Origins of the Gothic Novel

• Originated in the second half of the XVIII century (from 1760 to 1820)
• great popularity among all social classes
• the term “gothic” was initially used in architecture
• later, in 1764, introduced in literature by Horace Walpole in his “The Castle of Otranto” which he defined “a Gothic story”
• still very popular nowadays
Gothic Novel

Main features:
• use of flat characters
• very complicated and improbable plots, (where a wicked villain tries to deceive or chases the good heroine and keeps her prisoner).
• the surroundings are always fearful;
• Horror, terror, fear and sentiment are its prevailing emotional aspects;
• It reflects the disillusionment with the Enlightenment rationality and with the results of the American and French revolutions;
• It is a reaction against the industrialised society and the problems caused by industrialisation.

• The atmosphere is highly emotional;
• There are a lot of apparently supernatural events (which only successively are rationally explained);
“The Mysteries of Udolpho”

• the plot is highly improbable;
• the events are only used to create fearful situations;
• the story is set in the past (in 1584) to create remoteness and mystery to the events narrated.
• the physical setting is characterised by the presence of haunted castles located in a wild and isolated landscape, mysterious abbeys and convents with hidden passages, dungeons and secret rooms.
• the natural scenery is used to convey human feelings.
• the figurative language (personification, repetition of key-words) is used to emphasise the sense of:
  • remoteness,
  • wilderness,
  • solitude
• impending danger
felt by the heroine and shared by the reader.
Ann Radcliffe

- born in London in 1764;
- daughter of a merchant;
- married the manager of the “English Chronicle”;
- travelled a lot during the first years of marriage;
- never visited Italy and France;
- she lived a rather uneventful life;
• one of the first women writers;
• highly paid for her novels;
• influenced many romantic writers:
  • Mary Shelley,
  • Percy Bysshe Shelley,
  • Lord Byron,
  • Sir Walter Scott.
Mrs Radcliffe was at her best in:
• the description of landscapes
• the creation of atmosphere

Main works:
• The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayane (1789)
• A Sicilian Romance (1790)
• The Romance of the Forest (1791)
• The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794)
• The Italian (1797)