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The Supernatural Subject of the Sublime in Burke and Radcliffe: A Reading of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

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Abstract The article aims to explore how the supernatural is represented in Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), arguing that it reflects Radcliffe's ideas on the matter, described in her theoretical work *On the Supernatural in Poetry* (1826). Following Walter Scott's representation of Radcliffe in his work *Lives of the Novelists* (1825), her works have been associated with the concept of the explained supernatural. The articles argues that the supernatural present in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) complicates the subjective safety implied by the explained supernatural, a complication visible in the novel's narrative closure.

Keywords Gothic novel. Supernatural. The Sublime. Empiricism. Narrative. Edmund Burke. Ann Radcliffe. The Mysteries of Udolpho.

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1 Introduction

As is appropriate for an article analysing *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (henceforth *Udolpho*), this one aims to tell a doubled story, a twined narrative of the explained supernatural and the sublime. While those categories may seem to be mutually exclusive – what could be less explained than the obscurity of the sublime? – they both emerge from empiricist epistemology, and they both struggle to provide satisfying narrative closure. Through the explained supernatural, Radcliffe tries to fuse the thrill-and-revelation structure of the sublime with the rigours of realistic representation, hoping to solve one difficulty, concluding a narrative, with another, concluding a sublime experience. While her critics point out the failures of this attempt, her fame suggests she was also surprisingly successful. But I would suggest that *Udolpho*'s failure to provide conclusions that match the emotion stirred up by its initial circumstances indicates an important feature of the sublime that is ignored in much of the primary and secondary literature on the topic: its failed attempt to give its heroine an unhaunted home free of unsolved mysteries.

This article begins by re-examining Burke's sublime shift from rhetoric to nature and from pain to delight. This return to Burke reveals that his attempt to reconcile the physiological and the moral should raise our suspicions, and we will see that Radcliffe puts Emily St. Aubert in that very gap. In fact, his conclusions undermine the empiricist foundation he tries to provide for taste, because they retroactively depend on the empiricist subject, which is an emergent phenomenon in the eighteenth century. Burke is central to eighteenth-century English discourse on the sublime, but his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (henceforth *Enquiry*) is also central to Radcliffe's explained supernatural and her terror/horror distinction. The next section tracks Radcliffe's adaptation of his sublime to her narrative ends in *Udolpho* and treats Radcliffe as a canny reader of Burke. That novel has been read as ending with a sublime return of readers and characters to their places of safety, compensating physical suffering with a subjective home. While it is typical to read Radcliffe as an adherent of Burke's aesthetic theory, she is better understood as a respondent. She uses the narrative powers of the realist novel to clarify the narrative logic of the sublime, neatly separating the physical question of safety from the more important questions of knowledge and certainty, which drive the sublime. In *Udolpho*, she advances two key corrections to Burke's *Enquiry*: that delight is not the mark of the sublime, and that not all sublime encounters conclude with a fortified sense of self. I investigate the first point in the third section, and the second in the fourth. Surprisingly, Radcliffe's Gothic novel respects the limits of rationality imposed by empiricism more completely than Burke's trea-

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tise. Radcliffe knows that empiricism and subjective certainty cannot comport with one another, and both the charms of *Udolpho* and her revision of the sublime grow from that knowledge.

2 Burke's Apocalyptic Sublime

Samuel Holt Monk's *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* stands a touchstone for understanding the century's discourse on the sublime, even as it has been corrected for making Kant's third *Critique* the telos of the sublime and for ignoring English discourse on the sublime stretching back to the seventeenth century.[1] The precise importance of the *Enquiry* has shifted over time: Ashfield and De Bolla's anthology contextualises Burke's originality within other works in the tradition, and J. Jennifer Jones makes it clear that both appreciative and performative modes were already available in Longinus's treatise (see Ashfield, de Bolla 1996; Jones 2015). Rodolphe Gasché maintains that

> Burke was the first to propose an uncompromising empiricist – that is sensualistic – account of aesthetic experience, and to have radically uncoupled this experience from extrinsic considerations (particularly, moral and religious), which still dominate Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725). (2012, 24)

However, there is more to the *Enquiry* than a strictly empiricist account of aesthetic experience. As Frances Ferguson points out, the work is as notable for empiricism as for its

> emphasis upon the significance of the passions, or in other words, psychology. Obviously, Burke appears to be caught between a completely nonsubjective (nonidealist) scientism on one hand and a completely subjective irrationalism on the other. (1992, 40)

I want to focus on Burke not because he moved the sublime from rhetoric to aesthetics, nor because he introduced empiricist rigour to the aesthetics, but because his narration of the sublime experience sets a pattern for the discourse and shows the difficulties of capturing a preternatural object – the subject – in representation.

1 Monk (1960, 86-7) marks Burke's 1757 *Enquiry* as a turning point in the sublime's journey from rhetoric to aesthetics when he calls it "certainly one of the most important aesthetic documents that eighteenth-century England produced".

In fact, the *Enquiry* aims to bring a most elusive quality, human subjectivity, into the realm of representation with sublime rhetoric, and to make it the bedrock of taste. I claim that Burke uses narrative to first confront a difficulty, then describe its progress in physiological terms, and then to triumph over it with moral meaning and the emergence of a stable subject, treated as if it were a return. I call the end of Burke's sublime narrative "apocalyptic" because the conclusion redeems the chaos of experience with the certainty of an articulated subject. One of the less examined qualities of the *Enquiry* is its goal of settling the problem of subjectivity or selfhood for empiricism. As I will explain in the following sections, Radcliffe exploits the difficult problem of the empiricist self to maintain the realism of *Udolpho* and explore the consequences of the sublime for a heroine who cannot return all the way home.

It may seem odd to address subjectivity from an empiricist perspective. After all, empiricism rejects the *cogito*, and Hume denies that we ever have a "simple and continu'd" sense of self (1978, 252). However, the sublime often involves subject and object confusion, and often concludes, as in the egotistical sublime, with a restoration of the sense of self. Since Burke attempts to bridge empiricism and psychology in the *Enquiry*, a closer look at subjectivity will establish how Burke makes this move. The subject or self, for Hume, is an emergent phenomenon. As an emergence, it is beyond the given and therefore supernatural in the strictest sense. Subjectivity haunts the mind. Like a ghost, it emerges and departs from the chaos of sensation. Like the supernatural, it is an object of belief, experience notwithstanding. Humean subjectivity is a product of the assumptions required for daily life, but which cannot be proven with reason. However, Hume also warns that mere custom can be mistaken for more. John Wright explains that

> in the *Treatise* [*of Human Nature*], Hume describes his 'present hypothesis' as the claim that 'from custom' there is formed 'an easy transition to the idea of that object, which usually attends' the present impression […] By constant repetition the pathway linking their corresponding brain traces gets deeper, facilitating the motion of the animal spirits and making us conceive the 'idea in a stronger and more lively manner.' As the pathway grows deeper the belief grows stronger. (2009, 110)

In other words, an object of belief like the self can be built up through repetition and strong emotion into something we take for a simple idea, even though it is not. Burke uses the "easy transition" from custom to idea to locate stable subjectivity at the conclusion of the sublime.

Between the first and second edition of the *Enquiry*, Burke made substantive changes to answer his reviewers, though James T. Boulton points out that "the revisions in the second edition do not repre-

sent a full answer to his critics, nor do they on every occasion successfully meet the objections raised" (Burke 1986, xxv). In addition to the substantive changes, Burke made smaller revisions such as removing some section breaks that repay a closer look. The most important of these changes are his removals of sections 19 and 20 of part one, the first of which was unlabelled, and the second of which was labelled "The same". Those sections were additions to "The Recapitulation", which became one section in the second edition, simply called "Recapitulation". I say these are the most important changes because the recapitulation gathers his argument about how the sublime unfolds and states them plainly. The removal of breaks in the recapitulation of Part One reveals a key rhetorical move. Burke's emphasis on finality, the completeness of the conclusion drawn in the recapitulation, links the *Enquiry* to the tradition of the rhetorical sublime. While the *Enquiry* describes a natural sublime that confronts the observing body, it addresses itself to its readers through the rhetoric of haste recommended by Longinus in his *Peri Hypsous*.

Burke is deeply interested in proving that subjectivity emerges from experience, and that subjectivity is a proof of the grounds of his science of taste as much as it is a result of the aesthetic experience he narrates. As Barbara Claire Freeman puts it,

> Burke's wager in the *Enquiry* is that theory can put certainty in the place of ambiguity and replace diversity with fixed and universal 'principles in nature'. (1997, 43)

Burke writes about the sublime and the beautiful to solidify the subject as stable ground for his science of feeling. That is, in its essence, the rhetorical trick of the *Enquiry's* treatment of the sublime. A close reading of the revisions to the recapitulation and conclusion of Part One of the *Enquiry* reveals the moment of narrative repetition when physiological experience gives way to subjective certainty. The substitution of the result for an antecedent appears in the narrative of the sublime given in part one of the *Enquiry*. In both form and content, Burke uses the sublime to shape chaotic experience into a meaningful narrative whose result is an apparently returning subject, which is actually an emerging subject.

Jones (2015, 185-7) ties the natural sublime to the rhetorical sublime by showing that Burke relies on the same dialectic of concealment and revelation that Longinus does, though Burke attempts to eliminate concealment. Craig Smith (2018, 112) also ties Burke's project to the rhetorical roots of the sublime by arguing that

> [a]ttribution of causality is *rhetorical* because it is a product of the imagination that rationalizes simultaneous occurrences". Eva Antal links Burke to Longinus: "those providing sensations

> to Burke's imagination are poets and the classics. The method is borrowed from Longinus. (214)

I want to emphasise the temporal connection between the rhetorical and the natural sublime: Burke uses Longinus's method and borrows his dialectic of concealment and revelation, while also adopting Longinus's recommended technique of encouraging his readers to a hasty conclusion. The rhetorical sublime and the natural sublime share a temporal structure in which subjective suspension of certainty is followed by a subjective rush to conclude: our senses or intellect are presented with something beyond their capacities, a sublime object or utterance, and our intellectual response is to rush to a conclusion.[2] When reading *Udolpho*, we watch the heroine stumble across a veil and demand an explanation, though the text leaves us suspended for hundreds of pages.

Because Longinus's treaty is an educational text, he has no motivation to hide the hasty conclusion-forcing that comes with sublime rhetoric. He tells his student that "[s]ublimity […] tears up everything like a whirlwind, and exhibits the orator's power at a single blow" (Russell, Winterbottom 2008, 143). Sublime rhetorical power, yes, but also, haste – the power is concentrated in an instant. Longinus goes on to say that the "amazement and wonder" produced by sublimity, unlike persuasion, cannot be controlled, and "they exert invincible power and force and get the better of every hearer" (144). He identifies the trope of asyndeton, the deliberate leaving out of conjunctions, as one that produces sublimity. Leaving the conjunctions out "convey[s] the impression of an agitation which both obstructs the reader and drives him on" (165). Asyndeton compresses time and strikes the listener with ideas faster than she may be ready for them, first obstructing sense but then driving the listener to a conclusion. As long as the rhetorician's tropes elude detection, the physically agitated listener will conclude before reason can intervene, yielding to the demand for immediate conclusion.

Burke recognises the place of haste in the power of the sublime. He says: "[the sublime] anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force" (Burke 1986, 57). The sublime does not leave time for reflection, and from its incitement to haste comes part of its powers. However, referring to astonishment as the most powerful effect of the sublime, Burke states that "astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (57). Suspension vies with haste in the sublime, just as he says that pain and fear affect the body

2 For another perspective linking Burke's sublime to temporal experience see Yahav 2018.

> with an unnatural strength, which sometimes suddenly changes into an extraordinary weakness [and] that these effects often come on alternately, and are sometimes missed with each other. (132)

The middle of the sublime narrative is characterised by both suspension and agitation, alternating or mixed. I call particular attention to this because the torments of the sublime narrative's middle are retroactively changed by its conclusion.

"Delight" is the term that Burke uses to mediate the conflict between suspension and haste, whose status changes under the revisions of the recapitulation. He defines delight as "the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain or danger" (Burke 1986, 37). It is not a positive pleasure that arises of its own causes, but a privation of positive pain. The sublime poses a difficult question – how can something terrifying, like the sublime, give rise to pleasure? – which Burke answers with delight. That Burke makes a distinction between pain and delight indicates that he aims at more than a physiological explanation of the sublime. If the sublime were merely physical, it would collapse into fear. Is delight part of the sublime, or is it a separate emotional response that comes afterward? If delight is merely a response to sublime terror, and not part of the total complex named by the term, then it is hard to see that there is any difference between the sublime and simple abject terror. However, if delight is part of the sublime experience, and not just an adjunct to it, then the sublime has a coherence of its own. With delight as a necessary conclusion, the sublime provides a conclusive narrative structure for experiences of terror and the emergence of the subject of taste.

On this important question of delight and the sublime, Burke is equivocal. Introducing the sublime, he says that

> [w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger […] whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*. (39)

He goes on to identify the sublime with "the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling" (39). He holds that

> if danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we everyday experience. (40)

The sublime is terrible, and so are pains and dangers that press too nearly; the possibility of delight comes second, logically and temporally, to the presence of terror. It would seem at this point that de-

light is not a necessary part of the sublime, but a reaction to it. Without delight as part of the scheme of the sublime, the subject is left with the potential of unending terror uncushioned by delight. The distinction between the sublime and mere pain is not a physiological one: though it starts in the body, the sublime ends in the subject that transcends experience.[3]

Burke resolves the contradiction between pain and sublimity in the recapitulation of part one:

> The passions which belong to self-preservation, turn on pain and danger; they are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; they are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger without being actually in such circumstances [...] Whatever excites this delight, I call *sublime*. (1986, 51)

At this point, it is clear that delight, and not terror, is the mark of the sublime. Burke has made a subtle and important move here that is paradigmatic of discourses that could control the sublime: he eliminates the temporal movement of vacillation or suspension that initially characterises the sublime and gains the certainty of his delightful conclusion. Delight is the result of the Burkean sublime, just as loss of control, overwhelming of judgment (leading to a rhetorically advantageous and hasty conclusion) is the result of the Longinian sublime. In both cases, there is a move to get past the impasse, to put an end to the uncertainty introduced by the sublime experience: delightful conclusion triumphs over astonishment. The body suffers pain, but the empirical subject experiences delight as a return to its previous state.

This solution to the problem of pain in the sublime is textually overdetermined. In the first edition of the *Enquiry*, the recapitulation gathers three separate points, as it promises to do in its first words: "[t]o draw the whole of what has been said into a few distinct points" (Burke 1986, 51). Three recapitulations are rendered there in three sections. The second edition recapitulation erases these boundaries and makes one solid recapitulation of the whole of Part One, offering what looks more like a systematic conclusion of the whole, something more appropriate to the sense of the word recapitulation. This is a crucial moment because recapitulating and concluding are not simply rhetorically required moves for Burke. In this case, to restate is also to alter the foregoing arguments, to draw them into a narrow circle and collapse their rhythmic existence into a flash of insight. In short, Burke's recapitulation and conclusion to part one of the *Enquiry* attempt to replace the deliberative, discursive exposition of the sub-

3 For another perspective on the role of the body in Burke's sublime, see Ryan 2001.

lime and the beautiful with a sublime rhetorical fulguration, a transcendent statement that sweeps all before it and declares itself the truth about the sublime. Burke provides a narrative solution to the problem of the sublime, bridging the gulf between the body and the subject, concluding with the delightful supposed return of the subject to its point of homeostasis and safety. The moment of suspension overwhelms the subject physically, and challenges the limits of representation, but the moment of conclusion tries to grant meaning to suspension by sating the passion for self-preservation.

The recapitulation redeems the chaos of experience and retroactively installs the subject as a foundation; it is self-discovery (or self-making) presented as self-preservation. In Burke's hands, recapitulation is not just a section demanded by the genre within which he writes. It becomes an enactment of the phenomenon it describes. His recapitulation hurries the reader on, exchanging process for product, foreclosing experience and forgetting that foreclosure in a moment that fuses the sublime with delight. Burke's revisions bid his recapitulation to partake of the religious sense of the word, the redemption of all experience in the return of the saviour.[4] His forward-looking, subject-discovering, apocalyptic sublime is built on the certainty that the Other, in the Lacanian sense of a treasury of signifiers, will finally reveal the meaning of all experience.

3 "Amidst all the Tumult": The Explained Supernatural as a Reading of the Enquiry

Radcliffe's *Udolpho* is, at surface, the story of its heroine's adventures in the world and her eventual return home. Emily St. Aubert questions her family identity, confronts death in many forms, and ends the novel in wealth and wedlock. Without ever depicting supernatural events, Radcliffe's most famous novel presents Emily, several of her fellow women, and readers with the thrill of sublimity, but also gives them the closure demanded by late eighteenth-century readers. She navigates the two goals with the explained supernatural, balancing between the desire for narrative and the law of closure much as Burke balanced the chaos of experience with the retroactive certainty of the subject.[5] In this section, I argue that the explained supernatural is Radcliffe's reading of Burke's sublime, and that she main-

4 In Paule theology, "recapitulation refers to both the headship of Christ over his Body, the Church, and to the unity of all Things, the whole cosmos, under Christ" (*New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 952).

5 I borrow "desire for narrative" and "law of closure" from D.A. Miller (Miller 1981, 272-3). Radcliffe finds a way between the alternatives that Miller represents in de Sade and Austen.

tains the agitation of the second moment that Burke waves away in his conclusion. *Udolpho* stands as a critique of his sublime and an alternate take on the power of the Other to supply meaning and coherence to experience. Opposed to Burke's apocalyptic sublime, which takes its meaning in a final totality, Radcliffe's explained supernatural grants moments of revelation without committing to the certainty of a final revelation by the Other.

In his review of Radcliffe's work in *Lives of the Novelists*, Sir Walter Scott reads Radcliffe's famous practice of the explained supernatural and the tastes of the reading public together. Characteristic of Mrs. Radcliffe's romances is that

> all the circumstances of her narrative, however mysterious and apparently superhuman, were to be accounted for on natural principles at the winding up of the story. (Scott 1906, 326-7)

According to Scott, the reading public demands that mysterious events be rendered either supernatural or natural. Todorov (1975, 41) uses the same distinction: the fantastic is resolved either into the uncanny or the marvellous, depending on whether the phenomena receive a rational explanation or not. The explained and unexplained supernatural have long marked the male and female Gothic, with Matthew Lewis serving as Radcliffe's counterpart.[6] My reading resists both the hasty conclusion and the gender binary suggested by Scott's influential take on the reading public. Radcliffe expands the possibilities of the narrative middle.

Radcliffe's distinction between terror and horror, set forth in essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry," explains that the suspension of certainty is more important than its re-establishment. Suspension distinguishes readers. She writes:

> They must be men of very cold imaginations […] with whom certainty is more terrible than surmise. Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as the source of the sublime, though they all agreed that terror is a very high one; and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil? (Bloom 1971, 66)

6 See (Macdonald 1989, 197-9) for a representative reading that maps Todrov's uncanny onto Radcliffe and his marvellous onto Matthew Lewis. For a more nuanced take on the underpinnings of the terms "male" and "female Gothic", see Ledoux 2017.

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Readings of this passage usually emphasise the equation of horror with presence and terror with absence, but certainty and surmise are subjective states, not objective descriptions. The point of this exchange is not to decide whether causes of horror exist in reality, but how a reader responds to a stimulus. Those with warm imaginations suspend certainty, and enter into obscurity with the possibility of encountering novelty. Those with cold imaginations see through obscurity, but never experience the swelling of the soul that accompanies the suspension of the sublime middle.

While the explained supernatural may seem to let Radcliffe have it both ways, thrilling and explaining, her textual practice requires us to consider other possibilities between the binary solutions to the supernatural. As a narrative enactment of the Burkean sublime, the explained supernatural lets Radcliffe explore the subjective possibilities opened by terror while avoiding the subjective destitution of horror. However, many critical accounts, starting with Scott's, tend to overweigh conclusions. Nelson C. Smith (1973), for instance, reads *Udolpho* as a didactic novel in which Emily is disciplined until she has replaced the dangers of sensibility with the safety of common sense. Natalie Neill reiterates this common view when she states that Radcliffe ultimately "asserts the realism of her work through her policy of including rational elucidations" (2018, 169). Such readings follow the logic of Burke's sublime by discounting the value of the suspension of certainty occasioned by the not-yet-explained supernatural. Radcliffe's fiction and her literary criticism value the time between the initial shock and the eventual explanation as a signal of the quality of the observer over the correctness of the final answer.

Critics who pay close attention to *Udolpho*'s surface find that time and narrative are stranger there than the more conclusion-focused conservative critics lead us to expect. Richard Albright (2005) argues that time in *Udolpho* is chaotic, flowing back and forth. Brandy Schillace notes that out of place memories make for a "disorienting overlap of past, present, and future" in the novel (2009, 274). Michael Paulson goes even further, stating that "*Udolpho* severs the fundamental link between time and narrative, thereby elaborating a highly original and utterly inhuman form of time" (2019, 605). These readings indicate that both time and narrative fail to progress, as the empirical subject of sensations through which the novel is focalised stutters aimlessly from point to point. If Emily's time and subjectivity are chaotic, it is because Radcliffe refuses the easy transition from custom to idea that Burke uses to retroactively install subjective certainty through the sublime. An examination of responses to obscure stimuli in *Udolpho* shows that time and narrative are not equally strange for all characters. Heroic capacity in *Udolpho* is measured in the ability to defer the desire for conclusion.

The garrulous servant Annette represents one end of the spectrum of ways to read mysterious stimuli. Having seen strange men coming and going from Castle Udolpho, she reports to Emily. As is her wont, she starts with her conclusion that "they are coming to murder us all" (Radcliffe 2008, 297). After more than one lengthy passage of dialogue, reduced by her tactful direction, Emily gets Annette to tell her what makes her think that. She finally reveals that "ill-looking men" have come to the castle, and are currently housed close by (299). That event is enough to encourage her breathless report and conclusion. Annette fills the page with her words, leaving herself no time for hesitation or vacillation between different states.

Annette does not experience the sublime time of suspension. Instead, she has a purely physical reaction to what she has seen, jumping directly to the direst conclusion. She is an embodiment of the physiological side of Burke's *Enquiry*, rebounding by reflex. Emily's cooler response shines by contrast:

> She forbore to speak her apprehensions, because she would not encourage Annette's wild terrors; but the present circumstances of the castle both surprised, and alarmed her. (299)

The next paragraph jumps to the evening hours later, indicating that Emily has been sitting with this new sense of alarm without forming the kind of wild conclusion that Annette has. Like so much of the novel, Emily spends these hours in a state of suspense largely unknown to Annette, who always has a conclusion.

At the other end of the spectrum stands Montoni. During one of his attempts to get Emily to sign her Aunt's lands over to him, they hear a voice with no apparent source in the castle. He promises her a terrible punishment "this very night' – 'This night!' repeated another voice" (394). The mysterious voice interrupts Montoni only very briefly, who then continues his harangue. Even as the voice moans, the most we see is "something like a shade of fear" on his face. Meanwhile, "Emily sat down in a chair, near the door, for the various emotions she had suffered, now almost overcame her" (394). He continues to ignore the groans, and finally declares: "And for these fool's tricks – I will soon discover by whom they are practiced"(395). So sure is Montoni about the mundane truth of cause and effect that he never enters Emily's space of being nearly overcome by the uncertainty of experience. Montoni reasons by pure custom, so sure of the traces laid in his brain by repetition that he forgets the gap between cause and effect.

Annette and Montoni are surprisingly connected by their inability to enter the state of suspension so familiar to Emily and to readers of *Udolpho*. Both Annette and Montoni reach conclusions quickly, even if they are opposite conclusions. Annette's certainty that

she (and everyone in her party) is to be murdered equals Montoni's certainty that the groaning voice is a trick. The servant's reactions are physiological and the villain's are customary, but they both stop them from entering into the subjective process that promises to transcend experience.

The circuit between stimulus and conclusion is longer and less direct for Emily, so she (like the novel's readers) spends a great deal of time in suspense. Late in the novel Emily and Dorothée, housekeeper at Chateau-le-Blanc, explore the long-closed north end of the chateau where the Marchioness died. Their experience is a microcosm of sublime suspension and vacillation. They enter the death chamber, and they both see a human face rising from the bed. Their initial reaction is to scream with terror and flee. In Burke's terms, danger pressed too closely, and was simply terrible. Once they are sure of their physical safety, the two sort through possible causes of their vision, checking experience against what they know. Could it have been the wind? Maybe someone followed them? One by one, explanations are tried. Conclusion is suspended as they vacillate among possibilities. Reaching no conclusion, "Emily was very solemnly affected". The combination of the strange face, the setting of the death chamber, and Dorothée's telling of the Marchioness's fate "affected Emily's imagination with a superstitious awe". Emily concludes: "'Time […] may explain this mysterious affair'" (537). Emily experiences the astonishment of the sublime without having an answer to her question anywhere in sight, indicating that the most powerful emotion belongs to the time of suspension, not the moment of conclusion. Here we see Racliffe neatly separate physical safety, an adjunct to sublimity, from the return of certainty, the conclusion to a mystery. If Emily becomes more disciplined over the course of the novel, it is not toward Montoni-like faith in habit and loss of sensibility, nor toward Annette's hysterical certainty. Rather, it is toward suspending conclusion and dwelling in the possibilities opened in the middle of the sublime narrative.

Caught between provocation and conclusion, the narrative loops along with possibilities, stretching the time of suspension just as it stretches for *Udolpho*'s readers. Instead of minimising the time and experience of suspension and dissolving it in a sublime conclusion, as Burke does in the *Enquiry*, Radcliffe fills the middle of her novel with uncertainty, raising expectations beyond any hope of a satisfactory conclusion. Every reader of Radcliffe is dissatisfied at some point, because the size of the explanation cannot match the length of the suspension. The deficit of textual pleasure signals her disagreement with Burke's too-perfect sublime narrative.

4 "She at Length Concluded:" Narrative Closure in *Udolpho*

Critics in Walter Scott's camp, those who emphasise the consonance of *Udolpho*'s conclusion, tend to treat the whole last volume of the novel as a straightforward series of revelations. Indeed, many (though crucially, I argue, not all) of the mysteries are wrapped up in the fourth volume. Emily is doubled by Blanche, whose romance with M. St. Foix parallels Emily's with Valancourt. The action is set in the Chateau-le-Blanc, Castle Udolpho's double, where Emily discovers the strangely familiar image of the Marchioness de Villeroi and finally speaks to Signora Laurentini di Udolpho, in the guise of Sister Agnes. All of the doubling and Emily's return to La Vallée seem to lead to the perfect authentic cadence required by the law of closure.

However, that sense of completion falls apart under closer attention to the narrative structure of the text. It is typical for Gothic novels to exhibit narrative complexity, presenting stories-within-stories, interruptions, flashbacks, and other set-pieces that challenge textual wholeness. *Udolpho* is not among the more complex Gothic novels in this regard. Readers only have to negotiate among two or three narrative levels. The extradiegetic narrator recounts some of the action. At times, various characters speak, effectively becoming brief narrators. Included in this level are snatches of poetry that are presented either in a character's voice or as textual artifacts. A third level appears when a character reads a book and take readers with them, as in the case of Ludovico reading "The Provençal Tale" as he watches for ghosts in the Marchioness's bedchamber in Chateau-le-Blanc (552-7). Even as one level mirrors the events of another, Radcliffe carefully articulates their transitions and readers rarely have to wonder which level they are reading. In fact, keeping those levels separate is key to the book's imposition of suspense on characters and readers alike. The fraying of the narrative's management of knowledge in the final volume is Radcliffe's method for advancing her second response to Burke, that not all sublime encounters conclude with an empowered sense of self.

One facet of Radcliffe's strong reading of Burke's sublime is manifested in the knowledge and control of her narrator. In order for the suspension of the explained supernatural to exist, the reader must assume that an explanation will be forthcoming, and the narrator is the guarantee of the explanation. Characters operate under this injunction, too. This required assumption matters for the sublime, because Burke also knows that for the sublime to provide subjective certainty as an outcome of the sensate chaos of the empirical mind such protention and retroaction is needed. The projection of subjective stability into the shadowy past of the subject is Burke's goal, and Radcliffe achieves a similar expectation of returned stability with her extradiegetic narrator. The two works share the need to bridge be-

tween physiological disorder and subjective order, and they both do it by breaking their own empiricist rules and appealing to an authority that stands outside the physical realm. While Burke hides such an authority in his recapitulation, Radcliffe also refuses to completely satisfy the need for an external Other in her narrator.

Readers and characters must share the belief that an explanation will come forth in order to experience the sublime, but the narrator of *Udolpho* manages the two groups separately. The knowledge of the narrator (and of various characters) overlap with that of the reader only when it suits the narrator. However, for readers to continue in the text's illusory scheme of explanation, explanation must be accessible within the diegesis. In other words, explanations of mysteries that start in the diegesis are not typically limited to the first level of the narrative, where the extradiegetic narrator speaks to the readers. Effective conclusions to mysteries are shown, not told. The reader's experience of the explained supernatural is typically focalised through Emily. However, *Udolpho* continually plays with knowledge. There are sensations known to characters, but not to readers, such as what Emily thought she saw behind the black silk veil. There are facts known to the reader, but not to Emily, such as the events that happened at Castle Udolpho after Emily's escape. There are also facts apparently known only to the narrator, at least until they are revealed. For the explained supernatural to work, the narrator must exercise complete control of knowledge, so she can reveal what she wants to when she wants to. Readers (and characters of Emily's sensibility) have no choice but to trust the narrator. The narrator's perfect and complete knowledge makes her an Other like the one Burke implies, a guarantee of the meaning of experience, and a home for the subject. Burke and Radcliffe both write narratives that hinge on such an Other, but Burke is more deeply committed to the actual existence of such an Other because he aims at a scientific description of experience, not Gothic entertainment.

Radcliffe challenges the Other as guarantee of meaning in the third-to-last chapter, when the narrator reports that Signora Laurentini, known as Sister Agnes, left behind a will that transferred considerable property to Emily. After that, the abbess reveals, through convolutions, that she has learned more than needs to be revealed to Emily. Closure, a satisfaction both libidinal and narrative, finally appears on the horizon. However, readers do not get to know what the abbess tells Emily. Instead, the narrator says that,

> as the narrative of the abbess was […] deficient in many particulars, of which the reader may wish to be informed, and the history of the nun is materially connected with the fate of the Marchioness de Villeroi, we shall omit the conversation, that passed in the parlour of the convent, and mingle with our relation a brief history of LAURENTINI DI UDOLPHO. (655)

Radcliffe doubly curses the abbess's narrative, Emily's last chance to reach closure. First, the abbess's narrative is called deficient and, second, it does not appear in the book. Readers are separated from Emily in their knowledge of one of the most important facts in the narrative.

Radcliffe all but assures readers that her protagonist never has the most traumatic supernatural element dissolved by explanation by setting so many mysteries in motion that there is no character who can explain them all. Like Burke's sublime, the explained supernatural implies a meaningful universe in which cause and effect can eventually be explained, but Radcliffe makes a universe in which some bits of knowledge cannot be located, and desire for narrative survives the law of closure. The "oddly preternatural" language that permeates the end of the book, Terry Castle (1995, 122) notes, upsets the reductive impulse that would render *Udolpho* a didactic text about disciplining sensibility.

Radcliffe does not, or cannot, completely end narrative desire in her text, leaving two possibilities: either Emily does know what happened, and the novel cannot contain a revelation to her and to readers, or Emily does not know what was behind the veil because the diegetic world of the novel cannot answer all the questions it contains. Even after her meeting with the abbess, Emily cannot believe that Montoni would let her stumble across a victim's corpse, but her doubts "were not sufficient to overcome her suspicion of Montoni; and it was the dread of his terrible vengeance, that had sealed her lips in silence" on the matter (Radcliffe 2008, 663). Emily's silence is the last word on the wax corpse, eliminating the possibility that its mystery was revealed to her. The maintenance of suspense on the novel's final mystery, death itself, castrates the Other and leaves Emily without a subjective foundation. With this inconclusive conclusion, Radcliffe reveals that the mechanisms of the Burkean sublime can all function without necessarily leading to delight and subjective certainty.

5 Coda: Representing the Ghostly Subject of Empiricism

Instead of final certainty, the explained supernatural and Radcliffe's fiction provide only momentary consolations for the chaos of sensation. Both the novel and Emily's occasional glimpses of the divine in nature are momentary stays against confusion. With the incompleteness of the novel's conclusion, Emily's subjectivity is haunted and split by desire, without a final answer. That subjectivity riven by questions and uncertain of its own end is, surprisingly, much closer to the subjectivity described by Hume than that which appears in Burke's apocalyptic application. Radcliffe blends the realistic novel with the romance, but refuses to abandon desire for the law. The result is a text that repre-

sents the supernatural subject more effectively than any text answering all its questions can do.

The bounds of the realistic novel would seem to limit Radcliffe to the explained supernatural and to compel her to explain every mystery, yielding the bathos decried by critics from Sir Walter Scott to today. However, a more careful reading reveals that the necessarily incomplete realistic diegesis of *Udolpho* actually cannot contain and express all explanations. Ironically, it is Burke's philosophical treatise and not Radcliffe's Gothic novel that requires its readers to believe in apocalyptic revelation to make sublimity produce a stable subject in its conclusion. By leaving Emily without a conclusion to the mystery of the veil, Radcliffe presages what Simon Bainbridge (2020, 123) calls the negative sublime, opposed to the egotistical sublime:

> At the moment of his greatest mountaineering achievement, Keats rejected what Ross has termed the 'ultimate sublime experience', embracing instead what I have termed the 'negative sublime' […] his ascent confirmed the value of a poetic identity that was as 'capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts' as he had been when standing 'in a Mist' on Britain's highest summit.

Instead of giving Emily the mountaintop mastery of the triumphant sublime, Radcliffe gives her terror, brief reprieves, and a conclusion that acknowledges the incomplete state of knowledge under empiricism.

Instead of a stable subject that can serve as the bedrock of a science of taste, the subject of the sublime depicted in *Udolpho* is one whose certainty emerges and disappears. This subject is much closer to Hume's bundle of perceptions than it is to a triumphant ego. It is a subject that exists in the suspension between provocation and conclusion, reified neither by physiology nor custom, the correspondent of an Other that is either incomplete or inconsistent, which is precisely the position of *Udolpho*'s narrator.

The novel ends with an excuse for its existence:

> And, if the weak hand, that has recorded this tale, has, by its scenes, beguiled the mourner of one hour of sorrow, or, by its moral, taught him to sustain it – the effort, however humble, has not be vain, nor is the writer unrewarded. (Radcliffe 2008, 672)

Radcliffe's distributed and immanent sublime does not present the final certainty of Burke's but delivers on its promise. After finishing *Udolpho*, readers have redeemed time in suspension, not in apocalyptic conclusion. If they are disciplined, it is toward Emily's openness to possibilities, not to Annette's hasty conclusions or to Montoni's mistaking custom for reality.

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