

# 國立交通大學

外國語文學系外國文學與語言學碩士班

## 碩 士 論 文

逃亡／避之迷魅：安·瑞克麗芙

《烏多夫堡秘辛》之互文閱讀

The Enchantment of Escape: An Intertextual Reading  
Of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

研 究 生：顏佑蓉

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中 華 民 國 一 百 零 一 年 七 月

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摘 要

本論文旨在探討安·瑞克麗芙最著名的作品《烏多夫堡秘辛》中逃亡／避之主題。逃亡／避並不僅僅侷限於小說中女主角逃離匪徒的逃離過程，更影射了一種看似柔順屈服、實則游離閃避的心理狀態，策略性地回應了十八世紀社會所期望的女性美德。當發生在哥德式小說中時，這些逃亡的片段反映了女性憂懼、躲避、隱匿自身的集體經驗；從而逃離，又顯示了反抗父權暴虐統治的勇氣。然而當發生在現實讀者閱讀哥德式小說的經驗中時，閱讀小說的逃避行為卻被加以譴責，被認為是任意拋棄家事的本分、具有規避責任的傾向、甚至是代表了低俗的文學品味。本論文試圖分析對於哥德式小說中逃亡／避的兩種對立看法，探討究竟逃亡／避是消極的處事行為、抑或是潛有隱性的反叛力量。除了《烏多夫堡秘辛》之外，本論文也將納入《僧侶》、《義大利人》、《諾桑覺寺》等三部小說中逃亡片段的互文閱讀，藉此探討同時代作者與文本間的辯證與互動。筆者將聚焦於三個層面——敘事模式的懸疑手法、文本腳色的逃亡案例、以及讀者的逃避傾向——藉此探析作者／文本／讀者三方面錯綜複雜的關係，從而帶出十八世紀女性在家庭與社會中扮演的角色地位之辯；這些議題直到二十一世紀的今天，依然和我們息息相關。

關鍵詞：烏多夫堡秘辛、安·瑞克麗芙、互文閱讀、逃亡、逃避、哥德式小說、十八世紀女性

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to explore the theme of “escape” in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. By exploring this theme in Radcliffe's most famous Gothic novel, I argue that the definition of escape does not limit to the heroine's flight from the Gothic villain's tyrant reign; it also suggests an ostensibly submissive and elusive mentality that strategically responds to the expected feminine virtues in the eighteenth century. When taking place in the Gothic novels, these episodes of escape reflect the collective female experiences of apprehension, avoidance and concealment, and demonstrate the courage to resist patriarchal tyranny by running away; when escape takes place at the level of reading, however, the novel readers' escapism is often criticized for their wanton abandonment of domestic duties, the tendency to evade responsibilities, or ill literary taste for women's education. This thesis aims to deal with these two opposite responses towards escape in the Gothic novel, and to decide whether the act of escape encourages passive femininity, or it may contain a latent power of subversion. In addition to *Udolpho*, this thesis would also provide an intertextual reading between *The Monk*, *The Italian* and *Northanger Abbey* by exploring their respective episodes of escape and the dialectic interaction between contemporary authors and texts. I would focus on the three levels— the narrative's suspense, the character's flight, and the reader's escapism— to bring out the debate over women's role in the eighteen-century's family and society, issues that continue to concern us in the twenty-first century today.

Key Words: *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Ann Radcliffe, intertextual reading, escape, escapade, Gothic novels, eighteen-century women,

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## Introduction

This thesis aims to explore the theme of “escape” in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. By exploring this theme in Radcliffe’s most famous Gothic novel, I argue that the definition of escape does not limit to the heroine’s flight from the Gothic villain’s tyrant reign; it also suggests an ostensibly submissive and elusive mentality that strategically responds to the expected feminine virtues in the eighteenth century. When taking place in the Gothic novels, these episodes of escape reflect the collective female experiences of apprehension, avoidance and concealment, and demonstrate the courage to resist patriarchal tyranny by running away; when escape takes place at the level of reading, however, the novel readers’ escapism is often criticized for their wanton abandonment of domestic duties, the tendency to evade responsibilities, or ill literary taste for women’s education. In this thesis, I intend to deal with these two opposite responses towards escape in the Gothic novel, and to decide whether the act of escape encourages passive femininity, or it may contain a latent power of subversion. I would also correlate and compare this theme in three different Gothic novels— *The Monk*, *The Italian* and *Northanger Abbey*— to provide an intertextual reading of above novels. To begin with, I will first foreground some aspects of Radcliffe’s life and the historical context she was situated in, to make possible the further investigation into the readers’ responses of her works.

## I. Historical Background

I choose *Udolpho* to be my target text because it is Radcliffe’s most influential

and most representative work. Published in 1794 in four volumes, it was Radcliffe's fourth novel, and became tremendous popular in the late eighteenth century. Despite the fact that Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) was generally recognized as the first Gothic romance, critics usually acknowledge Radcliffe to be the one who set foundation to this genre.<sup>1</sup> Her works were widely translated into European languages, and brought her great wealth and fame.

Arguably one of the most influential and imitated Gothic authoresses in the eighteenth century, however, Radcliffe is recognized merely as a minor writer in today's literary arena. One of the reasons is due to the scarcity of biographical information,<sup>2</sup> as Radcliffe kept no diary, avoided social intercourse, and left so little personal details that Christina Rossetti gave up in despair the attempt of recreating a memoir for her in 1883.<sup>3</sup> Some said Radcliffe was extremely shy, and other regarded her as domestic and partial to live in seclusion. In 1826, a reviewer (whose name was now unfortunately lost) even boldly asserted that "she was ashamed, (yes, *ashamed*) of her own talent; and was ready to sink in the earth at the bare suspicion of any one taking her for an author; her chief ambition being to be thought a lady!" (*Literary*

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Sir Walter Scott distinguished Radcliffe to be the "founder of a class, or school" (Facer).

<sup>2</sup> Due to the meager material, only a few researchers have undertaken the project of writing a biography for Ann Radcliffe. The earliest version is the T. N. Talfourd memoir (1826), which is very much presented from and biased by the viewpoint of Radcliffe's husband William Radcliffe. In this thesis, I mainly take reference from recent works including Deborah D. Rogers' *Ann Radcliffe: A Bio-bibliography* (1994), an annotated bibliography of criticisms and literary responses, Robert Miles' critical literary study *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (1995), and Rictor Norton's cultural historical study *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (1999). Norton has written a detailed review of past projects on the information collection and analysis of this authoress's life. Please read his preface for a full exposition.

<sup>3</sup> In letters to her brother, Christina Rossetti had doubted the feasibility of writing a memoir on Radcliffe's behalf, and stated "...I can only say that I have done my best to collect Radcliffe material and have failed. Some one else, I dare say, will gladly attempt the memoir, but I despair and withdraw" (Bell 92).



*Gazette* 346). Radcliffe's "shame" of being an author, though only conjectured, may have to do with the social expectations at that time, that women were discouraged from entering this trade. "Exert your proper skill," an article in *Aberdeen Magazine* made an appeal to the fair sex in 1798, stating that they should "resume the needle, and lay down the quill" (338). While writing in general was already an "improper" skill for a lady, writing Gothic novels did not fit in with a decent woman's occupation even more so.

Radcliffe's endeavour to keep her ladylikeness is reflected in her tendency to explain away the supernatural by physical consequences. This tendency has put her on the side of reactionary and conservative rationalism, and has also affected the later reception of her works. Modern critics see Radcliffe as losing the critical edge that Romanticism particularly embodies. Her description is coy, avoiding straightforward sexual connotations; therefore compared with the more rebellious, even transgressive branch of the "male Gothic,"<sup>4</sup> her novels are regarded as feminine, timid and old-fashion. She shrinks away from inflicting plain violence and real injury; as a result, while her heroines are almost always on the run, they are scared but barely scratched. This tendency renders Radcliffe's works "less" Gothic, and suggests that her sense of "shame" to be an author is symptomatic of the social tensions during the rise of novels and the emerging trend of female writers.

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<sup>4</sup> Horace Walpole, William Beckford, Matthew Lewis to Charles Maturin and James Hogg belong to this male tradition. Some critics regard them as more "gothic" and representative of the "true Gothic strain" (Mulvey-Robert 78), for they are more forward in using violent or supernatural elements. In this case, Lewis' controversial work *The Monk* is reputed to be "the most Gothic of eighteenth-century Gothic romances" (Howells 62).

To better understand this scruple, we must trace back to the twilight of the Gothic genre. An advertisement appeared in London newspaper *Public Ledger*, January 1762, reporting a murdered lady who afterward returned as an apparition. The case known as the “Cock Lane ghost” set a supernatural atmosphere that preluded Walpole’s literary experiment two years later. When Walpole first published *Otranto*, he was rather tentative in the project. This first edition purported to be a translation, based on an Italian manuscript, by a gentlemen named William Marshal. Only after the assurance that his work was well received did Walpole acknowledge his authorship. In the second and subsequent editions he wrote, “[the] favourable manner in which this little piece has been received by the public, calls upon the author to explain the grounds on which he composed it” (7). This anxiety of literary acceptance was even more conspicuous in the case of women writers. Even in a time when the improved literacy had expanded the female readerships and opened up an opportunity for female authors, women who attempted the enterprise of writing were still held with contempt. The novel, the genre in which most authoresses engaged, was also regarded as inferior to the more “masculine” genres like poetry.

Nevertheless, Gothic novels found a way into the eighteenth-century literary field. Edmund Burke’s famous *Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) had provided a theoretical ground for the rise of the supernatural. In 1773, Anna and John Aikin also tried to offer a justification for the readers’ vigorous appetite in their essay “On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror.” Along with the contemporary rise of consumerism, the turn of the century marked a

debate over canonical and popular literature. “[The] works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels” (*Lyrical Ballads* 294), William Wordsworth lamented in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. As if to prove his words, this collection of poetry, published in 1798 with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, only earned them a rueful thirty guineas for remuneration (Boehm 454). An illuminating anecdote about Radcliffe, on the other hand, indicates that she received five hundred pounds for her *Udolpho*.<sup>5</sup> The commercial success of novels over traditional genres was reflected not only in authors’ financial gain, but also in the amount of publication. The last decade of the eighteenth century had witnessed an increasing demand for sensational romances, ghost stories or horror fictions. In the 1790s, the growing number of female readership had begun to make a gendered difference in the development of this popular genre (Clery 95), and answering to the market demand, new methods of publishing and distribution were also promoted. Circulating library, for example, was one of the cheapest and easiest accesses, by means of which women were able to read their favorable books in the safe seclusion of their households. Publishers like William Lane’s Minerva Press were also launched gallantly into the enterprise of literary production for women readers.

These rapid changes in the publishing industry, however, were depreciated as reproducing literary rubbish or escapist fictions, which only added to the notoriety of Gothic novels. In the 1790s, this uneasiness about women’s “unauthorized writing,” and the disapproval of women’s “unlicensed reading” came up to the current. For

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<sup>5</sup> Until decimalization in 1971, a guinea was twenty-one shillings and a pound was twenty shillings.

some critics, the new phenomenon of women writing popular literature was indeed outrageous.<sup>6</sup> And since “women readers become writers; monsters...breed monsters” (Botting and Townshend 3), in some literary satires or treatises on the conduct and education of women, female readers were also represented in the same manner in which Edmund Burke represented the riotous mob<sup>7</sup>— as deviant, irrational monsters who devoured literary rubbish without discrimination. The anxiety about literary propriety was thereby associated with the political apprehension toward the revolutionary force in France, both carrying subversive power against existing values at the age of enlightenment, and threatening the progress of civilization.

If we read Radcliffe’s regulation of the supernatural and romanced moralization in the historical context, it will be clear that she was extremely self-conscious about the criticism that a writer of Gothic romance must be entitled to. She negotiated and reconciled the aesthetical and political oppositions at the turn of the century. By adapting the feminine and bourgeois virtues such as decorum or propriety, Radcliffe tried to lift her profession above criticism by creating a genteel and lady-like image for herself. Her effort was not made in vain. Critics contemporary with her, in their condemnation of all the other women novelists and their improper undertaking, often granted exemption for Ann Radcliffe, who was “a *poetess*”<sup>8</sup> instead of a *novelist*, and “the mighty magician...amid the paler shrines of Gothic superstition”(Matthias 56).

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Francis William Blagdon in 1806 pointed out with indignation that “a certain *Monkish* author, the most *indecent* playwright, and the *grossest* and *most immoral* novelists of the present day, are *women*!” (Norton, *Gothic Reading* 317-18).’

<sup>7</sup> See Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).

<sup>8</sup> Emphasis mine.

Modern critics, ironically, are not so uniformly complimentary.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of the change in critical fashion, Radcliffe's compromise exemplifies the predicament a female writer in the eighteenth century was subject to. It explains her attempt to escape from critical attention, and her endeavour to display a virtuous image of the domestic lady in front of the public eyes.

From Radcliffe's attempt to escape public attention and criticism, to the publishing and reading of these escapist fictions, I believe it is the Gothic text that connects these female experiences of apprehension, concealment and flight. Represented by Gothic heroines' nightly adventures, these experiences mark Gothic novels as a genre that defies injustice and oppression, and to read and to write these texts are to recall the mutual memories shared among Gothic authors and readers. Therefore, reading Gothic novels can be more than just an escapist attempt to throw away the present duties and responsibilities; it is also a challenge to the established assumptions of women's duties and responsibilities.

In this thesis, I aim to focus upon the theme of "escape" in Radcliffe's most popular novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. This intricate interaction between the author/text and the text/readers would be explored at three levels: the narrative's suspense, the character's flight, and the reader's escapism.

## II. Chapter Outline

In the first chapter, I will examine the setting of remoteness and the mechanisms

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<sup>9</sup> Unlike her earlier positive reception, however, Radcliffe's romances suffer a "critical exile from the canons of English literature" in today's literary field (Keane 18).

of suspense in *Udolpho* to expand the definition of “escape.” I aim to analyze the author’s arrangement of plot and narrative, and then the effect it creates to highlight the central research question of this thesis: How do these passages of escapes serve as a medium to bring out the collective female experiences shared between the author and the readers, and how will Radcliffe’s readers possibly respond to these episodes of escapes— does this experience of reading turn out to be escapist as well, or does it contain latent power of subversion?

I try to answer these questions in my second chapter by looking closely at the selected episodes not only from *Udolpho*, but also from other two Gothic novels. The texts I choose for this purpose of comparison are Matthew Gregory Lewis’ *The Monk: A Romance*, a work claimed to be inspired by *Udolpho*, and Radcliffe’s last Gothic novel, *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents*, which is in some way Radcliffe’s response to Matthew G. Lewis. I choose these texts in order to compare and analyze these heroines’ attempts at escape; whether being successful or failed, they all in turn mirror a debate on the changing status of women’s bodies, domestic order, and the publishing enterprise that took place in the eighteenth century.

In the third chapter, I intend to explore the theme of escape in the form of novel reading. Jane Austin’s Gothic parody *Northanger Abbey* would be included in the discussion to explore the “effects” of reading Radcliffe’s *Udolpho*, as exemplified by the response of the heroine Catherine. During the process of reading, the readers’ sentiments often parallel with the heroine’s as they take flight from the stifling real life. Escapist reading reflects the anxiety towards and discontent with the status quo

that gave much pain to women who were under strict social expectations at that time. In this regard, reading offered them a transient freedom from their confinement inside the house. Like the Gothic heroines' escapes from the castles, the Gothic reading also demonstrated itself as a submissive yet elusive strategy to escape from house chores and the humdrum daily routine. The recreation of reading thus created a borderland for readers to tiptoe around the regulations of time and space. After this temporary flight, they were able to gain a more flexible stance to negotiate with the present predicament.

To sum up, I would argue that the Gothic heroine's escape and the readers' escapist reading do not just stand for a passive acceptance of the present situation. Instead, it cracks confinements through the glide of imagination and creates a cushioning period to relieve the current distress. Therefore, reading became a tool to negotiate with the social expectations on what a woman should do and what a woman should read in their free time. This opened up a long debate on the disposal of the leisure time, the education of literary tastes, and the woman's condition in their confinement in the house—issues that continue to concern us in our modern time.

## Chapter I

### Breaks in the Narrative

Radcliffe's heroine is always in flight. In *The Romance of the Forest*, Adeline and Monsieur Pierre's family flee from the pursuit of creditors, Ellena in *The Italian* runs away from the convent only through hair-breadth escape, and in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily tries to elude discovery in her nightly explore of Castle Udolpho. Escape is not only a necessary device for a closure in a story; in Radcliffe's novel, it plays an important role in terms of the heroine's development and progress.

#### I. Transportation of the Plot

First of all, the course of escape helps to convert the characters from their original location to another setting of time and space. Radcliffe is renowned for her elaborate depictions of the exotic landscapes, especially the routes along and across the mountains of Alps and Pyrenees, and into the domain of Rome and Naples. Time and space in Radcliffe's novel are deliberately removed from her contemporary life, made remote and unfamiliar in terms of historical scale. The Gothic space is usually set in a Roman Catholic country, like France, Spain or Italy. With its uncanny proclivity to spawn superstition and the corruption of Inquisition, the selected sites are often the loci of torture, punishment, mystery, blasphemy and insanity. These sites are deliberate choices since they contain all kinds of atrocity connected with a remote otherness to give their English readers an aesthetic distance. This distance not only exists in space, but also in time; as Peter Knox-Shaw points out, "[the] state of



anarchy ascribed to society on the far side actually belongs [...] to an era far earlier than sixteenth century” (111-12). In other words, these spaces bring back a time of antiquity, an atmosphere that belongs to the dark, medieval age. With this distance in space and time, readers can vicariously experience violence without having to concern about their own safety.

Through detachment from contemporary space and time, the Gothic romance stands on the opposite side of the realistic novel.<sup>10</sup> It creates a fantastic world in which the readers are able to temporarily escape from the burden of their respective realities. The process of escape is also deeply related to Romanticism’s discourse of imagination. As Coleridge describes, imagination works like hypnotism, enchanting readers into a “willing suspension of disbelief” (*Biographia Literaria* 4). Through the employment of imagination, readers participate in the author’s creation of a literary space such as Castle Uolpho and derive pleasure from its exoticism. However, this temporary freedom from actuality may have its drawbacks. Critics point out the negative possibility of self-delusion in the fantasy of reading these “escapist fictions,” and warn the readers against this indulgence, which may hide the truth of “the *real* threats circling about [them]” (Russett 162). Readers here are compared to the fanciful Emily: engrossed with her superstitious imagination, she overlooks that the cruelty and conspiracy of Montoni are in fact far more dangerous than the apparitions.

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<sup>10</sup> Radcliffe’s novels can still sometimes offer a realistic reflection of her contemporary social context. Emily’s father St. Albert is recorded to collect rent from his tenants and entrust it to a M. Motteville in Paris for investment. While the former is quite feudal, the latter effectively presents a facet of the eighteenth-century. Kate Ferguson Ellis points out that “the respectability of Radcliffe’s Gothic has to do with the fact that ‘real contradictions’ of eighteenth-century life are so close to the ‘medieval’ surface of her novels” (100-01). Radcliffe’s tendency to explain away the supernatural also shows her distance from the totally unrealistic Gothic. I will discuss this further in chapter two.

## II. Breaks in Narrative

Another kind of escape happens in the process of narration. According to the definition in *Oxford English Dictionary*, the act of escape is not limited only to the heroine's flight into the ruins or forest. It also suggests "an act of breaking free from confinement or control," "an act of avoiding something dangerous or unpleasant" and also "a form of temporary distraction from reality or routine." In this light, *Udolpho* is no doubt a narrative punctuated by escapes and temporary breaks, and therefore becomes a highly disrupted narrative that is full of suspense. Numerous examples find the sensitive heroine, persecuted by the cruel and ruthless Gothic villain, becomes stupefied of all senses. Take the second volume's climax for instance. When Montoni, running out of patience by his wife's repeated defiance, finally decided to dispose of her by force, the latter

...shrieked, but was immediately carried from the room; while Emily sunk, senseless, on a couch, by which she had endeavoured to support herself. When she recovered, she was alone, and recollected only, that Madame Montoni had been there, together with some unconnected particulars of the preceding transaction, which were, however, sufficient to renew all her terror. (*Udolpho* 322)

Emily typically falls into a swoon while the confrontation reaches its highest point. Suddenly deprived of all consciousness, she escapes the imminent meeting with the villain. By presenting the sudden stop in the heroine's consciousness, Radcliffe takes a break from the narrative flow. One minute ago, there was the infuriated Montoni,

and the next moment we find Emily alone in the room, with only “unconnected particulars of the preceding transaction” to recollect. Here, Emily escapes from Montoni’s fury through a sudden loss of consciousness which leads to the disconnection of the narrative flow. This escape can be seen an interval between confrontations. It also functions as suspense in narrative, where the readers will temporarily break from the narrative that is full of tension and get a moment of recess. Though the present conflict is momentarily suspended, apprehension of a greater danger is yet impending.

Ironically, the escape from confrontation only binds the readers more to “the secret...[fleeing] like a phantom before them” (Coleridge, “Review” 357). Thomas De Quincey praised Mrs. Radcliffe for her ability to charm the readers as “the great enchantress of that generation” (282), but malicious journalists, on the other hand, had no scruples to call her “the Eumenide,” “the sorceress” or “the harpy who lived upon corpses” (Arvine 268). Margaret Russett analyses the seductive effect of *Udolpho* and compares it to the warning lesson in Keats’ “La Belle Dame Sans Merci,” in which the Romantic poet depicts a world lost in factitious pleasures of spells. As the readers align themselves with the heroine’s equivocal anxiety, they in a way reproduce Radcliffe’s immobilized heroine, whose faculties are likewise suspended by the compelling yet pleasurable apprehension (Russett 159-60).

The plot of *Udolpho* is also highly circuitous. Some readers complain that a great part of *Udolpho* takes place at many other places rather than Udolpho. Before finally arriving at the famous castle, they have to follow the lengthy journey of Emily from

La Villée to the mounts of Pyrenees, from Toulouse to Venice. “Instead of taking the more direct road,” we are told at the feet of Pyrenees, St. Aubert chooses the road “winding over the heights,” which “[affords] more extensive views and greater variety of romantic scenery” (30). In the winding process towards Udolpho, Radcliffe also spends a long time dwelling on the Chateau-le-Blanc or the convent of St. Clair, spaces at first utterly unrelated to the mysteries the novel’s title has promised. When the geographic and chronological progress is broken away from its spontaneous flow, I will argue, the endless postponements paradoxically create a sense of frustrated expectation.

Hence while we usually regard the travel of the heroine as a journey of enlightenment and advance, Maggie Kilgour argues *Udolpho* to be a work of *anti-bildungsroman*, in which the deferral of achievement, the proliferation of episodes or the repetitive description of scenery all “serve to arrest time and development...freeze the action” (123). The suspension creates a fragmentation of text that often ends in bits and pieces, interrupted at its most intense moment and deferring an explanation until later. Thus Kilgour points out that the plot’s obsession with suspense retards Emily’s “growing up” even though she is moved from the “stasis of La Villée into a world of action and movement” (123).

Though I agree with Kilgour’s discussion about the deferral of narrative in *Udolpho*, however, I am still doubtful of her argument that Emily does not grow up and the plot of *Udolpho* does not develop. If anything, readers who have witnessed Emily’s courage to stand against Montoni to defend her rights over Madame

Montoni's estates could hardly recognize her to be the same submissive damsel at the beginning of this novel. Since what the narrative puts off would eventually come back in due time—be it the confrontation with the villain after fainting, the arrival at Udolpho after a lengthy journey or the unraveling explanation after torturing suspense—Emily always has to face the postponed confrontation she is temporarily spared. Yet when the moment of confrontation finally arrives, she would be prepared. In this light, the numerous uses of escapes can be seen as a strategy to “buy some time.” It creates a buffer zone to cushion the impact of violent emotions when the extremity of tension becomes too much; to unfold the progression of plot only when it is ready.

This cushioning period, I will argue, is the critical division that distinguishes the “male Gothic” and the “female Gothic” by their different methods of applying terror/horror. The male Gothic, in its frank disposal of violence and the supernatural, appeals to the extremity of blood and gore, while the female Gothic draws a safe distance from these elements until they become explainable and conquerable. In her essay “On the Supernatural in Poetry,” Radcliffe advocates to create in Gothic novels only a mild kind of terror that “expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life,” not the excessive horror which “contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them,” and that terror is by far a higher source of sublime than horror (145-52). Burke also asserts that “when danger or pain press too nearly, they are...simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful” (36-37). From this viewpoint, this definition may

provide a useful distinction between horror and terror, “male Gothic” and “female Gothic” in the light of escape. In other words, to escape is to create a certain distance from the excess of pain and danger. In Radcliffe’s novel, the heroine or readers are always provided with sufficient time to recover, “[awaking] the faculties to a high degree of life” and a personal space to escape to. Radcliffe once makes a connection between terror and sublime: “But a terror of this nature, as it occupies and expands the mind, and elevates it to high expectation, is purely sublime, and leads us, by a kind of fascination, to seek even the object, from which we appear to shrink” (*Udolpho* 254). In this light, it is possible to read escape from confrontation as creating the aesthetic distance from the overwhelming sublimity that Burke suggests. The sublime horror gives rise to awe and fear, appealing to our desires for self-preservation. Only when the safety distance is granted, can the appreciation of sublimity and the chances of personal growth be made possible.

### III. Escape in Travel

Besides its function to create a safety distance or a cushioning period, the suspension or escapes from narrative are also effectual in ways that they “[afford] more extensive views and greater variety of romantic scenery” (*Udolpho* 30). During the age when a variety of travel pamphlets and practical books<sup>11</sup> were published to instruct leisure travelers to appreciate the exotic or rural beauty, *Udolpho*’s description

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<sup>11</sup> Practical books are books which instruct and guide their readers. For example, William Gilpin published *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, etc. Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; made in the Summer of the Year 1770* in 1782, guiding his readers to examine the beauty of a country by the rules of picturesque.

of landscape has served to present foreign scenery to its female readers who otherwise would not have had the chance to witness it, particularly after the French Revolution (1789-99) and the war with France (1799-1815) have closed English travelers' access to the European continent. The repetitive descriptions about which Kilgour complains help to find a possible way-out to the seemingly inescapable plight. In spite of the worries and/or warfare from the outside world, women can still create a personal landscape through "sheer force of language" (Moers, "Metaphors" 255). Radcliffe has drawn her landscape with exquisite details and depicted it with painterly aesthetic techniques such as "perspective." Take the following passage for example:

...as the veil drew up, it was delightful to watch the gleaming objects, that progressively disclosed themselves in the valley—the green turf—dark woods—little rocky recesses—a few peasants' huts—the foaming stream—a herd of cattle, and various images of pastoral beauty. Then, the pine-forests brightened, and then the broad breast of the mountains, till, at length, the mist settled round their summit, touching them with a ruddy glow. The features of the vista now appeared distinctly, and the broad deep shadows, that fell from the lower cliffs, gave strong effect to the streaming splendor above; while the mountains, gradually sinking in the perspective, appeared to shelve into the Adriatic sea, for such Emily imagined to be the gleam of blueish light, that terminated the view. (247-48)

We can clearly distinguish the layers of perspective: a valley in the near distance, the pine-forests in the middle, and summit of mountains in the distant view. The play of light and shadow is captured by the author like in a painting, in which the bright glow of sunshine sheds light upon the mountains, while the shadow eclipses the cliff. Here Radcliffe has imbibed her contemporary aesthetic theories of “the picturesque” to present a literary space from where the heroine can take refuge.<sup>12</sup> Jane Spencer regards it as a trait of women’s special use of landscape among the “tradition of escape,” when a young girl’s freedom is “threatened by her entry into the male-dominated social world” (193). In the above passage, Emily is threatened by the prospect of rape from Count Morano’s nightly visit. Despite her inability to escape from her assigned chamber, she is free to relieve her apprehension by noticing external object as represented in the following passage: “Thus she endeavoured to amuse her fancy, and was not unsuccessful. The breezy freshness of the morning, too, revived her. She raised her thoughts in prayer, which she felt always most disposed to do, when viewing the sublimity of nature, and her mind recovered its strength” (248). Shifting her attention to the sublimity of the outside environment, Emily is granted a moment of peace with her inner world, where she is able to “recover” and be “revived” from the stress she previously suffers.

Besides the relieving power of nature, travel experience and its aesthetic function of expanding the sensibility of minds are important themes in the branch of

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<sup>12</sup> The aesthetic theories of the picturesque were first introduced in William Gilpin’s *Observations* (1782). Picturesque is a sensibility that comes naturally from the basis of human perception. Quite self-evidently, this word indicate the picture-like beauty. It is usually explained in relation with the aesthetic ideals of the beautiful and the sublime, and is regarded as a mediator between these two opposite experiences.



sentimental novels. Radcliffe's Gothic novels especially pride themselves on the exploration of sensibility. It not only entails a keen perception of various human sentiments or the landscape of the nature, but also indicates the capacity for pathos and empathy. A sharpened sensibility becomes an exemplar of emotions, accelerates the sense of moral responsibility, and helps harmonize human nature with the social orders.<sup>13</sup> In *Udolpho*, Emily's sensibility hence becomes a virtue that displays her moral superiority over her aunt, who prefers artificial luxuries to the beauty of natural scenery and is never able to find the transcendence and peace that Emily receives from nature, and hence is incompetent to escape and to survive the tyranny of Montoni.

Notably, the hours spent in the communication with nature are always a time of her own for the heroine. Solitude is equally important for Emily's personal space of escape. Simone de Beauvoir once describes the "refuge" a young girl can find in nature: it must be a private place where she can seek "a reflection of the solitude of her soul," and become "herself this limitless territory" (386). Just like the heroine's spiritual escape, Radcliffe's use of suspense or repetitive descriptions of scenery, I submit, can be seen as an endeavour to build the "limitless territory" within the constriction of texts. "Her novels move towards and away from disturbing worlds of danger and immorality," Fred Botting points out about Radcliffe's works; it is like

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<sup>13</sup> However, it is also important to note the picturesque is connotative with hierarchical politics. Critics have pointed out the relationship between the picturesque and gentlemen's political authority. The gentlemen are qualified to appreciate picturesque beauty in a way the middle-class merchants cannot, because their lack of particular engagement or interest "underwritten by the revenue 'naturally' generated by land, is what exempts [them] from partiality and so legitimates [their] political authority" (Barrell, 31-40).

“[t]he flight of the heroine [that] moves beyond the structures of paternal power and into zones of indiscernibility...where femininity encounters the possibility of becoming something other” (159-60). If de Beauvoir’s solitary refuge advocates a means for a woman to be self-contained in her own autonomy, unlimited by the outside world’s regulations and constrictions, Botting’s zones of indiscernibility moreover disclose a series of metamorphoses femininity would undergo during the process of escape from these constrictions. It demonstrates a greater power to transgress the existent rigidity of female roles under the patriarchal society.

#### IV. The Flight of Imagination

As far as the scarce biographical information could tell, Radcliffe has lived a life of social exclusion. Except for few journeys, she remains private and domestic. If it is intriguing that an author who has never been to Europe is capable of composing the poetic sceneries in *Udolpho*, it is equally interesting to discuss the theme of escape for the novelist whose life is confined in the household throughout.

Since the war within and with France had terminated English travelers’ access to Europe, Radcliffe was not able to make her Grand Tour until 1794, after the publication of *Udolpho*. Her travel experience is recorded in *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794, Through Holland and the Western Frontier of Germany*. It was her first travel to Europe. Hence during the whole time she was composing *Udolpho*, Radcliffe was portraying places she had never been to before. According to Ruth Facer, her elaborate descriptions of landscapes are greatly influenced by travel

pamphlets or paintings from authors like William Gilpin, Claude Lorraine or Salvator Rosa, to name just a few. This no doubt explains the connections between her novels and the aesthetics of the picturesque. Moreover, it reflects the parallel experience of imagination of the author, her characters and her readers, as it places Radcliffe in the role of a reader, who is subject to the nature provided by the picturesque authors; Emily and her readers also play the role of the author, for them actively respond to and participate in the fantastic world Radcliffe has built.

The flight of imagination is underwritten in the whole process of escape.

Vigorous imagination and keen sensibility help the female subject to break away from her present time and space, to create a “limitless territory” that de Beauvoir describes. In time, it implies a temporal annihilation in the flow of chronological hours, an experience we frequently have while the enchantment of reading renders us “lost the track of time.” In space, it infers the transference of locus from physical fixation to spiritual mobility through imagining an “elsewhere,” as I have demonstrated in the previous sections. In the following chapter, I shall look closer at the episodes of escape in *Udolpho* and other texts, such as *The Monk* and *The Italian*, to explore the connotative metaphor of escape.

## Chapter II

### The Flight of Characters

In this chapter, I intend to give a counterpart of Radcliffe—Matthew Gregory Lewis—in order to present an entirely different point of view in Gothic escapes. Matthew Lewis' first novel *The Monk* was published in 1796. Its appalling descriptions of excessive lust, sins and violence were soon received with astonishment and controversy.<sup>14</sup> In a letter to his mother, dated May 15, 1794, Lewis stated that, "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" (Peck 208). The praise becomes an open tribute to Radcliffe's literary influence, and an association Radcliffe did not receive with pleasure. In 1797, she published her fifth novel *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents*, which is commonly regarded as a corrective response to Lewis in terms of their discrepant aesthetics and political approaches. From *Udolpho*, *The Monk* to *The Italian*, this literary anecdote suggests a link between these three novels, a link that I aim to explore in this chapter about Gothic characters.

In the last chapter, we have explored Radcliffe's narrative as a faithful reflection of her contemporary female constrictions and an attempted escape of imagination to break away from these limits. Escape at the level of imagination is pleasant, peaceful and harmless. Escape for the Gothic characters, however, is a

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<sup>14</sup> In fact, as André Parreaux's *The Publication of The Monk: A Literary Event, 1796-1798* records, Lewis' anonymous first edition was received rather favorably. It is only after the second edition, when the author proudly signed his name along with the initials M.P. (which indicates his membership at Parliament) that the criticism began to mount (87-91).

matter of life and death. Every choice or decision would testify the heroine's mobility and her ability to survive. In Radcliffean novels, the escapes are always successful in the end. Despite the horror and dangers along the way, they are only put on the stage as a testament to the heroine's virtues; they never "overwhelm." These episodes of escape demonstrate Radcliffe's faith in reason and her affirmative attitude, if optimistic, towards the possibility of female development. Lewis' treatment of the female body and female agency, however, speaks otherwise. Radcliffe and Lewis' literary approaches differentiate them as representative of the opposite brands of female Gothic and male Gothic. Yet I contend that Lewis' writing does not merely stand as a counterpart to the former. Read both authors in conjunction, Lewis' male perspectives can also be seen as a complement to Radcliffe's purely female experiences in terms of escape. Given their literary interactions, we may even say, to contemplate Lewis is to provide a better understanding of Radcliffe. Therefore, I am going to examine the textual relations between *Udolpho*, *The Monk* and *The Italian* in the following sections.

## **I. Escape and Female Mobility**

Literary conventions represent women as occupying domestic spaces while men take control over the public sphere. Hearth, kitchens, chambers or attics, for example, are all loci which women are traditionally associated with. Women live in the house, and are constricted inside it. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their famous *The Madwomen in the Attic* once point out "dramatizations of imprisonment and escape

are so all pervasive in the nineteenth-century literature by women that we believe that they represent a uniquely feminine tradition of the period” (85). We can find the initiation of this escape tradition back in the eighteenth century’s Gothic novels, in which the interior spaces gradually come to symbolize confinement and persecution inside the tyrant-ruled house.

The Gothic spaces subvert the preconceived assumption that for women, living inside the house means safety and going outside it suggests dangers. In *Udolpho*, Emily once detects a secret stair-case connected to her chamber. “She wished to know to what it led, and was the more anxious, since it communicated so immediately with her apartment”(240). Not knowing the stair-case’s destination, Emily then determines to lock the door joined to it, only to discover “that it had no bolts on the chamber side, though it had two on the other” and hence “could not be perfectly fastened on the inside” (240). A woman’s chamber should have been a safe haven for her, but here, the stair-case is an intermediate space that exchanges the safety of the inside and the uncertainty of the outside. More accurately, it invites and brings in the invading darkness into the comforting security of the house, namely the nightly visits of Court Morano. With said door unfastened, the boundary between the inside/outside becomes ambivalent. Not only does it indicate the possible danger coming from the outside; moreover, its existence suggests the house itself is not a secure place from the very beginning!

Of course, while Court Morano employs this stair-case to steal inside, chances are that Emily could also take advantage of this passage as a means of escape to go

outside. However, at her first opportunity, Emily finds herself “[wanting] courage to venture into the darkness alone” (240). Her chances are forever forfeited, for later Montoni locks this door on account of Court Morano’s intrusion. The immobilization of women, whether physically or psychologically, involuntary or self-imposed,<sup>15</sup> is a prominent issue in terms of escape. The *Bildungsroman* often depicts a male protagonist “entering the world as a mobile being” (Tucker 4), but when it comes to female development, such mobility is often precluded or limited. Without the chance to enter the (public) world, and threatened by the inner danger coming from the house, women are forced to search for certainty in the spaces in between, like the mystical stair-case, which does not entirely belong to the inside, and yet is not strictly the outside. In the labyrinth of Castle Udolpho, Emily could still have her nightly exploration on the underground passages, secret galleries or dark corridors, whose departing points and destinations are not definite, and hence are fluid and infinite. In this light, Mark S. Madoff regards Emily’s exploration as an act of transgression from the inside to the outside, a penetration of the ignorance to the realm of knowledge (50-52).<sup>16</sup> Since transgression leads to discovery, these spatial metaphors are at the same time symbolic of the heroine’s quest for her sexuality, subjectivity and identity,

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<sup>15</sup> In the last chapter of volume one in *Udolpho*, Valancourt repeatedly asks for a secret union with Emily so he can take Emily away from the possible persecution of Montoni. His offer is resolutely declined by Emily due to “her duty, her disinterested considerations for Valancourt, and the delicacy, which made her revolt from a clandestine union” (164). The same scruple happens again in *The Italian* when Ellena considers Vivaldi’s offer of elopement (122). Here the female delicacy becomes their obstacle in escape and turns their wills to escape into immobilization.

<sup>16</sup> Madoff in his article “Inside, Outside, and the Gothic Locked-Room Mystery” tries to distinguish the poetics of spaces in *Udolpho* and *The Monk*. In his opinion, the inside becomes the locus of crime, disorder, barbarity and indecorum, while the outside represents resolved mystery, restored order and rationality. His distinction of the inside/outside is based upon the conventions of detective novels, and is exactly the opposite of mine. Here I try to preserve both ways of distinction in order to highlight the ambiguity of the inside/outside in Gothic spaces.

and therefore is a crucial factor for her social development.

A passage in *Udolpho* can be read as demonstrating Emily's symbolic entering into enlightenment:

"O! do not go in there, ma'amselle," said Annette, "you will only lose yourself further."

"Bring the light forward," said Emily, "we may possibly find our way through these rooms."

Annette stood at the door, in an attitude of hesitation, with the light held up to shew the chamber, but the feeble rays spread through not half of it. "Why do you hesitate?" said Emily, "let me see whither this room leads." (235)

The light of reason, like the lamp Annette holds, signifies the feeble radiance of reason that can only "spread through not half" in the darkness of schemes and conspiracy. But the curiosity to find out "whither this room leads" prompts the heroine to find out the way through her exploration. In this process, perchance is that she may eventually confront the "patriarchal darkness" (Williams 160) represented by the black veil, and the danger to "lose herself further," but at the same time, when she peeps into secrecy, gathers information of her aunt and schemes her own escape, it also becomes her only chance to display mobility and independence.

In fact, Emily's first courageous action takes place not at her own danger, but at her aunt Madame Montoni's abduction. With ruffians still combating everywhere in the castle, Emily nevertheless "determine[s], when night should return, and the inhabitants of the castle should be asleep, to explore the way to the turret," in where



her aunt is probably imprisoned, because “any certainty...appear[s] more tolerable, than this exhausting suspense” (324). From this point on, Emily seems to break away from the “suspense” that prevents her from “growing up,”<sup>17</sup> and begins to take action against her present plight. Notably, it is her ability to understand and sympathize with others’ sufferings that spurs her action in time of danger. This not only reflects her noble disposition, but also indicates a bonding between families and women.

Although Madame Montoni does not begin as a “good mother” or a competent guardian, trying to force her niece into an unwilling marriage as a representative of patricidal authority (as her father’s sister), she nevertheless is the only remaining family of Emily. Moreover, her unfortunate experience represents the adversity and menace a woman is subject to under an ill-advised marriage. Malicious dominance, physical as well as psychological violence are able to take place and bring distress upon women who are forced to remain at the domestic sphere. These collective experiences shared between two women under the same predicament motives Emily’s sympathy toward her aunt, and make her development possible.

Gothic is renowned to be the genre that best expresses female experiences. In Radcliffe’s novel, the subject of experience is her heroine, who endures much horror, nerves herself in great peril, and plays the role of a female detective in circumstances of obscurity and danger during her escape. In Lewis’ novel, however, the process of escape, if there is any, is narrated through the male perspective, and as a result does not contain descriptions of female experiences like Radcliffe’s novels do. The

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Maggie Kilgour’s argument in chapter one.

wretched Antonio, for one thing, falls victim to Ambrosio's incestuous lust and never has a chance of freedom until her death. Agnes, on the other hand, seems to be a more active and fearless heroine when she initiates the plan of escape to her lover Don Raymond, that she would impersonate the ghost Bleeding Nun in order to leave the convent. This course of adventure, however, is framed by Raymond's first person point of view. Raymond's male discourse contains and translates female experiences, and the whole process of escape is represented to us through his watchful gaze:

I kept my eyes constantly fixed upon the window, where I hoped to perceive the friendly glare of a Lamp borne by Agnes... Scarcely had five minutes elapsed, when the expected light appeared... I fancied I perceived a female figure with a Lamp in her hand moving slowly along the Apartment. The light soon faded away, and all was again dark and gloomy.

Occasional gleams of brightness darted from the Staircase windows as the lovely Ghost past by them. I traced the light through the Hall: It reached the Portal, and at length I beheld Agnes pass through the folding gates. (162-63)

Agnes' endeavour to escape is thus reproduced (and perhaps reduced) under the surveillance of a male perspective. The quoted passage demonstrates her movement is as followed, "traced" and "expected" by Raymond's powerful "eye/I" as her behavior is supervised by the patriarchs or their agents.<sup>18</sup> At the moment when Agnes' figure finally emerges into view, the male eye/I takes a step further to hold possession of the

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<sup>18</sup> Upon relating her plan of escape to Raymond, Agnes once states that, "[the] moments are precious, for though no more a prisoner, Cunegonda watches my every step" (155). Cunegonda is later captured by Raymond, who, ironically, in turn watches Agnes' every step when she escapes.

object of his gaze, as Raymond clasps her to his bosom, and exclaims, “Agnes! Agnes! Thou art mine!” (163). Though Agnes may own agency and mobility to execute her plan of escape, yet her scheme is ambushed and doomed to failure.<sup>19</sup>

## II. Rescue and Other Problems

Contrary to the Lewisian heroine’s failure, the Radcliffean heroine’s attempt at escape is reassuringly always successful, a tendency that reflects the authoress’ positive attitude as regards the agency and educability of women, and the progress thereafter. However, we must also take into account that such optimism towards escape and female mobility is still limited by the social constraints at that time, in which women have little access to places outside the periphery of their daily lives, can scarcely journey without chaperon or other company, and moreover, their conduct and movement are strictly regulated by the code of propriety. The whole process of escape therefore is hardly executed single-handedly by the heroine herself. On the other side of the heroine’s escape is the attempt to rescue and to help from many other characters, including servants (*Udolpho*), sisters from the convent (*The Italian*) and most conspicuously, the Gothic hero, who often comes to the heroine’s rescue and offers the prospect of marriage.

The reliance upon her rescuers and the final reintegration into the social structure of matrimony seem to undermine the Gothic heroine’s mobility at the first glance, but

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<sup>19</sup> Later plot will reveal to us that in fact, Agnes has already been caught and imprisoned by the abbess before she can have the chance to execute her plan, and what Raymond rescues is actually Bleeding Nun, the real ghost. This revelation renders the subjectivity and identity during escape more intricate, which I am going to relate further in following pages.

a closer examination soon reveals to us the problematic association between rescue and the prospect of marriage. In *Udolpho*, being acquainted with Montoni's real character and his former crimes, Valancourt repeatedly asks for an immediate marriage with Emily lest she commit herself to Montoni's ward. Valancourt's proposal is resolutely declined. Though "[the] tenderest love had already pleaded his cause... [Emily's] duty, her disinterested considerations for Valancourt, and the delicacy...[make] her revolt from a clandestine union" (164). Similar scenario also takes place in *The Italian*. While the plan of rescue might deliver Ellena from captivity, the agreement on it is given with much deliberation, because its implication makes a heart "so tremblingly jealous of propriety...[recoil] with alarm" (122). The pledge of marriage for the rescue is like a hidden code, never mentioned, but mutually acknowledged on the both sides. From the rescuer's point of view:

Vivaldi secretly hoped that she might be prevailed with to give him her hand on quitting San Stefano, but he forbore to mention this hope, lest it should be mistaken for a condition, and that Ellena might be either reluctant to accept his assistance, or, accepting it, might consider herself bound to grant a hasty consent (125).

The pledge for freedom is not openly proclaimed, and Vivaldi "forbears to mention," but the connotation is well understood by Ellena. Both Emily and Ellena recoil from such proposal due to "propriety" and "delicacy," codes that seek to regulate female interaction with the social decorum. "In the conduct manual, an aura of danger surrounded the body: if not properly handled, it was liable to arouse the scorn and

abhorrence of society,” stated Yael Shapira (457). Therefore, if the Gothic villain’s conspiracy entraps women in jeopardy physically, the marriage bond offered to them presents an equally repugnant violation against their body.

Another problem during the rescue lies in the fact that, except for their offering of marriage, Radcliffean heroes are peculiarly in lack of action compared with the Lewisian hero. In her article “The Pleasure of the Woman’s Text,” Coral Ann Howells refers to this inactivity as the “disphoric” element that alerts us to the incompleteness of Radcliffe’s otherwise euphoric romance (154). Both *Udolpho* and *The Italian* bear revision to the typical “hero-rescues-heroine” formula. Emily’s escape from *Udolpho*, for instance, is aided by servants Ludovio, Anettee and her admirer Du Pont, whom she mistakes for Valancourt. Only after Emily is safely returned to the sanctuary of St. Clare does Valancourt reunite with her. The same statement also applies to Vivaldi in *The Italian*, whose plan to conduct Ellena away from the convent of San Stefano is in fact contributed by Sister Olivia, and only succeeds for a short period of time, before they are again arrested by Inquisition on false charges. The rest of the plot unfolds with them separated from each other until the closure of this story. Consequently, the heroines are left to their own devices most of the time, and have to pursue their own survivals at the mercy of their oppressors’ villainy. In *Udolpho*, various instances demonstrate Emily’s stoicism in times of desperation, and she even reprimands Valancourt’s tearful franticness: “for heaven’s sake, be reasonable—be composed” (522). Sabine Augustine recognizes this contrast between the sensible heroine and the feminized hero as subtly posed and effectively undermining the contemporary

assumption of gender stereotypes, a “fictive strategies by which women authors conferred power on their heroines” (161). Though in the end, the Radcliffean heroine is always reintegrated into the social structure and domestic happiness under the protection of their legitimate husbands, these “odd moments” constitute a hidden configuration alternative to the “good marriage” (Howells 152-53).

The real rescuers, it turns out, are the chatty servants and convent sisters, who are indeed “the friends in need.” Interestingly, they are either beneath the heroine’s class or under a gender stereotype that should be submissive, powerless and incapable of action. To some degree, the reversal of power structure is carnivalesque by providing a topsy-turvy liberation. Though it is only a temporary upside-down in the absence of Gothic hero’s patriarchal authority, and will eventually return to the normal norms, it nevertheless brings out a possibility of subversion for a time being. This subtext, or the counter-narrative, is hence potential of challenge and transgression.

I would also like to point out a significant figure during Ellena’s escape in *The Italian*, namely the Sister Olivia in convent San Stefano. Her compassion towards Ellena manifests a purely feminine and maternal sentiment, and could not behold her falling victim to the solitary imprisonment consigned to her:

Within the deepest recesses of our convent, is a stone chamber, secured by doors of iron, to which such of the sisterhood as have been guilty of any heinous offence have, from time to time, been consigned. This condemnation admits of no reprieve, the unfortunate captive is left to languish in chains and darkness,

receiving only an allowance of bread and water just sufficient to prolong her sufferings, till nature, at length, sinking under their intolerable pressure, obtains refuge in death. (126)

Ellena is not the first victim of this persecution synonymous to the sentence of death. It is a punishment “generally inflicted upon nuns who...have been detected in escaping from the convent” (126). Olivia herself has witnessed a nun perish in such solitude, and is determined to assist Ellena avoid this similar fate. The cruelty of this punishment also reminds us of the inhuman condemnation Agnes suffers in *The Monk*, an infliction that renders her “so wretched, so emaciated, so pale, that [Lorenzo] doubted to think her woman” (381)! Ellena’s escape, therefore, reflects not only her personal experience, but a universal struggle shared by women to whom this monastic cruelty has befallen. The role of Olivia is momentous not only because she brings out the collective experiences of suffering endured by women, but also because she represents a mentor, a guardian and a mother figure among the way of the heroine’s development and escape. In the absence of male protection, her assistance towards Ellena indicates an alliance and an intimate bonding between sisterhoods inside the female community.<sup>20</sup>

### III. Concealment and the Mistaken Identities

In previous two sections, the heroine’s mobility during the process of escape is explored from the perspective of either the escape subject or the rescuers. In this part,

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<sup>20</sup> The bonding between sisterhoods turns out to be familial as well, as Olivia is later revealed as Ellena’s mother.

I will proceed to examine the theme of concealment and the confusion of identities it incurs as an important technique in the heroine's flight. While the secrecy of escape requires necessity to conceal the body and identity of the fugitive, this secrecy in turn leads to misunderstandings and mistaken identities during the escape. In *Udolpho*, Emily has mistaken Du Pont for Valancourt, an event of the most shocking disappointment for the heroine. The episode of Agnes' escape in *The Monk* also turns out to be a thrilling horror when Raymond recounts his discovery beholding the female figure he has rescued: "God Almighty! It was the Bleeding Nun! It was my lost companion! Her face was still veiled, but she no longer held her lamp and dagger. She lifted up her veil slowly. What a sight presented itself to my startled eyes!" (167). Disguises put these characters into a game of doubling, in which one stands for the alternative side of the other. Du Pont, for one, substitutes for the role that Valancourt should have played. Doubling also has a suggestive indication that the pair's fates may coincide, so the Bleeding Nun's tragic end might await Agnes should Lorenzo never have delivered her from misery.

Therefore, the veil Agnes and the Bleeding Nun both wear is not merely for concealment. It can be seen as a "mask" in the sense of performance. The veil not only covers Agnes' face from recognition, but also enables her to "perform" as the Bleeding Nun, who in turn substitutes the role of Agnes, and plays the role of Ramond's lover. Such exchangeability invites a broader interpretation for these characters. The Bleeding Nun's obsessive repetition in appearing on the fifth of May every five years, along with her veil, lamp and dagger, are rendered representative of



the uncanny (*unheimlich*) because they are “token of repression” (Freud 222)—the repression of sexual desires, which, once unveiled, would “presented itself to [the male spectator’s] startled eyes!” (Lewis 167).

In this light, the veil is at the same time expressive and repressive to the heroine’s quest for the romantic love and her own identity. Such repression applies to Agnes and the Bleeding Nun, as well as to all the regulated subjects in the Gothic novels. The existence of the veil and the consequent spectacle without it also bring out a debate over a woman’s “normal” body. As critic Yael Shapira points out, “the positive/negative fantasy of the body within the code of propriety is writ large in the eighteenth-century Gothic, which likewise imagines the body as caught between two extreme formulations: a radically purified ideal and a scandalous, spectacular grotesque” (461). Contrary to the “intact” virginal body, which is perfectly veiled and protected, the disrupt body is threatened with the risks of rape, murder, illegitimate marriage or improper sexual desires that should best be repressed.

The dialectic between these “twin” bodies finds its correlation in the Gothic novel’s prohibition, enclosure and escape, which can be amply explained by a passage in *The Italian*, in which Ellena and Vivaldi both undergo a masquerade-like encounter, struggling to identify each other under the veil and the peasant hat while searching for a way to escape from the convent of San Stefano. It is a significant passage that I would quote at length:

...having reached the grate, [Ellena] ventured to lift her veil for one instant. The stranger, letting his cloak fall, thanked her with his eyes for her condescension,

and she perceived, that he was not Vivaldi! Shocked at the interpretation, which might be given to a conduct apparently so improper, as much as by the disappointment, which Vivaldi's absence occasioned, she was hastily retiring, when another stranger approached with quick steps, whom she instantly knew, by the grace and spirit of his air, to be Vivaldi; but, determined not to be exposed a second time to the possibility of a mistake, she awaited silently for some further signal of his identity. (130-31)

The “condescension” of Ellena’s revelation to a stranger supplies a hierarchical connotation to the original gender-oriented veil image. It recalls the decorum and polite culture that belong to the middle and upper class females. Notably, except for the heroine’s angelic countenance and her lovely form (which surely capture the hero’s admiration at the first sight), any physical presence that Radcliffe allows for her heroine is usually moderate and minimal, to the contrary of Lewis. As a result, we can easily imagine Ellena’s hesitation to search for the right one to “reveal her face to” in this scene. A wrong move is not only improper, but also violating the integrality of her body. Radcliffe solves this dilemma by providing Vivaldi’s appearance, which is instantly known “by the grace and spirit of his air” (131). In this regard, the grace of one’s air is not a physical existence; quite the contrary, it is an inner quality that seems to radiate from inside the soul, and shifts the narrative’s focus from the solidity of flesh to the virtues and morality within.

While Radcliffe refrains from a detailed description of the flesh and blood, Lewis chooses to deliberate upon the spectacle of unveiled female bodies. In the

beginning chapters of *The Monk*, the young novice Rosario is reported to be “continually muffled up in his cowl; yet such of his features as accident discovered, appeared the most beautiful and noble” (47). Women’s veiling and Rosario’s cowl symbolize the ritual of the repression. The repressed objects may be improper sexual desires, supernatural phenomena, or secret crimes that should not be disclosed. Radcliffe endeavours to regulate and explain them away, but in *The Monk*, the repressed will often return with a vengeance. In the case of Rosario’s cowl, it is not as much an instrument of concealment as it is a tantalizing teaser, inviting the man’s curious exploration. The exploration goes further, and in a moment of haste, reveals Rosario’s true identity as the beautiful but demonic Matilda “to [Ambrosio’s] enquiring eye” (85). The latter is quickly amazed at the “exquisite proportion of features,” the “profusion of golden hair,” and the “rosy lips, heavenly eyes, and majesty of countenance” (85). This obsession with corporal appearances and carnal desires of course is offensive to Radcliffe’s polite Gothic, and later on, the publication of *The Italian* seems to be a corrective response to Lewis, by its exploration of the tension between the female body and decorum.

After escaping from the domestic tyranny of their previous hardship, Radcliffean heroines return to the security of a well-matched marriage without exception. Radcliffe’s sense of delicacy and her bourgeois happy ending reflect her limit as an eighteenth-century middle-class author. However, the textual configuration still allows a temporary get-away. Susan Wolstenholme in her *Gothic (Re)vision* argues that the veil image sets up a performance in *The Italian*. It determines an “interior

space” as theater, for the performers to stage their escape (26). The ceremony of receiving veil at the convent of Sab Stefano, for example, distinguished the veiled nuns as performers and everyone else the audience. Agnes’ plan of escape, too, presents a temporary freedom and mobility in her role-playing as the Bleeding Nun. This seems to suggest the freedom lies not in the euphoric ending designed for the heroine after escape, but in the very act of escape itself.

In the introduction of her *Textual Escap(e)ades*, Lindsey Tucker plays upon the word *escapade*, which means “a ‘reckless proceeding’ or ‘wild prank’” (2). Like the childish games of hide-and-seek or costume-play we have played in our childhood, the process of escape brings out the carnivalesque feelings of being reckless, prankish and defiant. Though I do not suggest Radcliffean heroines can self-consciously subvert the existent social order, their escapes nevertheless possess the quality to confuse the boundary of rigid regulations. Escape constructs an ambivalent space of indiscernibility where “femininity encounters the possibility of becoming something other” (Botting 160). Therefore, before the moment of unveiling, they are granted a temporary freedom.

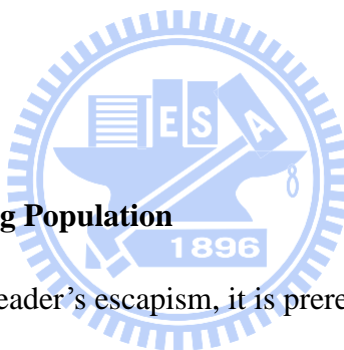
### Chapter III

#### Anxiety behind the Escapist Reading

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the theme of escape at the levels of plot narrative and characters' plans of escape, both of which, I argue, reflect Radcliffe's confidence in female developments. As a *Bildungsroman*, novel of education, Radcliffe's novel models its heroine as a paradigm of virtue whose example the readers are expected to follow suit. St. Albert's instruction for Emily to be a sensible and rational reader, for instance, speaks for Radcliffe's expectance towards her own readers. On the other hand, readers undergo the same Gothic adventures as Emily does, to experience a sense of wish fulfillments or vicarious pleasures in their course of reading. The most conspicuous example, perhaps, is Catherine Morland in Jane Austen's Gothic parody *Northanger Abbey*. Being a cordial reader of *Udolpho*, Catherine's own adventure imitates and parallels Emily's in the castle of Udolpho, a Gothic locus veiled by the former mistress' mysterious death. By identifying with the heroine, readers internalize the values Radcliffe tries to instill into them. Not only that the experiences of the readers echo that of the heroine, but the reading behavior itself can also be seen as a parallel to the performed escapes in the Gothic novels. As a parallel to its subject matter, reading demonstrates an attempt to and a process of escape as well. This is the main idea I would center on in this chapter.

I would first explore novel reading in its historical, social and economical context in order to draw forth the meaning of escape behind reading. Then, I intend to

explore the impact of novel reading to the construction of an ideal “home” and a perfect “woman” in the end of the eighteenth century. By putting Gothic novels into their own social context, we can see how novel reading negotiates with social issues related to the roles of women in their society, particularly those concerned with the female identity in marriage and the domestic life. This negotiation thus marked a long literary dispute since the end of the eighteenth century with regards to what the women should read, and when the women should read. In a way this dispute leads to the modern debate on the roles of women, the disposal of leisure time in a consumerist society in the formation, criteria on literary tastes, and the making of modern readers.



## **I. The Expansion of Reading Population**

Regarding the issue of reader’s escapism, it is prerequisite to first understand the scope and constituents of the readership at that time. The eighteenth century has witnessed a dramatic expansion and change in reading practices. The expansion has first taken place in the late seventeenth century due to the improvement of press technology, socio-economic progress, especially that of the bourgeoisie, and the rise of literacy. From local newspapers, broadsides, pamphlets to novels of two or three volumes, the demanding market facilitated the production of words. Henry Plomer’s bibliographic dictionaries of printers and booksellers in England between 1641 and 1775,<sup>21</sup> for example, has effectively demonstrated the size and number of the book

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<sup>21</sup> Plomer has published three dictionaries in this regard. Please see *A Dictionary of the Booksellers and Printers Who Were at Work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1641-1667* (1907), A

trading business, giving a clear index of growth in the market. It was growing so fast that “[by] the 1790s, the publication of new book titles was running at four times the level of the beginning of the century” (Vincent 11). The sprawling market reflects a rising demand of printed words that could be traced back to the 1600s, and achieved a peak in the last decade of the eighteenth century.

Gradually, the changing reading practices led to an integrated system of book trading and publishing. With regard to the variety of publications, Cheryl Turner gives a detailed study of some library catalogues which cover a wide geographical area, from Bath to London, for every decade between 1740 and 1820.<sup>22</sup> They offer “a glimpse of the breadth and diversity of the eighteenth-century literature market,” points out Turner (133). Though these studies also record a number of short-lived enterprises and ephemeral publications, the rapid growth in total nonetheless indicates a climate of boom and buoyancy.

Prevalence of printed words—especially novels, which became the main source of profits of the publishers—also facilitated the growing consumerist industry. The way in which reading became fashionable indicates the fact that readers of that time possessed extra time and money to read and to purchase a novel, which was a relatively expensive item. In the introduction of my thesis, I have mentioned Radcliffe was paid five hundred pounds for her *Udolpho*. To buy this four-volume bulk, at the

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*Dictionary of the Booksellers and Printers Who Were at Work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1668-1725* (1922), *A Dictionary of the Booksellers and Printers Who Were at Work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1726-1775* (1932).

<sup>22</sup> For the detailed list of all the target catalogues, please see page 229-30 of Cheryl Turner’s *Living By the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*.

time of its publication, one had to pay one pound and five schillings (£ 1.5s),<sup>23</sup> an unfavorable price comparing to other daily necessities like a whole pig (2s. 6d.), a pair of women's shoes (2s. 6d.), or a mahogany wash-stand (10s. 6d.).<sup>24</sup> As a result, frequent novel buying was not within the financial capacity of lower-middle class workers or domestic servants who lived on incomes of around £50 per annum (Turner 145). Other access to novels, however, was made possible through a convenient borrowing from the master's collection, cheap second-hand copies on book auctions, or the emergence of circulating libraries in the mid-eighteenth century.

Considering the average price of the novel, circulating libraries played a crucial role in its downwards expansion of the reading public. These establishments supplied fictions to an unprecedented number of customers, especially people from the poorer classes, who otherwise could not afford to read novels. However, the operation of these establishments entails a brief possession of such borrowed volumes, and compressed by the loan period, readers were forced to read in a limited and usually hurried time. The circulating economy suggests a fluid parade of books among the ladies who frequents the circulating library. They gave back books which would soon be devoured by the next customer, and then borrowed a new batch of books that had only just returned from their previous borrowers—hardly did they have enough time to digest their loan before they pursue another. A library proprietor once owned that these lasses “run over a novel of three, four or five volumes...faster than book-men can put them into boards” (Pratt 388-89). The rapid speed of book borrowing suggests

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<sup>23</sup> Around twenty-five schillings.

<sup>24</sup> Figure taken from Burnett, John. *A History of the Cost of Living*. London: Penguin, 1969.



symptoms of addiction, a further indicator of the lucrative profit and economical significance behind the publishing and circulation of books.

## II. Escapist Pleasure

Since novels were not daily necessity, and were by no means easily affordable products, the reason why people spent considerable time and money on them, instead of on something more substantial, is worth pondering. Novel's subject matter does not carry systemic or instructive knowledge. Also, given its limited loan period from a library, a cursory reading was almost inevitable. These circumstances evidence that the purpose of novel reading is not grounded on any substantial or practical values. Without any practical-oriented aim or similar regard of its content, the novel only provides its readers with pure pleasure during the process of reading. "While I have *Udolpho* to read," Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* exclaims, "I feel as if nobody could make me miserable" (42), and should it not be to meet her friend Isabella, she "would not have come away from it for all the world" (40). The feeling of reading a novel against the whole world indicates precisely where its attraction lies. Contrary to the real life, in the realm of the novel there is nothing to bother Catherine and no one to "make her miserable." In this regard, I believe it is the novel's disinterest in daily affairs that embellishes it with the escapist pleasure and attracts so many readers to step into its world.

By "escapist pleasure," I suggest novel reading as "a form of temporary distraction from reality or routine" ("escape" *OED*), and that this distraction is

pleasurable. In the first chapter of this thesis, I have pointed out that the romantic and exotic descriptions of foreign landscapes enable the readers to appreciate beauty and sublimity far removed from their daily experiences in the real life. Reading itself serves the same purpose. In a Gothic novel, the narrative would usually take the readers to a remote, unfamiliar time and space with an exotic and supernatural atmosphere, leaving the mundane triviality behind them—the further, the better. Through their imagination and transference with the heroines, the readers gain a vicarious pleasure by living another one's life for a moment. The dramatic suspension Radcliffe is so renowned for helps to entice the readers further into the world she interweaves. Being carried away by the plot, the readers are granted with a carefree moment not to think about the reality around them.

This disconnection with reality is liable to ridicule or criticism. A notable example is demonstrated at the end of *Northanger Abbey*, when Henry Tilney reprimands Catherine for the horrible surmise she has entertained, that General Tilney is the murderer of his deceased wife: “Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians...Consult [...] your own observation of what is passing around you” (255). His words testify that losing track of time and “what is passing around” is what the novel readers typically have come to when they are totally immersed in the reading. Such experience takes the readers away from their own social contacts. As a result, Catherine loses the sense of her social intercourse or historical context, and forgets for a moment that she is an English living in an “enlightened” era.

Critics warn against the tendency to escape via reading, since the enjoyment is not only transient but second-hand, removed from personal experience as well. In her detailed exploration on the effect of reading romance,<sup>25</sup> Janice Radway argues that “the good feelings [a reader] derives from reading romantic fiction are not experienced in the course of her habitual existence in the world of actual social relations, but in the separate, free realm of the imaginary” (117). Gothic novels, being the initial form of modern romantic fictions, also have similar effects on their readers. Disconnection from reality is not the only criticism falls upon novel reading. Resting satisfied with this vicarious pleasure, the readers are likely to evade responsibilities or disregard the predicament of their actual situations. In the face of such ready satisfaction, they may make no attempt to transform the status quo, which “gave rise to the need to seek out such pleasure in the first place” (Radway 117). Here, novels are described like opium. People take it to appease the throes of pressing matters at hand which they are yet able to find a resolution. Accordingly, their escapist attempt is regarded as lack of courage to resist and reform the present condition.

### **III. The Anxiety Behind Escape**

Behind the act of escape, however, lies the need of such act. The choices to read these “escapist fictions” may indicate dissatisfaction towards reality that incurs such desire to run away from it. Radway’s argument also insinuates there is enough anxiety

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<sup>25</sup> The target of Radway’s analysis is romance reading in the 1980’s America. Despite differences in social and historical contexts, I find Radway’s argument quite inspiring in the light of reader-response criticism. Her approach gives an eloquent portrait on the choice of reading romantic fictions, and moreover, she personally interviews various readers, which makes her study more authentic and persuasive.

and trouble in the readers' present lives that "[give] rise to the need to seek out such pleasure in the first place" (117). In this light, novel reading does not merely stand for a condemnable addiction or disconnection. It also depicts in a subtle way the anxiety towards a present situation, and the desperate need to escape from it. A closer look reveals to us that this anxiety is usually associated with a central motif of the Gothic novel, namely the idea of the "home." Since the word "Gothic" is originally derived from a specific type of architecture characteristics of pointed arch and the ribbed vault, the Gothic novel has always been associated with sites such as castles or cloisters. It is the place from which every heroine takes flight. It is not the architecture itself that are frightening, however, but the malicious dwellers, often kinsmen of the heroes and the heroines, who go to every expedient to persecute them. In this portrayal, the home, represented by the Gothic castle, becomes a dangerous place to live in.

The concern for an ideal home has always categorized this genre towards the end of the eighteenth century, accompanied with the rise of the bourgeois. Women, as the "angels of the house" in a middle-class nuclear family, were preoccupied with the inside spaces. Yet upon their choice of reading a Gothic novel, readers choose a genre that seldom includes the felicity of domestic lives, but usually lays emphases on a corrupted fallen home. This tendency reflects their uncertainty and disquietude toward the idealization of home. Originally a safe shelter from the evil outside, the house in Gothic novels is turned into the locus of danger, and "becomes the very opposite, a prison" (Ellis xiii). While the contemporary ideologies were shaping the home as a refuge from jeopardy, Gothic novels however undermined said ideologies by

revealing the domestic violence that is frequently directed against women. Female characters in Gothic novels are confined in the matter of marriage choice, and as a result, their properties are always at the patriarch's disposal. For example, in *Udolpho*, Montoni forces Emily to marry Count Morano in return for Emily's estate in Gascony, which "he had stipulated, as the price of his favour" and "should be delivered up to him from the day of her marriage" (279). This passage reflects the supreme influence, if not absolute authority, a husband holds over his wife's inheritance and properties. Even if their marriages are self-determined, as in the case of Madam Montoni, they are still subject to their husband's temper, and their lives are in peril. When Madame Montoni steadfastly fights back against Montoni's demand that she should resign her settlements in Toulouse to him,<sup>26</sup> she is treated with menace and cruelty. Yet she is in no power to sever this contract of matrimony that has "chained [her] for life to such a vile, deceitful, cruel monster" (286).

Above instances demonstrate how domestic tyranny is protected by the constitution of marriage and family law in Gothic novels. Despite the plot of *Udolpho* takes place in the remote France, the novel nevertheless dutifully reflects the plights a British woman faced at that time. Based on the traditional English common law, a married woman's legal existence was absorbed into her husband's and ceased to exist. She became *feme covert*, a "covered woman," who lived under the wing, protection and cover of her husband, and performed everything accordingly. The doctrine of coverture made a woman dependent on her husband in terms of all legal

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<sup>26</sup> The time and space of *Udolpho* is set in southern France in 1584, so it still requires Madame Montoni to sign the assignment to transfer her settlements under the name of her husband.

rights, duties and disabilities. She could not sign legal documents or enter into a contract, obtain an education or own a salary; her inheritance and properties would also be surrendered to her husband's free disposal after her marriage. Furthermore, a married woman had no litigation rights, so "if the wife be injured in her person or her property, she can bring no action for redress without her husband's concurrence," records William Blackstone in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (431).<sup>27</sup> This doctrine rendered the married woman helpless against domestic violence, against the persecutor who ought to be her protector in the first place. Therefore even Henry Tilney, who guides Catherine into acknowledgement that "in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land and the manners of the age" (259), remains helpless at General Tilney's cruelty towards his mother and later towards Catherine. Henry's confidence in the power of enlightenment comes from his privileged status as a male, whose needs are catered to by the custom and the law he has so much faith in. Gothic novels, though, portrays women being the object of abduction, assassination, or violation of male predators. They serve as a reminder of women's vulnerability in a world without proper protection. With their grim depictions of women's condition, Gothic novels subtly subvert the idealized bourgeois home.

Reading Gothic novels, therefore, is not merely an "escape" from their daily existences for Catherine Morland or other middle-class female readers. Rather,

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<sup>27</sup> This grievance would not be addressed until the Married Women's Property Act in 1882, which allowed married women to own and control their properties. Wives legal existences were also restored, and they were recognized as separate entities outside their husbands.

reading for them is to give voice to a hidden domestic condition of affliction and apprehension beneath their original social texture. Gothic reading bridges these two sets of world. “Reality” and “reading” do not stand opposite as a real world and a fictional one, one enlightened and the other medieval, but as “the manifest and the secret, the centre and the margin” (Ellis 7). One is represented by Henry’s optimistic male vantage point; the other by Catherine’s dark night exile from Northanger Abbey back to her home in Wiltshire. The difference between these two worlds is bridged by Catherine’s Gothic reading. Haunted houses metonymically represent the fearful expectations the readers brought into their readings, an apprehension captured by the Gothic authors, who might share the same sentiments, being women themselves.

In addition to their legal disabilities, the home became a prison for women due to the redefinition of “womanhood” toward the end of the eighteenth century. Under the social expectations to be a “perfect” mother, wife or daughter, women’s mobility was greatly restricted and their time equally regulated. For better understanding of what the ideal image of a woman was at that time, here I cite the writing of a clergyman Thomas Gisborne from his famous *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, published in 1797 as a conduct book to the fair sex:

In three particulars, each of which is of extreme and never-ceasing concern to the welfare of mankind, the effect of the female character is most important.

First, In (*sic*) contributing daily and hourly to the comfort of the husbands, of parents, of brothers and sisters, and of other relations, connections, and friends, in the intercourse of domestic life, under every vicissitude of sickness and health,

of joy and affliction.

Secondly, In forming and improving the general manners, dispositions, and conduct of the other sex, by society and example.

Thirdly, In modeling the human mind during the early stages of its growth, and fixing, while it is yet ductile, its growing principles of action; children of each sex being, in general, under maternal tuition during their childhood, and girls until they become women. (12-13)

From above passages, we can observe a woman's responsibilities as the main caretaker for all the family members, a guiding influence towards her husband and her children inside the domestic domain, while men's duties lay without the house, in the public affairs, politics and professions. The notion of "separate spheres" provided a theoretical base for women's confinement to the domestic spaces. Women's duties at home, especially as a mother and as a mistress of the house,<sup>28</sup> thus become a full-time occupation. In the introduction of *Mothering Daughters*, Susan C. Greenfield points out that the rise of Gothic novels "roughly corresponded with the idealization of full-time maternity, a parallel characteristic of the genre's general preoccupation with the problem of family" (15-16). A father's tyranny, the detachment or absence of a mother, the perpetual perplexity in choosing a husband along with other problems are what the Gothic novel dwells upon and repeatedly contests in its narrative construction. The heroine's flight from a failed home and her eventual return to build

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<sup>28</sup> Unlike married women, young unmarried girls often enjoyed relatively greater freedom to talk and to act, to acquaint with the other sex and to socialize in public places. Yet this freedom of behavior and acquaintance only lasted until they had achieved their ultimate goal: a marriage to an eligible bachelor, "which finally set an end to liberty and engagements out of the private space" (Hecher 8-9).



another ideal one dramatize “home” as a site of both problems and solutions.

Ironically, the problems of the original home can only be solved by providing the hope of building another and “better” one. Whether the heroine does enjoy a felicitous domestic life or not remains questionable since the novel ends before disclosing more details about the life after marriage. The seemingly felicitous ending seems to indicate that even in a novel, to escape from the home is never an option for the women at the time. Reading such fictions, therefore, can be seen as a reflection of women’s ambivalent sentiments towards marriage and family.

#### **IV. Reading against the Regulation of Time**

While the content of Gothic novel can be seen as a reflection of the discrepant sentiments women hold against the idealized domestic ideologies, the act of novel reading can also be seen as an ostensibly submissive and actually elusive strategy against the domestication of women. Since motherhood and household affairs have become a full-time occupation for the eighteenth century’s women, they have no other way but submit themselves to the confinement of the house. Reading, however, is adopted as their temporary escape. They would take up a volume, throwing themselves into the realm of a novel, and forgetting nearly everything around them inside the house. During the process of reading, chances are that they would confront the disapproval of a father, or be frowned upon by a brother; hence procedures are employed to avoid the prying eyes: reading a copy in the seclusion from the world, perhaps under the disguise of a false cover. In this light, the novel becomes Bleeding

Nun's veil in its double meanings of repression and expression. At the first glance, the act of reading seems to fit in with the expected feminine behaviors. Women at that time were repressed and restrained at home, and could only choose recreations that were regarded as quiet, inconspicuous and cultured. Gothic novels served as a tool of concealment that enabled them to engage in their own recreation under the mask of a submissive daughter or wife, diligently holding up a volume and quietly staying at home. But once this disguise is unveiled, the violence, sexual violation, blood and gore would soon present themselves to their guardians' startled eyes. The grotesque depictions in the Gothic novels were offensive to the "intact" virginal female body that should have been veiled/covered under the protection of the male guardians, as in the sense of *feme covert* in the doctrine of coverture. Yet underneath this protective disguise, there are possibilities to alter, contort and subvert the discourse of normality and the regulation of the "perfect" female body.

Seemingly conforming to the expected feminine virtues, novel reading strategically blur the boundary between the working time and recreation time inside the house. It is understandable why women's rapid consumption of novels became worrisome and aroused criticism. This recreation went against the social expectations that women should contribute all of their time to the family, and in their indulgence in the novels, they might neglect other "natural" duties. Such regulation of course aroused rebellion, especially from those middle-class women, who enjoyed growing leisure due to their wealth and the increasing number of servants at home, and were educated enough to reconsider their roles in the society. Exempt from physical labors,

they often “[sat] in the newly conceptualised home with nothing to do” (Allen 11), constrained by social expectations to be a qualified wife and full-time mother.

Critics apprehend that novels no longer limit themselves as an amusing pastime, but become an “all-absorbing vocation” (Clery 97), enticing their readers into intemperate self-abandonment. Thus without proper regulation, it was believed, these readers would be led into disorder and perplexity. The promiscuity of books, Clery further argues, in part represents the confounding of female bodies who internalized them. The transient possession of a library book, for one thing, symbolized the swift circulation of consumption in a consumerist society in the formation, and the “confounding female bodies” reflect the addiction to its consuming objects.

However, behind the motivation to “correct” these “confounding” bodies is the attempt to domesticate these female bodies through the restraint on reading choices, habits, and the time spent on them. While the women’s reading habit is criticized for being restless, superficial and surreptitious, what lies behind is actually the anxiety toward these indulgent and pleasurable moments novels bring to women, which loosen the grip of social regulations of female time.

Such “confounding” or “internalization,” however, also indicates a state of divided attention and fluid mental mobility in the process of reading. While immersed in the plot of a story, the readers are experiencing two sets of worlds at the same moment. Here, I would like to demonstrate this effect through a passage of *Udolpho* in which the servant Ludovico immerses himself in *The Provencal Tale*, a supernatural story borrowed from the Count’s housekeeper Dorothee while keeping

vigil over the haunted chamber in Chateau-le-Blanc:<sup>29</sup>

“...while he shivered in the blast, and looked on the dark and desolate scene around him, he thought of the comforts of his warm chamber, rendered cheerful by the blaze of wood, and felt, for a moment, the full contrast of his present situation.”

[Here Ludovico paused a moment, and, looking at his own fire, gave it a brightening stir.]<sup>30</sup> (562)

Two kinds of storylines intertwine, respond to, and also interrupt, each other in this passage. *The Provençal Tale*'s mysterious aura parallels with the atmosphere in the haunted chamber, and reading these lines, Ludovico must have connected the “desolate scene” in the novel with his own lonely vigil in this chamber. As a reaction to this connection, he recalls “his own fire,” which is almost extinguished, and “gave it a brightening stir.” The nearly expiring fire on the hearth also shows that his whole attention has been engaged by the book before him, and he forgets everything around him.

Another example of absorption takes place when Ludovico continues to read:

“...As he gazed, he perceived the countenance of the Knight change, and begin to fade, till his whole form gradually vanished from his astonished sense! While the Baron stood, fixed to the spot, a voice was heard to utter these words:—”

<sup>29</sup> I am aware that Ludovico is not a female reader. However, being a domestic servant, Ludovico's experience represents a typical situation a woman would have faced when she divides her attention between a novel and her housework at hand. I believe this passage gives a detailed and vivid description to the reactions she would have during reading. It is the reading habit instead of the exact gender difference that I would like to lay my emphasis on the domestic aspect.

<sup>30</sup> The baskets are originally given by the author.

[Ludovico started, and laid down the book, for he thought he heard a voice in the chamber... He listened, scarcely daring to draw his breath, but heard only the distant roaring of the sea in the storm... concluding, that he had been deceived by its sighings, he took up his book to finish the story.]

“While the Baron stood, fixed to the spot, a voice was heard to utter these words:—.” (563)

Immersed in the storyline, Ludovico internalizes the protagonist Baron’s experiences and fancies hearing the phantom voice. The narrative employs quotation marks and brackets to indicate the switches between two realities as Ludovico’s shifts his attention every now and then, his mind never entirely dwelling on either. As an evidence for his straying thoughts, the line “While the Baron stood, fixed to the spot, a voice was heard to utter these words” is deliberately repeated twice, suggesting Ludovico’s attempt to pick up the lines after distraction. This repetition indicates a loss of time, an overlapping of realities while reading, and the temporary confusion in the process thereof. In this brief hesitation, I believe, lies a moment of freedom that becomes the main source of pleasure in novel reading. The pleasure is derived from the temporary riddance of duties and the freedom to jump between different contexts in this multi-tasking. During that time, Ludovico’s time is fluid and flexible, stoppable at anytime. Granted the length of a novel, the readers must have gone through the fragmental experience of suspending their reading when their duties call them away from current plot narratives. They are always ready to put down their books for a while to deal with other pressing matters at hand, like Ludovico’s stirring of the fire.

Absorption in novels' make-believe reality is enjoyable. Besides Ludovico, this intermediated state of mind is also shared by many other female readers, housewives or maids alike, who steal their piecemeal time between household responsibilities and sneak into the realm of novels, a convenient way to escape from the daily routine or duties on hand for a moment. This distraction grants a moment of break for women from the unceasing operation of labor, and moreover, it enables them to experience the fluid mobility of time in a juxtaposed reality during reading, and reconsider the domestic ideology of an ideal house in which they were placed at the center without a choice otherwise.

Through reading the escape episodes of the Gothic heroines, the readers are experiencing their own escapes at the same moment. The novels not only remove them from the current space and time, but also lead them away from the social expectations of being a mother or a wife inside the house. The escape, nevertheless, is but too transient. Like the Gothic heroines who would always return to the castle and unite with the heroes in matrimony, the readers would soon have to resume their housework or familial duties after indulging a moment of pleasure in the book. This temporary moment of pleasure, however, allows us to reconsider the construction of an ideal home and a perfect woman, to redefine the criteria of literary tastes and the disposal of leisure time. In the end, novel reading turns out to be not merely a pass time recreation that allows the readers to escape from their duties. It is a strategic response to the expected feminine virtues in the eighteenth century. It is also a dutiful reflection of the collective female experiences of apprehension, avoidance and

concealment under social expectations, domestic regulations, and other possible persecutions.

At the end of this chapter, perhaps it is best to mention again Catherine Morland from *Northanger Abbey*, who represent one of the most positive readers of the Gothic novel. Catherine is portrayed not merely as a passive reader; she is capable of experiencing, sympathizing, understanding and gaining knowledge from the lessons of Gothic novels as well as from her life. After a short escape into the imaginary world of fictions, she eventually returns to the real life with strength and wisdom. It is possible to say that in her *Bildungsroman*, she has become the ideal audience Radcliffe would have had in mind.

The development and transformation we and Catherine undergo with Emily is therefore symbolic of the eighteenth-century's process to encode, through literary debates and negative criticisms of Gothic novels, the ideal readers. Departing from the deviant consumers of superstitious and sentimental romances, these readers are expected to become an enlightened subject who are competent of temperance and rationality, and most of all, to become the "ideal recipient[s] of a new kind of literary communication" who are "worthy of, sensitive and attentive to, the virtuous lessons which literature in its most respectable forms is deemed capable of imparting" (Botting and Townshend 4). This transformation, however, is not a lineal progression terminated by the arrival at the further end. Rather, it is like the process of escape of the Gothic heroine, often rife with frustration and stagnation, but always ready to embark after repowering.

## Conclusion

At the first sight, the word “escape” carries a negative overtone, as it suggests a tendency to abandon one’s duties and evade responsibilities. Yet in the Gothic novels, the act of escape is positive and even courageous since it helps to remove the heroines away from the threats of Gothic villains. The decisive factor whether escape is positive or negative, we may conjure, lies in the objects one is trying to escape from. The Gothic heroines’ escapes are justified in consideration of the injustice of their affliction, whereas the reading of Gothic novels is criticized because the readers neglect their own domestic duties or household chores. Such criticism is liable for inquiry, since it is founded upon an established assumption of what a woman should perform unconditionally and unquestionably. Moreover, to see the act of escape as purely inaction or inability towards the present situation is to neglect the anxiety, discontent or even potential resistance lurking behind the escape. Therefore, in order to answer the central problematic of my thesis, that whether escape is positive or negative, I will probe into the discrepancy between the two opposing definitions of escape, and the roles of women at the end of the eighteenth century.

In the introduction, I have marked that Radcliffe’s feeling of “shame” to be an author might be derived from the social tension against a woman who engaged in the career of Gothic novels writing. Radcliffe’s scruple was understandable in a time when merely the act of novel reading was frowned upon, let alone that of writing. Living by the pen, for Radcliffe, was strategic. She endeavoured to shun social attention by creating a façade of ladylikeness that lifted her above criticism. Reading,



at the same time, was also an experience of privacy or secrecy in an attempt to avoid attention. Whether its form or content, Gothic novels became a tool to channel the sense of fear, the relief of escape, and the courage when faced with danger—collective memories shared by women at that time.

The first chapter of my thesis analyzes the narrative techniques of *Udolpho*. Radcliffe's tendency to break away from tension serves to create a cushioning period for the readers as well as the characters to catch their breath for the following climax. Her narrative is rendered fragmentary with the frequent swoons of her characters, and moreover, the circuitous plot, the depictions of travel, fancy and reading all serve to remove the readers from the current confrontation. Given sufficient time to recover, the terror would be turned into delight which "expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life" (Radcliffe "On the Supernatural", 145). The repetitive process of escapes and returns becomes a movement towards and away from the male-dominant world, as Fred Botting points out, and beyond the structures of paternal power. In this "zone of indiscernibility," femininity may obtain a moment of her own and encounter endless possibilities to step out of the existent rigidity of female roles under the patriarchal society.

The second chapter focuses on episodes of escape in *Udolpho*, *The Monk* and *Italian* to explore the problems the heroines may encounter in their respective escapes. Unlike the Lewisian heroines in *The Monk*, Radcliffe's heroines enjoy greater mobility and autonomy, and they also share a female bonding, one of the most crucial elements during escape when the male rescuers fall short of expectation. As a result, a

successful escape demonstrates the female subject's courage and resourcefulness in times of crisis.

During the escape, the heroine's spaces no longer fall into the clear-cut inside/safety and outside/danger formula. Safety and danger infiltrate each other and blend together into the "zone of indiscernibility" in which the female subject finds a temporary liberation through employments of concealment or costume changing. The escape passage of Agnes, for example, shows how the angelic countenance of Agnes turns into a horrific face of the Bleeding Nun, and then later the wretched, emaciated face that can hardly be seen as a woman. The distorted faces are unfortunate products under oppression of the patriarchal society; yet it is also a face that escapes male gazes, for it is too hideous to be looked upon. By this almost "mischievous" face-off performance, the female subject stuns the male enquiring eye and barter for a temporary escape/escapade.

Similar techniques of escapes are also employed when it comes to the reading of Gothic novels, a point I focus upon in my third chapter. Altering the covers of the novels they are reading, and concealing themselves in a dark, inconspicuous corner, Gothic readers also endeavour to escape from the prying eyes and avoid attention. The experience of escape is echoed through the process of reading, and grants the readers a sense of pleasure. As a result, novel reading at that time was often criticized because it reflected the escapist tendency in reading books which were expensive and seemingly worthless for the cultivation of good tastes and practical skills. Moreover, the indulgence in reading may often lead to neglect of the household chores.

Nevertheless, we cannot disregard the motivation behind such a widespread social phenomenon. In their depictions of fallen houses, missing mothers and dictatorial fathers, Gothic novels become an instrument to connect the collective experiences shared by the eighteenth-century women. They were under social expectations to become qualified housewives and full-time mothers, whereas the legal system and matrimonial constitutions did not protect them against violence and dangers coming from the inside of the house.

In this regard, Gothic novels are not limited as an escapist tool to flight away from reality, they also serves as dutiful reflections that undermine the idealized image of the “home” in this era. To escape, on the other hand, represents an elusive strategy that gives voice to the doubts and discontent towards the status quo. Escape is not as submissive, passive or regressive as people commonly believe. From Radcliffe’s social seclusion, her fragmentary and circuitous narratives, Gothic heroines’ nightly adventures to the readership of Gothic novels, “escape” conveys a variety of different meanings for the authors, for the characters and for the readers. At the heart of these various escapes lies the attempt to explore and negotiate female identities within the family and the society that systematically marginalize women. Even today, when the fashions of entertainment has greatly evolved in a full-blown consumerist society, and the influences of Gothic novels can been found in all kinds of books, TV programs, movies, games, or animations, the Gothic remains a genre consistently written and read by women. These pieces of works continue to challenge existent social structures, channeling women’s anxiety with depictions of thrill and horror.

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