Rewriting Enlightenment: *The Mystery of Udolpho*

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I. Introduction:

Roy Porter in his succinct analysis of the Enlightenment proffers an intriguing question. Did the Enlightenment successfully challenge the established authorities or has the Enlightenment become the established authority itself (6)?[1] His answer is that the Enlightenment attempts and achieves both. Dedicated to "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage," any Enlightenment thinker demonstrates the autonomous and courageous use of his own reason.[2] Hence he dares to question religious doctrines, subjecting them to the tribunal of rational examination, like David Hume. He confronts social, political injustices and hypothesizes possible means of amelioration, like Voltaire and Rousseau. He exposes the inefficiency within current economic institutions, with better insights derived from his frequent intercourses with merchants, like Adam Smith. The Enlightenment literati's ideas stem from their discontent with the existing cultural systems and are perpetuated by intellectual debate and circulation.

If the Enlightenment registers one's emergence from previous darkness, no exponents of Enlightenment confine the scope of such awakening to himself. They reckon that rational thinking will yield little fruit unless it becomes a social activity (Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment* 20). Motivated by a strong sense of social responsibility, Enlightenment philosophers utilize their intelligence to understand human nature and the natural environment, with an ultimate view to effecting positive changes in both. That's why the Enlightenment assumes its clearest articulation in those places where the contrast between "a backward world and a modern one, was chronologically more abrupt, and geographically closer" (Venturi 133). That's why every Enlightenment campaign targets and promises a certain degree of improvement (Broadie, "Introduction" 18). The Jewish philosopher Moses

[1] In broaching this question, Porter does not pinpoint any span of time. For the sake of specific discussion, from now on I use the Enlightenment to refer to Gary Kelley's more precise delineation of this social phenomenon as "the intellectual and cultural criticism… especially in England, Scotland and France of the mid and late eighteenth century" (69).

[2] See Lewis White Beck ed., *Kant Selections* (New York: Scribner, 1988), 462.

Mendelssohn recognizes such promise as a continual "progress'" of "education for man" in the use of reason (qtd. in Outram 1). What may elude his judgment is that at the heart of this progress lies a homogenizing and normative power.

By maintaining "there was only one Enlightenment," Peter Gay delineates the Enlightenment as a unified entity, as the works of a group whose members interact with each other intimately (3). In addition, given their general conviction in the "power of human reason to change society," to liberate intellectuals from "restraints of customs and arbitrary authority," the Enlightenment ideas appear considerably homogeneous (Outram 3). Unity and homogeneity *per se* is innocuous in that they offer a common ground for intellectual interchange and discussion. At the same time, however, they are achieved through repressing those who are marginalized by the Enlightenment discourses. Michel Foucault in his *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1965) identifies various social misfits—the sick, the mad and the criminals—as those unfortunate and unenlightened few, who are peripheralized and demonized in the name of reason. In effect, women belong to such socially disadvantaged group in the long eighteenth century. The Enlightenment, in other words, while granting more freedom to those happy participants, confines those unwilling outsiders.

To analyze women's role in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment discourses is to expose the limited scope of such discourses. Although most of the Enlightenment *philosophes* study general science of man and target at collective improvement, both the study and the target bespeak male dominance. Women at that time were considered physiologically unfit, mentally unprepared and socially unacceptable for intellectual activities. As a consequence, in all social clubs and gatherings where the Scottish Enlightenment flourished, no female presence was observed. In addition, the public sphere and periodicals so integral to the formation and dissemination of Enlightenment ideas appeared "intrinsically masculinist, resting on gendered distinctions between a (male) public realm and a (female) private one" (Melton 13). In effect, learned women even received hostility from their male counterparts, a hostility, according to Jane Rendall, that united a number of Edinburgh reviewers (qtd. in O'Brien, "Introduction" 6).

This masculine hostility to female intellectual practices testifies to women's share in the Enlightenment scheme. Women's approaches, however, appear very different from men's. Whereas male intelligentsia traveled, socialized and

disseminated knowledge from their homes, Elizabeth Montagu, Catherine Talbot, Elizabeth Carter and other Bluestocking ladies modeled on the French salon hostess and held intellectual exchanges indoors. Their homes resembled a nucleus toward which information gravitates centripetally. One of the central concerns of male literati was how to improve social institutions, their intellectual energy being structured centrifugally. Women, if they ever claimed the title of intellectuals, tended to focus on 'self cultivation' through discussing theology and morality (O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment* 56-67). These differences further illustrate women's incompatibility with and exclusion from conventional masculine version of the Enlightenment. It is this gender-differentiating feature of Enlightenment that arouses criticism from women intellectuals like Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft.

In her feminist manifesto *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Wollstonecraft asserts that women possess equal reasoning capacity as men do, their potential to rational thinking only being obfuscated by false education. She desires to incorporate women into the otherwise male-oriented Enlightenment campaign, believing that this is the only way to ensure "the progress of human virtue and improvement in knowledge."[3] If the eighteenth-century Enlightenment discourse, with its rigorous search for external improvement and its gender-specific nature, demonstrates its centrifugal nature and an exclusive power respectively, Mary Wollstonecraft feels anxious about the hegemony inherent in the former and attempts to rectify the prejudices in the latter. All her life and works reflect such anxiety and such an ambitious attempt. However, her criticisms are voices *without* the whole Enlightenment discourses, clamouring for admittance.

Her contemporary, Ann Radcliffe, though sharing similar discontent, opts for different strategies. Radcliffe counteracts and re-writes the Enlightenment discourses from *within*. She qualifies the masculine traits in the Enlightenment discourses not by subverting the whole monolith but by highlighting the feminine features already embedded in or juxtaposed with such discourses. Moreover, she experiments with the distinctive means by which women may struggle against and break through male hegemony, which may be reckoned as their unique ways to their own Enlightenment.

Nancy K. Miller has rightly pointed out that women of all times continually

[3] See Janet Todd ed., *Mary Wollstonecraft: Political Writings* (London: William Pickering, 1993), 113.

hold complicated dialogues with the dominant languages of her cultures (29). Ann Radcliffe's gothic paradigm, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), typifies her claims in that it simultaneously encapsulates and counteracts the male-oriented Enlightenment discourses in ways subtle yet pivotal. It is worthwhile to examine in detail those methods by focusing on how Radcliffe dissolves the centrifugal nature and exclusive power inherent in the masculine version of the Enlightenment.

II. Re-writing the aesthetics:

The eighteenth-century aesthetics provides a microcosm through which we can best observe the centrifugality and exclusiveness of the Enlightenment. The discussion of taste occupies the foreground in contemporary aesthetic discourses. David Hume insists on demarcating an all-inclusive "Standard of Taste." He describes such standard as "a rule, by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled," as "a decision … confirming one sentiment, and condemning another" (12). Edmund Burke concurs with Hume's definition. His influential aesthetic manifesto *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) also argues for some "fixed principles" and "invariable" laws governing humans' taste (12). Their observations indicate two prevalent Enlightenment characteristics. One is the conviction that a universal principle of taste is necessary to prevent any confusion in sensation and communication that will produce social turmoil. The other is the tendency to "subsume all local differences and particulars within universal operation of reason" (Cottom 1-2). Both claim the potential to penetrate and regulate the general psyches.

Whereas the advocated standards of taste seem to stretch its tentacles to influence the general populace, taste in the eighteenth century essentially remained a discourse of aristocracy. Cottom points out such a class-conscious undercurrent. According to him, to consolidate their privileged status, the upper-class aristocrats mystify taste, making it the primary distinction between them and their lower-class counterparts. Lower-class people, due to their allegedly coarser mind and menial occupations, can only aspire to but never attain any aesthetic perceptions. They cannot look upon the world with pampered detachment as aristocrats do, nor can they afford ample leisure time to cultivate their taste (Cottom 3-13). The much-flaunted universal standards of taste actually belie its esoteric and exclusive nature for commoners.

Aside from participating in formulating standards of taste, Burke establishes the sublime and the beautiful as two canonical concepts of aesthetics that inform the long eighteenth-century. Burkean idea of the sublime, with its systematic revision of Longinus's literary sublime and its innovative physiological approach, proves to be a quintessential Enlightenment product of reason.[4] Naturally, it embodies the inherent forces of the Enlightenment. The scenes of Burkean sublime demand an extending, therefore centrifugal, view. Its vastness and obscurity deny our focus on a specific object, as it threatens to dissolve the viewing subject (Mellor 95). On the other hand, the sentiment of self-preservation the sublime calls for connotes its potential of exclusion. Burke's insistence that sublimity requires a certain distance to produce the desirable elevation of mind underscores the estrangement between the perceiver and the perceived nature.

If the sublime suggests alienation and exclusion, such connotation assumes its clearest form when juxtaposed with the beautiful. Burke insists that the two aesthetic concepts should remain a strict dichotomy, although many of his contemporaries, William Gilpin among others, argue they can complement each other (Kostelnick 32-33). This insistence on mutual exclusiveness, Boulton remarks, is the "principal weakness" in Burkes' aesthetic theory. It is because by reserving to sublimity "all that is awe-inspiring and powerful in its impact," Burke "reduces beauty to a weak and rather sentimentalized conception" (xxiv). Mary Poovey also observes the marginalized status of the beautiful due to the dominant power of the sublime, a power that excludes any possible rival. According to her, Burkean beauty appears "inferior in dignity" compared to sublimity, since it incurs "feminine weakness and vulnerability" (Poovey 315 n. 19).

As "the landscape novelist of all time," Radcliffe utilizes the language of aesthetics to criticize the aesthetics itself (Monk 217). She intersperses picturesque tableaux throughout *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Her descriptions of landscape accurately conform to Burkean characteristics of sublimity and beauty. Nevertheless, an interesting and innovative pattern is noticeable. Consistently, every single sublime scene is followed by a landscape of pastoral beauty.

The first full-winged sight of sublimity comes when St. Aubert and Emily

[4] For a detailed account of Burke's employment of reason to achieve innovation, see James T. Boulton, "Editor's Introduction," in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), xv-xx.

begin their journey to Languedoc. Forgoing the direct roads at the feet of Pyrenees, they decide to cross the mountain. Flanked by "stupendous walls of rock, grey and barren," the rugged roads lead them to view the "lofty cliffs" (28). [5] After reaching "the summit of one of those cliffs," whose solitude inspires "sublime reflections," they encounter an "edge of a precipice" whose magnificence makes "the eye dizzy to look down" (28, 30). These sublime landscapes are gradually replaced by scenes of pastoral beauty. As the journey goes on, the green ivy and the ilex appear, culminating in a vast expanse of "vivid verdure" where 'herds of cattle were grazing" and peals of "sheep-bell [were] heard" (30). Radcliffe enacts the identical pattern of shifting her aesthetic register again and again no matter who the travelers are and which mountain they happen to cross.

When Valancourt joins St Auber's journey, they ascend to the "higher region of the air, where immense glaciers exhibited their frozen horrors." There even a slight "vibration of a sound" can cause destruction to the travelers by bringing about an avalanche (42). This life-threatening sublimity gives way to lively beauty in due course. When the travelers' eyes are "fatigued with the extension of" sublime power, "features of beauty" appear (43). We see "the verdure of woods and pastures" by a rivulet. We see "the humble cottage," the "flowery nooks" and a shepherd's family (43, 50). The more sublime scenery the travelers observe, the more detailed depictions of pastoral beauty follow. Reminiscent of "Hannibal's passage over the Alps," Emily and the Montonis's journey through the same ridge allows them to witness the landscapes of equal grandeur: "perilous bridges," the "cataract foaming beneath" and "the dark summits of the pine forests" (164-165). Emily's terror is amply repaid when she soon finds herself amid "the tranquil beauty" of "Arcadian figures" and "Arcadian landscape" (164, 167). Similarly, Emily's hasty ascent of Apennines undergoes the trajectory from "tremendous crags" to the idyllic "green delight" (225-226).

Radcliffe recycles this shift from the awe-inspiring sublime to the comforting beauty when it comes to meteorological phenomena and human relationship. When the castle of Udolpho is under siege, Emily is escorted to Tuscany. During this journey Radcliffe takes pains to describe a typically sublime storm when "the rising wind" contends with the roaring thunder (410). Eventually, the tempest subsides.

[5] I take the text from Bonamy Dobree ed., *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be indicated parenthetically with pagination.

Emily rejoices to "survey the sleeping beauty of the vale," particularly a thousand fragrant flowers "called forth by the late rain" (411). The treacherous guards, Ugo and Bertrand, whose obscure intention and ferocious character symbolize Burkean sublime, are also succeeded by a peasant's daughter, Maddelina, whose kindness soothes Emily's mind. The second sublime "storm over the Mediterranean" produces identical outcome (484). After suffering the fright of swelling billows, Emily is safely ensconced in the peaceful countryside of Chateau-le-Blanc. At that time, Emily has just escaped the oppression of "sublime" Montoni and embraced the genuine friendship of Count De Villefort's daughter, Blanche.[6]

Why does Radcliffe repeatedly replace the sublime with the beautiful? Why does she frame the sublime terror of the castle Udolpho on both sides with two "sentimental idyll[s]" (Hoeveler 86)? Conservative critics either bypass those questions altogether or produce conservative answers, claiming that Radcliffe simply follows the obligatory aesthetic formula and ideology at her time.[7] Their answers ignore the possible subversion hidden in her aesthetic rendition.

In her discussion of Radcliffe's aesthetics, Jayne Lewis wisely draws our attention to the fact that Radcliffe's presentation of landscapes has a "linguistic nature" and that it is she who decides the sequence of description (379, 383). Her decision is of central importance concerning her attitude toward Burkean dichotomy. By directing readers' attention unmistakably from the sublime to the beautiful, Radcliffe qualifies the centrifugal impression of the former and invites centripetal appreciation of the latter. She seems to suggest that the beautiful, always associated with the feminine, stands out in juxtaposition with the masculine sublime. In particular, she weaves certain pastoral elements into her rendition of the beautiful. Those elements, characterized either by its lively or life-giving quality, underscore the attraction and the importance of maternal as well as of feminine beauty. In other words, Radcliffe recognizes the life-threatening violence sublimity spells, which she

[6] Most critics agree that Montoni epitomizes and embodies the Burkean sublime because of his mysterious power, his obscure personality and his name. See Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Desire and Truth: Functions of Plot in Eighteenth-Century English Novels* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 156; Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 119; Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London: Routledge, 1995), 119.

[7] See Rhoda L. Flaxman, "Radcliffe's Dual Modes of Vision," in *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670-1815*, ed. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (London: Ohio University Press, 1986), 125 and Miranda J. Burgess, *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order, 1740-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 167-169.

repeatedly dilutes with the generative harmony of idyllically beautiful landscapes.

The recurrent pastoral beauty also reveals Radcliffe's critique on the universalizing assumption of taste as well as on its inherent class prejudice. Contrary to the Enlightenment philosophers' belief of an "empirically based," "universal standard of taste," Radcliffe experiments with the possibility that individual sense experiences may differ according to various circumstances and social positions (Bohls 222). With this acknowledged difference in mind, Radcliffe distinguishes peasants' taste from those of aristocrats. She consistently elevates the peasants' taste, believing that their musical talents are in perfect unison with the beautiful landscape in which they dwell, a unison from which aristocrats are debarred owing to their indulgence in material luxury. Hence, surrounded by two tasteless aristocrats, Montoni and his wife, Emily wishes "to become a peasant of Piedmont" and laments that a young peasant's natural "taste" will be contaminated by corrupted ones as he enters voluptuous Venice (167-169).

Moreover, Radcliffe challenges the notion of the exclusive nature of aesthetic appreciation. She has Emily remark that "the scenes of nature… are open for the enjoyment of the poor, as well as of the rich" (60). Valancourt also articulates his author's opinion as he believes that "the faculty of deriving consolation" from viewing natural beauty is "the peculiar blessing of the innocent," which neither penury nor misfortune can withhold from us (503). Clearly, Radcliffe highlights the inclusive nature of aesthetic experience. All those who possess a responsive and innocent heart are entitled to the enjoyment of beauty. It is a matter of mind, not of class.

Terry Eagleton reckons that "creative repression and amnesia" best characterize the ideology of aesthetics (329). The beautiful and the non-aristocratic taste appear to be the marginalized and forgotten voices in the Enlightenment languages of aesthetics. Radcliffe rewrites this language not by jettisoning its ideas but simply by orchestrating a return of the repressed.

III. Rewriting sensibility:

One important facet of the Enlightenment discourse lies in its determination to improve human manners. This determination naturally places a premium on feeling since external behaviors are inextricably linked with internal conditions. The medical study of nerves first provided the vocabulary of feelings with a solid

scientific basis. It gradually influenced social mechanism as people began to regard refined feelings and (consequent) civilized manners as signs of enlightened citizens. This trend was fueled and popularized by the growing significance of the middle class and consumerism (Barker-Benfield xx-xxv). In addition, moral philosophers' emphasis on sympathy as a social glue and lubricant further elevated the status of affection. Literary production, especially novels, also participated in the prevalent culture of sensibility, not least by formulating the icon of "Man of Feeling."[8] This prototype of sentimentalism ushered in another significant aspect of feelings — gender.

Familiar with its theoretical framework and social appropriation, Radcliffe makes her novels deeply implicated with the cult of sensibility. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* reveals that its author singles out the gender line as she explores this complicated issue. Claudia Johnson has rightly commented that the patriarchal society tends to prescribe legitimate sensibility as an exclusive prerogative of men (97). Radcliffe does recognize contemporary male fascination with sentimentalism. Nevertheless, she exposes how male sensibility and insensibility alike produce conflict and constraint rather than the expected enlightenment and improvement.

Montoni and his henchmen have hearts "too void of feeling to oppose" the instigation of interest (240). Therefore they pillage and persecute the innocent without remorse. In contrast, St. Aubert precisely stands for a man of feeling who weeps for the afflicted and is responsive to the landscape. His familiarity with sensibility, however, prompts him to impose upon his daughter an unsentimental education. He endeavors to "strengthen [Emily's] mind" and to "inure her to habits of self-command," both of them conflicting with her innate delicate affection and "ready benevolence" (5). St. Aubert's discipline was so strict that "he was often obliged to witness, with seeming indifference, the tears and struggles which his caution occasioned [his daughter]" (5). This attempt to thwart the natural development of a woman's sensibility implies the sickening contention between desire and restraint in the 1790s, a contention William Blake addresses forcibly and Radcliffe only subtly (Fawcett 483).

[8] For the socially cohesive potential of feelings, see Christopher Lawrence, "The Nervous System and Society in the Scottish Enlightenment," in *Natural Order: Historical Studies of Scientific Culture*, ed. Barry Barnes and Steven Shapin (London: Sage Publications, 1979), 19-39. For a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between novels and the rhetoric of sensibility, see Stephen Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities: Romantic Excess and the Genealogy of the Novel 1680-1810* (New York: AMS Press, INC., 2007).

This contention bears directly on a conceived picture of female sensibility as jointly conditioned by the patriarchal order and the Enlightenment discourses. While the former fears the unbridled female sexuality that threatens to subvert legitimate genealogy, the latter belittles unreasonable fancy that is too frequently associated with femininity. Radcliffe's critique of female sensibility in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* apparently follows those lines. Firstly, she focuses on female sensibility as fanciful imagination. It is Emily's rampant imagination that makes her wrongly regard a wax corpse as the dead body of Signora Laurentini and that allows her to suspect her father's fidelity to her mother. These fancies only occasion the heroine unnecessary unease and distress. Secondly, Radcliffe moves on to discuss the degrading potential of female sexuality, another form of sensibility. All the "gothic anti-heroines" in this novel are led astray by passion and receive severe punishment (Hoeveler 89). Madam Montoni's vanity makes her unwisely marry Montoni, who later abuses, imprisons and indirectly causes her death. "[U]nder the dangerous circumstances attendant on youth and beauty," Signora Laurentini seduces the late Marquis de Villeroi, persuades the Marquis to murder his wife out of jealousy and suffers the pang of compunction throughout her life (655). Either in the form of unguarded imagination or of transgressive desire, Enlightenment preference for rational thinking and patriarchal anxiety for legitimate inheritance conspire to condemn female sensibility as the cause of corruption. Although acknowledging the potential weakness of sensibility, Radcliffe reckons that the contemporary pictures of female sensibility stem from male prejudices and thus fail to comprehend the complete potentials of women's feeling. Nelson C. Smith argues that Radcliffe proffers a return to 'reason' as the cure for the fallen, female sensibility (577). I disagree with him because his opinion realigns Radcliffe to Enlightenment and patriarchal ideology from which Radcliffe deliberately distances herself.

In effect, Radcliffe reminds her readers that female sensibility has another, often-ignored and more positive form, sympathy. Throughout the novel, sympathy empowers all women, good or bad, aristocrats or servants, in the time of horror and hardships. When Madam Montoni and Emily demand explanation of Montoni's mysterious behaviors, Montoni threatens the aunt with imprisonment and administers a severe blow on the niece's forehead. Her sympathy aroused by the sight of her aunt's grief and convulsion, Emily hastens to her assistance and forgets her own bleeding wound (305-306). In return, Madam Montoni refuses to sign away

her estate despite Montoni's menace because she sympathizes with her niece's desolate situation and wishes to keep the estate for Emily's sake (308). Another case in point lies in Annette, Madam Montoni's servant girl. When Emily collapses under a succession of suffering and weeps profusely, Annette stands by her side and offers timely comfort. Her sympathetic attention makes her dispel "all her former fears" of the supernatural occurrences otherwise haunting her (351). In the novel, female sympathy is not merely pity for the suffering but amounts to a sense of moral duty.

Another two aggrieved women also rely on similar sympathy motivated by moral obligation to reconcile themselves with their misfortunes. The murderess Signora Laurentini willingly forgoes her sumptuous life and retreats forever to a convent apparently because of her guilt. But her guilt actually results from her spontaneous sympathy for the innocent Marchioness whom she poisons. In other words, she feels obliged to do penance for destroying a life characterized by an unrequited love, the feeling of which she perfectly understands since she was also deserted by her lover. Because of this moral sympathy Signora Laurentini redeems her iniquity in the course of time and wins the genuine compassion from all the nuns around her. In addition, deep in the Marchioness's heart lies her sympathy for her husband whose marriage is doomed to be a failure at the very beginning because she cannot love him. This moral sympathy sustains the Marchioness despite her husband's sully and fretful temper. It remains so strong that it enables the Marchioness to comfort her husband's suffering at her deathbed, forgiving all his indifference at her illness (527). All in all, while paternal versions of female sensibility occasion either fall or degeneration, Radcliffe demonstrates that women's sympathy, their selfless feeling and senses of obligation for others, can engender redemption and empowerment for women.

Such empowerment of women through sympathy in fact revises the theme of "virtue in distress" so characteristic of the culture of sensibility. Growing out of the widening gap between "moral idealism and … practical action," the theme can refer to any deracinated individual who suffers the oppression of an unfeeling world. For sentimental novels in particular, it evokes a woman's virtue distressed by an unscrupulous man (Baker-Benfield xviii, Brissenden 77). Radcliffe concedes that a woman's virtue can be accentuated by a man's persecution. But in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* she particularizes that a woman's virtue springs primarily from her sense of vicarious distress occasioned by her spontaneous sympathy with others' sufferings.

In her revision of "virtue in distress," Radcliffe endows women with more autonomy. Women themselves can determine their virtue without recourse to male mediation.

Claudia Johnson argues that women in the 1790s navigated painstakingly between Scylla of unfeeling virility and Charybdis of male sentimentalism (95-116). Their plight partly results from a patriarchal Enlightenment discourse that attempts to improve male sensibility and demonize female one. Radcliffe concurs that male feelings need to be civilized but she refutes the complete depreciation of women's feelings. She reckons that women's selfless affection for one another can provide solace, solidarity and strength which the male-oriented Enlightenment denies them.

IV. Rewriting epistemological quest:

The Enlightenment represents human epistemological ambition and triumph. How does one obtain knowledge and how to secure knowledge are of central importance. Interestingly, these enquiries may sound neutral today but they have gender-specific nature when the Enlightenment flourished. Few Enlightenment philosophers led a sedentary life. They traveled a lot to expand the scope of their knowledge and to communicate their knowledge to others. The educational potential of travel was so widely recognized that a grand tour to Europe became a fashionable trend for most gentlemen intent on improving their knowledge.[9] Not surprisingly, women were excluded from this privilege at that time. The majority of English women were house-bound and, if they travel at all, they were either chaperoned or accompanied by a male guide. The acquisition of knowledge is equally important as its dissemination and systemization. The Enlightenment thinkers employed written documents, the manipulation of words, to achieve this end. Once again, with an exception of novel, writing and publishing were generally considered the business of men who were responsible for educating women.

Radcliffe understands such Enlightenment assumptions and incorporates them in her fiction. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* encompasses numerous travels, all of which are initiated by a man for his own benefit. And all of them are linked with an unresolved epistemological mystery. St. Aubert journeys to Epourville to improve his declining health. He weeps bitterly over a miniature of a woman the night before his departure, whose identity puzzles Emily when she observes the scene. Pecuniary

[9] For a definition of travel and its relation to education, see Georges Van den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor: From Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

interest motivates Montoni to go from France to Venice and to the secluded castle Udolpho. Neither Emily nor Madam Montoni knows the exact reason of their travel. Count De Villefort travel to Baron St. Foix's chateau not solely to facilitate his daughter's marriage but to restore his tranquility after Ludovico mysteriously disappear (579). Although those travels, those "circulation of men" propel the plot and conduce to male well-beings, they do nothing to help women to obtain knowledge (Wein 121). Women join those journeys either as inevitable companions or for other practical objectives. What's worse, during the travels, different forms of words, be it laws, documents and signatures, are employed to disinherit and tyrannize over women (Hoeveler 88).

Whereas physical travel, conditioned by the paternalistic ideology, fails to develop female subjectivity and knowledge, metaphorical travel can. Story-telling enables a woman to journey into another woman's physical and psychic realms, from which she derives valuable information. Radcliffe repeatedly has her heroine travel extensively to listen to another woman telling stories, authentic or not, of still another woman. The loquacious servant Annette relates to Emily the tale about the late Marchioness of the castle Udolpho. Her version is that this Marchioness was disappointed by an unrequited love, was beleaguered by Montoni's courting and disappeared mysteriously (237-240). Annette's story puzzles as much as it reveals. Although it makes Emily wrongly suspect that Montoni murders the late Marchioness, it "confirm[s]" Valancourt's warning that Montoni is in serious financial difficulties (240). Emily learns from the story the wisdom of patient meekness when circumstances require. Hence, the next morning immediately after the story is told, she tries to persuade her aunt, exasperated by Montoni's threat, to be "more reconciled to her situation" (243).

Travelling to the Chateau-le-Blanc, Emily has a chance of listening to more stories. The old housekeeper Dorothee tells Emily the history of her mistress, the late Marchioness De Villefort who marries at her father's behest, fares miserably and dies extraordinarily (524-528). Emily learns from this tragedy the importance of marrying wisely in accordance with one's true feelings. This lesson emboldens her to refuse Du Pont's apparent affection toward her and the Count's earnest pleading for him (564-565). Moreover, the two versions of the story of Signora Laurentini, dwelt upon by sister Frances (577) and the narrator (655-664) respectively, teaches Emily "the possibilities and limits of female independence" (Heiland 72).

Admittedly, all the stories Emily absorbs revolve around suffering womanhood, which makes every woman in the novel resemble one another. This mutual mirroring, in addition to producing the uncanny effect Terry Castle assumes, demonstrates the real plight and prejudices women suffered in Radcliffe's time (*The Female Thermometer* 120-139). It is through story-telling, Radcliffe believes, that women can be awakened to this uncomfortable fact, can be "enlightened" enough to seek possible resolution. Moreover, it is important to observe that Radcliffe has her heroine travel to listen to stories since it conforms to her usual strategy of tweaking the established discourses without overthrowing it. Videlicet, she does not object to travel, to male epistemological quest. She only opens up possibilities for women, possibilities that are embedded in this male privilege. Physical travels and metaphorical travels reinforce each other.

Throughout the novel, Radcliffe repudiates the epistemological potential of words in favor of nonverbal modes of communication. She explores different forms of words and demonstrates how they impede women's happiness and acquisition of knowledge. On his deathbed, St. Aubert recollects that several documents concerning the violent murder of his sister will poison Emily's peace of mind if she discovers them. He therefore solemnly enjoins Emily to destroy those papers unread. Nevertheless, Emily involuntarily reads several words before consigning the documents to fire. A "sentence of dreadful import" she has taken in along with her father's inexplicable injunction only throws Emily into confusion concerning her real identity (103). St Aubert's will, another form of words, prevents Emily from seeking an answer at La Vallee. He has named Madam Cheron, Emily's another aunt, as Emily's legal guardian, who takes her away from home soon after she burns the papers. Words can also bring misunderstandings. The servant Ludovico kindly conveys messages between Emily and an unknown prisoner. Their words wrongly convince Emily that the prisoner is her lover Valancourt. And Valancourt's reputation is seriously damaged as his peccadilloes, through circulation of words, are exaggerated into unpardonable crimes. This exaggeration precludes Emily's knowledge of Valancourt's moral depth and delays their union. On a stylistic level, Radcliffe also implies the limitation of words in relation to knowledge. Her novel rumbles on for hundreds of pages. During most of the time both her heroine and her readers are kept in the dark.

The title of this fiction, however, suggests that it is a story of clearing

"mysteries" and gaining knowledge in due course. Radcliffe associates women's acquisition of knowledge with non-verbal objects.[10] When hastily quitting La Vallee, Emily brings with her a miniature of a woman over which she witnesses her father weep bitterly. Emily believes that this portrait is the only means to uncover her father's history from which she is temporarily debarred. In the castle Udolpho, Emily is determined to examine the veiled picture, considering it the only possible way to access the knowledge about the mysterious castle (248). In the Chateau-le-Blanc, Emily's request to see a portrait of the late Marchioness De Villeroi also manifests her belief that this picture will confirm or refute Dorethee's hint that she has something to do with the Villeroi family (533).

In addition to pictures, music functions as a source of knowledge waiting to be excavated. It also engenders a sense of certainty and security that the acquisition of knowledge naturally produces. The first mysterious music comes when St. Aubert, severely ill, resides in a peasant La Voisin's house. The music has remained for eighteen years an object of enquiry but no one has resolved this Gordian knot. 'It [i]s like the music of angels' and inspires St. Aubert's faith in a happy reunion with his beloved after death (67, 71).[11] During her imprisonment in the castle Udolpho, another unidentified music captures Emily's attention. It triggers Emily's desire to find who the musician is. As a familiar song from her native country, it also "impart[s] the comfort" Emily so anxiously needs (438).

Unlike words, pictures seldom perplex. Unlike words, "music does not lie" (Hoeveler 87). In her representation of human relationships to knowledge, Radcliffe deliberately prioritizes earlier modes of knowledge acquisition and dissemination that predates the establishment of written documents. It is because, whereas written documents are relatively straightforward, portraits and music open up more spaces for interpretation. If Emily's road to knowledge consists in training her "to see and to interpret… visual [acoustic] and psychological reality," the pictures and music provide adequate exercises (Flaxman 131). To interpret on one's own, Radcliffe

[10] I am aware that Emily is a well-read character. But it is non-verbal forms of communication that trigger her curiosity and prompt her to pursue new knowledge. Radcliffe also suggests in the very beginning that Emily's reading habit is taught, her access to words given, by her father. It is not necessarily out of her own volition. In other words, non-written modes of communicated are privileged not simply for polemical reasons. For Radcliffe, they are peculiarly tailored for feminine epistemology.

[11] For a discussion about the theme of sentimental reunion after death and its dominance in the eighteenth-century western culture, see Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 129-132.

believes, is the first step for women to access knowledge and to recognize their desires (Spacks 157). In an era when women obtain knowledge primarily through the mediation of men, when women repress their desire for social decorum, this message sounds particularly timely and timeless.

V. Conclusion:

The Gothic fiction is traditionally a genre of subversion that concerns the fundamental aspects of human nature. Dramatizing the possible threat and the eventual bliss a home promises, it is preoccupied with the success and failure of domestic relationship. Yet it is precisely in this preoccupation with home that lies its salient subversive potential. More often than not, Gothic fictions throw basic family ties into chaos and challenge the value of filial piety.[12] Gothic fictions are usually denounced for its decadent taste because they blatantly expose sex, desire, and other taboos forbidden in the public discussion of a polite culture. These fantastic tales have prefigured the functions of modern psychoanalysis of addressing "subversive themes" without the superego's sanction (Laughlin 482, Todorov 160-161). With its emphasis on the supernatural phenomena and on the inexplicable human fantasy, the Gothic fiction even threatens to overthrow the faculty of reason the Enlightenment had endeavored to promulgate.

Is *The Mysteries of Udolpho* a gothic novel then? Yes and no (Castle, "Introduction" vii-xii). Although retaining some essential Gothic paraphernalia, such as an ancient castle and a perfidious villain, the novel insists on a certain distance from such a genre. Extensive descriptions of picturesque landscapes repeatedly interrupt the narrative, creating an illusion of a travelogue. Contrary to the gothic assumption, the primary villain Montoni protects Emily twice from being abducted by the disappointed suitor Count Morano. And as if deriding the suspense the gothic tradition upholds, Emily is mildly ridiculed for her susceptibility to fear and superstition, a ridicule reminiscent of Jane Austen's Catherine Morland (635).

Why does Radcliffe make her novel seem "perversely anti-Gothic in mode" (Castle, "Introduction" x)? It has something to do with her uniqueness as a Gothic novelist, particularly with her unique response to the Enlightenment that

[12] For the relation between Gothic fiction and domestic disruption, see Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (London: Harvard University Press, 1972), 36 and Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), ix.

distinguishes her from other male gothic novelists. By excavating the irrational and depraving tendencies of human nature that resist being exorcised, the works of Horace Walpole and of Matthew Gregory Lewis reveal their discontentment and discredit the whole Enlightenment ideology of reason and improvement. Radcliffe's subversion assumes a much anodyne appearance. She reveres the Enlightenment as a desirable human progress and does not attempt a radical break with such a tradition. Only, she envisions a particular female Enlightenment that may evolve from the dominant male-oriented Enlightenment discourses. The roads to such a female Enlightenment, as I hope I have already demonstrated, consists in uncovering and accentuating those feminine features or possibilities embedded in the otherwise male-centered Enlightenment discourses.

Despite different analytical methods they adopt, most critics concur that Radcliffe consolidates "the plot of the female gothic" (Miles 101). Their arguments generally derive from the fact that Radcliffe scrutinizes various roles of a woman and a woman's navigation through patriarchal demands (Moers 58). My argument will move to a similar conclusion yet with different analytical approach. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is a female gothic fiction not simply because it embodies women's life and predicament within a given society but because it subtly appropriates and rewrites the male Enlightenment discourses for the benefits of all the female readers. Does the Enlightenment make women fettered or free? Radcliffe would have answered that a female Enlightenment acknowledging feminine beauty, appreciating female sympathy and promoting women's competence for interpretation will make women free to invent their own rhetoric, selfhood and independence.

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