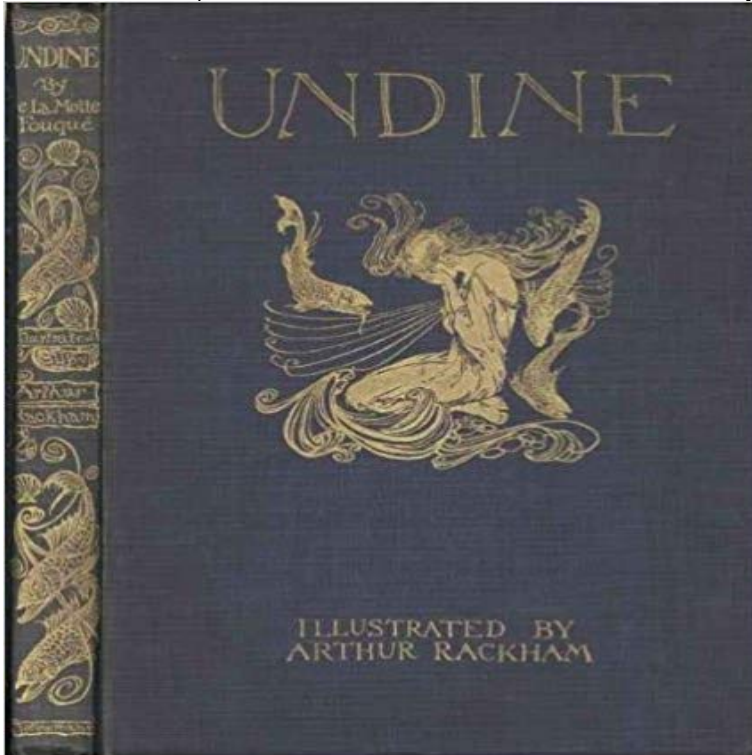


## Undine by Friedrich de la Motte Fouque Illustrated by Arthur Rackham



Undine is a fairy-tale novella by Friedrich de la Motte Fouque in which Undine, a water spirit, marries a knight named Huldebrand in order to gain a soul. It is an early German romance, which has been translated into English and other languages.

Of Undine George MacDonald, the famous Scottish author, poet, and Christian minister, and author of the Princess and Curdie, as well as many other works, and the inspiration for C. S. Lewis, said it was the most beautiful of all fairy stories. Of all the great mass of material left by Friedrich de la Motte Fouque (1777-1843), only a lyric or two and the fairy tale Undine have any value for the present day. Fouque represents the talent which develops in the glare of the world, is popular for a decade, but soon withers when the sun is set. His relations to Romanticism are largely external; he frequented the salons of Rachel Levin and Henrietta Herz in Berlin, was aided by August von Schlegel, and was praised by Jean Paul; but in his heart he was not inspired by any of the deeper longings that characterize the true Romantic spirit. Even though he is to be credited with the first modern dramatization of the Nibelungen story, The Hero of the North (1810), and though he took subjects from the Germanic past and from the chivalric days, he brought no new life to his rehabilitations. Fouque was too productive, too facile, too external, too indifferent to psychological motivation to be real. He diluted Romanticism and sentimentalized it. In him patriotism becomes chauvinism; love, philandering; and his age of chivalry, a thinly veiled and sentimental picture of his own times. The strength and the indigenoussness of Arnim are gone, and that power to throw a Romantic glamor over life which Tieck and Hoffmann had, is lacking. Only in his charming fairy-tale, Undine (1811), does Fouque rise above his milieu. Undine, the source of which, according to Fouque

himself, is to be found in a work of Paracelsus on supernatural beings, remains one of the best creations of the Romantic school and, like Eichendorff's novel, has become international, not only in its original form but in the opera by Lortzing (first performance, Hamburg, 1845). The value of the story lies in the author's power to make the reader believe in Undine, the water sprite, and in the presentation of a new nature-mythology. All Romanticists have consciously or unconsciously attempted to satisfy Friedrich Schlegel's demand for a new mythology: Fouque's earth, air, and water spirits people the elements with graceful forms from the world of nature; the nymph Undine in the form of a flowing stream embraces even in death the grave of her lover. VOLUME V, THE GERMAN CLASSICS, Masterpieces of German Literature Beautifully Illustrated by Arthur Rackham

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