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Andrew Smith

Radcliffe's aesthetics: or, the problem with Burke and Lewis

How and why does Ann Radcliffe develop a Gothic aesthetic and then revise it? This article argues that the self-conscious Gothic constructions of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) are concealed in *The Italian* (1797). *After Lewis's The Monk* (1796) had parodied Radcliffe's Gothic techniques, she revises her earlier engagement with Burke in order to move beyond his claim that Terror can be rhetorically produced. Such issues have ramifications for an understanding of gender as we witness how these aesthetic issues are staged in a debate, between Radcliffe and Lewis, centred on the representation of holy mothers. This article thus explores how a Gothic aesthetic was negotiated at the end of the eighteenth century.

Keywords: sublime, aesthetics, Terror, Burke, art, mothers.

It has become somewhat of a critical commonplace to note that Radcliffe's writings privilege Burkean obscurity over an aesthetics of horror, the crucial lines coming from her posthumously published essay 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' (1826), where she claims that 'Obscurity leaves something for the imagination to exaggerate' (Radcliffe, 2000: 169). Her explicit engagement with Burke (and Shakespeare) underpins her well-known binary of Terror and Horror which 'are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them' (Radcliffe, 2000: 168). 'Terror' is peculiarly life-affirming in its safe contact with fear. It is, however, difficult to observe a clear distinction between Terror and Horror when aesthetic considerations come into play. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), for example, Emily St.

Aubert faints after discovering a wax effigy of a corpse behind a veil at the Castle of Udolpho. When she revives:

She had scarcely strength to remove from the room, and regain her own; and when arrived there, wanted courage to remain alone. Horror occupied her mind, and excluded, for a time, all sense of past, and dread of future misfortune. (Radcliffe, 2008: 249)

Terry Castle's textual note on this moment argues that whilst Emily may be subject to Horror (as she thinks she has seen a real corpse) the reader's comparative distance and lack of understanding (as at this point they do not know what Emily has just seen), means that they feel Terror.¹ Although she does not develop the link here, there is a point of contact between this position and Castle's argument in 'The Spectralization of the Other in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*' where she claims that the uncertainties of Radcliffe's Terror produce a model of the uncanny. For Castle, this is because the anxieties in the novel that the living may be dead and that the dead may be alive, anticipate Freud's account of how the dead uncannily seem to haunt the living.² Horror, however, as in this scene with the wax effigy, makes you forget about the past or the future and is therefore of a different temporal order to that of Uncanny Terror. The subject is frozen, abstracted from time, as they are lost in a moment of genuine fear.

The factor which has been overlooked in this debate is the role of artifice in the production of fear. An effigy inspires an emotional response which is both profound and bogus and this might be seen as different in kind, rather than degree, to Burkean Terror. However, it is by examining how Radcliffe questions the idea of a Gothic aesthetic that we witness a casting off of ideas about art and artifice, ideas which have their roots in Burke's

account of aesthetics and in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). To that end this article explores how these precise aesthetic shifts are developed between the publication of *Udolpho* and *The Italian* (1797). The argument is that Lewis's novel prompts Radcliffe to re-examine the grounds on which fear had been manufactured in *Udolpho*. This leads her to conceal an all too self-conscious aesthetics of Terror which is hidden in *The Italian*. In turn this will lead her to distinguish between Terror and Horror, which suggests that Radcliffe saw in Lewis's novel an engagement with Burke (and *Udolpho*), that prompted her to aesthetically revise her engagement with Burke's theory of Terror. In order to reach this position I will seek to complicate Burke's view of sublime Terror by arguing that its supposed obscurity is rhetorically rather than ontologically produced. This may seem like a radical re-envisioning of Burke, but it is one which focuses on his, often overlooked, closing account of writing in the *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757), where he transforms his theory of obscurity into an account of aesthetics that has implications for the theory of Terror. Ultimately it will be argued that Radcliffe should not just be seen as a champion of Burkean obscurity, but as a critic of a self-conscious Gothic aesthetic which makes visible how obscurity can be rhetorically produced. Her 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' represents a late attempt to recuperate Burke by redirecting him towards the metaphysical and away from the representational dilemmas which he addresses in the closing sections of the *Philosophical Enquiry*.³ This focus on Burke may seem to be narrow, as the wider aesthetic context of the Gothic was defined by other contributions to it. Whilst not denying the importance of texts such as John Aikin and Anna Laetitia Aikin's 'On the Pleasures Derived from Objects of Terror' (1773) and Clara Reeve's Preface to *The Old English Baron* (1778), in shaping a Gothic aesthetic in the late eighteenth century (and the various associated discourses of the sublime and the picturesque), the discussion of Burke represents a return to first principles - ones which initiated a conceptualisation of the Gothic which ghosts these later accounts. The

political and religious context of Radcliffe's work has been widely discussed and, whilst much of that informs her aesthetic outlook, they are not topics which are explicitly addressed here because the focus is on the quite specific exchanges which take place between *Udolpho*, *The Monk*, and *The Italian*. This emphasis on art and artifice helps to channel a critical reappraisal about why Radcliffe revises her engagement with Burke after *The Monk*. Burke is thus the principal figure in this discussion because his complex account of language has ramifications for how a Gothic aesthetic was formulated at the time.

Burke's treatise is arranged into five sections, which illustrates how he worked through a series of linked topics. It is in Part 2 that we find his account of obscurity, which includes an outline for a model of the Gothic that anticipates his discussion of literature and art in Part 5. In an exploration of how the night contributes to a feeling of dread he argues that:

Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds, which give credit to the popular tales concerning such sorts of beings. (Burke, 1998: 54)

The examples here are literary ('ghosts and goblins') and this leads Burke into quoting Milton's description of death from Book II of *Paradise Lost* (1667). Milton figures death as a night time, shadowy, monarch, which prompts Burke to claim that 'In this description all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree' (Burke, 1998: 55).⁴ Obscurity is thus granted a literary provenance, but this is questioned in the final section of his treatise which directly addresses literary forms and the power of words.

Burke's discussion of language initially denies it representational efficacy because 'words undoubtedly have no sort of resemblance to the idea for which they stand'.⁵ However, over six tightly argued pages Burke revises this position as he weighs the merits of poetry against painting and comes down in support of the former because:

To represent an angel in a picture, you can draw a beautiful young man winged; but what painting can furnish out any thing so grand as the addition of one word, 'The angel of the Lord?' It is true, I have no clear idea, but these words affect the mind more than the sensible image did. (Burke, 1998: 158-9)

The obscurity within the poetic discourse is the element which moves us and stimulates the imagination. Language begins to take on an importance which leads Burke to symbolically reconnect it to objects because words are 'able to affect us as strongly as the things they represent' (Burke, 1998: 161). Crucially, Burke does not leave it there but asserts that words might also affect us 'much more strongly' than their referents (Burke, 1998: 161). The problem now confronted by Burke is that sublime Terror looks like a rhetorical construction rather than a real-world phenomenon. It is this model that Radcliffe engages with in *Udolpho*, but which she renounces in *The Italian*.

Jane Stabler, in an argument about why Radcliffe included no original poetry in *The Italian*, has recently claimed that it was 'presumably in response to critics who found the interspersed lyrics distracting' (Stabler, 2014: 185). However, I want to pursue a (less pragmatic) line of enquiry which argues that it was the very rhetorical nature of her poems that led Radcliffe to renounce a self-conscious Gothic aesthetic, which Lewis developed in *The Monk*. One of the key poetic inclusions in *Udolpho* is 'To Melancholy' in part because

its topic has obvious connections to a wider romantic discourse.⁶ The poem (which is sung by Emily St. Aubert) begins:

Spirit of love and sorrow – hail!
Thy solemn voice from far I hear,
Mingling with ev'ning's dying gale:
Hail, with this sadly-pleasing tear!
(Radcliffe, 2008: 665, ll. 1-4)

This invocation to the spirit of melancholy is followed by the request that they should:

Awake thy lute, whose charming pow'r
Shall call up Fancy to obey:
(Radcliffe, 2008: 665, ll. 7-8)

The point is that melancholy is rhetorically rather than metaphysically produced and the pleasure in melancholy is synonymous with Burke's pleasurable fear. Indeed the imagination is stimulated by this muse of melancholy as the muse is asked:

To paint the wild romantic dream,
That meets the poet's musing eye.
(Radcliffe, 2008: 665, ll. 9-10)

Words thus stimulate the imagination (of the poet) even whilst the poem proceeds to embrace the emotional importance of a picturesque landscape characterised by vales, cliffs and the sea.

The poem suggests that mood is rhetorically conjured by a muse who enables us to see the landscape in a certain way – one in which a Burkean obscurity is championed. The narrator asks the muse to:

Lead to the mountain's dusky head,
Where, far below, in shade profound,
Wide forests, plains and hamlets spread.
(Radcliffe, 2008: 666, ll. 25-7)

The dusk and the shade obscure the view which anticipates the sublime night time vision conjured in the final stanza:

...pause at midnight's spectred hour,
And list the long-resounding gale;
And catch the fleeting moon-light's pow'r,
Oe'r foaming seas and distant sail.
(Radcliffe, 2008: 666, ll. 37-40)

Pleasurable melancholy, like pleasurable fear, is made safe because it sits within a self-conscious poetic framework which emphasises the unreality of the moment.

For Stabler the invocation of 'Fancy' in Radcliffe's poems should be seen within a romantic context in which Fancy is gendered feminine in contrast to the Burkean masculine

sublime, so that in Radcliffe's poetry we repeatedly see in her 'measured' tones a 'poetic voice [...] where the feminine poetics of Fancy meets the masculine territory [...] of the Burkean sublime' (Stabler, 2014: 190). The structure and tone of the poems thus contain the rebellious impulses of sublime Terror. However, if we consider the poem within the context of Burke's account of aesthetics, a rather different picture emerges, one in which sublime Terror appears as a rhetorical construction that can only be called into being by the imagination of the poet.

Sublime Terror, because it stimulates the imagination, is central to creativity and its rhetorical presence is shown in how Radcliffe's 'To Melancholy' reaches out for a model of the imagination which can generate the required Burkean obscurity. To that degree it can be argued that Radcliffe is writing about that process whereas Burke is left helpless before words. Nevertheless, the issue of the status of obscurity is the same as in both it is associated with aesthetics, which had led Burke to claim that words can, because of their emotional resonance, affect us 'much more strongly' than what they ostensibly depict. The problem is that pleasurable Terror, now granted a literary provenance, becomes devoid of meaning because whilst it seems to conjure presence it reveals absence.

Death might seem to be the key as to why these aesthetic issues appear in the Gothic. Burke, in his account of obscurity, had cited Milton's representation of the figure of death as a source of the sublime. Burke returned to this topic in Part 5 when discussing lines 618-22 of Book II of *Paradise Lost*. There he addresses the affective issue of language and argues that: 'this affection caused by a word, which nothing but a word could annex to the others, raises a very great degree of the sublime; and this sublime is raised higher by what follows a "Universe of Death"' (Burke, 1998: 159). Death is both absent and present as its grandeur becomes reconstituted through dramatic phrasing. This, superficially, has much in common with Radcliffe's 'To Melancholy', but little with the wax work corpse in *Udolpho*, which

does not leave much to the imagination and overwhelms Emily. However, the issue of aesthetics refuses to go away – art can stimulate either Terror or Horror and this poses a challenge for any ontology of fear during the period. It is an issue that Radcliffe would seek to resolve by simply removing such aesthetic considerations from *The Italian* and by putting back a Burkean obscurity which is beyond rhetorical simulation. The reasons for this lie in *The Monk*, the aesthetic complications of which also have significant implications for an understanding of gender during the period.

Critics such as Michael Gamer and Lauren Fitzgerald have noted that Lewis's writings including *The Monk*, his short stories and *The Castle Spectre* (1798) were negatively regarded as derivative literary formations by a culture which celebrated the creative imaginative potential of romanticism.⁷ Fitzgerald has claimed that manifestos for originality, such as Edward Young's 'Conjectures on Original Composition' (1759) gendered creativity as masculine and imitation as feminine. To copy was to be passive and for Fitzgerald this assigns Lewis a feminine role in his copying of the more masculine (because more original) Radcliffe.⁸ This form of narrative cross-dressing is also a topic explored within *The Monk* as Matilda masquerades as Rosario, before being revealed as a male demon. This also suggests, for Fitzgerald, that as gendered identity is constructed so is the idea of the author as the originator of textual constructions.⁹ Lewis was much criticised for his textual borrowings and as Gamer has noted, Coleridge in a letter to Wordsworth mocks the unoriginality of Lewis's *The Castle Spectre* which he described as 'a mere patchwork of plagiarisms' although ones which have a hold over the audience because 'they are very well worked up, & for stage effect make an excellent whole' (Coleridge, 1982: 378-9).¹⁰ Lewis appears more like 'an artisan' than 'an architect', although one who troubles a romantic concept of the author (Gamer, 1999: 837).

The Monk, in imitation of Udolpho, includes many interpolated poems, although they tend to reflect directly on the plot rather than function as Radcliffean mood pieces. The poem ‘Love and Age’ written by Theodore, a page in the employ of the Marquis, provides an opportunity to explore what can be read as a homosocial poem, and provokes a discussion about authorship and criticism.¹¹ This self-reflective moment appears to associate writing with failure, even though the Marquis praises the poem. The Marquis informs Theodore that ‘to enter the lists of literature is wilfully to expose yourself to the arrows of neglect, ridicule, envy, and disappointment’, although it is debatable if all these arrows are likely to hit (Lewis, 1992: 199). Lewis in such moments exposes what lies behind the aesthetic.

This issue of showing is closely aligned to the idea of Horror as a form of graphic display – one which also relates to the structure of the novel. Lorenzo’s dream, for example, in the first chapter, gives away the central plot line relating to Ambrosio and Antonia. Lorenzo notes that in his vision:

Antonia shrieked. The Monster clasped her in his arms, and springing with her upon the Altar, tortured her with his odious caresses [...]. She disengaged herself from his embrace; But her white Robe was left in his possession. Instantly a wing of brilliant splendour spread from either of Antonia’s arms. She darted upwards. (Lewis, 1992: 28)

The drama is thus presented to the attentive Gothic reader as only ending in one pre-ordained way and the remaining 400 pages or so flesh this out. The moment is also, however, about exposing what lies behind the aesthetic and this is a topic that Lewis repeatedly addresses within the novel in self-conscious references to poems, paintings, and literary debates.

Authorial self-reflection and plot exposures would seem to have little to do with Burkean obscurity, but they should be seen as exposing the grounds under which that obscurity is constructed and this means that Lewis has rather more in common with the Radcliffe of *Udolpho* than it would appear. Robert Miles has argued that in Radcliffe ‘the very complexity of her language and narratives tends to sketch in a position closer to Lewis’s’ as she attempts ‘to hold the excesses of desire in sight without being explicit’ (Miles, 1995: 55). Whilst Miles’s argument relates specifically to how Radcliffe balances the demands of the Romance (with its unreality) with the novel (and the expectations of its engagement with reality), this observation of a similarity with Lewis acknowledges that Lewis makes aesthetically explicit what was implicit in *Udolpho*. Radcliffe’s renunciation of this proximity between her and Lewis in *The Italian* has ramifications for a reading of gender as it evokes a discourse about mothering (as a point of origin) which symbolically represents a return to the moment of birth, or of creation, which is why Ellena Rosalba both misses her mother and unconsciously pursues her. The key aesthetic moment in this regard is Ambrosio’s portrait of the Madonna.

Ambrosio attempts to contain his desire for Matilda by contemplating a portrait of the Madonna in order to solicit ‘her assistance in stifling such culpable emotions’ (Lewis, 1992: 67). In his subsequent erotic dream, images of the Madonna become blurred with that of Matilda, which culminates in the moment where:

The animated form started from the Canvas, embraced him affectionately, and his senses were unable to support delight so exquisite [...] His unsatisfied Desires placed before him the most lustful and provoking Images, and he rioted in joys till then unknown to him. (Lewis, 1992: 67)

This is a much critically discussed moment in the novel because it is regarded as representing the transformation of Ambrosio from a spiritual into a carnal being – one now defined by sexual appetite. Portraits coming alive in the Gothic are not new, of course; Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) begins this tradition when Manfred's grandfather steps out of his portrait to silently admonish Manfred for plotting the continuation of the dynastic usurpation that the now, seemingly repentant, grandfather had begun. Ambrosio's engagement with the portrait of the Madonna represents a different, less obviously political, account of aesthetic power which overwhelms the Monk in a moment of sexual sublimity that seems to transcend, or overwhelm, the artistic. At a more abstract level, however, it also suggests that representations can seduce us by their pictorial, or rhetorical, power. We discover the demon that inhabits Matlida has been the model for the Madonna (or so 'Matlida' claims), before being disguised as Rosario. Identities are unstable, employed as masks, but they are ultimately exposed. The aesthetic may move Ambrosio, but the representational shifts that have occasioned this will be revealed. In aesthetic terms the scene can therefore be read as about how art works on us in ways which are familiar from Burke's idea of aesthetic transport. Art becomes in this instance both a means of transcendence (as it enables Ambrosio to escape from the confines of a monastic life) and entrapment (because it exposes Ambrosio as a hypocrite). The novel thus centres on representation as paradox – as both presence and absence. The fact that the portrait is of the Madonna is central to understanding these debates about art. These links to religion invite a comparison with Burke.

Burke's examples of sublime obscurity often anticipate a Gothic aesthetic which incorporates, frequently via Milton, religious imagery. Earlier we had noted Burke's preference for the linguistic over the pictorial when he argued that 'To represent an angel in a picture, you can draw a beautiful young man winged'. Although for Burke there is a limit to

the visual image, Burke's example anticipates Lewis's description of the fallen angel in which Ambrosio:

...beheld a Figure more beautiful, than Fancy's pencil ever drew. It was a Youth seemingly eighteen, the perfection of whose form and face was unrivalled. He was perfectly naked: A bright Star sparkled upon his fore-head; Two crimson wings extended themselves from his shoulders. (Lewis, 1992: 277)

Burke's angel becomes transformed into a fallen erotic spectacle by Lewis, which demonstrates how Lewis attempted to rework Burke's merging of Gothic gloom with religious awe. However, the portrait of the Madonna also introduces an additional theme about mothering which is related to these religious contexts.

The Monk's position on mothering appears to be wholly negative. Ambrosio is seduced by a portrait of the Madonna, he murders his mother, the Mother Superior is stamped to death by a mob, and Agnes is incarcerated with only her rotting baby for company. Radcliffe's representation of daughters in search of lost mothers which will complete them articulates an impulse centred on reconciliation and family togetherness, an impulse that The Monk so relentlessly attacks. These issues are difficult to isolate from religious concerns because so much of the iconography in both *The Monk* and *The Italian* centres on Protestant reconfigurations of Catholic images.

Elisabeth Bronfen has provided a complex analysis of how issues of representation, religion, and gender are run together in images of the Virgin Mary which bears relevance to how the Madonna is represented in *The Monk*. Bronfen's thesis also, more generally, provides an interesting critical context for a consideration of the representation of mothering across *The Monk* and *The Italian*. According to her:

The Virgin Mary functions as an epitome of timeless, of undifferentiated, immortal beauty and bliss, as an allegory for the defeat of death and the promise of eternal life, precisely because in her mythic construction the materiality or body is missing from the start. (Bronfen, 1992: 68)

This function is both aesthetic and theological and it should be noted that Burke's references to angels and Milton represent an engagement, if a tacit one, with a conceptualisation of the numinous. In *The Monk* the sacred becomes profane because the virgin is in reality a demon who encourages the defilement of a virgin such as Antonia. What putatively presents as pure and feminine is demonic and has more in common with Eve. Bronfen has noted that the Virgin Mary is 'constructed in diametric opposition to Eve, the deceiver and temptress, whose association with death and decay is based on her equation with the human (or animal) body and sexuality' (Bronfen, 1992: 68). Representation in *The Monk* therefore cannot be trusted, a point captured in the precautionary warning of the Gypsy's Oracle which notes that:

Fair Exteriors oft will hide
Hearts, that swell with lust and pride!
(Lewis, 1992: 38, ll. 19-20)

Bronfen claims that the demonization of Eve represents the male Othering of female sexuality, one in which Eve becomes 'synonymous with the loss of the literal, with the creation of metaphor, of the figural as derivation, as deflection, as denaturing, as a tropological turning away' (Bronfen, 1992: 68). In *The Monk* this duplicity of representation is captured in the image of the Madonna whose symbolic transformation into Eve implies this

fall into representation. The mother of Christ has been supplanted by Eve, a disavowed mother, which is why *The Monk* is repeatedly hostile to images of motherhood – because they cannot be properly trusted, even if many of these figures are cast as victims: Elivera is not who Ambrosio thinks she is, the Mother Superior abuses her authority, and Agnes has a child out of wedlock. The Italian represents a desire to find an image of motherhood that can be reincorporated within a symbolic system that grants her the ethereal spirituality that the Madonna represents. Ellena's discovery of her mother represents a psychological completion that is a hallmark of the Female Gothic, but it also represents a purity of experience which sits outside of the symbolic complexities that are associated with Ambrosio whose killing of his mother implies, when read aesthetically, a plagiarist's hostility towards origins. These emerging differences between Lewis and Radcliffe can also be clarified by comparing the treatment of Ambrosio with Schedoni.

Jerrold E. Hogle has recently explored how Radcliffe seems to reconnect with Walpole's *Otranto* by casting her villain as a type of Manfred rather than an Ambrosio.¹² However, there are other links between Ambrosio and Schedoni which demonstrate how a new Gothic aesthetic is constructed in this debate between Radcliffe and Lewis. Our first sight of Schedoni is one which emphasises his estrangement from truth. His fellow monks note of Schedoni that:

...he seldom perceived truth when it lay on the surface; he could follow it through all the labyrinths of disquisition, but overlooked it when it was undisguised before him. In fact he cared not for truth, nor sought it by bold and broad argument, but loved to exert the wily cunning of his nature in hunting it through artificial perplexities. (Radcliffe, 1992: 34)

This estrangement from truth is also implied in his chameleon-like personality in which ‘he could adapt himself to the tempers and passions of persons, whom he wished to conciliate, with astonishing facility, and generally with complete triumph’ (Radcliffe, 1992: 35). This arch dissembler conjures into existence the faux Gothic narrative which dupes Vivaldi at the start of the novel when a mysterious, possibly supernatural, monk is employed to try and deter him from visiting Ellena. It is also the repentant Schedoni who, at the end, reveals to Vivaldi that he had used such tricks because he was conscious that he could play upon Vivaldi’s “susceptibility [...] to superstition” (Radcliffe, 1992: 397). The Gothic narrative involving the monk is exposed as the novel works towards correcting, through the possibilities of redemption, all that Lewis had seemingly defiled in *The Monk*. Schedoni is better than he thinks he is and Ambrosio is a lot worse, but this exchange is rooted in a renunciation of a Gothic aesthetic which is tarnished in its association with trickery. Radcliffe’s Gothic exposures in *The Italian* are of a different order to Lewis’s. In *The Italian* the aesthetic is animated but revealed in a moment of redemptive confession, whereas in *The Monk* it is left to Satan to explain. Radcliffe thus redeems what is otherwise parodically demonised by Lewis and her return to the numinous can be interpreted as a correction of Lewis’s appropriation of Burke. To appreciate this it is necessary to look at other stylistic changes in *The Italian* which to some degree correct the aesthetic engagements of *Udolpho*.

In *Udolpho* the descriptions of the landscape are as Hogle notes ‘always already a painting, filtered through assumptions about the picturesque, the sublime and the beautiful’ (Hogle, 2014: 163). Such a view has also been ascribed to *The Italian* because it too often provides ways of looking at the landscape which appear to be indebted to familiar aesthetic categories from the period. However, descriptions of the landscape in *The Italian* are focused (more than they are in *Udolpho*) on a model of divine immanence that inhabits nature, and by the failure of an artistic vision to adequately capture this presence. Amongst the detailed

descriptions of nature, focalised by Ellena, the dramatic qualities of the landscape are also internalised as points of conflict which correspond to her emotional dramas. At one level the landscape is pictorially rendered, but only for it to be repeatedly reworked as emotional affect as it, ultimately, enables her to preserve ‘a strenuous equality of mind’ as the divine scale of the ravines and mountains produces a humble contextualisation for her all too human fears (Radcliffe, 1992: 63). This landscape also eludes her descriptive powers when it is noted that a particular mountain pass was ‘more terrific than the pencil could describe, or language can express’ (Radcliffe, 1992: 63). This sense of experience beyond representation is not a neutral one as it should be seen as a rebuttal of the type of aesthetic revelry introduced into the Gothic by Lewis. It puts back a level of obscurity which is not rhetorically produced, as it was in ‘To Melancholy’, and indicates a reconstruction of a discourse of the sublime.

Radcliffe in *The Italian* moves beyond the type of aestheticism developed in *Udolpho* because her various Gothic devices were turned by Lewis into a self-parodying rhetoric that critiqued Radcliffe’s Burkean aesthetic. Radcliffe responds in *The Italian* by moving away from these earlier Gothic devices (most notably demonstrated by the novel’s poetic omissions), in order to reengage with a version of Burke’s obscurity which is untouched by his complex aesthetic considerations. Burke’s identification of Terror as a category of aesthetic appreciation turns feeling into art and whilst Lewis reworks this idea as a Gothic trope, Radcliffe, in *The Italian*, renounces this self-conscious Gothic aesthetic in order to engage with both a Burkean sublime and a discourse of Lockean empiricism that substitutes symbolism with a conceptualisation of the ‘real’.¹³

In ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’ Radcliffe returned to these considerations when contemplating the role of the poet. Here, the poet is conceived as the creator of a point of view which artlessly, rather than artfully, directs the reader towards certain types of conclusion. The aesthetic is now buried rather than exposed even whilst it is granted a level

of abstraction that contains within it the type of ‘truth’ that Burke had regarded as central to obscurity. This is to acknowledge that Radcliffe was aware that, in order for the aesthetic to work, it must remain hidden; as she replaces an idea of the self-conscious aesthetic construction with a model of the imagination in which some poets, such as John Dryden, ‘may have high talents, wit, genius, judgement, but not the soul of poetry, which is the spirit of all these, and also something wonderfully higher – something too fine for definition’ (Radcliffe, 2000: 170). The explicit Gothic machinery of *Udolpho* is thus finally laid to rest.

Burke has been the key figure in this argument because his discussion of artifice provides a context for how and why Radcliffe reflects on a model of obscurity and how, after *The Monk*, she sought to conceal the type of artistic construction that had characterised *Udolpho*. Radcliffe’s discrete Gothic aesthetic may seem to have trumped Lewis, but arguably it is *Frankenstein* (1818) that takes forward Lewis’s aesthetic agenda, albeit via an engagement with Burke’s model of the monstrous rather than his version of sublime obscurity as the debate about the direction of a Gothic aesthetic becomes redirected in the nineteenth century.¹⁴

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Endnotes

¹ Terry Castle, *Udolpho*, pp. 686-7, note 249.

² Terry Castle, in 'The Specialization of the Other in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*' in *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 120-139. Freud's 'The "Uncanny"' can be found in *Art and Literature: Jensen's Gradiva, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works*, ed. Albert Dickson, Vol 14, Penguin Freud Library (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1990), pp. 339-76. See p. 364 where Freud discusses 'the return of the dead'.

³ I discuss this issue of Burke's aesthetics within a wider idealist context in *Gothic Radicalism: Literature, Philosophy and Psychoanalysis in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 17-23.

⁴ The lines from *Paradise Lost* are from Book II: 666-73.

⁵ Edmund Burke, p. 157.

⁶ See also my 'Frankenstein's Melancholy' in *English Language Notes*, 48.1 Spring/Summer 2010, 79-88, where I discuss the poem on 80. Stabler's essay also locates Radcliffe's verse within a wider romantic context.

⁷ Michael Gamer, 'Authors in Effect: Lewis, Scott, and the Gothic Drama', *ELH*, Vol 66. No 4 Winter 1999, 831-861. Lauren Fitzgerald, 'The Sexuality of Authorship in *The Monk*' *Romanticism on the Net*, no 36-37 2004. <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2005/v/n36-37/011138ar.html?vue=resume>

⁸ Fitzgerald, paragraph 4.

⁹ Fitzgerald, paragraphs 26 and 28.

¹⁰ cited in Gamer, 836.

¹¹ See Fitzgerald for just such a reading, paragraphs 10-23. For a more complete reading of Camp in the novel see Max Fincher's 'The Gothic as camp: Queer Aesthetics in *The Monk*', Romanticism on the Net, no 44 2006. <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2006/v/n44/013997ar.html>

¹² Jerrold E. Hogle, 'Recovering the Walpolean Gothic: The Italian: Or, the Confessional of the Black Penitents (1796-1797)' in Ann Radcliffe, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, eds., Dale Townshend and Angela Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 151-167, p. 153.

¹³ See Hogle on Locke and Radcliffe, p. 163.

¹⁴ Burke has much to say that implicitly relates to monstrosity in his repeated accounts of Beauty. He also in his section 21 on 'Ugliness' in Part 3 explored ugliness as a form of the sublime when it is linked to Terror, pp. 108-9.

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