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A Revolution in Gothic Manners: The Rise of Sentiment from Walpole to Radcliffe

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A Revolution in Gothic Manners

The Rise of Sentiment from Walpole to Radcliffe

Katherine E. Stein

Submitted for Honors in Independent Study

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I Hereby Reaffirm the Lawrence University Honor Code

Advisor: Celia Barnes

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Introduction

The eighteenth century was characterized by revolution, and the influence of revolution—whether social, political, or economic—affected every aspect of culture. As English society at large attempted to understand the growing pains it was experiencing, the literary field was also expanding. The contemporary novel began to take form, and by the end of the eighteenth century authors were primed for their own literary revolution. Growing up and developing alongside realist fiction, the Gothic novel attempts to reconcile shifting social expectations with the security of nostalgia. This project will situate the Gothic's generic arc in a revolutionary context, focusing on the ways in which the genre uses cultural protocols to address the social and political fears of the second half of the eighteenth century. When critics attempt to grapple with the changing cultural landscape of the eighteenth century, and the generic evolution of the Gothic specifically, they tend to isolate one stressor—the French Revolution, political tension, social change, or gender roles—as the dominant anxiety propelling that generic evolution. But such a narrow focus diminishes the ways in which the Gothic was responding to political, social, and even generic pressures simultaneously. Here, I want to suggest that, in order to understand the Gothic as interacting with its time rather than simply reacting to it, we must consider social and political uncertainty in conjunction with generic development. If we look carefully at the contemporary debate surrounding manners—a term that, through the period carried with it a host of gender, class, and political valences—we begin to understand the evolution of the Gothic as a complex product of social, political, and generic pressures. Indeed, manners encompass both the social and political worlds during this period. That is, they embody

the social practices that restricted behavior and speech and bolstered the aristocracy in the age of revolution. As I will argue, throughout this period Gothic authors used the supernatural as a metaphor for the uncontrollable in order to test how humans (and, as we shall see, families and nations) could become more ordered—could become, we might say, well mannered.

Manners have been inextricably linked to the Gothic since Horace Walpole invoked them in the preface to his imaginative new novel *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. Manners, however, do not simply function as a defense for Walpole (and later Clara Reeve) rather, I argue that manners become the backbone of the Gothic. In a genre seemingly interested in the upheaval of society, the Gothic's dedication to the reinstatement of social convention, or manners, suggests a more *traditional* angle. In the early Gothic of Walpole and Reeve, manners function on the societal level: they are imposed and understood as a necessary aspect of social interaction. Walpole and Reeve are not interested in why or how someone chooses to live in accordance with the rules of etiquette, but rather assert that if they are a true member of society, they will uphold and adhere to the structures of behavior. In the wake of the French Revolution, manners are no longer simply a default mechanism for social interaction. Instead, authors of late Gothic works like Matthew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe attempt to understand the individual thought processes that drive a character to either comply with or reject mannerly behavior, going so far as to suggest that a character can present as the picture of good manners, when really their motivations are much less socially acceptable. For them, manners cannot simply be skin-deep.

Criticism of the Gothic tends to consider the genre in almost piecemeal fashion: generic evolution, political tension, and social change. Fred Botting, for instance, focuses on reoccurring tropes like the sublime and the functions of terror versus horror; Maggie Kilgour emphasizes the individual political and social conversations occurring throughout the genre. Other critics choose

to focus on a finite period of the Gothic. In *Equivocal Beings*, Claudia Johnson focuses on the late eighteenth century and investigates the introduction of sentimentality into the post-French Revolution literary field; while Michael Gamer and Marilyn Butler consider how the Gothic interacts with Romanticism. These critics have provided a rich field of scholarship, but we might discover something new about the Gothic if we bring some of these narrow foci together. If we consider the ways in which generic, political, and social revolutions are simultaneously unfolding in association with the Gothic novel's rise and the ongoing debate about the role of manners in the revolutionary age, we see Gothic writers participating in the debates of the eighteenth century: challenging, and reestablishing, social conventions.

Manners are not simply a convention used to ensure polite behavior. The term encompasses complicated notions of gender roles—chivalrous, effeminate men and deferential women—and political systems dependent upon propriety. Eighteenth-century England, like much of continental Europe, was a political aristocracy: the landed gentry controlled the political field, keeping the class and gender structure in place by emphasizing the cultural nostalgia of a more chivalrous time, as Edmund Burke does, to ensure the maintenance of the status quo. And yet the power of the aristocracy was being challenged across Europe and the globe. As the middle and working classes began to assert their political agency, the aristocracy's defense of their cultural guardianship became less convincing. Much of the social anxiety that plagued eighteenth-century England was caused by the major political conflicts that bookended the century. The English Civil War (1642-1651) and The Glorious Revolution of 1688 at the end of the seventeenth century combined with the American War of Independence (1776) and the French Revolution of 1789 at the end of the eighteenth century created a climate of uncertainty that lingered throughout the period. These conflicts left the English in a state of constant worry.

Memory of the political upheavals of the seventeenth century coupled with the palpable social unrest that followed accentuated the hanging sword of social dissatisfaction that threatened England throughout the eighteenth century.

It should not surprise us, then, that the discourse of the time and the anxieties it revealed bled into the contemporary novel, especially the Gothic novel, influencing its generic arc. As far as Gothic authors wished to push the envelope of propriety, despite the outlandish nature of their supernatural elements, the maintenance of manners centered the Gothic in reality, elevating the genre's potential for social commentary. The supernatural became a metaphor for the cultural uncertainty of the day, and manners became insurance that no matter what happened, civil society would persist—if perhaps, in a slightly adapted form.

While critics investigate the Gothic's connection to the novel of manners and its literary offspring the sentimental novel, they often focus on the large-scale development of the genre rather than the specific way that manners impact the Gothic. This may be because Walpole's Gothic was born as a way to rebel against the literary tradition of realist fiction, which attempted to depict the realities of life and impart the audience with a moral lesson of how best to conduct themselves. Samuel Johnson's insistence that the novel reflect an idealized reality of moral didacticism can be interpreted as a response to the social anxieties of the day, the same anxieties that the Gothic attempts to address through the use of the supernatural and the marvelous. For Johnson and other supporters of realist fiction, the didactic nature of fiction was a way to quell social unrest. As Kilgour explains, "the possibility that the gothic represented simply a fairy-tale world created by an imagination, an artistic aesthetic realm that was completely irrelevant and detached from the social order and norms, made it more, rather than less, threatening" (7). Yet Kilgour is not correct in saying that the Gothic was "irrelevant and detached from the social

order and norms.” Perhaps it is fair to say that Walpole perceived of his Gothic as detached from social norms, but I would argue that the Gothic quickly develops into a genre much more, if not solely, interested in “social order and norms.”

The Gothic was not simply a “fairy-tale world” “detached from the social order and norms;” rather, it investigated the reliability of the social order by testing its constitution against the supernatural (Kilgour 7). As Peter Garret reminds, “writing always stems from reading, fiction from earlier fiction” suggesting that there are more thematic similarities between realist and Gothic fiction than Johnson—and indeed Kilgour—would like to admit (4).¹ For instance, Gothic novels often appear to reject social order, yet they conclude by upholding what could be described as the conservative values of a patriarchal and hierarchal social system. Kilgour clarifies her earlier claim that the Gothic is “detached from social order and norms,” pointing out that despite appearing to be “a transgressive rebellion against norms” the Gothic does end up “reinstating [norms]” (7-8). I argue that the reinstatement of the “governing systems of limitation,” to borrow Kilgour’s phrase, is the restoration of manners and systems of chivalry rather than simply a restoration of legal government. The return to regulated behavior is essential to the Gothic: the good (almost) always win. The triumph of the good—good morals, manners, behaviors, and feelings—is particularly important in the eighteenth century because the bedrock of society, the *conventional* good, was beginning to crumble, causing mass anxiety across English society. I assert that despite the seemingly transgressive nature of the Gothic, the genre relies on the maintenance of social expectations as a way to comment on and critique the validity

¹ In fact, James Watt even designates an aspect of Gothic fiction as “Loyalist Gothic” because these works align themselves with Johnson’s view of the romantic novel as “a military fable of the middle ages” and “served an unambiguous moral and patriotic agenda.” (4, 7). Watt includes Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* in the category of Loyalist Gothic.

of the threatened social structures that it ultimately champions. In challenging social norms, and eventually preserving them, the Gothic strengthens the very institutions it seems to reject.

Within the Gothic canon, the novels of the 1790s are most frequently associated with the French Revolution; however, the genre bespeaks revolutionary tendencies long before the outbreak and aftermath of the French Revolution. Michael Gamer explicitly connects the Gothic of the 1790s with the “widespread alarm” in England during and directly following the French Revolution, and yet the widespread alarm regarding the rise of radical politics had existed in England long before the break out of the French Revolution (31). Marilyn Butler broadens the timeline, suggesting that “social and economic pressures were building up from the 1760’s, if not earlier” (11). Butler connects the social unrest of the late eighteenth century, which characterizes the Gothic of the 1790s, to the decade of the genre’s inception, the 1760s, asserting that the rapidly changing culture and environment of the second half of the eighteenth century created social restlessness long before the revolutions took shape. Furthermore, Butler highlights the apprehension of expected change, and as we will see in the texts this project considers, the possibility of change is almost more threatening than the instances of change themselves. While the Gothic deals directly with the political and social challenges presented by a rapidly evolving economy and culture, it also addresses the expanding understanding of the self. Philosophers of the eighteenth-century attempted to understand the internal world as much as they tried to understand the connection between the individual and their society. Part of this movement includes understanding the origins of sentiment and sympathy: how one feels and how one imagines others to feel. James Chandler designates a number of influential British philosophers of the eighteenth-century that addressed the growing conception of the soul and moral

sentimentality, noting the writings of the Third Earl of Shaftsbury, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith (3-4).

The idea of the self and the origin of that self's emotions, becomes vitally important to Gothic fiction of the last decade of the eighteenth century. As Claudia Johnson points out, "during the 1790s in particular, sentimentalism and Gothicism converged to produce a body of novels distinctive first and foremost for their egregious affectivity" (*Equivocal Beings* 1). Sentimentality, or "egregious affectivity," is an important and distinct part of the Gothic of the 1790s; however, it is an evolution of the social exploration that occurred in early Gothic works and their attention to manners and chivalry. We will recall Butler's assertion that the social pressures present in the Gothic began long before the French Revolution; I assert that the same logic can be applied to the introduction of sentimentalism in the Gothic. From its inception, the Gothic developed a close relationship with the novel of manners—where etiquette and social order determine the longevity of characters and their society—and the sentimental novel—where the predominate inquiry is about the self (one's passions and desires) and its effect on society. However, the novel of manners and the sentimental novel are arguably two sides of the same coin. The novel of manners simply focuses on the external regulation of the individual while the sentimental novel emphasizes an individual's internal regulation.

As the Gothic evolved, the way in which manners and morality interact shifted from emphasizing manners as a large-scale external regulator to focusing on an individual's internal regulation. I argue that the domestication of the French Revolution acted as the main impetus for this shift, metamorphosing the political debate into one that centered on individual and social

chivalry, which allowed Gothic authors to explore the stability of a society based on individual desires. In early Gothic fiction, Horace Walpole and Clara Reeve investigate manners as a litmus test for the stability of society. Responding to the social anxieties of the mid-eighteenth century, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and *The Old English Baron* (1777) base the success of revolution or reformation on the patriarch's commitment to manners and the social institutions he supports. These works of early Gothic fiction attempt to quell social unrest by working through two different outcomes of social revolution.

In many ways, the conversation occurring between Walpole and Reeve—understanding the feasibility of revolution versus reform—parallels Burke and Wollstonecraft's debate regarding the French Revolution. The debate that occurs between Burke's *Reflection on the Revolution in France* (1790) and Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), addresses the French Revolution not as a political movement, but as a revolution in manners. The two theorists debate the practicality of a society that is dependent on chivalry. The domestication of the French Revolution, turning the political debate into one revolving around manners, changes the conversation within the Gothic genre: it is no longer about attempting to challenge or preserve the systems of social control in hopes of preventing revolution. I argue that Burke and Wollstonecraft, intentionally or not, expose the inherent problems of a society dependent upon the external regulation of behavior.

Therefore, post-Revolution Gothic does not address manners as an externally-regulating force, but rather interrogates the validity of using sentiment and sympathy as the foundations of the new social order. In *The Monk* (1796) and *The Italian* (1797), Matthew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe manipulate Burke's theories of the sublime in tandem with Smith's theories of moral sympathy to determine if a society driven by feeling—an inherently selfish concept—can be

maintained. Radcliffe and Lewis attempt to reestablish a social morality that is derived from self-regulation, sympathy, and sentiment rather than the enforcement of superficial and performative structures of etiquette.

In my first chapter, “Do Manners Matter? Walpole, Reeve, and Social Control in Early Gothic Fiction,” I investigate the rise of the Gothic in conjunction with the rise of the realist novel and argue that part of the anxiety of the Gothic stems from the fact that it is a departure from the accepted literary conventions of the day. In the prefaces of Walpole’s and Reeve’s texts, both authors apologize profusely for their novels, and cite manners, both contemporary and historical, in defense of their ventures. I argue that their fascination with manners extends beyond a defense of the genre. In fact, for both Walpole and Reeve, manners function as a litmus test for the stability of a society. The differences in the ways that Walpole and Reeve employ manners—whether as a reason to oust a ruler or as a reason to restore one—highlight their different approaches to social change: change either comes off a failed revolution, as is the case in *Otranto*, versus change through restoration and personal reformation, as is the case in *Baron*.

In my second chapter, “Can Chivalry Save England? Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Gentlemanly Politics,” I assert that the polemics of Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, domesticate the French Revolution. That is, they discuss the French Revolution as an issue of manners and behaviors rather than as a political movement and contextualize it within English society, discussing how a similar movement might fare in England. I use my analysis of these texts to argue that by centering this debate on manners and chivalry, both Burke and Wollstonecraft demonstrate that the real threat of the revolution was the social, not political. Burke and Wollstonecraft do not simply bring the French Revolution across the channel to

England; they evolve it from a conflict of political revolt to one of social change, and, while the two thinkers differ on the validity and moral good of the French Revolution, they acknowledge that the conflict suggests more than just dissatisfaction with the political system.

The analyses from my first two chapters culminate in my final chapter, “Virtue or Vice? Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, and the Merits of Moral Sentiment,” in which I argue that the French Revolution changed the conversation of the Gothic from one that challenges the merits of outward behavior to one that investigates the psychological and moral validity of sympathy and sentimentality. Lewis and Radcliffe, I claim, place the individual’s emotions and perceptions at the center of the narrative as a way to challenge the individual’s moral constitution and determine its effects on society. I argue that Lewis and Radcliffe use Adam Smith’s theories of sympathy and Edmund Burke’s theories of the sublime as tools to determine if sentiment can function as a sustainable system of moral regulation or if a society driven by one’s id is really viable.

All these factors come together to create a genre that is directly responding to the world around it. While the critical field has discussed at length the relationship between the Gothic and the French Revolution, it has continually overlooked the importance of manners within its generic arc. Manners remain an integral part of the Gothic and become more important when we consider that England discusses the French Revolution, not as a political movement, but as a rejection of chivalry and decorum. Therefore, by following the function of manners from Walpole and Reeve, through Burke and Wollstonecraft in the pamphlet debate, to Lewis and Radcliffe post revolution, it becomes clear that the Gothic is not rebelling against its literary moment but is critically examining the way society self-regulates during this volatile period.

Chapter One

Do Manners Matter? Walpole, Reeve, and Social Control in Early Gothic Fiction

The eighteenth century was a time of social and political uncertainty, but it was also an era of intellectual and creative growth. Marked by a series of political and social revolutions in the second half of the century, the 1700s also played host to the development of the modern novel and its many different sub-genres. As the novel began to popularize, there arose disagreement about the nature of its function. Samuel Johnson, for instance, argued that the novel should only be a didactic text that reflected life as a casual observer may live it in order to guide young people towards morality. Others, like Sarah Fielding, Henry Fielding, and Frances Burney used the novel to explore the power of feelings and propriety, developing the subsidiary genres of the novel of manners and the sentimental novel. Horace Walpole, however, had a different idea altogether. With the publication of *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, Walpole inaugurated the Gothic genre, an amalgamation of supernatural and sublime elements, with manners, sentiment, and maybe even a hint of didacticism, all mixed together in a novel the likes of which had never been seen.

Gothic fiction arose in part as a challenge to realist fiction, which sought to use the novel as a moralizing force—a way to teach young people the proper way to behave in society. Samuel Johnson praised realist fiction for its commitment to manners and its mission to model proper social behavior, especially for the adolescent audience that most frequently consumed fiction. Voicing his opinions about the functions of fiction in *The Rambler* No. 4 Johnson writes, “these books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures

of conduct, and introductions into life” (61). Johnson insists that the novel serve as “introductions into life” for young people, suggesting that novels that do not provide an accurate portrayal of reality will mislead impressionable youth. Throughout his essay, Johnson argues that imagination and exaggeration do not have a place in the novel because they overtake the didactic purpose of teaching a clear moral right and wrong. Johnson insists that, aside from historical narratives, what authors “cannot credit” to real life “we shall never imitate” (65). Johnson’s prescriptive understanding of the novel as didactic and moralizing, coupled with his assertion that the novel depicts the reality of life, prevents an author from composing a novel that includes elements of the marvelous or supernatural, even if these elements are used to examine morality and culture. However, Johnson creates a paradox when he demands that novels will not stray from reality and yet will always portray “the highest and purest that humanity can reach” (65). Simply displaying the “perfect idea of virtue” cannot capture an accurate portrayal of humanity since most people cannot live their lives to the highest moral standards (65). Walpole, as we shall see, exploits the impossibility of Johnson’s prescriptive ideas about the novel by trafficking exclusively in “what we cannot credit” (Johnson 64).

While realist fiction reflects an idealized reality back at the audience and Gothic fiction attempts to understand reality through the exploration of the fantastic, sentimental fiction and the novel of manners—offsprings of realist fiction—arose as more intimate investigation of contemporary society. In her book *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*, Patricia Meyer Spacks outlines the development of the sentimental novel² and the novel of manners as works of fiction in which “social behavior is rendered with sharp

² The sentimental novel focuses on the human capacity for feeling and prizes emotional depth over intellectual reason.

particularity;” they are “focused on social detail” rather than didacticism (160). The important distinction that Spacks makes here is that the novel of manners examines social detail and looks at behavior with inquisitiveness, whereas the realist novel simply seeks to inform without the desire to dive deeper into the effects of behavior and social expectations. Spacks asserts that, in the novel of manners and sentimental fiction, manners “become a subject of consuming interest” and that “manners could be seen as momentous, reflections of important values” (160). While behavior is an important part of the didactic nature of realist fiction, the novel of manners examines how manners “urge us to assess the ways in which, the degree to which, that frame impinges on lives occurring within it” (Spacks 168). In other words, the novel of manners examines how the restrictions manners impose shape our everyday lives; it is, Joseph Wiesenfarth writes “one in which ‘assumption rules,’ implication is manifold, and cultural expectations have political, moral, and religious interaction” (9).

These definitions of the novel of manners can be applied to certain aspects of Walpole’s Gothic, where the pressure of social expectation truly impinges upon the inhabitants of Castle Otranto, creating a claustrophobic and precarious political and moral world. In the Gothic genre, manners function as a type of social contract: assumptions rule not just the lives of the characters, but also the audience’s experience, reinforcing Wiesenfarth’s assertion that manners influence more than decorum and propriety, but also politics, religion, and cultural expectations. Social institutions like marriage, religion, courtship, and inheritance, along with expectations for behavior all govern the interpersonal, political and moral interactions of the characters within *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Old English Baron*, and the Gothic genre more generally. Manners in Gothic fiction lie in between their didactic nature in realist fiction and their interrogation by the novel of manners. Gothic fiction does not teach the audience how society explicitly should

behave, but it does examine manners as a means of maintaining social order, and on what could happen if that social control is questioned and rejected. The sentimental novel and the novel of manners synthesize the effects of protocol and emotion on contemporary society, whereas Gothic fiction uses physically and temporally remote settings to test the validity of contemporary etiquette. E. J. Clery notes in her essay “The Genesis of ‘Gothic’ Fiction” that, during the mid-eighteenth century “romances had been called improbable, [but] now Walpole accused modern fiction of being too probable: ‘the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life’” (23). By including aspects of the marvelous in fiction, Walpole rejects the redundant probability of the contemporary novel and its emphasis on realism. He revels in the improbability of the supernatural and therefore escapes the strict and confining social mores of contemporary fiction in order to meditate on society, emotion, and existence in a broader and more meaningful way. Walpole’s belief that the fantastic can be a conduit for emotional appraisal and catharsis is in conjunction with the common understanding that, within Gothic fiction, the supernatural is often read as a metaphor for emotional turmoil. In a time when concealing true emotions in favor of preserving social order was common, Walpole’s Gothic catharsis and blatant disregard for convention is a clear counter-argument to Johnson’s civilized realist fiction.

Walpole published *Otranto* ten years before the American Revolution, and he rejects the notion that the novel should accurately represent contemporary morals and manners. However, when Clara Reeve publishes *The Old English Baron*, the “literary offspring” of *Otranto*, in 1777 she makes her perspective on Gothic manners clear: despite historical setting, novels should always reflect contemporary standards of behavior (Reeve 2). As we will recall from Wiesenfarth’s definition of the novel of manners, regulating public behavior through manners

can have an effect on the political landscape. Therefore, for Reeve, emphasizing a strict moral code is a tangible way to maintain social order, and by extension prevent revolution in England. While *Otranto* explores the tumultuous society within Otranto and stokes a potential revolution in manners, *The Old English Baron* attempts to reestablish romantic chivalry, straying from its parent text and further blending the novel of manners with the Gothic. For Reeve, the immediacy of political revolution and its possible ramifications for England and Great Britain certainly influence her desire to reject Walpole's (apparently) revolutionary take on manners.

While Walpole's and Reeve's texts were foundational for the Gothic genre, they were major departures from the conventional form of the novel and their departure from realist fiction generated an anxiety for both authors that we see in their texts' respective prefaces. Both Walpole's and Reeve's prefaces attempt to establish respect for the new genre they are creating; however, Walpole is focused on making sure the audience will read the novel during a time that idolized the realist novel, while Reeve's intention is to highlight the significant difference between her text and Walpole's original Gothic experiment. Reeve and Walpole both defend the Gothic genre as a valid form of expression, and both place the Gothic as a genre in conversation with the burgeoning genre of sentimental fiction.

The anxiety that dissatisfaction with the status quo might reach past politics and affect cultural norms was nothing novel, but Walpole and Reeve were particularly intrigued by the effects of subscribing to or rejecting manners. The concept of manners—whom they affect, when they should be enforced, and how they function—are the foundations of their respective prefaces, as Walpole and Reeve consider how social control will function in the Gothic world. In his preface to the first edition of *Otranto*, Walpole defends his imaginative new work by determining that it is representative of the manners of the time period in which it was set,

effectively freeing it from the scrutiny of contemporary moral expectations. In contrast, Reeve's preface argues for the maintenance of contemporary manners despite historic setting and defends the Gothic genre against critics who believe it will corrupt modern morality. *The Castle of Otranto* tends toward the overt use of the marvelous and supernatural—in acts of horror rather than feelings of terror—all of which amount to an aggressive disregard for appropriate society and good manners. However, Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron*, originally published with the title *The Champion of Virtue. A Gothic Story*, criticizes Walpole's text for being heavy-handed and immoral and corrects the mistakes by imposing contemporary moral structures on the historical setting. Arising from a fear of revolution and a desire to maintain acceptable social hierarchy and behavior, Reeve's novel emphasizes the protagonist Edmund's emotions, virtues, and manners while simultaneously rejecting destructive instances of the marvelous. Instead, Reeve uses the supernatural as a pseudo-guardian angel for Edmund as he attempts to discover who he is and what he deserves. However, despite their different emphases, Walpole's and Reeve's foundational texts together set the expectations for the basic functions of manners, the sublime, and the supernatural within Gothic fiction.

I

Walpole's Revolution and The Crumbling Castle: What Happens when Revolution Fails

Walpole originally claimed that his novel *The Castle of Otranto* was an English translation of an ancient Italian manuscript—not surprising given Walpole's own fascination with antiquity. “The following work,” Walpole writes in the preface to the first edition, “was found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at

Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1592. How much sooner it was written does not appear. The principal incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of Christianity; but the language and conduct have nothing that favours of barbarism” (5). Here, Walpole claims that the novel he is translating is a found document that was written centuries before its discovery, successfully exempting it from the rigorous moral standards of the eighteenth century. Yet he also complicates the novel’s situation in time, providing contrasting details that further obscure the document: the principal action is from the “darkest ages of Christianity,” but the “conduct,” the execution of said incidences, did not seem barbaric. By establishing that *Otranto*, whose temporal setting is ambiguous and can exist in a number of different contexts, Walpole suggests that it can be, in effect, unbound by time.

Furthermore, in claiming that the contents of the novel are significantly older than they actually are, Walpole mimics a tactic which James Macpherson used in his preface to *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* just four years earlier:

The public may depend on the following fragments as genuine remains of ancient Scottish poetry. The date of their composition cannot be exactly ascertained. Tradition, in the country where they were written, refers them to an era of the most remote antiquity: and this tradition is supported by the spirit and strain of the poems themselves; which abound with those ideas, and paint those manners, that belong to the most early state of society.

The rhetorical similarities between Macpherson’s and Walpole’s prefaces are unmistakable. Both rely on the notion of resurrecting something ancient that speaks to contemporary society:

Macpherson employs language of distance and recovery such as “remote antiquity” and “early state of society,” which Walpole then mimics with “ancient catholic family,” and “darkest ages.”

Both texts are masquerading as found documents:³ the sense that Macpherson's and Walpole's texts have come unstuck in time implies that the past can be coopted to reflect on the present without openly presenting ideas that could be seen as threatening to the contemporary dominant political or social movements. Finally, Walpole and Macpherson both associate themselves with antiquarianism—supported, in part, by Macpherson's use of “antiquity” and Walpole's use of “antient” in reference to their found documents—a movement that sought to make the past accessible through the disparate collection and examination of historical objects.⁴

As Walpole continues his preface, he constructs a defense for *Otranto* and the genre by suggesting that it was an attempt to combat censorship and give the peasantry back their enjoyable pastime: ghost stories. In order to maintain the ruse of history, Walpole writes of an ancient priest who attempted to reject a stifling empire by preserving superstition in the story Walpole is now translating: “It is not unlikely that an artful priest might endeavor to turn their own arms on the innovators; and might avail himself of his ability as an author to confirm the populace in their antient errors and superstitions” (5). The circumstances that Walpole is describing here are remarkably similar to his own circumstances, with the priest acting as a surrogate for Walpole. By representing himself as an ancient priest seeking to maintain “antient errors and superstitions,” Walpole draws attention to the cyclical nature of censorship and blurs the intention of his novel by layering contemporary commentary into a historical setting. As letters “dispel the empire of superstition”—an intention Johnson declared of realist fiction—Walpole's priest preserves ancient superstitions as a way to appeal to the populace (5). Walpole

³ James Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* was published as a found document, but it is widely believed that he fabricated its origin story, however, he never confessed to doing so.

⁴ Walpole's interest in antiquity extended past his literary endeavors and overtook his life as he converted his estate in Twickenham, Strawberry Hill, into a Gothic castle. With its unconventional layout and lack of natural light, Strawberry Hill is widely believed to be the inspiration for the setting of *Otranto*.

therefore casts his experiment as a public service, one that will restore the audience's interest in superstition. By interweaving time, place, and purpose, Walpole both forces his audience to reinterpret the past and articulates the fact that historical trends repeat themselves. Contemporary England, he seems to say, can be just as stifling as a Gothic Italian government.

Throughout the preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole justifies instances of the supernatural in the novel he claims to be translating by saying that when the original was published, the characters' superstitions and beliefs in the marvelous were acceptable, whereas by the time Walpole is translating it, these tropes have fallen out of fashion. He writes, "some apology for [the contents of the book] is necessary. Miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams, and other preternatural events, are exploded now even from romances. That was not the case when our author wrote; much less when the story itself is supposed to have happened" (6). Here, he excuses his departure from contemporary sensibilities by taking advantage of the exemption Samuel Johnson provides for historical texts in *The Rambler*. "Historical veracity," we will remember, is the only situation in which a novel does not need to impose contemporary manners and contemporary morals (Johnson 64).

In his attempt to release himself from the oppressive standards of realist fiction, Walpole articulates a significant aspect of the modern novel: the separation of author from subject. "Belief in every kind of prodigy was so established in those dark ages," Walpole writes, "that an author would not be faithful to the *manners* of the times who should omit all mention of them. He is not bound to believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as believing them" (6). Walpole's segregation of the characters' beliefs from the author's marks an important departure from contemporary narrative form: a character is not simply a representation of the author and his beliefs, but an instrument to investigate human existence. However, by severing the

connection between author and subject, Walpole complicates the symbolic similarities between the novel's historical setting and a contemporary commentary; that is Walpole rejects the contemporary notion that a novel's job is to mimic life rather than reflect on life. His italicization of the word "*manners*" emphasizes the contemporary obsession with social regulation and the expectation that men, women, and fictional characters adhere to convention. By contextualizing the novel as aligning with the *manners* of the Gothic age, Walpole expands the meaning of the word. Therefore, *manners* take on a dual meaning: distanced from the contemporary affiliations and yet not fully rid of them, Walpole's *manners* adopt the Gothic traditions—social institutions and superstitions—and then demand to be read in conjunction with the eighteenth century iterations of those same institutions.⁵

Walpole continues to use the Gothic to draw parallels between then and now at the end of his preface to the second edition. Paying homage to Shakespeare,⁶ Walpole declares that Shakespeare was the originator of Gothic fiction—once again deflecting blame for the Gothic—connecting the themes and anxieties of *Otranto* to the current moment and Elizabethan England simultaneously. With a coy nod toward Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Walpole credits it for the Gothic genre despite his insistence that he is inventing something original. Declaring that he "might have pleaded, that having created a new species of romance, [he] was at liberty to lay down what rules [he] thought fit for the conduct of it" Walpole sarcastically acknowledges his lack of

⁵ Fred Botting comments of the temporal complexities of the faux antiquity of *Otranto*, writing, "the historical distance that is opened up by the device of the discovered manuscript returns readers to the neoclassical strictures and produces an uncomfortable interplay between past and present that both displaces and confronts contemporary aesthetic and social concerns" (49).

⁶ When the second edition of *Otranto* was published in April 1765, Samuel Johnson had just released his edition of Shakespeare. Therefore, Walpole's claim that Shakespeare invented the Gothic genre further enforces the perspective that Walpole is responding directly to Johnson's insistence that novels reflect reality and provide the audience with a moral center.

ownership over Gothic tropes (14). Walpole's use of "liberty" and "conduct" provide an interesting dichotomy between the rigidity of conduct and the unrestrained character of liberty and invention. In some ways Walpole is staging a rebellion—one where the novel can become any act of invention the author desires, so long as it coincides with the "manners" of the story's setting. Walpole continues, though, by moving away from his declaration of independence, modestly admitting that he "should be more proud of having imitated, however faintly, weakly, and at a distance, so masterly a pattern" as Shakespeare's "than to enjoy the entire merit of invention, unless I could have marked my work with genius as well as with originality" (14). Walpole reminds the audience that, despite the seemingly groundbreaking nature of *Otranto*, the novel is simply mimicking a preexisting trope. Thus, he connects manners, supernatural tropes, and concepts from Shakespeare, through the Gothic, to eighteenth-century England, finally establishing *Otranto* as a commentary on contemporary society—how members of a community are supposed to behave and where the lines of acceptable behavior lie—and the potential effects of flaunting those guidelines. Walpole concludes his preface to the second edition by making a cross-class appeal: "Such as it is, the public have honoured it sufficiently, whatever rank their suffrages allot to it" (14). Walpole's statement that his novel has been well received by the public across, and in spite of, rank, draws the end of his preface to the second edition back to the concept of revolution. If a novel can be appreciated by readers "whatever rank their suffrages allot," then the distinctive line that separates social classes, genders, and levels of education blurs.

The instances of the marvelous and supernatural in *The Castle of Otranto* are malicious and foreboding, as the physical structure of Otranto attempts to oust the wrongful and dishonorable inheritor from its walls. The first moment of the marvelous, when a giant helmet

falls from the sky and destroys the young prince Conrad, propels the story into motion. Manfred becomes concerned when Conrad does not appear at the altar to marry Isabella, and he goes to investigate what has happened and sees his servants attempting to move “a mountain of sable plumes” (18). “What are you doing? Cried Manfred, wrathfully,” in response to seeing the servants attempting to move the plumes, “Where is my son? A volley of voices replied, Oh, my Lord! The prince! The prince! The helmet! The helmet!” (Walpole 18). The contrast between Manfred’s anger and the hysteria of the servants introduces a dynamic that will persist throughout the novel: the domestics are harbingers of the supernatural whom Manfred initially disregards. Manfred examines the situation in front of him and “shocked at these lamentable sounds, and dreading he knew not what, he advanced hastily—but what a sight for a fathers eyes!—He beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black feathers” (18). Only a few pages after Walpole declared that the sins of the father will be visited on generations to come, Manfred loses his son to the supernatural, ending his paternal line. The helmet, we learn, is “exactly like that on the figure in black marble of Alfonso the Good, one of [Otranto’s] former princes,” a revelation that destabilizes Manfred’s legitimacy (20). In order to reestablish in the patriarchal line, Manfred corners Isabella, rejecting his wife and proposing to her instead, saying, “In short, Isabella since I cannot give you my son, I offer you myself I tell you . . . Hippolita is no longer my wife; I divorce from her this hour” (24). Manfred’s overt disregard for the institution of marriage, and of religion along with it, is directly followed by the appearance of an animated family portrait. As Isabella flees, Manfred himself addresses the portrait of his assumed grandfather that has just come to life, preventing him from immediately pursuing Isabella.

Although the giant helmet is an important plot device, it is the living portrait that foreshadows Manfred's true identity and impending destruction. When Manfred first engages with the apparition he exclaims, "Speak, infernal spectre! Or if thou art my grandsire, why dost thou too conspire against thy wretched descendant" (25). By invoking the perceived familial relationship that Manfred shares with the person depicted in the portrait as an obligation for the apparition to speak, Manfred indirectly requests that the apparition confirm that Manfred is truly his "wretched descendant" (25). However, the specter does not verbally respond to Manfred, casting doubt over whether Manfred is the rightful heir to the castle. Manfred's fear and astonishment are justified when the specter is described as having a "grave melancholy air," a negative and off-putting characterization that heightens the horrific nature of the apparition. While Isabella "made for the door" and Manfred was "distracted by her flight" the portrait "uttered a deep sigh" (25). The contrast between Isabella's quick and fearful flight out of the room and the lethargic painting distracting the frustrated Manfred leaves the living painting feeling isolated from the human emotions of fear and anger and therefore gives it an inhuman quality: it is detached from the life and death scenario playing out in front of it, and its detachment heightens its horrific nature. As Manfred addresses the specter, Walpole punctuates Manfred's speech with exclamation marks, giving Manfred's conversation with the apparition an aggressive, obstinate, and disrespectful tone. But Manfred's disrespect does not stop with his tone of voice: he addresses the specter with the disrespectful and cruel adjective "infernal," accusing it of coming to torment and "conspire against" him (25). As a whole, this passage establishes Manfred's disregard for his ancestral family, as well as his wife and child.

If we read the specter as a representation of historical social institutions like inheritance, then Manfred's inability to follow the specter (he is, we learn, "clapped to with violence by an

invisible hand” when he tries) suggests Manfred’s failure to uphold said structures (25). His attempts, consciously or unconsciously, to influence the line of succession are thwarted as the door—a metaphor for the existing social institutions—“resisted his utmost efforts” to “forcibly burst” through. The implication that Manfred will not succeed in his plans to reject his duty as the patriarch of Otranto, which is to provide stability to the structures of social governance through legitimate succession and marriage, reinforces Walpole’s stated moral that negative actions have grave consequences for generations to come. But it goes further: as Manfred tests the limits of the consequences of his hubris in thinking that he is above social conventions, Walpole determines that he is not, sending the message that while revolutions may suit a society for a time, they ultimately fail and the status quo remains.

Perhaps it should not surprise us, then, that *Otranto* begins with the violent death of one of Manfred’s children and ends with the violent death of the other. Manfred’s murder of Matilda sets off the final chain of events that reveals Theodore to be the true heir of Otranto. As Matilda is dying of the stab wound her father inflicted, she professes her forgiveness of him, and begs for his forgiveness in return: “Matilda, resigning herself patiently to her fate, acknowledged with looks of grateful love the zeal of Theodore. Yet oft as her faintness would permit her speech its way, she begged the assistants to comfort her father” (100). Matilda epitomizes proper behavior even as she is dying. A docile, patient, and resigning person, her quintessentially feminine behaviors act as a foil to Manfred, and her untimely death punctuates the fraught relationship between the worldviews represented by Theodore and Manfred. Matilda represented the possibility of a union between Manfred’s existing Otranto and Theodore’s rightful Otranto, but her death at the hands of her father dashes any hopes for a reconciliation.

The inversion of Matilda's deference from Theodore—Alfonso's heir and her love—to Manfred—a murdering imposter and her father—obscures the responsibility of women as the guiding center of mannered society. Throughout the novel, Matilda has functioned as a touchstone for how the characters should be behaving; intelligent and deferential, Matilda is exactly what a princess should be. Therefore, her death at the hands of her father, who is attempting to upend civilized society, calls into question the longevity of the values she represents. After Matilda's plea for forgiveness from her murderer, Manfred responds, "Forgive thee! Murderous monster! . . . can assassins forgive? I took thee for Isabella; but heaven directed my bloody hand to the heart of my child!—Oh! Matilda—I cannot utter it—canst thou forgive the blindness of my rage?" (100). Manfred's insistence that it was heaven that directed him to murder his child implies that it was God's will rather than Manfred's own inadequacies that led to the death of his daughter.⁷ However, Theodore is quick to blame Manfred, calling him a "savage, inhuman monster!" (99). By stripping Manfred of his connection to the spiritual and divine, Theodore separates him from Otranto, which has been steeped in the spiritual and supernatural throughout the novel.

After Matilda's death, and after Theodore has been revealed the rightful heir of Otranto, Manfred rejects Theodore's claim, only to be presented with an undeniable display of the sublime that legitimizes Theodore: "A clap of thunder at that instant shook the castle to its foundations; the earth rocked, and the clank of more than mortal armour was heard behind" (103). The implied divinity of the clap of thunder suggests that Manfred—compelled by God to

⁷ Manfred's claim that God implored him to kill Matilda recalls the Abraham and Isaac story from the Bible. However, Manfred is not saved from the horror of killing his only remaining child, effectively severing him from God rather than strengthening his connection to Him.

murder his last heir—has no true claim to the castle, and that his reign has been destructive and has “shook the castle to its foundations.” Manfred’s blatant disregard of the supernatural signs throughout the novel, all of which are designed to inform him of the truth, has now led to the partial destruction of Otranto and Manfred’s final demise:

The moment Theodore appeared, the walls of the castle behind Manfred are thrown down with a mighty force, and the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude, appeared in the centre of the ruins. Behold in Theodore, the true heir of Alfonso! Said the vision: and having pronounced those words, accompanied by a clap of thunder, it ascended solemnly towards heaven. (103)

Alfonso anoints Theodore as the ruler of Otranto, forcing Manfred to acknowledge his amoral ways and subjugate himself to Theodore. Alfonso, characterized as a godly figure (immense, solemn, mighty), shakes Otranto to its core and demolishes a wall. In this display of power, Alfonso legitimizes Theodore’s reign. Aside from the pronouncement that Theodore is the rightful heir to Otranto, Alfonso symbolically rejects Manfred’s claim to a divine right to rule through the destruction of Otranto, highlighting his disgraceful behavior towards religious piety and morality. *The Castle of Otranto* uses the metaphor of the divine and the supernatural to end a failed social revolution, implying that a misguided attempt to change society is predestined to fail. While Manfred did not overthrow Alfonso the Good, he has been illegitimately inhabiting his home while threatening sacred institutions like marriage and lineage. Theodore’s ability to usurp Manfred means that the end of Horace Walpole’s novel takes a conservative turn: no matter how distorted a society becomes, civility will triumph. The sins of the father may affect generations to come, but eventually they are atoned for.

II

Reeve's Restoration: The Importance of Contemporary Manners to Gothic Fiction and the
Inception of the Female Gothic

I have seen, too the criticism you mention on the Castle of Otranto, in the preface to the Old English Baron. It is not at all oblique, but, though mixed with high compliments, directly attacks the visionary part, which, says the author or authoress,⁸ makes one laugh. I do assure you, I have not had the smallest inclination to return the attack. It would even be ungrateful, for the work is a professed imitation of mine, only stripped of the marvellous; and so entirely stripped, except in one awkward attempt at a ghost or two, that it is the most insipid dull nothing you ever saw. It certainly does not make one laugh; for what makes one doze, seldom makes one merry.

-Horace Walpole to William Cole, 1778

As Walpole's 1778 letter to Cole on the subject of Reeve's novel reveals, he was not a fan. Walpole fumes that she has attacked the "visionary part" and his work by claiming it is not scary but is instead funny; and then pettily comments that he would rather be funny than "dull," and yet his cynicism undersells Reeve's novel. In writing that her project was "stripped of the marvellous" and "the most insipid dull nothing you ever saw," he misses the point of Reeve's take on the Gothic experiment. Walpole contradicts himself saying that he will not "return [Reeve's] attack," for by characterizing *The Old English Baron* as an attack and an "imitation," he rejects Reeve's innovations to the Gothic. Reeve adapted Walpole's Gothic and in doing so gave rise to a completely new Gothic aesthetic that does not try to imitate Walpole's aesthetic. Walpole is arguably frustrated with Reeve, not for her perceived criticisms, but because she stripped the Gothic of the "marvellous." We will recall that when Walpole invented the Gothic, he intentionally used the marvelous as a way to counter realist fiction, and now Reeve is taking his creation and moving it closer to the genres from which he sought to distinguish himself.

⁸ Here, Walpole refers to Reeve as "author or authoress" because *The Old English Baron*'s first edition was published anonymously. Reeve did not attach her name to the project until the second edition in 1778. It is the second edition of the text that also changes the name from *The Champion of Virtue* to *The Old English Baron*.

However, Clara Reeve believed there was another way to approach the Gothic, one that was less concerned with the supernatural and more interested in the human condition and the institutions humanity has created to protect itself.

By stripping the marvelous and only having “one awkward attempt at a ghost or two,” Reeve is able to shift the focus of the genre away from Walpole’s supernatural horror and failed revolution in order to highlight the human spirit she believes is necessary for the continuation of civil society.⁹ Proclaiming her 1777 novel *The Old English Baron* the “literary offspring” of *The Castle of Otranto*, Reeve displays an overt insecurity, similar to Walpole’s, about the Gothic genre in her preface (2).¹⁰ “I confess that it may be abused,” Reeve writes in regards to the romance and Gothic genres, “and become an instrument to corrupt the manners and morals of mankind; so may poetry, so may plays, so may every kind of composition” (2). Reeve defends the Gothic saying that every area of literature that is now revered was at one point believed to be the downfall of morals or may in the future become a corrupting force. Reeve’s repetition of the word “may” emphasizes the hypothetical nature of the claims against the Gothic: something that may happen might as easily not happen. Strengthening the relationship between the two novels’

⁹ Abby Coykendall notes that *Baron* was “at odds with just about everything that sets *Otranto* apart from other novels” but that Reeve “nonetheless tries to pass off her unseasonably didactic romance in the guise of charmingly refurbished Walpolean antique, summoning the trendy name and far-away era of Walpole’s ‘Gothic Story’ but sanitizing the traits with which he distinguishes each” (451). While Coykendall is correct that Reeve’s work is almost antithetical to Walpole’s, her criticism that Reeve associates *Baron* with the Gothic to be “trendy” diminishes Reeve’s attempt to reform the genre.

¹⁰ Reeve has been largely ignored by Gothic scholarship—so much so in fact that she does not even appear in Susan Wolstenholme’s book *Gothic (Re)Visions, Writing Women as Readers*, which looks at the trend of women rewriting works of Gothic fiction written by men and providing female spaces in literature. Wolstenholme credits Radcliffe with having “succeeded in claiming Gothic as ‘female’ in terms of what might be called ‘maternal presence,’ a textual space which challenges the representation even though confined by it” (16). While it is true that Radcliffe and other later female Gothic authors will provide more female representation in their works, I will argue later in this project that Radcliffe owes a debt to Reeve for her work to establish what we now refer to as the Female Gothic.

respective prefaces and her dismissal of critics' concerns about the corrupting nature of the Gothic genre parallels Walpole's defense of *Otranto*.

Reeve does not simply reframe and repeat Walpole's concerns and defenses; she criticizes what she assesses to be a flamboyant use of the supernatural and a dangerous disregard for contemporary conventions of polite society.¹¹ Reeve writes that the Gothic "is an attempt to unite the various merits and graces of the ancient Romance and modern novel" (3). In this definition, Reeve undermines *Otranto*'s status by claiming that it does not include the "merits" of the "modern novel," but instead tests the merits of modern society in its use of historical setting. Reeve continues her definition by elaborating on the qualities needed to achieve unity between Romance and the modern novel: "there is required a sufficient degree of the marvelous, to excite attention; enough of the manners of real life, to give an air of probability to the work; and enough of the pathetic to engage the heart in its behalf" (3). Reeve's use of the word "*manners*" here differs from Walpole's; while Walpole abandons decorum as a means of discovering the truly essential aspects of social order, Reeve's preservation of "the manners of real life" allows her to investigate the ways in which a society can repair itself by upholding its traditional behavioral codes of conduct. Reeve argues that a representation of the "manners of real life" is required to "give an air of probability" to the text. In many ways, Reeve's insistence on an "air of probability" advances support for her argument that the Gothic novel should incorporate modern manners to increase the "probability" of a text being accepted by a

¹¹ Reeve proposes her criticism, Fred Botting asserts, as a way to combat what he claims is the ambivalent nature of the Gothic that Walpole initiated. Botting uses the term ambivalent to capture both the effect of the contradictions of Gothic fiction, claiming that they diminish the intended power of the texts, and the tone for criticism regarding the Gothic (Botting 45, 55). However, Botting's argument focuses on the aesthetic intent of Reeve's project, while I want to shift our focus to the social-reform implications of Reeve's text.

contemporary audience, but probability also implies chance and uncertainty.¹² The lack of stability associated with probability reflects the relative instability of contemporary society. By reflecting the manners of the time as a reliable peacekeeping mechanism—maintaining honor, inheritance, and gentlemanly behavior—Reeve offers a contrasting perspective on the function of them in the Gothic. It might offer, she suggests, a tool to reform and preserve society rather than one to undermine and test it.¹³

Reeve claims that *Otranto* disregards the balance of three elements of the Gothic—the marvelous, manners, and probability—and relies too heavily on the marvelous. “The book we have mentioned is excellent in the two last points,” Reeve writes, “but has a redundancy in the first . . . with all these brilliant advantages, it palls upon the mind (though it does not upon the ear); and the reason is obvious, the machinery is so violent, that it destroys the effect it is intended to excite” (3). Reeve’s emphasis on the violent machinery of *Otranto* and how it “palls upon the mind” is an argument against Walpole’s attempt to understand the consequences of a social revolution (3). Reeve suggests that Walpole may have pushed the envelope too far—used too much violence—and in doing so diminished the impact of his investigation into the effects of revolution. Despite the fact that the revolutionary characters in *Otranto* fail to succeed, the mere suggestion that the subversion of proper society can survive for some time before being eliminated frustrates Reeve. Had *The Castle of Otranto* “kept within the utmost verge of

¹² In his article “Probability and Character in the Eighteenth Century,” Paul J. Korshin claims that the eighteenth century redefined character probability, changing it from stable character types to a more dynamic understanding of the mathematical probabilities of outcomes (65-6). Korshin argues that probable, stable characters were a function of seventeenth century literature and became outdated in the eighteenth century, yet Reeve insists on the need for probability in the eighteenth century Gothic novel (67). Reeve’s emphasis on probability, and in some sense reliability, suggests that she is attempting to undo the revolutionary aspects of the Gothic and return it to the more dependable aspects of seventeenth century literature.

¹³ Botting makes the observation that while Walpole hailed from an aristocratic family, Reeve is from the educated middle class. He argues that because she herself is not of the gentry, she uses Edmund to claim that gentlemanly traits are not dependent on rank (55).

probability,” Reeve writes, “the effect had been preserved, without losing the least circumstance that excites or detains the attention” (3). Part of Reeve’s argument here is about narrative flow: had Walpole kept the audience on the “*verge* of probability” he could have built suspense and kept them engaged throughout the novel. Instead he over relies on the marvelous, desensitizing the audience to the necessary suspense of the Gothic novel. However, if probability, with its echoes of uncertainty, is read as an allusion to the uncertainty that revolution and even the possibility of revolution creates, then Reeve’s comments take on another meaning: Walpole, she insists, should explore the permanence of contemporary manners without placing his characters in an environment of contained revolution. In other words, Reeve makes clear that, in her opinion, the Gothic is better served by leaving things unsaid. By including just enough chaos to convince the audience that there is a “probability” of social collapse, a kind of literary jump scare, Reeve can sustain her audience on the verge, exploring the possibility that a proper man of feeling, armed only with good manners and a birthright, can save a struggling social structure.

In Edmund’s humble journey from ward to lord, he never fails to embody the sympathetic and righteous characteristics of the man of feeling; polite, deferential, and honorable, he is everything Manfred is not. Edmund’s respectful interactions with the supernatural distinguish him not only from the other residents of castle Lovel, but also from the characters in *The Castle of Otranto*. Tasked with spending the night in the haunted chambers of the late Lord and Lady Lovel, Edmund begins to uncover his true identity when two ghosts appear before him. He reacts to the two ghosts in a rather surprising way: with quiet reverie, awestruck respect, and impeccable manners. While Reeve’s apparition sequence is similar to the portrait passage from *The Castle of Otranto* (namely in that they both contain deceased potential relatives who appear to offer guidance), the passages differ significantly in aesthetic choices and

the character's demeanor toward the apparition. Reeve's scene is slow and methodical; there is no violence, no rushing action as a character tries to escape. In fact, it reads like a moment out of a fable: the warrior enters "leading a lady by the hand" as they "approached the bed" and "undrew the curtains" (38). There is no frenzy here. Reeve's decision to pace this moment as a dream allows the audience to savor it. Reeve is careful to obscure this scene, allowing the audience to question whether Edmund is recalling a dream or a supernatural occurrence. The scene is prefaced by the line "as soon as he was perfectly awake [Edmund] strove to recollect his dreams" (38). However, the nature of the scene is further complicated when Edmund vividly recalls the events of the night: "he thought that he heard people coming up the staircase that he had a glimpse of; that the door opened, and there entered a Warrior" (38). Despite the fact that this recollection is prefaced by the declaration that it is a dream, Edmund describes the encounter as if it really occurred. Reeve's descriptions of Edmund's senses "he thought he heard" and "he had a glimpse" place Edmund's recollection in the physical world, suggesting that rather than dreaming the encounter, he actually experienced it. The uncertain nature of this scene, whether it was a dream or an actual encounter with the supernatural, allow Reeve to argue that it is not solely the sublime that determines destiny, as is the case in *Otranto*, but that men can control their fate.

Edmund's night in the haunted chamber, meant to scare him into leaving Castle Lovel, instead inaugurates his rise to power. In the dream sequence from *The Old English Baron*, Reeve has Edmund interact with the marvelous in a restricted, respectful way. While Manfred insulted the apparition, Edmund tries "to rise and pay them his respects" (38). Reeve's decision to shift the focus of *Baron* from a Manfred type character to one that closer resembles Theodore's arc allows her to explore the consequence of a universe in which the restoration of a rightful heir

occurs through etiquette and law rather than marvelous destruction. As Lady Lovel says to Edmund, to restore house Lovel, “Sleep in peace . . . for those who are the true possessors of this apartment are employed in thy preservation: Sleep on, sweet hope of a house that is thought past hope” (38). Lady Lovel encourages Edmund to sleep, which implies that Edmund can peacefully return castle Lovel to its rightful family; the ship will right itself eventually. Yet, Lady Lovel’s phrase, “sleep on” once again suggests that Edmund is dreaming and that the apparitions are nothing more than figments of his imagination. Lady Lovel’s comments undermine the supernatural, and support the claim that it is not the intrusion of the sublime that will restore house Lovel, but rather it is the strength of Edmund’s character. We cannot forget that in the Gothic restoration is inevitable—a theme that Alfonso determined in *Otranto*. However, the ambiguous nature of Edmund’s interaction with the marvelous indicates that Reeve does not think that the sublime is necessary for restoration, and even suggests that the Gothic can maintain its unsettling aesthetic without the overt use of the supernatural. Furthermore, Reeve’s decision to characterize the certainty of restoration as so certain that its steward could sleep through it suggests that revolutions fail due to their violent nature; the rightful social order will be reinstated in a peaceful inevitability. While Walpole may use “doze” as an insult in his description of *Baron*, Reeve manipulates the concept of sleep and dreams as a way to emphasize the power of human intervention. Edmund’s measured reclamation of Castle Lovel, and his ability to reinstall manners and gentlemanly behavior suggest that, it is better to reform a corrupt institution than to attempt to overthrow it, a marked departure from *The Castle of Otranto*.

Reeve emphasizes the power of manners as a means of regulation and maintenance, but she also underscores the importance of the law, thereby unifying social and legal structures. Reeve combines “gentleman’s law”—like the duel between Sir Philip and Walter Baron of

Lovel—with stringent forms of justice like the practices of legal inheritance. While preparing for the duel, Sir Philip “sent for a lawyer and made his will,” naming Edmund as his heir “by the name of Lovel, alias Seagrave, alias Twyford” (82). This scene underscores the importance of legality, a concept that is absent in *Otranto*. By marrying etiquette and the legal system, Reeve creates stability in both the social and political spheres even as the people upholding those structures are removed from power. As Edmund proceeds on his mission to reclaim Castle Lovel, he disrupts the existing power structure of those wrongfully in possession of Castle Lovel, but because he is the legal heir and approaches the situation with deference and respect, the social and political institutions remain intact. As Sir Philip bests the new Lord Lovel in their duel, he forces Walter to confess to the murder of Lord Lovel: “It was done by your own order” Sir Philip asserts, to which Walter replies “It was . . . and heaven is just” (88). After Walter confesses his crime and appeals to heaven—a move reminiscent of Manfred’s justification for murdering Matilda—Sir Philip addresses the crowd and presents Edmund as the rightful Lord Lovel, appeasing both divine right and human law: “In this young man, said he, you see the true heir of the house of Lovel! Heaven has in its own way made him the instrument to discover the death of his parents I have sufficient proofs of every thing I say” (89). Sir Philip’s inclusion of divine providence, “heaven . . . in its own way,” and human proof of fact, “sufficient proofs of every thing” elevate the restoration of Edmund and chivalry to the level of divine anointment. Furthermore, Sir Philip’s anointment of Edmund echoes Alfonso’s pronouncement of Theodore as the true heir to Otranto. Again, Reeve replaces the supernatural or sublime with humanity, indicating that that humanity can restore itself without the intrusion of the supernatural. By unifying human justice with divine intent, Reeve sanctifies the systems for maintaining order that humanity has created. She makes politeness and chivalry part of the justice of law, blesses those

institutions as the will of heaven, and thereby dispels the tumultuous anxiety that characterized the disorderly failed revolution of *Otranto*.

Reeve restores legal order to the Gothic genre, articulating more than just the important function of civility in the continuation of society, but also the impracticality of a disordered society. The rule of law determines the outcome of the novel and secures Edmund's reign, providing a stark contrast to the end of *Otranto*. While Alfonso was able to restore Theodore to Otranto, he did so by destroying the building, but Reeve makes a stronger claim for Edmund's legitimacy: he ascends to Castle Lovel without having to destroy it in the process. Reeve advances her anti-revolution perspective, not in the sublime punishment of a usurper, but in the gentlemanly conduct of the rightful heir to Castle Lovel and the rule of law. Reeve's approach to the Gothic shifts the focus of the genre from moments of horrific spectacle to moments of human strength—a legacy that Radcliffe will continue. Reeve's insistence that the human element can outweigh the supernatural undercuts Walpole's thesis: the supernatural, or the divine, is no longer a safeguard for society. For Reeve, the only insurance that society will persist is the knowledge that honorable people will hold themselves and others accountable for their actions, making sure their behavior aligns with chivalry. Reeve's approach to the supernatural thus makes the Gothic applicable to reality. Unlike Walpole, where the restoration of the rightful line depends on the supernatural, Reeve proposes a Gothic where the restoration is driven by *people*. When the Gothic elements are ambiguous, it allows the moral clarity of Reeve's protagonists to shine through, and, in a society on the precipice of a number of domestic and foreign revolution, Reeve's Gothic suggests that we need only wait for the return of an honorable gentleman.

Chapter Two

Can Chivalry Save England? Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Gentlemanly Politics

I flatter myself that I love a manly, moral, regulated liberty as well as any gentleman of that society, be he who he will.

- Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)

“Manly, moral,” and “regulated”: the characteristics that Edmund Burke believed were necessary for liberty to be legitimate, fit perfectly into the definition of gentlemanly behavior (89). Burke, and the rest of England, watched as the social order and governmental structures of France were ripped away and replaced with terror and chaos as the French Revolution (1789-1799) began and the war between England and France followed. Burke feared that the violent and directionless nature of the Revolution could inspire a similar movement in England and the rest of the United Kingdom. Burke famously argued in his *Reflections* that the revolution lacked a defined outcome for the government, organized leadership, and above all that it rejected the traditional behaviors of polite society. However, Burke was not the only British voice commenting on the revolution, and there was widespread debate in Great Britain over whether the tactics and motives of the French movement were sound and ethical. British radicals such as Dr. Richard Price, Joseph Johnson, and Mary Wollstonecraft saw the Revolution as a beautiful opportunity for the working and middle classes to obtain the rights often denied to them by the existing structure of hierarchical aristocracy such as representation in the government and the ability to own land and other property. In contrast, Burke’s *Reflections* articulated the conservative side of the British debate on the French Revolution and revealed the deeply rooted

anxiety that the British upper classes felt toward the vigor of the French middle and working classes and the parallels that it drew to the British working and lower classes.

In his edited collection *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, Mark Philp outlines the long-term domestic reaction to the French Revolution, writing, “The British government faced widespread, organized pressure for parliamentary reform, and a public which had been so encouraged to flirt with republicanism by Paine’s work, that the social and political elite had felt it necessary to organize to an unprecedented extent in defense of the status quo and the constitution” (8-9). Burke’s *Reflections* contributed to the conservative campaign in “defense of the status quo” by emphasizing the need for chivalry, the system of social contracts and expected behaviors that defined the British class system, which Burke saw as the backbone of British society. Claudia Johnson elaborates on the notion of Burke’s desire to prolong the age of chivalry: “Burke regarded the calamity of revolution in France as a crisis of sentiment, and this in turn—I shall stress—as a crisis of gender. Burke’s tribute to the ‘age of chivalry’ infuriated, bewildered, gripped, and eventually convinced English readers interested in the political turmoil on the other side of the channel and in the state of the nation at home” (*Equivocal Beings* 3). Johnson argues that by framing the revolution as a crisis of manners, or sentimentality, Burke obtained the interest of British citizens who otherwise would not have been invested in the conflict abroad. Taking Johnson’s argument a step further, I argue that Burke contextualized and simplified the complicated political situation of the French Revolution into phrases and concepts that the British populace could understand, such as chivalry and manners; he domesticates the revolution, both in terms of beginning discourse in England and reframing the revolution in terms of what he deems as unnecessary social (domestic) reform instead of constitutional reform. As Johnson points out, Burke’s argument is fundamentally a gendered one. He argues that

England does not need a revolution because its social constructs still perpetuate chivalry, implying that women belong in the subjugated state that they occupy at the end of the eighteenth century. However, Mary Wollstonecraft vehemently disagrees with Burke, and argues as such in both of her *Vindications*. Wollstonecraft criticizes the social construct of chivalry and its byproduct the “man of feeling,” rejecting the idea that men need to protect docile and servile women, and that women need to be docile and servile in the first place. Wollstonecraft’s *Vindications*, both the *Rights of Men* and the *Rights of Woman*, argue for the equal education of the sexes and the abolishment of a rigid chivalric social order that, Wollstonecraft claims, oppresses men and women equally.

While *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is not Wollstonecraft’s direct reply to Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, the two texts frame an important contemporary conversation on the function of manners in British society during and after the French Revolution. The argument of *Rights of Woman* refutes Burke’s perspectives on sentimentality and chivalry; as Johnson points out, “Wollstonecraft quarrels with Rousseau as well as Burke because she recognizes that male sentimentality turns even politically progressive men into sexually oppressive [men]” (*Equivocal Beings* 17). The idea that sentimentality, a consequence of chivalry, turns men into “sexually oppressive” people encapsulates the idea that the gender hierarchy established by chivalry is detrimental not just to women but to men as well. In her essay “Mary Wollstonecraft and The French Revolution or Feminism and *The Rights of Men*,” Irene Coltman Brown outlines one of the fundamental differences between Wollstonecraft and Burke: “Burke had envisioned the French revolutionaries as possessed with a satanic lust of destruction because they had chosen to condemn what could have been reformed, but Mary Wollstonecraft believed that there was much in both countries that was better gone” (8). Brown

highlights Burke's belief that the removal of the political system was not the only social structure the French disavowed, but that the revolutionaries also rejected the traditional polite society of French aristocracy. However, she also points out that Wollstonecraft believes that the same social structures Burke reveres must be eliminated; they are "better gone" or adapted rather than maintained. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* responds to the exclusion of women from the French Declaration of the Rights of Men and of Citizens by highlighting the need for women to be educated beyond how to behave with proper manners. While Wollstonecraft craved a revolution, in both a political and social context, Burke cultivated deep anxiety over the implications of a revolution in England.

Stephen Prickett argues that while the *Reflection's* purpose may have been to quell revolutionary tendencies in England and Great Britain, Burke inadvertently enforced the exact notions he was attempting to dispel:

Such eulogies of the condition of England were themselves signs of implicit change in a way that is unlikely even Burke could have been conscious of. Whatever the effects of the Revolution in France, by provoking such a debate in England it had altered the situation beyond recall . . . Whatever Burke might claim, it was not just the French constitution that was on trial. (60-1)

As much as Burke believed that Revolution in Great Britain was unnecessary, the anxieties apparent in the *Reflections* prove that he was still deeply concerned that there would be revolution, implying that there is something within the British society—and its aristocratic similarities to French society—with which to be dissatisfied. By addressing the "signs of implicit change" and "provoking" "debate in England" Burke inadvertently reinforced the radical agenda. Through his domestication of the French Revolution, Burke provided ammunition for English

revolutionaries, proving through his adamant defense for the status quo that there were things in England worth revolutionizing.

While Wollstonecraft welcomes the idea of revolution, Burke's writing reflects the anxieties that are often seen in a populace when conflict arises in a neighboring country. As Mary Favret explains, "distant violence becomes at once strange and familiar, intimate and remote, present and yet not really here" (15). The nearness and familiarity of the conflict in France, its direct parallels to England and rising tensions in Great Britain, scare Burke, and many other Britons, precisely because the conflict is "present and yet not really here." Mary Wollstonecraft provides an outline, and potential solutions, for these dissatisfactory aspects of British society within both of her *Vindications*. In my examination of both Burke's and Wollstonecraft's polemics, I assert that the British desire to characterize the French Revolution in terms of manners, chivalry, and sentimentality is an attempt to make the French Revolution more accessible to a English audience: if an English reader can picture the French Revolution as an attack on manners and morals, regardless of whether they see it as justified, they are more likely to be aware of the possibility that revolution may arise in England and therefore see a need to maintain or subvert social order. That is to say, manners act as a tangible touchstone for the possibility of a geographically and socially domestic revolution.

I

Edmund Burke and the Death of the Gentleman

In his *Reflections*, Burke argues that the French Revolution was a misguided attempt at reforming a social and political system that did not need to be changed in the first place. The French, Burke argues, behaved in an uncivilized and barbaric manner, betraying the established

social structures that most of Western Europe had been built upon. Burke believes that if one European country were to reject the universal structures of behavior, it would be like pulling a strand of thread and unraveling the entire sweater. He claims that because the English base their manners on those created in France they are at a greater risk of having the French Revolution inspire social corruption: “But among the revolutions in France, must be reckoned a considerable revolution in their ideas of politeness. In England we are said to learn manners at second-hand from your side of the water, and that we dress our behavior in the frippery of France” (162). Burke’s assertion that the revolution in France is tied to “ideas of politeness” emphasizes the perspective that politics and politeness are interdependent. Therefore, when Burke claims that the English “learn manners,” “dress,” and “behavior” from France, he is declaring that England takes more from France than just social customs: it also takes political cues (162-3). By associating England with France, Burke places the French Revolution in a framework that a wide range of English readers can recognize and relate to, developing avenues for the English to imagine what a domestic revolution might entail.

Burke goes on to exploit the connection he has just established between England and France by claiming that England is “still in the old cut,” abiding by the old manners, and would never consider behaving in the way that the French currently are. Burke associates the “new Parisian mode of good-breeding” with humiliation and murder (163). The irony that Burke creates in his association of “good-breeding” with a revolution that attempted to dismantle the aristocratic structures (that dictate good breeding) by murdering the monarch emphasizes his disdain for the behavior of the French populace and his desire to convince the English to agree with him through making the French ridiculous. After encouraging the English audience to see France as a *reflection* of itself or as a role model, Burke then corrupts that idolization and forces

the audience to consider whether England could behave in the way that France has. Burke forces the English to consider the lengths they would go to for reform and makes them reconcile with the consequences of a violent and uncouth revolution at home. In underscoring the immediacy of a domestic threat, Burke attempts to dissuade the English populace from revolution, and reestablishes the importance of maintaining social contracts.

Burke claims that, had the French maintained a reverence for chivalry and manners, which are ubiquitous across Europe, the revolution would not have occurred and social order—and safety within that social order—would have been maintained. Burke builds on his claim that the social systems of Europe are interdependent by asserting that chivalry is a “mixed system of opinion” that has been developed through “varying states of human affairs” (170). For Burke, universal structures of social politeness have developed and been perfected with the inclusion of many different types of people and populations, so if one country that has its “origin in antient chivalry” rejects the system, it will begin to crumble across Europe (170). Burke praises European chivalry as the ultimate system: it “has given its character to modern Europe. It is this which has distinguished it under all its forms of government, and distinguished it to its advantage, from the states of Asia, and possibly those states which flourished in the most brilliant periods of the antique world” (170). Burke believes that the rules of decorum are what make European governments more “distinguished” and that the character given to Europe by these practices raises contemporary Europe above even ancient Greece and Rome. However, in his praise of chivalric practices, Burke employs language of aristocracy, emphasizing chivalry’s history as a practice born out of social hierarchy. Burke claims that chivalry has been passed down through “a long succession of generations,” with the connotation that the practice should be venerated because it has been enforced for so long, but also calling to mind the tradition of

inheritance that Burke claims is necessary for the maintenance of civil society (170).¹⁴ Elsewhere in the *Reflections* Burke claims that “No other experience has taught us, that in any other course or method than that of an *hereditary crown*, our liberties can be regularly perpetuated and preserved sacred as our *hereditary right*” (109). Burke’s reverence for heritage and inheritance entrenches him in a world of historic social behaviors. Burke rebrands what Price and Wollstonecraft would call antiquated as traditional and asserts that it is therefore worthy of preservation.

Burke epitomizes his argument for the importance of decorum to a functioning society with his famous passage in which he imagines the storming of Versailles. He dedicates much of his argument to establishing the necessity of the social hierarchy, the byproduct of chivalry, as a means of protecting the innocence of women. In Burke’s imagining of the storming of Versailles, Marie Antoinette becomes the field on which the battle is fought:

A band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with [the guards] blood, rushed into the chamber of the queen, and pierced with an hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked, and through ways unknown to the murderers had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a king and husband, not secure of his own life for a moment. (164)

The portrayal of the Queen as “persecuted” and “naked,” vulnerable to the attacks of “ruffians,” epitomizes Burke’s perspective that women must be protected. The overtly sexual language used to describe Marie Antoinette’s “naked” flee from her “bed” suggests that the ruffians and assassins had been planning to rape the Queen—a fate she narrowly escapes by being able to

¹⁴ Here, we recall Reeve, and her marriage of heredity, chivalry, and law through the ascension of Edmund.

“fly,” like an angel, from the attackers. Burke emphasizes the violent sexual overtones of the passage through the use of words “rushed” and “pierced” coupled with objects often used as euphemisms for male genitalia such as “bayonets” and “poniards.” The physical and sexual nature of the actions described brings Marie Antoinette’s body to the forefront of Burke’s defense of chivalry. The imagined rape of the Queen of France, the pinnacle of elegance, nobility, and social order, turns the Queen from a popular-culture villain into a damsel in distress, needing to be saved by the chivalric king and adoring populace of France.

Unfortunately, French society is so devoid of chivalry that the king cannot even protect his wife, as he was “not secure of his own life for a moment” (164). However, Burke’s claim is that men ought to be able to use their gentlemanly qualities to protect vulnerable and “naked” women. If all men are acting with chivalry, then women are inherently protected. Burke continues lamenting the fate of Marie Antoinette by remarking on his dismay that no men attempted to save her from her fate:

Little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbars to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult.—but the age of chivalry is gone.— (170)

In these passages Marie Antoinette does not just represent the role women ought to play in a chivalrous society, she also represents the essence of the chivalric mission. Marie Antoinette—helpless, regal, and in distress—becomes the ultimate object of gallantry. By beginning his disavowal of “gallant men,” with the statement that he could never have dreamed there would be such a lack of good men, Burke attempts to establish his credibility as a gentleman and statesman so as to be able to claim that he has the authority to judge the Frenchmen who did not protect the

Queen. To Burke, the fact that no men in a “nation of men of honour and of cavaliers” protected the Queen shows that France is beyond saving as it has strayed too far from the dictated social behaviors of manners, deference to women, and societal regulation. Burke even insults the manhood of the French populace, as no men draw their “swords” to protect the Queen. This clear inversion of the “bayonets” and “poniards” that previously threatened the Queen accuses the men of France of being effeminate—emasculated in more ways than one.

As Burke laments that “the age of chivalry is gone” in France, he is attempting to solidify its reign in England (170). While Burke argues that chivalry is manifested in the behavior of gentleman to ladies, he also asserts that it has a larger function in the regulation of society and the continuation of civility and lawfulness. Burke asserts that manners hold a greater power in society than written laws, or even a constitution: “Without force, or opposition, [chivalry] subdued the fierceness of pride and power; it obliged sovereigns to submit to the soft collar of social esteem, compelled stern authority to submit to elegance, and gave a domination vanquisher of laws, to be subdued by manners” (170-1). Burke employs “subdued” and “submit” to instill manners with the power to quell social unrest and feminizes the conventionally masculine characteristics of pride, power, authority, and law by subjugating them to the traditionally feminine qualities of social esteem, elegance, and manners. By intertwining the masculine qualities of law with the feminine qualities of manners, Burke combines the masculine language of reason with the feminine language of romance and, in doing so, implies that chivalry can be rehabilitated into a relevant form of governance; law is better served, Burke suggests, when it is intertwined with sentiment. With the connection of manners to these powerful words of surrender, Burke implies that only through the restoration of manners will the French be able to govern themselves. Similarly, he suggests that only through the maintenance of social

obligation will England be able to avoid revolution. Burke's connection between manners and the submission of a sovereign implies that, had the French maintained polite discourse in their attempts to reform their government, they would have been more successful since, as Burke claims, chivalry and politeness force kings to submit to the will of the people.

In other words, had the French maintained social order and settled for political gradualism rather than radicalism, they would have had more success ensuring their desired social and political outcomes. Burke believed that the continued efforts of civil discourse could reform a government to reflect the will of the people without upending the status quo. Interestingly, Burke employs the same tactic of using female iconography when portraying the French and American Revolutions, though he had differing opinions on the conflicts.¹⁵ As Dror Wahrman highlights, Burke's descriptions of Marie Antoinette's attack and his depiction of a colonial woman burning down New York to delay the British are strikingly similar. Burke approaches the representation of these revolutionary women in different ways, complicating his perspective on a woman's role in revolution. Wahrman juxtaposes the two images, writing, "Burke's portrayal of female heroism in the American revolutionary tableau, by contrast, virtue and disorder were inextricably intertwined . . . To the extent therefore that she too, like Marie Antoinette, embodied the nature of the internal tension and disharmony, involving the perhaps unnatural confusion of fundamental identity categories" (222-3). Wahrman argues here that Burke's affection for Marie Antoinette was used to emphasize the differences between the values

¹⁵ While Burke initially did not believe that the American colonies should be independent, once he realized that the options were complete monarchical rule in America or American independence, he supported ending British rule of the American colonies (Wood). Prior to his resignation that American Independence was inevitable, he gave a Speech on Conciliation to Parliament on March 22, 1775, arguing for a mutual solution to the America conflict that would provide Americans with representation in Parliament. In 1778, after the Declaration of Independence, Burke, along with Charles Fox, would introduce a doomed motion to the House of Commons that would have authorized peace commissioners to negotiate American independence (Ayling 86).

of the British and the French and paint the British in a sympathetic and gallant light. The Colonial woman, however, is used to represent the disconnect and internal conflict of the war with the colonies. Both images, though, represent “internal tension and disharmony,” suggesting that Marie Antoinette epitomizes not just chivalry, but also the separation of the aristocracy from the populace. The interaction between the two branches of society represented in the image of Marie Antoinette presents a “confusion of fundamental identity” because it presents two visions of society fighting for the same thing: liberty and equality. However, Burke uses chivalry and the characterization of Marie Antoinette to strengthen the aristocratic argument for the status quo rather than the egalitarian ideals of the revolutionaries.

In the *Reflections*, political gradualism is described in tandem with Burke’s belief that social order should dictate political action. Burke insults the impatience of the French assembly, saying “you may object—‘a process of this kind is slow. It is not fit for an assembly, which glories in performing in a few months the work of ages. Such a mode of reforming, possibly might take up many years.’ Without question it might; and it ought” (280). He belittles the naiveté of the French assembly and portrays them as impatient children wanting to have a toy without having to work for it. However, Burke—acting paternalistically—disciplines them, firmly stating that their desired outcome, an orderly society, cannot occur “in a few months” but rather is “the work of ages.” He then describes his ideal legislator: a gentleman who is the exact opposite of the French heathens who have rushed through the process of reform in favor of expedient rebellion. Fashion (a medium prone to change) is what rules the French, not the sense and sensibility (pardon the pun) that rule English politics. Burke writes:

But it seems as if it were the prevalent opinion in Paris, that an unfeeling heart, and an undoubting confidence, are the sole qualifications for a perfect legislator. Far different

are my ideas of that high office. The true lawgiver ought to have an heart full of sensibility. He ought to love and respect his kind, and to fear himself. It may be allowed to his temperament to catch his ultimate object with an intuitive glance; but his movements towards it ought to be deliberate. (281)

This passage recalls the passage from *Reflections* we considered above where Burke equates the law with sentimentality, effeminizing the masculine world of reason with the feminine world of feeling. Burke reiterates here that an ideal legislator has “an heart full of sensibility.” However, he claims that the Parisian inclination to place a man with an “unfeeling heart” and “undoubting confidence” in charge can also be read as an inclination to place political power in the hands of careless and hasty men. Burke then declares that he does not believe the new Parisian legislature is his “idea” of what suits “that high office.” The inclusion of the word “high” carries with it the implication of class, as if to remind the audience that in addition to being deliberate and having a “heart full of sensibility” a proper legislator must be high-born. Burke continues his assertion that politics and society are intimately intertwined, saying, “Political arrangement, as it is a work for social ends, is to be only wrought by social means. There mind must conspire with mind. Time is required to produce that union of minds which alone can produce all the good we aim at” (281). Here, Burke goes as far as to claim that political change should only be “wrought by social means,” asserting that only through civilized discourse—minds conspiring with minds—can reformation occur effectively. As Burke states, “the present French power is the very first body of citizens, who, having obtained full authority to do with their country what they pleased, have chosen to dissever it in this barbarous manner” (297). In their refusal to take meditated action the French have irrevocably destroyed their country and replaced chivalry with barbarism.

Burke's insistence that revolution requires the combination of forethought, manners, and time recalls his characterization of change as the blending of sentimentality and government, politics and sociality. By synthesizing the engendered qualities of political and social governance, Burke blurs the chivalrous gender roles he is desperately trying to define and defend. Despite the fact that throughout the *Reflections* Burke implies that women are simply objects in the game of chivalry, chivalry itself is characterized as a deeply feminine system. As Burke attempts to place men and women back in their respective gender roles, he ends up complicating the notion of socially dictated gender norms in both the romantic and reasonable contexts.

II

Wollstonecraft's Revolutionary Etiquette: Rejecting Chivalry in Favor of Equality

In response to the conservative values of Burke's *Reflections*, Mary Wollstonecraft argues for the equal education of women in society at the expense of what she deems are restrictive chivalric models of behavior. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* expounds upon Wollstonecraft's initial support of the French Revolution and extends her beliefs regarding the intrinsic rights of both men and women. Wollstonecraft argues in *Rights of Woman* that contemporary female education amounts to the production of well-mannered and conventionally accomplished young girls: "in the education of women, the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some corporeal accomplishment" (131). Here, "corporeal accomplishment" can be read as a lady's pursuit of traditionally feminine activities

such as music, dance, and drawing. When society dictates that a woman's only goal is to acquire said corporeal accomplishments, their worth becomes dependent on their mastery of them.

Indeed, acquiring accomplishments is a quintessential aspect of hierarchical society as genteel women were expected to be able to display their abilities for the entertainment of men, thus emphasizing Wollstonecraft's point that the development of "corporeal accomplishments" is detrimental to a women's education and therefore participates in the subordination of women to men.

Like Burke, Wollstonecraft fixates on female bodies and the physical constraints of societal conventions. In one instance she writes, "Men have superior strength of body; but were it not for mistaken notions of beauty, women would acquire sufficient to enable them to earn their own subsistence, the true definition of independence; and to bear those bodily inconveniences and exertions that are requisite to strengthen the mind" (207-8). Wollstonecraft employs a woman's lack of bodily strength as an example of subordination. The fact that society restricts the exercise of women further hinders women's ability to be independent because they do not have the physical stamina to exert themselves to "strengthen the mind" or "earn their own subsistence." The constrictions of a sedentary lifestyle hinder women both intellectually and physically, and therefore Wollstonecraft uses the term "Corporeal accomplishments" ironically: since the so-called appropriate activities for women require little to no physical activity or movement of the body, corporeal accomplishments are, in practice, not corporeal at all. If society allowed women to indulge in the same physical exercises as men, women would be capable of expanding their horizons in more ways than one. If we apply Wollstonecraft's argument that women should partake in physical activity to gain independence to Burke's assertion that Marie Antoinette lacked the physical protection of gallant men, Burke's argument is undermined. If the

Queen had acquired physical capabilities as well traditional accomplishments as Wollstonecraft suggests, then she would have been able to protect herself from the invading ruffians. Increasing the physical capabilities of women, instead of rendering them physically weak and helpless, increases the equality between men and women because women are no longer reliant on men to protect their physical safety, making the physical protection of chivalry obsolete.

When this understanding of accomplishment as a constricting force is applied to Wollstonecraft's argument, it becomes clear that the pursuit of accomplishments is antithetical to the complex education she believes is needed to equalize men and women. Wollstonecraft continues her explanation of the failings of female education by stating that "if [girls] have natural sagacity, it is turned too soon on life and manners" (131). Wollstonecraft equates the gathering of accomplishments with societally dictated manners and customs of behavior in an attempt to display the frivolous nature of wasting a woman's intelligence on a talent that does not contribute to society except for the entertainment of men.

Wollstonecraft elaborates on the gendered hypocrisy of manners when she highlights how they hinder both men and women. Using military men as an example she writes, "officers are particularly attentive to their persons, fond of dancing, crowded rooms, adventures, and ridicule. Like the *fair* sex, the business of their lives is gallantry; they were taught to please, and they only live to please" (132). Wollstonecraft criticizes military men by associating their enjoyments (appearance, dance, socializing, ridicule) with those of women. The claim that soldiers are in practice more like young girls than men undermines their credibility as protectors of England because, as we have established, women in the eighteenth century were expected to need protection. The feminization of military gallantry is, in effect, a critique of chivalrous men more generally. Chivalry in its earliest uses was a term applied to "men at arms," making the use

of gallantry as a term of feminization particularly ironic. Wollstonecraft uses irony here to further her point that the double standard when it comes to dancing, vanity, and other social behaviors is problematic. She claims that when the army, a socially noble career, trains men to be effeminate, they are applauded, but when women are trained by society to behave in the same way, to “live to please,” they are labeled unintelligent. Therefore, women must be dependent on men. It is this double standard that Wollstonecraft hopes to rectify with her *Rights of Woman*.

Wollstonecraft does not believe manners are fundamentally destructive; rather, she argues that the gendered nature of manners and the fact that they are placed ahead of intellectual curiosity, political knowledge and morality are at the root of the problem. Wollstonecraft equates morals to intellect, noting that it is unfortunate that people “acquire manners before morals, and a knowledge of life before they have from reflection any acquaintance with the grand ideal outline of human nature” (132). Because women and soldiers are taught manners without any instruction on how to think independently, they form “a knowledge of life” without any true understanding of “human nature.” Wollstonecraft goes on to say that when women are solely taught manners they begin “taking all their opinions on credit and blindly submit to authority” (132).

Wollstonecraft’s language, “blindly submit to authority,” calls to mind Burke’s earlier language regarding the importance of chivalry in government and how his ideal legislator is a gentleman. Here, however, Wollstonecraft believes that the inclusion of manners in government hinders its ability to produce informed citizens. In fact, she goes as far as to claim the incomplete education of boys and girls in France for the corruption of French society, writing, “in France, boys and girls, particularly the latter, are only educated to please, to manage their persons, and regulate their exterior behavior; and their minds are corrupted, at a very early age, by the worldly and pious cautions they receive to guard them against immodesty” (203). Wollstonecraft redirects the

notion that the French Revolution was uncivilized or barbaric by saying that the true reason the French Revolution occurred was because France was *over*-civilized. The French tradition of solely focusing on superficial qualifications—"only educating to please," teaching children to "manage their persons," and prioritizing "exterior behavior"—has diminished the intellectual capabilities of their children. Wollstonecraft criticizes the superficiality of manners as corrupting their moral import and she accuses Burke of believing that these artificial manners are the same ones that maintain society. However, by undermining the quality of the manners which Burke claims would have saved French society, Wollstonecraft discredits the fundamental aspect of Burke's argument. By "only educating to please" and raising children with a corrupted notion of good manners, or what Burke might call fashionable manners, Wollstonecraft claims that the French crippled their society, corrupting their population and shepherding in an era of immodesty.

Wollstonecraft continues to berate the gender oppressiveness of manners when she addresses Scottish physician and moralist John Gregory. Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, a series of letters meant to be given to his daughters upon his death, was published in 1795 as a conduct book that outlines proper behavior for young, unmarried women.

Wollstonecraft quotes Gregory's advice to his daughters "that they will hear at least once in their lives, the genuine sentiments of a man who has no interest in deceiving them" (221).

Wollstonecraft argues that Gregory's advice sets standards for his daughters' lives that are fundamentally reductive. Wollstonecraft begins her rebuttal by highlighting the "vain and useless" nature of women who have been wooed by "the unmeaning intercourse of gallantry" (221). Her claim that the structures that dictate the societal intercourse of gallantry are "cold" and "unmeaning" strips gallantry of any gentleness or affability and interestingly, masculinizes

traits that she previously characterized as effeminate (221). Wollstonecraft changes the gender association here because she is no longer attempting to highlight the harm chivalry causes to men, but rather the dangers that gallantry creates for women; therefore, the behavior must be depicted as cold and unfeeling, ready to eviscerate the hearts of susceptible “vain and useless” young women (221). In reframing the dangers of chivalry, Wollstonecraft highlights the varying layers of harm false manners can cause. She continues her rebuke saying that the “heartless attention” that men give to women is perceived as “manly” and “polite” despite the detriment the behavior poses to young women who have only been raised to respond to well mannered, if not well moraled, gentlemen; and until the perception changes regarding the mask of chivalry, she proclaims, the “vestige of gothic manners” will not be replaced by a “reasonable and affectionate moral code” (222). The inclusion of the phrase “gothic manners” reaffirms that the practices of chivalry are antiquated and do not belong in a modern civilized society precisely because they beget falsehood and danger. Wollstonecraft even goes as far as to say that the contemporary European states which still abide by these “gothic manners” are also the countries with “extreme dissoluteness of morals” (222). While Burke may insist that chivalric practices are the backbone of a civilized nation, Wollstonecraft equates the disingenuous nature of gallantry and “gothic manners” with immorality and the morally destitute states of continental Europe.

Wollstonecraft argues that society has contradictory expectations of well mannered women, suggesting that men expect women to be blindly obedient and yet also seek out thoughtful men. However, Wollstonecraft asserts that men cannot subjugate women into being thoughtless and vain and also expect them to search for intelligence in a partner. Women are taught to esteem politeness and manners over sense in men because of their misguided education. “How,” she asks, “can [men] expect women, who are only taught to observe behavior, and

acquire manners rather than morals, to despise what they have been all their lives laboring to attain? Where are they suddenly to find judgment enough to weigh patiently the sense of an awkward virtuous man, when his manners, of which they are made critical judges, are rebuffing, and his conversation cold and dull because it does not consist of pretty repartees, or well-turned compliments?" (247). Wollstonecraft recycles the adjective "cold" here, calling to mind her earlier statement that gallantry leads to the cold manipulation of women by gentlemen. However, here "cold" applies that same attribute to women who reject socially awkward but morally sensible men. By continually reframing related or identical concepts, Wollstonecraft reveals the redundancy and ineffectiveness of the structures of chivalry. Wollstonecraft characterizes both men and women of chivalry unflatteringly. The characterization of women is unmistakably similar to how a person would describe a begging dog: simpering, docile, thirsting for praise (247-8). While the overt implications here harm women, the subtle criticism that men of manners long for a partner that is trained by society to be no more than a dog to entertain them diminishes the male belief that they can "have their cake and eat it too" when it comes to finding an accomplished and well-mannered woman who is also intelligent and has sound moral judgment.

Throughout Burke's and Wollstonecraft's arguments, etiquette functions in complex and often paradoxical ways. While Burke and Wollstonecraft hold conflicting perspectives on the productiveness of manners, both provide an important commentary on contemporary gender roles—and specifically where, when and how women are allowed to participate in both social and political public spheres. Burke, whose focus is masculine manners, often refers to the women participating in the French revolution as "women lost to shame;" for him, women who participate in public and intellectual life are fallen women (161). Meanwhile, Wollstonecraft criticizes contemporary middle-class women for their frivolity and lack of interest in bettering

their minds and their gender's standing in society. While Wollstonecraft and Burke are arguing for drastically different outcomes when it comes to the fate of manners, both offer harsh criticism of working-class and public women.

Wollstonecraft's commentary on women of all classes often centers on how they are presenting themselves publicly, and why they are motivated to present in that way. However, Wollstonecraft is often the hardest on middle-class women, who, for her, live in a place of limbo: not wealthy enough to spend time and money on personal fashion and yet not poor enough to work on clothing as a means of income. Wollstonecraft argues that it is necessary for women to work—but only when the motivation is morally driven. In regards to clothing, she writes that making clothing is not itself what “weakens the mind;” rather, the “friperies of dress” is what diminishes the righteousness of women (195). Wollstonecraft continues, writing, “When a woman in the lower rank of life makes her husband's and children's clothes, she does her duty, this is her part of the family business; but when women work only to dress better than they could otherwise afford, it is worse than sheer loss of time” (195). The combination of “duty” and “business” creates a correlation between moral duty and commerce. In order for lower class women to morally participate in society, they must be allowed to work and provide not only for their families but also for those outside of their families. “To render the poor virtuous,” Wollstonecraft continues, “they must be employed, and women in the middle rank of life, did they not ape the fashions of the nobility, without catching their ease, might employ them, whilst they themselves managed their families, instructed their children, and exercised their own minds” (195). The description of middle-class women as vapid and materialistic, ignoring their domestic and personal responsibilities (their families, children, and minds) in favor of imitating nobility, expresses Wollstonecraft's blatant contempt for them as a group.

Wollstonecraft associates the pursuit of fashion, albeit fashion outside of one's means, as incompatible with domestic and intellectual accomplishment. However, Harriet Guest argues in her book *Small Change* that fashion and female advancement are inexorably linked: "Feminine learning," Guest argues, "is perceived with increasing insistence in the mid- to late [eighteenth] century in a parallel relation to fashionable elegance. Fashionable consumption is moralized by its relation to the consumption of learning" (73). Guest's claim directly contradicts Wollstonecraft's assessment of fashion. Yet Guest goes on to qualify her initial statement, writing that "excessive fashionable consumption by women, and particularly women of the trading classes, does of course continue to be ridiculed, satirized, and stigmatized as the abomination of polite society; but with increasing insistence . . . a kind of counterimage of equally undesirable feminine behavior emerges in the figure of the woman who does not consume enough" (76). Here, Guest more closely aligns herself with Wollstonecraft's argument that the true crime is want outside of one's means. Wollstonecraft aligns with the argument that middle class women fall pray to "excessive fashion" and thus diminish their standing in polite society. Still, Guest's argument that fashion is intertwined with female advancement is not to be overlooked, and Wollstonecraft does not fully discount the association of fashion with female independence. For her, materialism becomes a space in which women can gain financial independence, and from financial independence intellectual independence can follow. However, Wollstonecraft's segregation of women into economic classes—lower or working class, middle class, and nobility—and basing moral behavior on those distinctions calls to mind Burke's insistence that only members of the gentry and peerage can hold certain positions in society. Furthermore, by drawing attention to the different standards of manners imposed on women based on economic class Wollstonecraft more closely aligns herself with Burke. Burke and

Wollstonecraft reflect the stratification of contemporary society when they associate morals with manners and manners with class, suggesting that neither truly craves the complete abolishment of contemporary social structures.

Burke and Wollstonecraft's conversation changes manners, which Walpole and Reeve understood as a generalized system for social comportment to a term that now explicitly carries political and gendered connotations. For the novels I considered in my first chapter, manners were fundamental: while they may be challenged, there is never any doubt that they will ultimately prevail. But Burke and Wollstonecraft dispute that surety. Burke's assertion that France has rejected manners and his fear that England may do the same suggests that they are a nonessential aspect of society despite his fervent claims to the contrary; and Wollstonecraft confirms manners' ornamental quality with her suggestion that they need to be rehabilitated. The debate between Wollstonecraft and Burke turns manners from the rigid system that we saw in Walpole's and Reeve's work into a system that is in flux—a living concept that indicates the need to revitalize an antiquated system. Wollstonecraft's argument suggests that rather than reject manners, as the French have done, England needs to expand the meaning of the word itself. Manners, she argues, should no longer be a system whose purpose is to maintain social and political hierarchy; rather, they should be based in political and gender egalitarianism, her gender “revolution.” Gender equality, beginning with education and extending to every aspect of society, will allow manners to remain an integral part of social intercourse without underwriting subjugation and oppression.

Wollstonecraft is ultimately suggesting unmooring manners from chivalry, opening up the possibility of public, educated women who are not frivolous. As she writes at the end of *Rights of Woman*, “to render women truly useful members of society . . . they should be led, by

having their understandings cultivated on a large scale” (340). For Wollstonecraft, women need to be educated. She then marries this “cultivated understanding” to politics and domesticity, writing, that “private duties are never properly fulfilled unless the understanding enlarges the heart; and that public virtue is only an aggregate of private” (340). Politics, domesticity, and knowledge are codependent. In order for women to fulfill their “private duties” they must be educated and have an understanding of the world, which extends to an “affection for their country” or political interest. Wollstonecraft’s connection of domesticity and manners to politics and knowledge changes the function of manners entirely: no longer externally enforced, they depend only on an individual’s private feelings. People, and especially women, can only have proper manners when they have a robust intellect and an understanding of the world: this notion of manners would be taken up by Gothic novels of the 1790s, where we see women move to the forefront, leaving their domestic spheres and surviving, not by their etiquette, but rather on the strength of their intelligence and inner feeling.

Chapter Three

Virtue or Vice? Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis and the Merits of Moral Sentiment

The marriage of terror, pity or sympathy, and pleasure are central to the works of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis. The conversation created between *The Italian* (1797) and *The Monk* (1796) highlights a number of debates occurring at the time—most notably the validity of sentiment as a moral principle. Patricia Meyer Spacks writes in her book *Desire and Truth* that exclusion of sentimental novels “from the [critical] canon probably results specifically from their sentimentalism, more readily rejected or patronized than comprehended” (116). Spacks also associates sentimentality with the female Gothic saying, “the female gothic novel, [is] now widely recognized as a variation of or development from the novel of sensibility” (146). However, Radcliffe’s sentimental heroines suggest that in a world rife with anxieties and circumstances outside of an individual’s control, the regulation of one’s passions and the exertion of one’s sentiments can be the only solace and autonomy a woman has.¹⁶ Lewis, on the other hand, highlights the perils of excessive sentimentality—the reckless abandon of propriety—and the dangers of the man of *too much* feeling. This chapter examines the relationship between the sublime and sympathy within *The Monk* and *The Italian*. However, the conversation between the two authors began when Radcliffe published *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in 1794, which prompted Lewis to write *The Monk* just two years later. Lewis wrote *The Monk*

¹⁶ Susan Wolstenholme writes, “As part of a literary conversation with men who wrote Gothic novels, in particular with Horace Walpole and ‘Monk’ Lewis, Radcliffe succeeded in claiming Gothic as ‘female’ in terms of what might be called ‘maternal presence,’ a textual space which challenges the representation even though confined by it” (16). Wolstenholme makes the compelling point that in creating a narrative space that highlighted the female experience in a patriarchal society, Radcliffe enhances the Female Gothic. However, Wolstenholme leaves out the important work that Reeve did to establish the restrained Gothic aesthetic that Radcliffe builds off of.

after being inspired by *Udolpho* inverting the plot and making the villain the central character.¹⁷ I focus here, however, on *The Monk* and Radcliffe's response to that novel, *The Italian*, because this pairing provides greater insight into the function of sympathy and the sublime than that of the more obvious adjustments of the female to male Gothic that occur between *Udolpho* and *The Monk*. *The Monk* critiques Radcliffe's female Gothic and her reliance on the sentimental, taking the rational sentimentality that characterizes Radcliffe's work and exploring what it might look like if feeling and emotion turned from a virtue into a vice. However, in *The Italian*, Radcliffe defends the sentimental, turning Lewis's debaucherous romp into a complex inquiry into rationality, sentimentality, and morality.

Radcliffe and Lewis interpreted Burke and Adam Smith's theories of the sublime and sympathy, which I will explore in more depth shortly, in radically different ways in an attempt to understand the subtle complexities of feeling and the human experience. Lewis employs the human sublime of the body and desire in an attempt to understand the limits of human sympathy and morality, while Radcliffe uses the sublime as a tool to regulate emotion: her characters often maintain hyper-control over their emotions while projecting their true feelings onto the world around them. In her book *Novel Beginnings*, Spacks writes that "sensibility, the virtue denied by sublimity, operates on a human scale; sublimity claims more. Lewis's novel attempts to have it both ways: on the one hand, it repeatedly invites the reader to sympathetic response; on the other, it offers the titillation—the factitious terror—of the sublime" (210). In other words, sensibility and the sublime, for Spacks, are almost antithetical. However, Lewis, and especially Radcliffe,

¹⁷ In a letter to his mother in 1794 Lewis writes, "I was induced to go on with it by reading 'the Mysteries of Udolpho,' which is in my opinion one of the most interesting Books that ever have been published" (qtd in Peck 208-9).

will manipulate that line in an attempt to merge the two theories of sympathy and the sublime. In contrast, Spacks argues, that Radcliffe's *The Italian* "makes the polemic point that suggestion can carry more power than description" rejecting Lewis's tendency to show aspects of the Gothic like rape and murder rather than simply gesture at their possibility (211). However, *The Italian* is not simply an opportunity for Radcliffe to chastise and teach Lewis the proper forms of the Gothic; rather, it is an opportunity for her to complicate the conventional use of the external and internal sublime to return credit to the heroines of both novels. Spacks acknowledges this, saying that Radcliffe manages to utilize Burke's masculine sublime while maintaining femininity by "allowing [Ellena] to appropriate the internal power it connotes" and capitalizing on the beautiful as it relates to the sublime (213). Maggie Kilgour expresses a similar argument regarding the effects of sentiment in Lewis and Radcliffe's work, writing, "In *The Monk* . . . the relation between presentiment and fulfilment is too strict" whereas "*The Italian* strikes a balance between these two extremes, in a way that will reconcile the aesthetic pleasure in mystery and the moral imperative towards clarification" (174). However, these analyses still overlook the relationship between the sublime and sympathy and their functions in *The Monk* and how they are revised in *The Italian*; instead they focus on the effects of the sublime and sympathy on plot and narrative function in the novels. However, the novels employ sentimentality and the sublime not just as a way to influence narrative plot structures. For Lewis and Radcliffe, sentimentality and sublimity become avenues for understanding the moral integrity of sympathy in a post-revolution age—one in which the status quo of a hyper-regulation is being challenged. If society can no longer rely on its members to self-regulate their behavior, is a moral society based on sentiment and sympathy still viable? Both authors use Burke and Smith's theories to interrogate the feasibility of moral sympathy and sentiment. Lewis's work would suggest that no, a society based on sentiment is

not viable, as it opens up the possibility that sympathy can be corrupted. However, Radcliffe's response to Lewis argues that if members of a sentimental society self-regulate, then the moral principles of sympathy become a practical moral system.

I

A Brief Enquiry into the Philosophy of the Mid-Eighteenth Century and the Functions of Sympathy and the Sublime

Edmund Burke's *An Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) and Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) attempt to understand complexities of human emotion—whether passion, pain, or empathy—and the bodily responses to it. Critics of sentimental literature and culture like Michael Frazer and James Chandler have investigated the philosophers of the sentimental Enlightenment like David Hume, Joseph Butler, and Francis Hutcheson, but neither directly address Burke's *Enquiry*—his aesthetic work that investigates his theory of the sublime—though they briefly mention his political writings (Frazer 4). By examining the relationship between Burke's theory of the sublime in conjunction with Smith's theory of moral sentiments we can gain a better understanding of their interdependence.

Burke's theory of the sublime and its effects on the human condition become central to the Gothic genre.¹⁸ In *An Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke defines the sublime as “whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger . . . whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror . . . It

¹⁸ We first encountered the sublime in the works of Walpole and Reeve. However, I have delayed the discussion of Burke's theory until now because, for Walpole and Reeve, the sublime functions in a way that is analogous to a parlor trick or a plot device—falling helmets, talking portraits, walking ghosts—whereas Lewis and Radcliffe use theories of the sublime to question convention, narrative form, and morality.

is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (39). Burke’s assertion that the sublime produces the “strongest emotion which the mind is capable of,” along with the fact that it excites “the *ideas* of pain and danger” and not the *feeling* of pain and danger implies that the sublime is a mental state and not a physical state: it is imaginative not active (39; emphasis added). In order to fully understand the function of the sublime, it is necessary to examine Burke’s definition of terror as the sublime is “analogous to terror.” Burke distinguishes the sublime from terror, which he defines as “a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too close, and pity is a passion accompanied with pleasure, because it arises from love and social affection” (46). The close associations between the sublime and terror, and terror and pity, allows Burke to investigate the role that sympathy plays in the sublime. “Sympathy,” Burke writes, “must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected; so that this passion may either partake of the nature of those which regard self-preservation, and turning upon pain may be a source of the sublime” (44). Burke’s use of the sublime in the context of sympathy diverges from the classic notion of the sublime in the aesthetic sense of landscape, setting, and artwork. It becomes less about how the external environment can inspire terror and instead about the terrifying ways in which our internal environment can, almost against our own desires, be influenced by the external. However, Burke continues, the sublime is not simply used to define sympathy, but sympathy helps to articulate further the function of the sublime:

We would be united by the bond of sympathy, he has strengthened that bond by a proportionable delight; and there most where our sympathy is most wanted, in the distresses of others. If this passion was simply painful, we would shun with the greatest care all persons and places that could excite such a passion. (46)

Burke employs sympathy to highlight the relationship between pleasure and pain that is integral to understanding the sublime. The pleasure one gets in providing sympathy encourages people to sympathize, creating a culture in which sympathy and sentiment are painful and powerful in the same way the sublime is.

While Burke's definition relies on a quasi-psychological understanding of emotions, which he calls ideas, Adam Smith's definition of sympathy focuses on the physical response to imagination and the ideas and feelings it creates. Smith's focus on bodies and sensations is a departure from the nebulous understanding of emotions that Burke articulates. Because Smith emphasizes the physical imagination—attempting to enter another's body—he shifts the concept of sympathy from a purely psychological understanding of someone else's experience to a physical act. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith writes:

By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measures the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations and even something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (13-4)

Smith's argument that we place ourselves in another's pain, feeling what they are feeling, forming an idea of their sensations, is a much more tangible and physical description of the mechanisms of sympathy than Burke provided. Yet, Smith employs language reminiscent of Burke's definition of the pleasure that pain causes. Smith writes, "his agonies, when brought home to ourselves . . . begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels. For as to be in pain or distress of any kind excites the most excessive sorrow" (13-4). Smith's assertion that to be in another's pain "excites" sorrow echoes Burke's claim that the ideas of pain and danger excite feelings. And so, despite Smith's greater emphasis on the

physical, his version of sympathy is still dependent on the imagination the same way that the sublime is dependent on the mind. The role of the imagination in both definitions connects the two concepts through the process of thought rather than a physical impulse. As James Chandler states in *An Archeology of Sympathy*, “Smith’s account of sympathy explicitly banishes, from the outset, the idea that we can feel what others feel in favor of the notion that we feel according to how we *imagine* it would be to place ourselves in their situations” (240; emphasis added). Chandler’s explanation gets to the heart of Smith’s definition: while a person can sympathize with another, and feel their pain, that pain is still an imagining of the real thing. Therefore, what Smith accomplishes in his definition of sympathy is that he provides a conceptual tool for understanding the degrees of sympathy and the physical response to another person’s plight.

II

The Bodily Sublime and the Dangers of Too Much Feeling in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*

Born as a critique of Radcliffe’s sentimental female Gothic, *The Monk* centers on the dangers of ignorance and feeling—or what happens when those with too much feeling lack the rationale to moderate their desires. In *The Monk*, characters are shielded from knowledge of the human body and emotions by the institutions of which they are a part: Ambrosio is kept ignorant of women by the Catholic church, while Antonia is kept ignorant by her mother.¹⁹ In *The Contested Castle*, Kate Ellis suggests that the sexual ignorance that is prevalent throughout *The*

¹⁹Kate Ellis suggests that “Elvira thus exemplified those attitudes of Lewis’s day that Mary Wollstonecraft excoriated, attitudes that sacrificed women’s intelligence on the altar of ‘simplicity’ and made virtually all knowledge forbidden” (140). Ellis provides an insightful, if slightly one-sided, view of education within *The Monk* by arguing that Ambrosio and Antonia are both made ignorant due to their forced participation in institutions—the catholic church and modest familial structures—that shun knowledge of the human body and desires. Ellis oversimplifies the degree to which a culture built on sensibility hinders the safety and fulfillment of its citizens when she blames Elvira for Ambrosio’s and Antonia’s ignorance.

Monk—and allows for much of the corruption and abuse that occurs—is fostered by the flawed social structures that the characters are a part of. “Ambrosio,” Ellis writes, “has been protected from ‘forbidden’ knowledge by an institution believed . . . to be hostile to sexuality. But Antonia has been protected by her mother” (134). However, Toni Wein argues that Ambrosio’s and Antonia’s miseducation is representative of misogyny rather than the unilateral failing of institutions. Wein writes, “the leveling of gender in Antonia’s and Ambrosio’s education does not serve an egalitarian message . . . Instead, it forms part of the misogyny of his text” (*British Identities* 134). Wein goes on to argue that Matilda’s education has made her a “masculine feminine,” implying that the novel suggests that female education, or feminizing education, leads to immorality (*British Identities* 134).

Elvira, in an attempt to shield her children from the dangers of life has damned both Antonia and Ambrosio to a life of sexual ignorance that ultimately vilifies and victimizes them in equal measure. Elvira’s well-intentioned mistake encapsulates the anxieties surrounding knowledge, sentimentality, and sexual liberation in post-French Revolution England. However, what Wein and Ellis fail to address in their analyses of *The Monk* is the significance of the knowledge that replaces the characters’ ignorance. Due to their lack of knowledge, Ambrosio and Antonia are made vulnerable to the corruption of the human sublime and the social incompetency created by Elvira’s maternal failings stunts Ambrosio’s emotional and social growth, creating a man who cannot comprehend the needs or wants of others. As Smith writes in regards to, what Chandler terms, becoming a sentimental monstrosity, “To a man who from his birth was a stranger to society, the objects of his passions, the external bodies which either please or hurt him, would occupy his whole attention” (134). Smith suggests that in order for a person to be able to sympathize with others, they need to have been raised with society, for a man who

is a stranger to society will only concern himself with his own passions and pleasures. As Chandler writes “not to fulfill the aspiration that our capacity for projective sympathy instills in us as creatures is to become an aberration” (242). Chandler’s use of the phrase “projective sympathy” encapsulates Smith’s theory of sympathy. In imagining another person’s suffering, we do not experience it fully, but rather we project our own interpretation of the feelings onto their situation. Therefore, a stranger to society would be incapable of projective sympathy and instead become a sentimental monstrosity. Ambrosio embodies the idea of a sentimental monstrosity: incapable of understanding the emotional or physical autonomy of others, and not recognizing that it is morally impermissible to live solely for one’s own gratification.

In Ambrosio’s transformation from a vain priest to a lust driven murderer, Lewis explores the dangers of feeling too much, a direct challenge to the regulated sentimentality of Radcliffe’s heroines and villains. Ambrosio is characterized as a vapid person who, while outwardly pious and modest, longs for the adoration of others. In the first moment of insight into Ambrosio’s private life, Lewis reveals Ambrosio’s need to dominate, to be considered and envied as the best. “He was no sooner alone,” Lewis writes, “than he gave free loose to the indulgence of his vanity . . . his imagination presented him with splendid visions of aggrandizement” (32). Ambrosio’s need for self-aggrandizement and adoration undermine his credibility as the reclusive and pious priest and establish distrust for his actions and public image. The association of Ambrosio’s vanity with his imagination and “splendid visions of aggrandizement” echoes the rhetoric of sympathy and sublime. Ambrosio’s overactive imagination and its tendency to inflate his own ego echoes Smith’s notion of monstrous sensibility: those who are not properly socialized become self-centered and external bodies only matter in regard to his own passions. By associating Ambrosio’s ego with sympathy, or distorted sympathy, Lewis undermines its

credibility, having corrupted it by making it a tool for self-pity and aggrandizement. Ambrosio feigns an understanding of his shortcomings, but his ability to assert that he has overcome them simply inflates his ego. Ambrosio proclaims, “who else has subdued the violence of strong passions and an impetuous temperament, and submitted even from the dawn of life to voluntary retirement? I seek for such a Man in vain. I see no one but myself possessed of such resolution. Religion cannot boast Ambrosio’s equal!” (32). His ability to acknowledge his “passions and impetuous temperament” indicates that Ambrosio does possess self-awareness; however, his ability to critique himself is distorted by his belief that his voluntary seclusion, resolution, and commitment to religion elevate him above other men, and that he is therefore above reproach. Ambrosio believes himself the superior to those around him—“religion cannot boast Ambrosio’s equal”—establishing the foundations of his personality that will allow him to commit crimes ranging from rape to murder and still believe himself worthy of salvation. Ambrosio’s passions and impetuous temperament are described with rhetoric that echoes the sublime’s emphasis on passions, feelings, sociality, and love. The inclusion of the rhetoric of the sublime in reference to Ambrosio’s personality suggests that the sublimity of personality and the ways in which people interact can do more than incite terror; they can produce horror and devastating actions. Ambrosio’s volatile and sublime personality, along with his vanity, will leave him vulnerable to seduction (in more ways than one) by Matilda as she attempts to secure his fall from grace.

Egged on by the beguiling and wicked Matilda (who is revealed to be one of Satan’s disciples) Ambrosio consumes women, satisfying his sexual appetite, which is itself encouraged by his vanity, and then rejecting the women out of shame and disgust. Ambrosio’s interest in the female form begins with the revelation that his beloved apprentice Rosario is actually Matilda masquerading as a young novice in order to gain Ambrosio’s trust and adoration. As Matilda

threatens to kill herself upon Ambrosio's rejection, he is enticed into pardoning her by the image of her breast. The darting moon-beams illuminate the "dazzling whiteness" of Matilda's "beauteous orbs," calling to mind symbolism of the moon as enlightening nature's unknown while simultaneously representing femininity (51). By characterizing Matilda's body as something ethereal and deeply connected with nature—dazzling, beauteous, illuminated by the moon—Lewis associates the female body with Burke's theory of the sublime as a force that instills a mixture of fear and pleasure. Ambrosio's revelation of Matilda's body opens his eyes to an "anxiety and delight" that bewilders his imagination (52). Overcome with sentiment, Ambrosio is unable to distinguish between propriety and immorality. Ambrosio succumbs to his animal instincts and begins his descent into debauchery. Ambrosio's sexual awakening occurs when "a raging fire shot through every limb" and "the blood boiled in his veins" (52). Lewis is alluding to the physical reaction to sexual desire—Ambrosio is having an erection—and his shame at his reaction to Matilda's inadvertent seduction forces him to run from the encounter.

This scene may read like a seduction, but in reality it is a threatened suicide. Matilda, distraught at Ambrosio's rejection, threatens to take her own life by stabbing herself with a dagger. Ambrosio is introduced to sexual pleasure through Matilda's threat of violence, and his physical reaction to the moment shows that he gets a perverse enjoyment from the spectacle of a violated and damaged woman. Ambrosio's fetish for the sexual pleasure he receives from the physical violence against women will continue to grow more powerful as he moves past Matilda (notably once she stops threatening to kill herself) and decides that he must have the pure and innocent Antonia by any means, especially if they are violent. Matilda's manipulation of Ambrosio—flattering him with the assertion that she would rather die than be spurned by him—appeals not just to Ambrosio's vanity but also to his sympathies and portrays sentimentality as a

weapon rather than a virtue. If, according to Burke, an aspect of sublimity is a person's ability to conceptualize another's pain, to sympathize with them, then Lewis inverts the intent of sublime sympathy when Matilda takes advantage of Ambrosio's sympathies in order to orchestrate his downfall; in doing so, Lewis suggests that sympathy is a weakness rather than a virtue and leaves a person vulnerable to attack.

Matilda's ability to masquerade as a sentimental heroine by feigning modesty throughout her seduction of Ambrosio enables her to exploit Ambrosio's belief that he is an honorable man even as he betrays his religious vows. After Ambrosio's acceptance of Matilda's identity, she serenades him in his room. "Her Cowl," the narrator observes, "had fallen backwarder than usual: Two coral lips were visible, ripe, fresh, and melting, and a chin in whose dimples seemed to lurk a thousand Cupids" (61). Ambrosio's description of Matilda's features as ripe and fresh apply the language of consumption to Matilda's body. Her cowl, acting as a type of cocoon, has hidden her away until she had matured—was ripe—and ready to be tasted while still fresh and pure. Furthermore, as Ambrosio continues to survey Matilda, he once again focuses obsessively on the whiteness of her skin: "she had drawn [her sleeve] above her elbow, and by this means an arm was discovered formed in the most perfect symmetry, the delicacy of whose skin might have contended with snow in whiteness. Ambrosio dared to look on her but once" (61). As we will recall from Ambrosio's encounter with Matilda's beauteous white orbs, Ambrosio is fascinated by the pure and untouched color of her skin; Lewis capitalizes on the color white as a symbol of purity and innocence, implying modesty even as she reveals her body. He creates a dichotomy, that is, between modesty and sexual desire—and by extension he implies that modesty is a form of seduction. Establishing a link between modesty and seduction reveals that Ambrosio's interest in Matilda is antithetical to his identity as a champion of purity, undermining the perspective he

holds of himself as a pious master of his passions. Furthermore, the inversion of modesty as sexually arousing indicates that what is appealing for Ambrosio about Matilda's delicacy is the possibility that he can consume and ravish it; he conflates rape and sexual desire.

While Ambrosio concedes that he has a weakness for the adoration of women, he undermines his confession by implying that he would only truly be tempted by a woman who resembled the image he has had for two years of the "lovely" virgin Madonna (32). Ambrosio pines for the woman in his picture, crying "Were I permitted to . . . press with my lips the treasures of that snowy bosom! Gracious God, should I then resist the temptation?" (32). We learn later that Matilda had planted the image of the Madonna in Ambrosio's room, having had the painting done to resemble herself. Up until this point, Matilda has portrayed herself as an innocent, sentimental, and love-struck woman who was surprised by her adoration for Ambrosio: she has portrayed herself as the quintessential sentimental heroine. However, she confesses, "I formed the project of conveying to you my picture: crowds of admirers had persuaded me that I possessed some beauty, and I was anxious to know, what effect it would produce upon you," (64). Here, Matilda reflects back to Ambrosio his own ego, asserting that her "crowds of admirers" had persuaded her to reject her otherwise modest qualities in an attempt to win his passions. By mirroring Ambrosio's own weakness for admiration, and shedding her sentimental masquerade, Matilda implies that by embracing the immodest side of one's personality—the side that is controlled solely by the gratification of desire—they can achieve happiness without damnation of either soul or reputation. In other words, Matilda's successful masquerade proves to Ambrosio that he can gratify his sexual desires and still maintain a pious public image. Matilda's corruption of Ambrosio is slow and complete: she has physically seduced him, introducing him to a powerful vice—the complete adoration of another human—and she has

subversively displayed to him that even in privately breaking with religious traditions of modesty and celibacy as she has, he can maintain his public image of haughty religious and moral superiority. Lewis's corruption of the integrity of passion, and by extension the morality of sentimentalism, undermines the Radcliffian belief that the maintenance of chivalry and propriety forms the foundations of a civilized society, and in fact goes so far as to argue that the unfettered indulgence in sentiment can trigger social collapse. Ambrosio's corruption represents the instability of institutions that were previously thought incorruptible, like the catholic church. By destabilizing the morality of sentimentality and the social institutions tasked with maintaining it, Lewis shakes the foundations of a society built on the emotional commodity of chivalry.²⁰

Ambrosio quickly tires of Matilda as she loses all the charms of modesty, and he promptly sets his devouring gaze on Antonia, the beautiful virgin who has professed admiration and love for him. By the time Ambrosio begins to meet with Antonia, he is critically aware that his desires mean her ruin and is pleasantly surprised by her ignorance about the reality of sex and the social regulations in place to protect young women from sex. "The innocent familiarity with which she treated him," Lewis writes, "encouraged his desires: grown used to her modesty, it no longer commanded the same respect and awe: he still admired it, but it only made him more anxious to deprive her of that quality, which formed her principle charm" (197). Ambrosio's motive is to defile Antonia. His desires have shifted from idolizing the virgin Madonna to longing for the ability to corrupt that image. Ambrosio himself is trapped in a double bind: what he craves most is the ability to possess the purity of another, but in achieving his goal of

²⁰ As we saw in the previous chapter, Burke believed that only by maintaining chivalry and gentlemanly gallantry could the political foundations of Europe survive. Recall, for instance, Burke's imagining of the storming of Versailles, where he determines that had gallant men protected the Queen from the rape that he imagined, France would have subdued the revolution.

consuming someone's innocence he defiles it beyond the point of purity and it no longer appeals to him. Thus, he despises the woman for not retaining her innocence after he has used her up. Antonia functions as a mock-Radcliffian heroine: overly sentimental, modest, well mannered, and naïve. Therefore, when she finds herself the target of Ambrosio's lust, we are reminded of the impracticality of a society based solely in moral sentimentality.

Ambrosio's obsessive need to possess Antonia compels him to break in to Antonia's room so that he can rape her, and his desires again are described in terms of consumption. Ambrosio gazes upon Antonia in her bedchamber, spending "some moments devouring those charms with his eyes, which soon were to be subjected to his ill-regulated passions" (232). As he steals a kiss from her the "momentary pleasure increased his longing for still greater. His desires were raised to that frantic height, by which Brutes are agitated. He resolved not to delay for one instant longer the accomplishment of his wishes, and hastily proceeded to tear off those garments, which impeded the gratification of his lust" (232). As Ambrosio devours Antonia's charms, the image of eating is followed by an illicit kiss as he takes her into his mouth: consumption without consent. Now that Ambrosio has acted upon his "ill-regulated passions," he has passed the point of redemption and has sealed his fate as a lust-driven brute.

Elvira threatens to expose Ambrosio's impious desires—to destroy his reputation—and he immediately transitions from sexual excitement to physical terror, creating a perverse relationship between his murder of Elvira and the intended rape of Antonia. Ambrosio's murder of Elvira epitomizes his anxiety about his own perverse sexual desires and what the loss of his reputation would mean. Lewis figures Elvira's death by suffocation as a kind of violent sexual encounter. Elvira detains Ambrosio as he attempts to escape from Antonia's chambers, setting the fateful action in motion:

Worked up to madness by the approach of ruin, he adopted a resolution equally desperate and savage. Turning round suddenly, with one hand He grasped Elvira's throat so as to prevent her continuing to clamour, and with the other, dashing her violently upon the ground, He dragged her towards the Bed. Confused by this unexpected attack, she scarcely had power to strive at forcing herself from his grasp: While the Monk, snatching the pillow from beneath her Daughter's head, covering with it Elvira's face, and pressing his knee upon her stomach with all his strength, endeavoured to put an end to her existence. He succeeded but too well. (234-5)

Ambrosio was a "brute;" now he is a "savage." Lewis creates an association between Ambrosio's desire to rape Antonia with his decision to kill Elvira. The distorted eroticism of the moment continues as Ambrosio grasps Elvira's throat—a twisted embrace—and drags her toward the bed. Once Ambrosio has Elvira at the bed, Lewis reminds the audience why Ambrosio is attempting to silence Elvira by bringing Antonia back into the scene when Ambrosio snatches the pillow from beneath her head. It is important to recall that Ambrosio was almost able to rape Antonia because of the totem that he placed upon her pillow to make her sleep as though she were dead. Therefore, the fact that Ambrosio uses the same tool he would have used to execute his rape of Antonia to murder her mother intimately connects the two actions, providing Ambrosio with a perverse sexual gratification upon Elvira's demise.

Once Elvira has ceased to struggle underneath Ambrosio, he takes a moment to gaze upon her corpse, blurring the line between eroticism and disgust. The narrator observes that "the monk took the pillow, and gazed upon her. Her face was covered with a frightful blackness: Her limbs moved no more; The blood chilled in her veins; Her heart had forgotten to beat, and her hands were stiff and frozen. Ambrosio beheld before him that once noble and majestic form, now

become a Corse, cold, senseless and disgusting” (235). Ambrosio’s gaze recalls the way he has looked upon the women he has sexually desired like the Madonna, Matilda, and Antonia. His view of Elvira is described with the same rhetorical structure as when Ambrosio observes Matilda playing the harp: both scenes read like blazons, although Elvira’s blazon is a gross perversion of the poetic form as Ambrosio views Elvira’s black face, motionless limbs, cold blood, and unbeating heart. Furthermore, the description of Elvira’s body is antithetical to the way Ambrosio has described the purity of the women he has previously been attracted to, often noting their white skin, coral lips, and soft bodies. Elvira has become an emblem for what happens to women after Ambrosio has extracted all that he can from them. If we recall Ellis’s theory that Elvira, through her classically sentimental education of Antonia, damned both Antonia and Ambrosio, her death becomes further proof of the dangers of an excess of sentiment. By sexualizing Ambrosio’s murder of Elvira, Lewis emphasizes Ambrosio’s need to subjugate his female conquests in order to find sexual pleasure. The moment is retroactively made more perverse when it is revealed that Elvira is Ambrosio’s mother.²¹ The oedipal nature of Ambrosio’s murder of Elvira and the sexual nature of the crime reinforces the idea that the damaged nature of Ambrosio’s personality—his vanity, his desire to dominate women, his inability to moderate himself or his sexual desires—is because he is irrevocably impaired by the lack of a female presence in his upbringing. Thus, the blame for Ambrosio’s demise shifts from being placed on him, critiquing a highly restrained masculinity in which withholding is the optimal morality, and instead attributes Ambrosio’s fall to the women who surround him. By

²¹ The revelation of a long-lost parent is a typical trope of the sentimental genre. Lewis’s perversion of it here emphasizes the far-fetched dangers of modeling society on sentimentalism and sentimental fiction, a mantle Jane Austen will take up in her novel *Northanger Abbey* (1818), a satire on Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic.

implicating Elvira's inability to mother Ambrosio as a leading factor in his downfall, the narrative shifts from the corruptible nature of false chivalry and piety to an investigation of the responsibilities of women as a controlling factor in a sympathetic, moral society. If it is Elvira's job to have raised Ambrosio to be able to regulate his desire (to become, we might say, a hero straight out of a Radcliffe novel), that places the weight of moral justice not on the patriarchal society and the offending man, but on the disenfranchised women within it. Ambrosio's murder of Elvira, highlights a fatal flaw in sentimentality: it falls to sentimental women, who have no physical or political power, to regulate the passions of the men who have all of the power.

In a plot reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet*,²² Ambrosio drugs Antonia to make it look as though she has died and sequesters her away to the crypt in the abbey so that he may rape her without anyone ever discovering his crime. Prior to Antonia's awakening the narrator remarks that Ambrosio "longed for the possession of her person; and even the gloom of the vault, the surrounding silence, and the resistance which he expected from her, seemed to give a fresh edge to his fierce and unbridled desires" (292). In this moment Ambrosio acknowledges that what truly gives way to his "unbridled desires" is resistance. Ambrosio, completing his corruption, recognizes that, in Antonia's resistance, and therefore his subsequent need to subjugate and harm her, he will achieve the highest sexual gratification. And when Antonia inevitably resists, Ambrosio gets to begin his coercion of her, employing the tool that first gained him female admiration: his oratory.

Ambrosio attempts to convince Antonia that by entering into a sexual relationship with him she will be participating in a loving relationship in which he will instruct her in the greater

²² Here we see a trope that we first witnessed in the preface to *Otranto* reappear: integrating Shakespeare with the Gothic.

pleasures of life. However, his speech is punctuated by the language of possession, control, and contradiction—which speaks to the real nature of the relationship Ambrosio desires (294). He no longer wants a consensual relationship, but rather one in which his partner is completely subjugated. Furthermore, while he articulates to Antonia that he desires her consent—he wants to instruct her in sexual pleasure and have her learn to enjoy the pleasures in his arms that he “must enjoy” in hers—Ambrosio, we will recall, actually craves her resistance (294). His attempts to win over her consent are simply another step in his game to satisfy his own sexual appetite. When he is finally able to make himself “master of [her] person” with the “rudeness of an unprincipled barbarian,” the language turns from possession back to consumption, as Antonia becomes his “prey” (295).²³ Ambrosio was taught how to treat Antonia by Matilda—first, when she introduces him to sex and manipulation, and then by encouraging him to be violent and to murder. If we recall Ellis’s and Wein’s arguments, Matilda is able to instill these corrupted values in to Ambrosio because he was left ignorant by his mother and the church.

The similarities between Matilda’s seduction of Ambrosio and his “seduction” of Antonia conclude when Ambrosio stabs Antonia in the chest with the very dagger Matilda used to threaten her own life earlier. In order to prevent Antonia’s escape and inevitable incrimination of Ambrosio, “he now enforced her silence by means the most horrible and inhuman. He still

²³ In his article “The Loss of Maiden head: Rape and the Revolutionary Novel,” Clayton Carlyle Tarr notes that in this scene Lewis aligns himself with authors of the Revolutionary novel through his “shocking representation of Ambrosio’s physical brutality resembles depictions of rape featured in 1790s revolutionary novels Whereas victims of rape in revolutionary novels are considered deformed, beastly, or inhuman, Lewis implies that they are as good as dead. Richardson’s *Clarissa* dies several volumes after Lovelace’s drug assisted assault, but Antonia is effectively dead both before the rape and immediately after” (562). Tarr concludes his essay by stating that at the end of the eighteenth century “the discourse surrounding rape had begun to consider the violence inflicted on the entirety of the victim’s subjectivity—mind, soul, and body” (547). By associating Lewis’s depiction of the violent reality of rape with its effects on the personhood of the victim, Tarr suggests a sympathetic reading of *The Monk*, where, even if Ambrosio is incapable of sympathy, the audience gains a sympathetic understanding of the reality of rape, and therefore sympathizes with Antonia.

grasped Matilda's dagger: Without allowing himself a moment's reflection, He raised it, and plunged it twice in the bosom of Antonia!" (301). The parallels between Matilda's threatened suicide and Ambrosio's murder of Antonia underline the fundamentally flawed relationship between sentimentality, sympathy, and the sublime. Antonia's demise is the ultimate perversion of the happy ending that sentimental heroines are meant to achieve, and she was deprived of it because of the manipulation of a woman masquerading as a sentimental heroine. Matilda is capable of transforming and translating her corruption of sentimentality on to Ambrosio who, instead of pretending to be sentimental, hungers instead for the destruction of those who are the epitome of sentimentality. Matilda is able to corrupt Ambrosio because he wrongfully believes that he understands her feelings, and Antonia ends up in Ambrosio's path because she incorrectly assumes that he is a respectable man. If sentimentality is understood in conjunction with Burke's and Smith's definitions of sympathy and the sublime, then it becomes clear that by undermining sentimentality in these relationships, Lewis is able to criticize a moral society that is built upon an imagined, and therefore flawed, understanding of other people's emotions and desires.

III

The Natural Sublime and the Moral Importance of Regulating Sentimentality in Ann Radcliffe's

The Italian

The Italian is Ann Radcliffe's response to *The Monk*, and her defense of her Gothic aesthetic and sentimentality. Radcliffe is often characterized as writing Romantic Gothic fiction, blending Burke's theories of the sublime with the emotional depth of the sentimental novel. The marriage of the two genres allows Radcliffe to explore the relationship between the internal and external worlds, and the psychological and emotional aspects of personhood. Spacks refers to

Radcliffe's plots as daughter plots, arguing that "they originate in a female consciousness . . . and establish internal principles of action by giving due weight to the psychology and morality traditionally associated with daughters as well as to the assumptions of sons" (*Desire and Truth*, 148). Radcliffe has given Ellena more emotional intelligence and psychological awareness than any character we have examined thus far. Ellena modulates her emotions through her surroundings, gaining strength and comfort from the natural world. After being ripped from her home following the murder of her aunt, Ellena is transported into a world in which she has no control over what happens to her or anyone else, which lands her in some perilous situations. In response to the chaos of her new reality, Ellena regulates her emotions, enacting control over the only thing she can: her internal world. As Ellena encounters new conflicts and environments, her internal landscape remains quasi-stoic even as the natural landscape around her careens into sublimity and Romanticism. Radcliffe contrasts Ellena's internal and outer worlds, teasing out the influence the two have on each other.

When Ellena is first dislodged from her life and carried to the abbey where she is to be imprisoned, the blackness of the carriage ride gives way to sublime scenes of nature, comforting Ellena with their imposing grandeur. The narrator remarks, "Ellena, after having been so long shut in darkness, and brooding over her own alarming circumstances, found temporary, though feeble, relief in once more looking upon the face of nature" (62). The transition from cramped darkness to expansive nature underscores Ellena's tendency to be influenced by the external landscape. Within the darkness of the carriage she is "brooding," but as she looks upon nature, she reflects to herself that "If I am condemned to misery, surely I could endure it with more fortitude in scenes like these, than amidst the tamer landscapes of nature!" (62-3). Ellena's ability to claim power from the chaos of the wilderness stands in stark contrast to the fact that

she is hyper-regulated by society. Ellena even states that “the objects seem to impart somewhat of their own force, their own sublimity to the soul:” she is not just taking strength from the natural landscapes around her, but that they “impart” sublimity (63). The sublimity of nature, Radcliffe suggests, can be internalized. Radcliffe rejects Lewis’s notion that the internalized sublime is destructive, and instead claims that to internalize the natural sublime is to claim strength and dignity. In all of Radcliffe’s works, E.J. Clery notes, “strong feelings can safely be indulged . . . because of their sublimation in aesthetic experience” (*Women’s Gothic* 61).

Similarly, Patricia Meyer Spacks argues that Radcliffe uses the sublime to influence how the structure of narrative plot can impact morality, saying, “the sublime of nature, less morally ambiguous than its human equivalent, extends its strength from the physical to the moral realm Moreover, Radcliffe’s plot suggests that the human sublime, for all its terrifying aspects, can help to strengthen those committed to softer virtues” (*Desire and Truth* 154-5). Spacks suggest that the sublimity of the natural world reaches in to the moral world, strengthening a character’s moral constitution, and yet Spacks also asserts that the human sublime can fortify those with “softer virtues.” While the marriage of the natural and “terrifying” human sublime allows Radcliffe’s characters to persevere, Ellena gains her moral fiber not from the human sublime which is subjugating her, but rather from the natural sublime which allows her to escape her dangerous reality.

In a world where her status as a friendless and title-less woman leaves her powerless to the chaotic societal and human decisions happening around her, Ellena regulates her internal environment—the one she has control over—and projects her anxieties onto the sublime scenery around her where the purity of nature, which bends to no one, diminishes the bleakness of her reality. As Ellena observes, “it is scarcely possible to yield to the pressure of misfortune while

we walk, as with the deity, amidst his most stupendous works!” (63). Ellena associates the natural world with God and with peacefulness—she cannot succumb to the “pressure of misfortune” in nature, implying a state of Zen or freedom in nature—which is quintessentially Romantic.

Ellena’s association of nature with God is strengthened once she is imprisoned in the convent and discovers a turret off of her bedroom that affords her views of the surrounding mountains. Gazing out of the window of the turret Ellena contemplates the insignificance of man in the face of nature:

Here, gazing upon the stupendous imagery around her, looking, as it were, beyond the awful veil which obscures the features of the Deity, and conceals Him from the eyes of his creatures, dwelling as with a present God in the midst of his sublime works; with a mind thus elevated, how insignificant would appear to her the transactions, and the sufferings of this world! (90-1)

Superlatives like stupendous and sublime characterize the natural world as grandiose and imposing, something close to God that man cannot tarnish or impact. Interestingly, one of the human items that Ellena observes as obscuring the Deity is the “awful veil,” which one could interpret as a nun’s veil, implying that Ellena believes that one is closer to God when in “the midst of his sublime works,” rather than in a convent. The implication of Ellena’s observations about how the veil can conceal God from the wearer underscores her disdain for the Abbess and her belief that the choices and acts of people, which have dictated her life, are insignificant when compared to the vast, terrifying sublimity of the unregulated natural world. Ellena continues her reflection on the divine sublimity of the natural world outside of her religious prison, remarking how feeble men are in the face of nature: “How poor the boasted power of man, when the fall of

a single cliff from these mountains would with ease destroy thousands of his race assembled on the plains below!” (91).²⁴ Ellena’s fantasy about how nature might destroy “thousands” of people below is a projection of her own wishes for power and control.²⁵ Ellena, the perfectly regulated sentimental heroine, would not harm another person and does not have the capacity for violence, however; her fantasy that God has the power to control the deaths of those who have wronged her through acts of nature allow her the catharsis of retribution without the consequences.

In a text that is clearly interacting with both the *Reflections* and the *Enquiry*, Ellena exists in extremely rigid situations that align with a Burke’s nostalgic understanding of chivalry and modesty, however Radcliffe allows her to express individuality and independence through her interactions with the natural sublime:

How would it avail them, that they were accoutered for battle, armed with all the instruments of destruction that human invention ever fashioned? Thus man, the giant who now held her in captivity, would shrink to the diminutiveness of a fairy; and she would experience, that his utmost force was unable to enchain her soul or compel her to fear him, while he was destitute of virtue. (90-1)

Ellena’s perspective that nature can crush men despite all of the “instruments of destruction that human invention ever fashioned” is more than a comment on the uselessness of battle, but also a remark about the gender roles that men have created and enforced. Ellena implies that the structures which have literally and figuratively imprisoned her have no meaning other than those

²⁴ This description of sublime destruction echoes the final moments of Ambrosio in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*, when he is tossed off the side of a mountain and left to die on the plains below. Radcliffe’s implication that nature has the ability to destroy those that flaunt a society rooted in regulated sentimentality reinforces the conversation between the two authors on the role of the sublime—as either a destructive or strengthening force.

²⁵ Donna Heiland asserts that in this moment “Ellena’s vision of sublimity as union with the divine contrasts with her vision of the sublimity cause by confrontation and destruction,” however, I think the two—the divine and natural destruction—are intertwined (65). For Ellena, the sublimity of the divine can control the natural sublime.

which other humans have given to them. By insisting that in the face of the sublime, men, or “the giant” who holds her captive, would “shrink to the diminutiveness of a fairy,” Ellena undermines the masculinity of her captors but also emphasizes the powerlessness of men more generally. Those that are giants become nothing more than diminutive fairies in the face of the destructive force of the natural rather than man made world. Finally, Radcliffe outlines her moral understanding when Ellena comments that while men remain “destitute of virtue” they will not be able to “enchain her soul or compel her to fear him.” The claim that a lack of virtue undermines authority and power coincides with Burke’s notions of politics as a system of the chivalrous and the gentry. In her abduction and imprisonment, Ellena recognizes that she is no longer in a social structure that values virtue, honesty, and chivalry and therefore claims that so long as she retains those forces, she will not succumb to those around her, they will not be able to “enchain her soul.” Ellena, confronted with solitude and an antagonistic society, finds solace in the sublime. As Burke notes, “society . . . without any particular heightenings, gives us no positive pleasure in the enjoyment; but absolute and entire *solitude* . . . is as great a positive pain as can almost be conceived. Therefore in the balance between the pleasure of general *society*, and the pain of absolute solitude, *pain* is the predominant idea . . . temporary solitude on the other hand, is itself agreeable” (*Enquiry* 43). Ellena is fluctuating between the lost pleasures of society—her aunt and Vivaldi—and the pleasure of being alone in the face of the abbey and a society without any “particular heightenings” and in fact quite a few societal detractors.

During her time in the abbey, Ellena is subject to a number of vicious interactions with the Abbess, who accuses her of social climbing and disrespect. In Ellena’s interactions with the Abbess, Radcliffe underscores the growing class divide in society: who belongs where, who enforces those lines, and can an individual’s character circumvent class distinctions? “It is

unnecessary,' said Ellena. With an air of dignified tranquility, 'that I should withdraw for the purposes of considering and deciding. My resolution is already taken, and I reject each of the offered alternatives. I will neither condemn myself to a cloister or to the degradation, with which I am threatened on the other hand'" (84). Because Ellena is able to reject the Marchesa's options with "dignified tranquility," she is elevated above the Abbess, who attempts to impose upon Ellena with fervor and intimidations. The Abbess's speech is punctuated by exclamation points and qualifiers such as "stern" and "austere" (83-4). The contrast between the Abbess's forcefully controlled fury and Ellena's resolute dignity and modesty emphasizes the injustice of the Abbess's control over Ellena. Radcliffe characterizes Ellena as the embodiment of nobility and so the abbess—who is described as lacking justice, benevolence, and respect—clearly becomes the antithesis of nobility despite the fact that she claims to be Ellena's "superior" and to be executing the "generosity" and "goodness" of the Marchesa (84). In a text that prizes sentimentality as the highest moral philosophy, to insinuate that the aristocratic system lacks true sympathy undermines the moral justice of nobility, and therefore breaks from Burke's argument in *Reflections* that only by preserving the aristocracy—the guardians of chivalry—will society remain civil. Instead, Radcliffe uses Ellena, and her hidden nobility to imply that what protects chivalry and sentimentality is not a corrupt notion of superiority, but rather an innate understanding of one's self worth and a tendency towards benevolence.²⁶

²⁶ The "hidden noble" device is not new to Radcliffe, we will recall having seen it in *Otranto* and *Baron* with Theodore and Edmund respectively. The infusion of innate goodness with humble upbringings throughout the Gothic seems to suggest that while a hero's eventual nobility secures the gentry's control of society, those raised in nobility tend to lack sentimentality and chivalry necessary for just leadership. Therefore, a humble upbringing seems to blend the stratified classes and create a firmer social regime built on sympathy for other's situation, and therefore compassionate and just rule.

After Ellena's encounter with the Abbess, she returns to her cell where she engages in what to Radcliffe's world is the height of morality: reflection. Ellena "sat down pensively, and reviewed her conduct" with the Abbess and determined that she "approved of the frankness, with which she had asserted her rights, and of the firmness, with which she had reproved a woman, who had dared to demand respect from the very victim of her cruelty and oppression" (85). Ellena's ability to reflect on her conduct and assess it critically is a noticeable difference between her and Lewis's Ambrosio. Lewis and Radcliffe engage in a conversation about the role of moral sentiment within the Gothic genre and Radcliffe uses Ellena's ability to rationalize her sentimental behavior as a claim that, while sentiment and sympathy allow for civilized conduct and discourse, unregulated sentiment—as seen in *The Italian* as the Abbess, Schedoni,²⁷ and in Lewis's Ambrosio—is counterproductive and dangerous. As Ellena continues her assessment of her behavior, she determines that her ability to control her passions further enhances her dignity in the moment: "she was the more satisfied with herself, because she had never, for an instant, forgotten her own dignity so far, as to degenerate into the vehemence of passions, or to falter with the weakness of fear" (85). Passion and fear are two emotions closely associated with sensibility and the sublime, and so Ellena's ability to control those emotions, to refrain from degeneration, speaks to Radcliffe's perspective that moral sensibility is not a free pass to

²⁷ Susan Wolstenholme claims that Schedoni is a feminized villain in a similar way to how Ambrosio has been feminized, writing, "The position of the criminal (or the woman) is the position assigned to Schedoni: disruptive but marginalize, controlled by the presence that sees and interprets, representative of a story to be unfolded, though mute" (29). While Ambrosio's femininity is derived from his ignorance and exaggerated feeling, Schedoni's, Wolstenholme asserts, derives from his marginalization. While the femininity of Ellena, and later of Agnes, appears to be their greatest asset, the femininity applied to Ambrosio and Schedoni ultimately dooms them.

succumb to our most notorious and lewd passions, but rather a tool for sympathizing with others and viewing the world from a generous and dignified perspective.²⁸

Sympathy functions as a moralizing quality not just in the heroes of *The Italian* but also for its villains. Radcliffe adapts Ambrosio, creating Schedoni—the vain and wicked monk who has convinced the Marchesa that Ellena must be murdered—who is repeatedly affected by sympathy and pity. When he encounters Ellena on the beach, prior to his attempt to murder her in her sleep, he is touched by her helplessness: “As he gazed upon her helpless and faded form,” Radcliffe writes, “he became agitated. He quitted it, and traversed the beach in short turns, and with hasty steps; came back again, and bent over it—his heart seemed sensible to some touch of pity” (223). Schedoni’s ability to pity Ellena’s vulnerability, to sympathize with her and debate his own decision to kill her, complicates his status as a classic Gothic villain. By allowing Schedoni to struggle over his conflicting emotions—duty and greed against sympathy and pity—Radcliffe turns Schedoni into a quasi-sympathetic character.

As Schedoni continues to struggle with his emotions, he interacts with the natural landscape around him, echoing Ellena’s use of the natural world and yet he advances it from simple observation and projection from the internal world and brings it to the physical world. “At one moment,” Radcliffe continues, “[Schedoni] stepped towards the sea, and taking water in the hollows of his hands, threw it upon his face; at another, seeming to regret that he had done so, he would stamp with sudden fury upon the shore, and walk abruptly to a distance. The conflict between his design and his conscience was strong, or, perhaps, it was only between his passions” (223). Radcliffe alludes to a baptism here, suggesting that the awakening of Schedoni’s

²⁸ As we saw in *The Old English Baron*, Edmund’s ability to control his emotions, sympathize, and behave in a dignified manor enhanced his claim to Castle Lovel and indicated his noble lineage despite his humble upbringing.

sympathy has ushered in a rebirth of moral goodness. However, the effect is counteracted when Schedoni—regretting what he has done—furiously stamps around the shore, retreating from his potential reform back toward his immoral self. By tracking the oscillation of Schedoni’s moral compass, Radcliffe complicates the notion of villainy—and by extension—the notion of righteousness. The audience understands throughout the novel that the sentimental heroes Ellena and Vivaldi are the pinnacle of perfection; rational and empathetic, they navigate their conflicts with dignity. However, by allowing Schedoni to exist in a gray area, Radcliffe expands sentimentality as not just a moralizing force but also as an avenue towards redemption. As Kate Ferguson Ellis notes in her book *The Contested Castle*, “though Schedoni has all the crimes, the flaws, and the birth order that characterize a Radcliffian villain, he too is travelling toward a truth he does not fully know, and it is this journey, rather than those of the virtuous Ellena and Vivaldi, that constitutes for the reader the center of consciousness in the novel” (125). If we consider Schedoni as Radcliffe’s attempt to rewrite Ambrosio, then his ability to modulate his emotions through the sublime rather than simply being controlled by sublime passions becomes a strong defense of the sympathetic sublime. By suggesting that moral corruption can be redeemed through sentiment, Radcliffe rejects Lewis’s suggestion that the sympathetic sublime is destructive, claiming instead that it can lead to reform.

Radcliffe argues that rational sentimentality is the optimal mode of behavior, but she does not simply use Ellena’s character to affirm the reliability of correctly practiced sentimentality; she provides legal credibility to the use of sentiment and sympathy when the Inquisition praises Vivaldi for his chivalry, reaffirming the moral validity of sentiment. Radcliffe takes up Reeve’s mantle when she allows Vivaldi’s sentimentality to influence the law. As we will recall from the first chapter, Reeve combines chivalry with the legal system to reclaim Castle Lovel for

Edmund. Radcliffe employs a similar move here, when she allows Vivaldi's sentimentality to influence the legal system of the inquisition, suggesting that sentimentality, when regulated individually and socially, is an acceptable foundation for society. Within the inquisition, Vivaldi emphatically tells the elusive Monk of Paluzzi, who is attempting to coax him into implicating Schedoni for murder, that he cannot "summon any man before a tribunal, where innocence is no protection from ignominy, and where suspicion alone may inflict death" (322). Vivaldi refuses to provide false testimony to the inquisition despite the fact that the monk of Paluzzi has threatened him to do so. Vivaldi, in an expression of sympathy, cannot participate in subjecting someone to the same poor treatment he has faced. Vivaldi's honor and self-sacrifice to defend his stated rival encompasses the ideal sentimental hero, and the inquisition validates this decision. When Vivaldi is asked to reveal information about Schedoni and the mysterious monk, he does not oblige, using the same claim that he cannot determine if the information is authentic. In response to his testimony, the interrogators begrudgingly commend his honor saying, "The account you have given of your informer, . . . is so extraordinary, that it would not deserve credit, but that you have discovered the utmost reluctance to reveal the charges he gave you, from which, it appears, that on your part, at least, the summons is not malicious" (330). By noting Vivaldi's "reluctance to reveal the charges," and his discomfort with potentially providing false and incriminating information, the council can assess the information as not having a malicious intent. This speaks to the ability of Vivaldi's valor to extricate him from suboptimal situations. In praising, and even rewarding, Vivaldi for his honorable testimony, Radcliffe attaches a legal justice reminiscent of Reeve's treatment of the law to the existing moral justice of sentimentality.

IV

A Sentimental Compromise: Lewis's Agnes as a Modified Radcliffian Heroine

Vivaldi's and Ellena's journey as successful sentimental heroes allows Radcliffe to prove that rational and legal sentimentality can be successful. However, while Lewis does point out the flaws of moral sentimentality, he also suggests there is validity to Radcliffe's argument in the success of his secondary characters. Lewis may condemn Ambrosio to a classically sublime death (being dropped off a mountain by a disciple of Satan), but the only characters to survive the novel are those that maintain a regulated sentimentality, like Agnes, Raymond, Virginia, and Lorenzo. In the previous sections, I argued that Antonia functioned as a failed Radcliffian heroine. Her lack of knowledge and her excess of sentimentality and sympathy leave her vulnerable to Ambrosio. However, Agnes, another sentimental heroine, is allowed to live and even thrive. In the concluding pages of *The Monk*, Lewis has Agnes narrate her own story, taking control of the narrative and highlighting her perceptions and feelings throughout her ordeal. Agnes recounts her horrific tale with regulated sentimentality—emotional and psychological intelligence that parallels Ellena's—which seems to support the perspective that sympathy can be a viable moral code when executed correctly.

The switch to first-person narration provides Agnes's story with an intimacy lacking throughout Ambrosio's exploits and allows the audience to perceive the control she has over her story. Agnes's description of her dungeon and her inability to release her child's corpse as it decays in her arms creates an aesthetic terror that recalls Radcliffe's style rather than the horrific

actions that Lewis has trafficked in previously.²⁹ Agnes recalls her first impression upon seeing her cell: “My blood ran cold, as I gazed upon this melancholy abode. The cold vapours hovering in the air, the walls green with damp, the bed of straw so forlorn and comfortless, the chain destined to bind me forever to my prison . . . struck my heart with terrors almost too exquisite for nature to bear” (314). Agnes’s surroundings—the damp walls, cold vapors, forlorn and comfortless bed—influence her despondency and inform the recognition of her terror. Agnes’s emotions are affected by her surroundings, creating an interesting dichotomy between her and Ellena in their ability to take in the environmental sublime. When Ellena is able to project her feelings of powerlessness onto nature—envisioning a terrible natural power that destroys men—she gains comfort. However, Agnes’s melancholy and dejection are enhanced by the claustrophobic and bleak dungeon. As Agnes continues her lamentable tale, she makes a plea for the importance of sympathy, saying “in solitude and misery, abandoned by all, unassisted by Art, uncomforted by Friendship, with pangs which if witnessed would have touched the hardest heart, was I delivered of my wretched burthen” (316). Agnes’s longing for friendship and her belief that her plight would have “touched the hardest heart,” along with her assertion and praise for the friends she did have while imprisoned, indicates that sympathy can be a powerful moral force.

In fact, Agnes is rewarded for persevering through her emotionally and physically traumatic experience. She was “captive,” “opprest with chains,” “hidden from light,” “excluded from society,” and “neglected,”—Ellena experienced an almost identical list of trials—but now

²⁹ Donna Hieland argues that Lewis makes Agnes a victim of the dehumanizing sublime used as “an aesthetically acceptable way of killing off women” (34). Hieland writes, “lying there with her dead child on her breast, Agnes is a grotesque parody of a *pietà*, an image of death in life expressive of the fundamental ambiguity that characterizes the Burkean sublime” (40). I assert that the sublime here, while grotesque, is an aesthetic sublimation of Agnes’s emotional trauma.

Agnes is “restored to life and liberty, enjoying all the comforts of affluence and ease, surrounded by those who are most loved . . . and on the point of becoming [Raymond’s] Bride who has long been wedded to my heart” (320). Agnes succeeds, finally achieving “happiness . . . so exquisite, so perfect” that her brain can “scarcely . . . sustain the weight” (320). Agnes’s story evolves from sublime depression to sublime happiness. While her strong emotions echo Ambrosio’s uncontrollable emotions, she is spared his fate by her unwavering sympathy.

Agnes both invites sympathy when recounting her imprisonment, which she relates with deep personal emotion, and understands how to sympathize with others. Despite the cruelty she faces at the hands of the prioress, she is able to forgive her and recognize how she suffered in her final moments, saying “Unfeeling woman! But let me check my resentment: She has expiated her errors by her sad and unexpected death. Peace be with her; and may her crimes be forgiven in heaven, as I forgive her my sufferings on earth!” (318).³⁰ Her ability to sympathize with the Prioress and her “sad and unexpected death” is a learned quality; her imprisonment has taught her how to forgive. At the beginning of the novel, she is unable to forgive Ambrosio for imprisoning her, and in cursing his treatment of her—which in many ways is less severe than the Prioress’s—prophesizes his fall:

You are my Murderer, and on you fall the curse of my death and my unborn Infant’s!
 Insolent in your yet-unshaken virtue, you disdained the prayers of a Penitent; But God
 will show mercy, though you show none . . . when shuddering you look back upon your

³⁰ Agnes’s forgiveness could also be read as evidence for her regulated sentimentalism. Despite the torment that the Prioress caused Agnes, she has the rationale to understand that maintaining anger is pointless, and that the Prioress has now been punished. Arguably, the only reasonable thing for Agnes to do is forgive the woman.

crimes, and solicit with terror the mercy of your God, Oh! In that fearful moment think upon me! Think upon your Cruelty! Think upon Agnes, and despair of pardon! (39)

Agnes condemns Ambrosio for his lack of sympathy, declaring that God will be merciful even though Ambrosio “show[s] none.” Agnes’s perspective shifts from a selfish understanding of punishment and sympathy—Ambrosio “could have restored [her] to happiness and virtue, but would not”—to sympathizing for others despite what they may have done to her, as we saw with her forgiveness of the prioress (39). The development of Agnes’s sympathy contrasts with Ambrosio, who is unable to learn to regulate his passions or sympathize with his victims.

Agnes survives this novel, not because she is virtuous (after all, she had a child out of wedlock) but because, by her punishment, she learns to regulate her sentiment and sympathize with those who have hurt her. Agnes has emotional intelligence from the beginning of the novel and therefore she can perceive that Ambrosio is a phony, but she has allowed her emotions to overtake her propriety in regards to her affair with Raymond. While Antonia lacks any perception of Ambrosio’s true character and blindly trusts him, inviting him into her home as a counselor and friend, Agnes sees through his superficial virtue and suggests in her condemnation of his behavior that one must encounter vice in order to understand true virtue. When Agnes asks Ambrosio, “where is the merit of your boasted virtue? What temptations have you vanquished? Coward! You have fled from it, not opposed seduction,” she implies that despite the fact that she has lost her virtue—her virginity—she is actually more virtuous than Ambrosio who has not had to overcome temptation (39). Agnes’s words ring true, Ambrosio is unable to cope with his passions, and his “proud, stern, and cruel” nature is revealed in his treatment of Antonia (39).

Antonia represents the other side of Agnes’s claim that experience is necessary for virtue: she is classically virtuous, but she lacks the emotional or practical intelligence and experience

that saves Agnes; instead, she ignorantly values her virtue. As we will recall, Antonia has been kept ignorant of sex and love, and at one point even expresses that she does not know the difference between a man and a woman (15). Antonia's unblemished virtue is what draws Ambrosio to her, and ultimately leads to her rape and murder. Agnes's success makes the argument that virtue and sentimentality must be earned. There must be an intelligence associated with one's sentimental decisions. Even though Agnes is punished for having sex before marriage, she ultimately prevails, and marries the man she loves. She is allowed to succeed in this way because she truly understands emotion: what it means to be with someone, to love someone and not just lust after them. Agnes understands every aspect of love, marriage, and sex. Whereas Antonia and Ambrosio are rather simply drawn, Agnes has a complex understanding of sentiment. Lewis uses Agnes's success to suggest that moral sentiment and sympathy only works when people have a transparent understanding of the complexities of themselves and others. Not only is the ability to regulate emotions necessary, as Radcliffe suggests, but one must also know the reasons behind feelings and that must factor into their regulation.

Agnes's regulated sentimentality and her ability to sympathize associate her with the Radcliffian archetype, yet her knowledge about sex and love separate her from the virtue of Ellena. The surviving women of these novels do not succeed unscathed: they are subjugated, tortured, threatened with death, and on the whole rejected by society. But they are eventually rewarded for maintaining a cohesive understanding of, and control over, their feelings and fostering sympathy for others. The conclusion of these novels is complex; while sentimentality seems to win out in the end, it is brutalized and challenged throughout each text. Those who misuse or misunderstand their role in a sentimental world ultimately perish. In the post-

revolutionary Gothic world, where femininity and womanhood leaves one open to personal terror and horrific violence, the only means of protection is a formidable emotional constitution.

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