Reading Questions on *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Castle of Otranto*

**Guide to Responding**

1. Although the narrative of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is much longer and wider ranging than *The Castle of Otranto*, it still repeats many of the Gothic tropes identified in unit 1, such as 1) an old building with gloomy interiors, 2) a setting in southern, Catholic Europe, 3) an angelic heroine, 4) an evil patriarch, who demands absolute obedience, 5) apparent supernatural happenings, 6) family secrets revealed, and 7) problems from previous generations that need to be resolved by the current one.

2. Radcliffe clearly differentiates between terror and horror. She believes that works of terror create a sense of uncertain apprehension that lead to a complex fear of obscure and dreadful elements. The essence of terror stimulates the imagination and often challenges intellectual reasoning to arrive at a somewhat plausible explanation of this ambiguous fear and anxiety. Resolution of the terror provides a means of escape. On the other hand, works of horror are constructed from a maze of alarmingly concrete imagery designed to induce fear, shock, revulsion, and disgust. Radcliffe believes that horror appeals to lower mental faculties, such as curiosity and voyeurism, and that horror renders the reader incapable of resolution and subjects the reader's mind to a state of inescapable confusion and chaos. The terrors that Emily experiences in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* are products of, and representations of, her own mind; thus, Radcliffe would categorize her novel as an example of terror. Because Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* presents the supernatural through concrete imagery and without logical explanation, Radcliffe would most likely categorize the novel as horror.

3. At either novel's close, the reader must make a decision as to the laws that are governing the novel. If she decides that new laws of nature must be in place for the phenomena to occur, the novel is classified in the genre of "the marvelous," also called supernatural accepted. If she decides that the laws of nature as she knows them can remain unchanged and still allow for the phenomena described, the novel is in the genre of "the uncanny," or supernatural explained. Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* resides in the genre of the marvelous, or supernatural accepted, adopting new laws of nature for the setting and circumstances. While Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* falls into the genre of the uncanny, or supernatural explained, citing known laws of nature as reasons for the phenomena described.

4. Emily moves through all her horrors and comes face to face, at last, with Valancourt, not on the final page of *Udolpho* but a good fifty pages from the end. This leaves time enough for Emily to resolve her doubts about her lover being a gambling man, and the marriage then takes place in the final chapter. Emily ends her days in the pastoral serenity of The Valley, pensively musing on her father's memory, and she is confident that his injunction to demonstrate the strength of sensibility has been obeyed. Walpole offers us two heroines; while both are depicted as helpless and defenseless, the weaker of the two, Isabella, ultimately succumbs to the fate of the weaker sex. Matilda escapes Manfred's clutches aided by a mysterious hero of strange origin.