mrs Radcliffe's explanations. If we were to inquire curiously into the objection, we should probably find that the inquiry led us into one of the differences between classical art and romantic art. Mrs Radcliffe, although in the main a disciple in the school of romantic art, yet paid homage to classical art in her efforts to explain the strangest occurrences by accidents within the limits of human possibility; and a thorough-going romanticist like Sir Walter Scott might be inclined to reprobate this concession.—WILLIAM MINTO, *The Literature of the Georgian Era*, ed. William Knight, 1894, Ch. 9

The supernatural in Mrs. Radcliffe's case is mainly, if not wholly, what has been called "the explained supernatural,"—that is to say, the apparently ghostly, and certainly ghostly, effects are usually if not always traced to natural causes, while

in most if not all of her followers the demand for more highly spiced fare in the reader, and perhaps a defect of ingenuity in the writer, leaves the devils and witches as they were. In all, without exception, castles with secret passages, trap-doors, forests, banditti, abductions, sliding panels, and other apparatus and paraphernalia of the kind play the main part. The actual literary value is, on the whole, low; though Mrs. Radcliffe is not without glimmerings, and it is exceedingly curious to note that, just before the historical novel was once for all started by Scott, there is in all these writers an absolute and utter want of comprehension of historical propriety, of local and temporal colour, and of all the marks which were so soon to distinguish fiction.—GEORGE SAINTSBURY, *A History of Nineteenth Century Literature*, 1896, p. 45

It would be tedious to give here an analysis of these once famous fictions *seriatim*. They were very long, very much alike, and very much overloaded with sentiment and description. The plots were complicated and abounded in the wildest improbabilities and in those incidents which were once the commonplaces of romantic fiction and which realism has now turned out of doors: concealments, assassinations, duels, disguises, kidnappings, escapes, elopements, intrigues, forged documents, discoveries of old crimes, and identifications of lost heirs. The characters, too, were of the conventional kind. There were dark-browed, crime-stained villains—forerunners, perhaps, of Manfred and Lara, for the critics think that Mrs. Radcliffe's stories were not without important influence on Byron. There were high-born, penitent dames who retired to convents in expiation of sins which are not explained until the general raveling of clues in the final chapter. There were braves, banditti, feudal tyrants, monks, inquisitors, soubrettes, and simple domestics *à la Bianca*, in Walpole's romance. The lover was of the type adored by our great-grandmothers, handsome, melancholy, passionate, respectful but desperate, a user of most choice English; with large black eyes, smooth white forehead, and jetty curls, now sunk, Mr. Perry says, to the covers of prune boxes. The heroine, too, was sensitive and melancholy. When alone upon the seashore or in the mountains, at sunset or twilight, or under the midnight moon, or when the wind is blowing, she overflows into stanza or sonnet, "To Autumn," "To Sunset," "To the Bat," "To the Nightingale," "To the Winds," "To Melancholy," "Song of the Evening Hour." We have heard this pensive music drawing near in the strains of the Miltonic school, but in Mrs. Radcliffe the romantic gloom is profound and all-pervading. In what pastures she had fed is manifest from the verse captions that head her chapters, taken mainly from Blair, Thomson, Warton, Gray, Collins, Beattie, Mason, and Walpole's *Mysterious Mother*. Here are a few stanzas from her ode "To Melancholy":

Spirit of love and sorrow, hail!  
Thy solemn voice from far I hear,  
Mingling with evening's dying gale:  
Hail, with thy sadly pleasing tear!  
O at this still, lonely hour—  
Thine own sweet hour of closing day—  
Awake thy lute, whose charming power  
Shall call up fancy to obey:  
To paint the wild, romantic dream  
That meets the poet's closing eye,  
As on the bank of shadowy stream  
He breathes to her the fervid sigh.  
O lonely spirit, let thy song  
Lead me through all thy sacred haunt,

The minster's moonlight aisles along  
Where spectres raise the midnight chant.

In Mrs. Radcliffe's romances we find a tone that is absent from Walpole's: romanticism plus sentimentalism. This last element had begun to infuse itself into general literature about the middle of the century, as a protest and reaction against the emotional coldness of the classical age. It announced itself in Richardson, Rousseau, and the youthful Goethe; in the *comédie larmoyante*, both French and English; found its cleverest expression in Sterne, and then, becoming a universal vogue, deluged fiction with productions like Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*, Miss Burney's *Evelina*, and the novels of Jane Porter and Mrs. Opie. Thackeray said that there was more crying in *Thaddeus of Warsaw* than in any novel he ever remembered to have read. Emily, in the *Mysteries of Udolpho* cannot see the moon, or hear a guitar or an organ or the murmur of the pines, without weeping. Every page is bedewed with the tear of sensibility; the whole volume is damp with it, and ever and anon a chorus of sobs goes up from the entire company. Mrs. Radcliffe's heroines are all descendants of Pamela and Clarissa Harlowe, but under more romantic circumstances. They are beset with a thousand difficulties; carried off by masked ruffians, immured in convents, held captive in robber castles, encompassed with horrors natural and supernatural, persecuted, threatened with murder and with rape. But though perpetually sighing, blushing, trembling, weeping, fainting, they have at bottom a kind of toughness that endures through all. They rebuke the wicked in stately language, full of noble sentiments and moral truths. They preserve the most delicate feelings of propriety in situations the most discouraging. Emily, imprisoned in the gloomy castle of Udolpho, in the power of ruffians whose brawls and orgies fill night and day with horror, in hourly fear for her virtue and her life, sends for the lord of the castle,—whom she believes to have murdered her aunt,—and reminds him that, as her protectress is now dead, it would not be proper for her to stay any longer under his roof thus unchaperoned, and will he please, therefore, send her home?

Mrs. Radcliffe's fictions are romantic, but not usually mediæval in subject. In the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, the period of the action is the end of the sixteenth century; in the *Romance of the Forest*, 1658; in *The Italian*, about 1760. But her machinery is prevailingly Gothic and the real hero of the story is commonly, as in Walpole, some haunted building. In the *Mysteries of Udolpho* it is a castle in the Apennines; in the *Romance of the Forest*, a deserted abbey in the depth of the woods; in *The Italian*, the cloister of the Black Penitents. The moldering battlements, the worm-eaten tapestries, the turret staircases, secret chambers, underground passages, long, dark corridors where the wind howls dismally, and distant doors which slam at midnight all derive from *Otranto*. So do the supernatural fears which haunt these abodes of desolation; the strains of mysterious music, the apparitions which glide through the shadowy apartments, the hollow voices that warn the tyrant to beware. But her method here is quite different from Walpole's; she tacks a natural explanation to every unearthly sight or sound. The hollow voices turn out to be ventriloquism; the figure of a putrefying corpse which Emily sees behind the black curtain in the ghost chamber at Udolpho is only a wax figure, contrived as a *memento mori* for a former penitent. After the reader has once learned this trick he refuses to be imposed upon again, and, whenever he encounters a spirit, feels sure that a future chapter will embody it back into flesh and blood.—HENRY A. BEERS, *A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century*, 1898, pp. 250–54

Mrs. Radcliffe wrote for the story, and not for the characters, which are all types, and soon became conventional. There is always the young lover, a gentleman of high birth, usually in some sort of disguise, who, without seeing the face of the heroine, may fall in love with her 'distinguished air of delicacy and grace' or 'the sweetness and fine expression of her voice.' The only variation in the heroine is that she may be either dark or fair. The beautiful creature is confined in a castle or a convent because she refuses to marry some one whom she hates. She finally has her own way and marries her lover. The tyrant is always the same man under different names; add to him a little softness, and he becomes the Byronic hero.

Mrs. Radcliffe was praised in her own time for her ability to describe places she had never visited. She had seen mountains, castles, and abbeys, but not those of southern Europe. Her descriptive epithets were accordingly general, suitable to the type, and not to the individual. 'Terrific' or dreamy scenes assumed clear outlines in her imagination, and she was able to transfer the image of them to the reader. She saw into the art of description far enough to maintain without incongruity a point of view. Perhaps she was at her best in noting the changing aspects of forest, castle, and sea, at the approach of evening twilight.—WILBUR L. CROSS, *The Development of the English Novel*, 1899, p. 106

Does any one now read Mrs. Radcliffe, or am I the only wanderer in her windy corridors, listening timidly to groans and hollow voices, and shielding the flame of a lamp, which, I fear, will presently flicker out, and leave me in darkness? People know the name of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*; they know that boys would say to Thackeray, at school, 'Old fellow, draw us Vivaldi in the Inquisition.' But have they penetrated into the chill galleries of the Castle of Udolpho? Have they shuddered for Vivaldi in face of the sable-clad and masked Inquisition? Certainly Mrs. Radcliffe, within the memory of man, has been extremely popular. The thick double-columned volume in which I peruse the works of the Enchantress belongs to a public library. It is quite the dirtiest, greasiest, most dog's-eared, and most scribbled tome in the collection. Many of the books have remained, during the last hundred years, uncut, even to this day, and I have had to apply the paper knife to many an author, from Alciphron (1790) to Mr. Max Müller, and Dr. Birkbeck Hill's edition of *Bozzy's Life of Dr. Johnson*. But Mrs. Radcliffe has been read diligently, and copiously annotated.—ANDREW LANG, "Mrs. Radcliffe's Novels," *Cornhill Magazine*, July 1900, p. 23

SIR WALTER SCOTT  
From "Ann Radcliffe" (1824)  
*Lives of the Novelists*  
1825

The materials of these celebrated romances, and the means employed in conducting the narrative, are all selected with a view to the author's primary object, of moving the reader by ideas of impending danger, hidden guilt, supernatural visitings—by all that is terrible, in short, combined with much that is wonderful. For this purpose, her scenery is generally as gloomy as her tale, and her personages are those at whose frown that gloom grows darker. She has uniformly (except in her first effort) selected for her place of action the south of Europe, where the human passions, like the weeds of the climate, are supposed to attain portentous growth under the fostering sun; which abounds with ruined monuments of



antiquity, as well as the more massive remnants of the middle ages; and where feudal tyranny and Catholic superstition still continue to exercise their sway over the slave and bigot, and to indulge to the haughty lord, or more haughty priest, that sort of despotic power, the exercise of which seldom fails to deprave the heart, and disorder the judgment. These circumstances are skilfully selected, to give probability to events which could not, without great violation of truth, be represented as having taken place in England. Yet, even with the allowances which we make for foreign minds and manners, the unterminating succession of misfortunes which press upon the heroine, strikes us as unnatural. She is continually struggling with the tide of adversity, and hurried downwards by its torrent; and if any more gay description is occasionally introduced, it is only as a contrast, and not a relief, to the melancholy and gloomy tenor of the narrative.

In working upon the sensations of natural and superstitious fear, Mrs. Radcliffe has made much use of obscurity and suspense, the most fertile source, perhaps, of sublime emotion; for there are few dangers that do not become familiar to the firm mind, if they are presented to consideration as certainties, and in all their open and declared character; whilst, on the other hand, the bravest have shrunk from the dark and the doubtful. To break off the narrative, when it seemed at the point of becoming most interesting—to extinguish a lamp, just when a parchment containing some hideous secret ought to have been read—to exhibit shadowy forms and half-heard sounds of woe, are resources which Mrs. Radcliffe has employed with more effect than any other writer of romance. It must be confessed, that in order to bring about these situations, some art or contrivance, on the part of the author, is rather too visible. Her heroines voluntarily expose themselves to situations, which in nature a lonely female would certainly have avoided. They are too apt to choose the midnight hour for investigating the mysteries of a deserted chamber or secret passage, and generally are only supplied with an expiring lamp, when about to read the most interesting documents. The simplicity of the tale is thus somewhat injured—it is as if we witnessed a dressing up of the very phantom by which we are to be startled; and the imperfection, though redeemed by many beauties, did not escape the censure of criticism.

A principal characteristic of Mrs. Radcliffe's romances, is the rule which the author imposed upon herself, that all the circumstances of her narrative, however mysterious, and apparently superhuman, were to be accounted for on natural principles, at the winding up of the story. It must be allowed, that this has not been done with uniform success, and that the author has been occasionally more successful in exciting interest and apprehension, than in giving either interest or dignity of explanation to the means she has made use of. Indeed, we have already noticed, as the torment of romance-writers, those necessary evils, the concluding chapters, when they must unravel the skein of adventures which they have been so industrious to perplex, and account for all the incidents which they have been at so much pains to render unaccountable. Were these great magicians, who deal in the wonderful and fearful, permitted to discuss their spectres as they raise them, amidst the shadowy and indistinct light so favourable to the exhibition of phantasmagoria, without compelling them into broad daylight, the task were comparatively easy, and the fine fragment of *Sir Bertrand* might have rivals in that department. But the modern author is not permitted to escape in that way. We are told of a formal old judge before whom evidence was tendered, of the ghost of a murdered person having declared to a witness, that the prisoner at the bar was

guilty: the judge admitted the evidence of the spirit to be excellent, but denied his right to be heard through the mouth of another, and ordered the spectre to be summoned into open court. The public of the current day deal as rigidly, in moving for a *quo warranto* to compel an explanation from the story-teller; and the author must either at once represent the knot as worthy of being severed by supernatural aid, and bring on the stage his actual fiend or ghost, or, like Mrs. Radcliffe, explain by natural agency the whole marvels of his story.

We have already, in some brief remarks on *The Castle of Otranto*, avowed some preference for the more simple mode, of boldly avowing the use of supernatural machinery. Ghosts and witches, and the whole tenets of superstition, having once, and at no late period, been matter of universal belief, warranted by legal authority, it would seem no great stretch upon the reader's credulity to require him, while reading of what his ancestors did, to credit for the time what those ancestors devoutly believed in. And yet, notwithstanding the success of Walpole and Maturin, (to whom we may add the author of *Forman*.) the management of such machinery must be acknowledged a task of a most delicate nature. 'There is but one step,' said Bonaparte, 'betwixt the sublime and the ridiculous;' and in an age of universal incredulity, we must own it would require, at the present day, the support of the highest powers, to save the supernatural from slipping into the ludicrous. The *Incredulus odi* is a formidable objection.

There are some modern authors, indeed, who have endeavoured, ingeniously enough, to compound betwixt ancient faith and modern incredulity. They have exhibited phantoms, and narrated prophecies strangely accomplished, without giving a defined or absolute opinion, whether these are to be referred to supernatural agency, or whether the apparitions were produced (no uncommon case) by an overheated imagination, and the presages apparently verified by a casual, though singular, coincidence of circumstances. This is, however, an evasion of the difficulty, not a solution; and besides, it would be leading us too far from the present subject, to consider to what point the author of a fictitious narrative is bound by his charter to gratify the curiosity of the public, and whether, as a painter of actual life, he is not entitled to leave something in shade, when the natural course of events conceals so many incidents in total darkness. Perhaps, upon the whole, this is the most artful mode of terminating such a tale of wonder, as it forms the means of compounding with the taste of two different classes of readers; those who, like children, demand that each particular circumstance and incident of the narrative shall be fully accounted for; and the more imaginative class, who, resembling men that walk for pleasure through a moonlight landscape, are more teased than edified by the intrusive minuteness with which some well-meaning companion disturbs their reveries, divesting stock and stone of the shadowy semblances in which fancy had dressed them, and pertinaciously restoring to them the ordinary forms and commonplace meanness of reality.

It may indeed be claimed as meritorious in Mrs. Radcliffe's mode of expounding her mysteries, that it is founded in possibilities. Many situations have occurred, highly tinged with romantic incident and feeling, the mysterious obscurity of which has afterwards been explained by deception and confederacy. Such have been the impostures of superstition in all ages, and such delusions were also practised by the members of the Secret Tribunal, in the middle ages, and in more modern times by the Rosicrucians and Illuminati, upon whose machinations Schiller has founded the fine romance of *The Ghost-Seer*. But Mrs. Radcliffe has not had recourse to so artificial a

solution. Her heroines often sustain the agony of fear, and her readers that of suspense, from incidents which, when explained, appear of an ordinary and trivial nature; and in this we do not greatly applaud her art. A stealthy step behind the arras, may doubtless, in some situations, and when the nerves are tuned to a certain pitch, have no small influence upon the imagination; but if the conscious listener discovers it to be only the noise made by the cat, the solemnity of the feeling is gone, and the visionary is at once angry with his senses for having been cheated, and with his reason for having acquiesced in the deception. We fear that some such feeling of disappointment and displeasure attends most readers, when they read for the first time the unsatisfactory solution of the mysteries of the black pall and the wax figure, which has been adjourned from chapter to chapter, like something suppressed, because too horrible for the ear.

There is a separate inconvenience attending a narrative where the imagination has been long kept in suspense, and is at length imperfectly gratified by an explanation falling short of what the reader has expected; for, in such a case, the interest terminates on the first reading of the volumes, and cannot, so far as it rests upon a high degree of excitation, be recalled upon a second perusal. A plan of narrative, happily complicated and ingeniously resolved, continues to please after many readings; for, although the interest of eager curiosity is no more, it is supplied by the rational pleasure, which admires the author's art, and traces a thousand minute passages, which render the catastrophe probable, yet escape notice in the eagerness of a first perusal. But it is otherwise, when some inadequate cause is assigned for a strong emotion; the reader feels tricked, and as in the case of a child who has once seen the scenes of a theatre too nearly, the idea of pasteboard, cords, and pulleys, destroys for ever the illusion with which they were first seen from the proper point of view. Such are the difficulties and dilemmas which attend the path of the professed story-teller, who, while it is expected of him that his narrative should be interesting and extraordinary, is neither permitted to explain its wonders, by referring them to ordinary causes, on account of their triteness, nor to supernatural agency, because of its incredibility. It is no wonder that, hemmed in by rules so strict, Mrs. Radcliffe, a mistress of the art of exciting curiosity, has not been uniformly fortunate in the mode of gratifying it.

T. NOON TALFOURD  
From "Memoir of the Life and  
Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe"  
*Gaston de Blondville*  
1826, pp. 105-32

Mrs. Radcliffe may fairly be considered as the inventor of a new style of romance; equally distinct from the old tales of chivalry and magic, and from modern representations of credible incidents and living manners. Her works partially exhibit the charms of each species of composition; interweaving the miraculous with the probable, in consistent narrative, and breathing of tenderness and beauty peculiarly her own. The poetical marvels of the first fill the imagination, but take no hold on the sympathies, to which they have become alien: the vicissitudes of the last awaken our curiosity, without transporting us beyond the sphere of ordinary life. But it was reserved for Mrs. Radcliffe to infuse the wondrous in the credible; to animate rich description with stirring adventure;

and to impart a portion of human interest to the progress of romantic fiction. She occupied that middle region between the mighty dreams of the heroic ages and the realities of our own, which remained to be possessed; filled it with goodly imagery; and made it resonant with awful voices. Her works, in order to produce their greatest impression, should be read first, not in childhood, for which they are too substantial; nor at mature age, for which they may seem too visionary; but at that delightful period of youth, when the soft twilight of the imagination harmonizes with the luxurious and uncertain light cast on their wonders. By those, who come at such an age to their perusal, they will never be forgotten.

The principal means, which Mrs. Radcliffe employed to raise up her enchantments on the borders of truth, are, first, her faculty of awakening emotions allied to superstitious fear; and, secondly, her skill in selecting and describing scenes and figures precisely adapted to the feelings she sought to enkindle. We will examine each of these powers, and then shortly advert to their development in her successive romances.

I. The art, by which supernatural agency is insinuated, derives its potency from its singular application to human nature, in its extremes of weakness and strength. Simply considered, fear is the basest of emotions, and the least adapted to the dignity of romance; yet it is that, of which the most heroic heart sometimes whispers a confession. On the other hand, every thing, which tends to elevate and ennoble our feelings, to give the character of permanency to our impressions, and impart a tongue to the silence of nature, has reference to things unseen. The tremblings of the spirit, which are base when prompted by any thing earthly, become sublime when inspired by a sense of the visionary and immortal. They are the secret witnesses of our alliance with power, which is not of this world. We feel both our fleshly infirmity and our high destiny, as we shrink on the borders of spiritual existence. Whilst we listen for echoes from beyond the grave, and search with tremulous eagerness for indications of the unearthly, our Curiosity and Fear assume the grandeur of passions. We might well doubt our own immortality, if we felt no restless desire to forestal the knowledge of its great secret, and held no obstinate questionings with the sepulchre. We were not of heavenly origin, if we did not struggle after a communion with the invisible; nor of human flesh, if we did not shudder at our own daring;—and it is in the union of this just audacity and venial terror, that we are strangely awed and affected. It is, therefore, needless to justify the use of the supernatural in fiction; for it is peculiarly adapted to the workings of the imagination—that power, whose high province is to mediate between the world without us and the world within us; on the one hand to impart sentiment and passion to the external universe, and make it redolent of noble associations; and, on the other, to clothe the affections of the heart and the high suggestions of the reason with colour and shape, and present them to the mind in living and substantial forms.

There are various modes, in which the supernatural may be employed, requiring more or less of a dextrous sympathy, in proportion to the depth and seriousness of the feeling, which the author proposes to awaken. In cases where the appeal is only made to the fancy, it is sufficient if the pictures are consistent with themselves, without any reference to the prejudices, or passions, of those, before whom they are presented. To this class the fables of the Greek mythology belong, notwithstanding their infinite varieties of grandeur and beauty. They are too bright and palpable to produce emotions of awe, even among those, who professed to believe them; and rather tended to inclose the sphere of mortal vision, which they

adorned and gladdened, with more definite boundaries, than to intimate the obscure and eternal. Instead of wearing, then, the solemn aspect of antiquity, they seem, even now, touched with the bloom of an imperishable youth. The gorgeous Oriental fictions and modern tales of fairy lore are also merely fantastical, and advance no claim on faith, or feeling. Their authors escape from the laws of matter, without deriving any power from the functions of spirit; they are rather without than above nature, and seek only an excuse in the name of the supernatural for their graceful vagaries. Akin essentially to these are mere tales of terror, in which horrors are accumulated on horrors. Beyond the precincts of the nursery, they are nothing but a succession of scenic representations—a finely coloured phantasmagoria, which may strike the fancy, but do not chill the blood, and soon weary the spectator. It is only the “eye of childhood” which “fears a painted devil.” In some of the wild German tales, indeed, there is, occasionally, a forcible exaggeration of truth, which strikes for a moment, and seems to give back the memory of a forgotten dream. But none of these works, whatever poetical merit they may possess, have the power to fascinate and appal, by touching those secret strings of mortal apprehension, which connect our earthly with our spiritual being.

In these later days, it, no doubt, requires a fine knowledge of the human heart to employ the supernatural, so as to move the pulses of terror. Of all superstitions, the most touching are those, which relate to the appearance of the dead among the living; not only on account of the reality which they derive from mingling with the ordinary business of life, but of the cold and shuddering sympathy we feel for a being like to whom we may ourselves become in a few short years. To bring such a vision palpably on the scene is always a bold experiment, and usually requires a long note of preparation, and a train of circumstances, which may gradually and insensibly dispose the mind to implicit credence. Yet to dispense with all such appliances, and to call forth the grandest spirit, that ever glided from the tomb, was not beyond Shakspeare’s skill. A few short sentences only prepare the way for the ghost of the murdered King of Denmark; the spirit enters, and we feel at once he is no creature of time; he speaks, and his language is “of Tartarus, and the souls in bale.” Such mighty magic as this, however, belonged only to the first of poets. Writers who, in modern times, have succeeded in infusing into the mind thoughts of unearthly fear, have usually taken one of these two courses: either they have associated their superstitions with the solemnities of nature, and contrived to interweave them in the very texture of life, without making themselves responsible for the feelings they excite: or they have, by mysterious hints and skilful contrivances, excited the curiosity and terror of their readers, till they have prepared them either to believe in any wonder they may produce, or to image for themselves in the obscurity fearful shapes, and to feel the presence of invisible horrors.

Those, who seek to create a species of supernatural interest by the first of these processes, find abundant materials adapted to their use in the noblest parts of our own intellectual history. There are doubtful phenomena within the experience of all reflecting minds, which may scarcely be referred to their mere mortal nature, and which sometimes force on the coldest sceptic a conviction, that he is “fearfully” as well as “wonderfully made.” Golden dreams hover over our cradle, and shadows thicken round the natural descent of the aged into the grave. Few there are, who, in childhood, have not experienced some strange visitings of serious thought, gently agitating the soul like the wind “that bloweth where it listeth,” suggesting to

it holy fancies, and awakening its first sympathy with a world of sorrow and of tears. Who has not felt, or believed that he has felt, a sure presentiment of approaching evil? Who, at some trivial occurrence, “striking the electric chord by which we are darkly bound,” has not been startled by the sudden revival of old images and feelings, long buried in the depth of years, which stalk before him like the spectres of departed companions? Who has not shrunk from the fascination of guilty thoughts, as from “supernatural soliciting?” Where is the man so basely moulded, that he does not remember moments of inspiration, when statelier images than his common intellect can embody, hopes and assurances brighter than his constitutional temperament, may recal, and higher faculties within himself than he has ever been able to use, have stood revealed to him like mountain-tops at the utmost reach of vision, touched by a gleam of the morning sun? And who, in the melancholy calm of the mind, sadly looking into its depths, has not perceived the gigantic wrecks of a nobler nature, as the fortunate voyager on some crystal lake has discerned, or fancied he has discerned, the wave-worn towers of a forgotten city far in the deep waters? There are magic threads in the web of life, which a writer of romance has only to bring out and to touch with appropriate hues of fancy. From the secret places of the soul are voices more solemn than from old superstitions, to which he may bid us hearken. In his works, prophecies may be fulfilled; presentiments justified; the history of manhood may answer to the dreams of the nursery; and he may leave his readers to assert if they can, “These have their causes; they are natural.” Let him only give due effect to the problem, and he may safely trust their hearts to supply the answer!

The other mode of exciting terror requires, perhaps, greater delicacy and skill, as the author purposes to influence the mind directly from without, instead of leaving it, after receiving a certain clue, to its own workings. In this style, up to the point where Mrs. Radcliffe chooses to pause and explain, she has no rival. She knows the string of feeling she must touch, and exactly proportions her means to her design. She invariably succeeds not by the quantity but the quality of her terrors. Instead of exhibiting a succession of magnificent glooms, which only darken the imagination, she whispers some mysterious suggestion to the soul, and exhibits only just enough of her picture to prolong the throbbings she has excited. In nothing is her supremacy so clearly shown, as in the wise and daring economy, with which she has employed the instruments of fear. A low groan issuing from distant vaults; a voice heard among an assembly from an unknown speaker; a little track of blood seen by the uncertain light of a lamp on a castle staircase; a wild strain of music floating over moonlight woods; as introduced by her, affect the mind more deeply than terrible incantations, or accumulated butcheries. “Pluck out the heart of her mystery!”—tell, at once, the secret, the lightest hint of which appals—verify the worst apprehensions of the reader; and what would be the reality in common hands? You can suspect nothing more than a cruel murder perpetrated many years ago by an unprincipled monk, or an avowed robber! Why should we suffer all the stings of curiosity on such an issue? Human life is not held so precious, murder is not so strange and rare an occurrence, that we should be greatly agitated by the question whether, two centuries ago, a bandit destroyed one of his captives; but the skill of the writer, applying itself justly to the pulses of terror in our intellectual being, gives tragic interest to the inquiry, makes the rusted dagger terrible, and the spot of blood sublime. This faculty is the more remarkable, as it is employed to raise a single crime into importance; while others of equal dye are casually alluded

to, and dismissed, as deeds of little note, and make no impression on the reader. Assassins who murder for hire, commonly excite no feeling in romance, except as mere instruments, like the weapons they use; but, when Mrs. Radcliffe chooses to single out one of these from the mass, though undistinguished by peculiar characteristics, she rivets our attention to Spalatro, as by an irresistible spell; forces us to watch every movement of his haggard countenance, and makes the low sound of his stealthy footsteps sink into the soul. Her faculty, therefore, which has been represented as melodramatic, is akin to the very essence of tragic power, which is felt not merely in the greatness of the actions, or sorrows, which it exhibits, but in its nice application to the inmost sources of terror and of pity.

It is extraordinary, that a writer thus gifted should, in all her works intended for publication, studiously resolve the circumstances, by which she has excited superstitious apprehensions, into mere physical causes. She seems to have acted on a notion, that some established canon of romance obliged her to reject real supernatural agency; for it is impossible to believe she would have adopted this harassing expedient if she had felt at liberty to obey the promptings of her own genius. So absolute was her respect for every species of authority, that it is probable she would rather have sacrificed all her productions, than have transgressed any arbitrary law of taste, or criticism. It is equally obvious, that there is no valid ground of objection to the use of the supernatural, in works of fiction, and that it is absolutely essential to the perfection of that kind of romance, which she invented. To the imagination it is not only possible, but congenial, when introduced with art, and employed for high and solemn purposes. Grant only the possibility of its truth, which "the fair and innocent" are half disposed to believe, and there is nothing extravagant in the whole machinery, by which it works. But discard it altogether, and introduce, in its stead, a variety of startling phenomena, which are resolved at last into petty deceptions and gross improbabilities, and you at once disappoint the fancy, and shock the understanding of the reader. In the first case, the reason is not offended, because it is not consulted; in the last, it is expressly appealed to with the certainty of an unfavourable decision. Besides it is clear that all the feelings created up to the moment of explanation, and which it has been the very object of the author to awaken, have obeyed the influence of these very principles, which at last she chooses to disown. If the minds to whom the work is addressed were so constituted as to reject the idea of supernatural agency, they would be entirely unmoved by the circumstances arranged to produce the impression of its existence; and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* would have fallen still-born from the press! Why then should the author turn traitor to her own "so potent art?" Why, having wrought on the fears of her readers till she sways them at her will, must she turn round and tell them they have been awed and excited by a succession of mockeries? Such impotent conclusions injure the romances as works of art, and jar on the nerves of the reader, which are tuned for grand wonders, not paltry discoveries. This very error, however, which injures the effect of Mrs. Radcliffe's works, especially on a second perusal, sets off, in the strongest light, the wizard power of her genius. Even when she has dissolved mystery after mystery, and abjured spell after spell, the impression survives, and the reader is still eager to attend again, and be again deluded. After the voices heard in the chambers of Udolpho have been shown to be the wanton trick of a prisoner, we still revert to the remaining prodigies with anxious curiosity, and are prepared to give implicit credence to new wonders at Chateau le Blanc. In the romance

of *Gaston de Blondville*, Mrs. Radcliffe, not intending to publish, gratified herself by the introduction of a true spectre; and, without anticipating the opinion of the public on that work, we may venture to express a belief, that the manner, in which the supernatural agency is conducted, will deepen the general regret, that she did not employ it in her longer and more elaborate productions.

II. Mrs. Radcliffe's faculties of describing and picturing scenes and appropriate figures was of the highest order. Her accurate observation of inanimate nature, prompted by an intense love of all its varieties, supplied the materials for those richly coloured representations, which her genius presented. Without this perception of the true, the liveliest fancy will only produce a chaos of beautiful images, like the remembered fragments of a gorgeous dream. How singularly capable Mrs. Radcliffe was of painting the external world, in its naked grandeur, her published tour among the English Lakes, and, perhaps still more, the notes made on her journeys for her own amusement, abundantly prove. In the first, the boldness and simplicity of her strokes, conveying the clear images to the eye of the mind, with scarcely an incrustation of sentiment, or perplexing dazzle of fancy, distinguish her from almost all other descriptive tourists. Still the great charm of simplicity was hardly so complete, as in her unstudied notices of scenery; because in writing for the press, it is scarcely possible to avoid altogether the temptation of high sounding and ambiguous expressions, which always impede the distant presentiment of material forms. To this difficulty, she thus adverts in her account of Ulswater. "It is difficult to spread varied pictures of such scenes before the imagination. A repetition of the same images of rock, wood, and water, and the same epithets of grand, vast, and sublime, which necessarily occur, must appear tautologous, though their archetypes in nature, ever varying in outline or arrangement, exhibit new visions to the eye, and produce new shades of effect on the mind." In the journals, as no idea of authorship interposed to give restraint to her style, there is entire fidelity and truth. She seems the very chronicler and secretary of nature; makes us feel the freshness of the air; and listen to the gentlest sounds. Not only does she keep each scene distinct from all others, however similar in general character; but discriminates its shifting aspects with the most delicate exactness. No aerial tint of a fleecy cloud is too evanescent to be imaged in her transparent style. Perhaps no writer in prose, or verse, has been so happy in describing the varied effects of light in winged words. It is true, that there is not equal discrimination in the views of natural scenery, which she presents in her romances. In them she writes of places, which she has not visited; and, like a true lover, invests absent nature with imaginary loveliness. She looks at the grandeurs and beauties of creation through a soft and tender medium, in which its graces are heightened, but some of its delicate varieties are lost. Still it is nature that we see, though touched with the hues of romance, and which could only be thus presented by one who had known, and studied its simple charms.

In the estimate of Mrs. Radcliffe's pictorial powers, we must include her persons as well as her scenes. It must be admitted that, with scarcely an exception, they are figures rather than characters. No writer ever produced so powerful an effect, without the aid of sympathy. Her machinery acts directly on her readers, and makes them tremble and weep, not for others, but for themselves. Adeline, Emily, Vivaldi, and Ellena, are nothing to us, except as filling up the scene; but it is we ourselves, who discover the manuscript in the deserted abbey; we, who are prisoners in the castle of Udolpho; we, who