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BODY POLITICS IN ANN RADCLIFFE'S *THE MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO AND THE ITALIAN*

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the way in which Ann Radcliffe manages to register shifts in the ontology of the self and the other which were taking place in the late eighteenth century. Acknowledging the ambivalences of the semiotics of the body, especially in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*, allows her to toy with the notion of the body as character correlate, and orchestrate the problematics of the union between a character and his or her corporeal designation and perception by others. The paper demonstrates how grappling with the dynamics informed by the Cartesian opposition of substance and essence in turn allows for subscribing to the paradigmatic gothic atmosphere, but also foreshadows the contemporary post-Cartesian phenomenological understanding of the body, and introduces a truly modern psychologised and internalised eschatology and "spectralisation of the other."

KEYWORDS: Ann Radcliffe, body, character, perception, death

With the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), subtitled "A Gothic Story," the birth of Gothic fiction in the last decades of the eighteenth century came at a historically momentous point of multiple cultural transitions. Firstly, as Terry Castle has evidenced, "in its denial of the traditional spirit-world" Gothic fiction "anticipates the thoroughly God-abandoned forms of modern literature" (1995: 121). Trying to pin down the immense popularity of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in the decades following its publication, Castle attributes it to the fact that it "encapsulated new structures of feeling, a new model of human relations, new phenomenology of the self and other" at a time when new sensibilities were being formed, whereby the other was becoming "a purely mental effect, or image, as it were, on the screen of consciousness itself" (1995: 125). In this respect Radcliffe's novels seem to anticipate a truly modern grappling with the Cartesian dualism of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, whereby she registers the problematics inherent in the understanding of the body, its perception, communication with the world and the other, but also its presence in the fictitious reality. Secondly, with the novel securing "its hegemony in the cultural field" (Lynch 1994: 142), the late eighteenth century witnessed a gradual change in the meaning of the term "character." The imaginary personages of fiction became its primary

designation, and “the pictorialist episteme” associating “character” with “visible information,” was replaced by realistic characterisation (Lynch 1994: 114-115). Therefore, affected by the discussions on “semiotic economy and diseconomy,” fictional characters were no longer visible “excesses of the appearing body” (Lynch 1994: 115), but rather, as Deidre Lynch suggests, that excess was translated into a psychological complexity which is not transparent but evidences “a contradictory relation between personal truths and the forms that make them publicly visible” (Lynch 1994: 142). And thirdly, the late eighteenth century was a time of transition in attitudes towards death and dying. After a period termed by Philippe Ariès as “One’s Own Death” came the era of “Thy Death” with the refocusing of emotional interest from the dying person towards the survivors and focusing on one’s own feelings when confronted with the death of another. Death was ceasing to be an expected fact of life, tamed and familiarised, “a solemn event, but also an event as banal as seasonal holidays,” inscribed by the religious “rituals laid down by custom” (Ariès 1974: 59). With the growing “secularisation [which] was one of the signs of the de-Christianisation of society” (Ariès 1974: 65) and “a new intolerance of separation” (Ariès 1974: 59) the emphasis shifted towards mourning and the psychology of loss, towards one’s own experiencing of the death of the other.

The purpose of this analysis is to look at the way Ann Radcliffe, one of the best representatives of the Terror School of the first phase of the Gothic, registers these cultural transitions and the way they impact on the narratorial handling of characters and their physical presence in her last two novels, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797). Together with M. G. Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796) they form a curious triplet of fruitful literary influences and responses, evident, for example, in the handling of the imagistic potency of the veil, and, especially in the case of the last two novels, in the attitude to Catholic imagery and themes, and their role in character delineation and plot construction. The aim here is to look at the ways in which Radcliffe progresses especially in the delineation of her main female characters – from Emily in *The Mysteries* to Ellena in *The Italian* – and how, inspired by Lewis’s response to her *Mysteries of Udolpho*, she seems to depart from the subjectivity of psychological probation – so crucial in the depiction of Emily – towards what can only apparently be taken for objectivity inscribed in what is visible, in the semiotics of the body in *The Italian*. This analysis traces the ways in which the body of a character comes to be understood as a composite of meanings, a composite of “personal truths,” a non-verbal message board, but also at the ways in which visual perception creates character, communicates meaning and the way in which the memory of the body, dead or alive, contributes to the creation of the gothic atmosphere, all, in the case of Radcliffe, firmly located within the ethics of the story.

As a novelist, Radcliffe understands, on the one hand, the importance of visibility, of presenting and fashioning of the body, especially of the female body, and, on the other hand, the importance of the invisible depths constituting the essence of personality which make up “character.” As a Gothic novelist, she also recognises

the conventions of the genre and the expectations of the readers with relation to the character-types – such as the villain and the damsel in distress – but also with relation to the atmosphere created by their opposition and by the mechanisms generating fear. To what extent does appearance constitute a character, does perception create a character or communicate it, and to what degree does the shared cultural imaginary shape expectations of the other? These problematics are the preoccupation of the phenomenological thought of the twentieth century, especially evident in the studies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty who focuses the critique of the Cartesian paradigm on corporeality and its perception. The importance of the first phase of the Gothic lies in the fact that, in addressing these issues, it paves the way for the modern aesthetic, philosophical and phenomenological considerations.

E. M. Forster has said that death, like birth, is strange. Both are “at the same time experiences and not experiences. We only know them by report. ... Our final experience, like our first is conjectural” (1975: 55). Kenneth Burke has added that death can only be seen as “an idea, not something known to us” (1952: 359). The only experience of death that living beings can undergo is, therefore, the death of others, which, before medical examination is carried out to confirm the cessation of vital processes, is communicated as a visual, olfactory or auditory sensation. Death is also associated with the emotions aroused in those who witness it, and in those who anticipate it. As the great unknown, as the cessation of all matters worldly, as an emotional departure, but also as a process often preceded by pain, it is, for most humans, a dreaded experience. As a literary convention, death is communicated by recognisable signs, its possibility is the source of gradable emotions: from apprehension to terror, and from terror to horror. Whether resulting from natural or unnatural causes, death is a sight encrypted in the cultural reservoir of signs which in their “general representativeness,” as Barthes would have it, make them legible and unmistakable (1993: 26). Death is inanimation and peaceful stillness, but also a life-cancelling physiology. Unnatural death can be communicated by distortions of the body and leakage of bodily fluids, the redness of blood being the most conspicuous of signs. Structurally, as a source of suspense it is one of the pivotal Gothic conventions, recognised as a potent aesthetic sign already in the mid-eighteenth century by Edmund Burke, considered the first theoretician of the genre.

Speculating about “the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling,” Burke famously defined it as the sublime (1967: 39-40), with its immediate sources, the emotions pain and terror, being much stronger than pleasure. He recognised death as the only “idea” more powerful than pain, because “what generally makes pain itself ... more painful, is, that it is considered as an emissary of this king of terrors,” whereas fear, being an “apprehension of pain or death” is that passion which, like no other, so “effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning” (1967: 57). By analogy, Burke defined this combination, the fear of death, as the ultimate and the most effective source of the powerful sublime. Therefore, “the excitation of fear becomes one of the most significant enterprises a writer can undertake” and

thus, as David Punter has noticed, though other prerequisites of the sublime listed by Burke “have relevance to the Gothic writers,” “his most important contribution was to confer on terror a major and worthwhile literary role” (1996: 39-40).

Among the Gothic writers of the first phase, Ann Radcliffe is the most diligent recipient of the Burkean sublime, and recognises the potential of the sight of the death of the other as a source of terror. Unlike in the horror phase of M. G. Lewis, it is not the enactment of life-rupturing murder that signifies death for her, it is not the sight of death but its smell, suggestion and artefacts. In her Terror Gothic phase, Radcliffe also recognises the potential of obscurity – she knows less is more. Therefore, in the early passages of *The Italian*, the sight of a bloodstained dagger, or, the walls and floor “stained with gore” (Radcliffe 1998: 77), “a garment covered with blood” abandoned in a cave, unmistakably evoke in the characters who witness the scene the mental image of the “mangled body whose blood has stained it” concealed beneath, as its semiotics seems to “tell the fate of the one who had been confined” there (Radcliffe 1998: 76).

Radcliffe’s last two novels differ considerably with regards to the narratorial management of characters. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* offers a greater profusion of long-unexplained mysteries, unidentified voices, unaccounted-for disappearances and look-alike corpses. At the centre of its narrative consciousness is a persecuted heroine equipped with an “uncommon delicacy of mind” (Radcliffe 1992: 5). Narratorial insight into her powers of reasoning and feeling affords knowledge not only of her circumstances but also of her emotive response to them. On the one hand, when transported to Udolpho, Emily has every reason to fear for her life: she witnesses the verbal abuse and psychological torture to which Montoni subjects her aunt, she follows her gradual descent to a vulnerable object, crushed emotionally under his unyielding material demands, the emotional emptiness and subsequent complete rejection. Finally, she witnesses her aunt’s agony and death, facts which deprive her of her sole legal protector and make her the inheritor of a vast property in the south of France. Emily’s refusal to sign it off to Montoni becomes the ultimate reason for her incarceration in Udolpho. On the other hand, as a hypersensitive character, Emily has always been prey to the “influence of superstition,” therefore, her stay in Udolpho, a prolonged state of uncertainty and anxiety, makes “her long-harassed mind” completely lose its powers of perception (Radcliffe 1992: 335). As a consequence, her mind manufactures grave scenarios and supplies her with self-instilled imaginary preludes to events which hardly ever materialise, but also with recollections of an idyllic past with her idealised parents, the link with whom is her psychological survival strategy. Emily admits that her life in Udolpho is “like the dream of a distempered imagination, or like one of those frightful fictions, in which the wild genius of the poets sometimes delighted” (Radcliffe 1992: 296), in other words, a complete fabrication. Filtered through her distressed mind, the danger she is exposed to is magnified by her acute awareness of it and makes her personalise the sights she witnesses; Emily sees herself in every corpse she imagines and encounters in Udolpho.

When she is locked by Barnardine in a chamber where, as she assumes, she is going to see the dead body of her aunt – who, in fact, at this point in the story is still alive – she comes across an iron chair with a ring hung above it and iron bars below. Her fertile imagination immediately supplies her with images of the people who must have been tortured and starved to death there. At once it occurs to her that “her aunt might have been one of these victims, and that she herself might be the next!” (Radcliffe 1992: 348). When she finally reaches her aunt’s chamber, she is incapable of determining whether Madame Montoni is actually alive or not.

‘Do you indeed live,’ said Emily at length, ‘or is it but a terrible apparition? She received no answer, and again she snatched up the hand. ‘This is substance,’ she exclaimed, ‘but it is cold – cold as marble! She let it fall. ‘O, if you really live, speak!’ said Emily, in a voice of desperation, ‘that I may not lose my senses – say you know me!’

‘I do live,’ replied Madame Montoni, ‘but – I feel that I am about to die.’

(Radcliffe 1992: 364)

Projecting her fears onto the body of her aunt, Emily takes its stillness in sleep for death. The physical symptoms of death – death-like inanimation and coldness – anachronistically signify the future state of Madame Cheron’s body and foreshadow the events to come.

The most infamous instance of Emily imagining she sees a corpse is her encounter with the mysterious figure behind the veil – in the most celebrated scene of this phase of the Gothic – which, although never named by the narrator as such, is assumed by all the domestics to be the skeleton of the missing owner of the castle, Signiora Laurentini. Defining Emily’s agitation, which produces a terror that “occupies and expands the mind, and elevates it to high expectation,” as “purely sublime,” Radcliffe makes her “by a kind of fascination” seek the object from which she appears to “shrink” (Radcliffe 1992: 248). Curious to see what is hidden behind the veil, Emily ventures to an obscure part of the castle, but when in an expectedly dark corner of a desolate chamber she lifts the veil, she drops senseless on the floor. This intense emotional reaction is all the reader gets for the next several hundred pages, and Emily’s presumed shock at the sight of the body is taken for proof of Montoni’s murderous activity and capacity for more. Only at the end of the narrative is the mysterious sight explained away to have been a wax figure, installed as a peculiar form of penitence-evoking *memento mori*. What Emily saw behind the veil was in fact a look-alike corpse,

a human figure of ghastly paleness, stretched at its length, and dressed in the habiliments of the grave. What added to the horror of the spectacle, was, that the face appeared partly decayed and disfigured by worms, which were visible on the features and hands.

(Radcliffe 1992: 662)

The semiotics of the image of a decomposing human body ridden with worms unmistakably evokes a message in line with the medieval tradition of the *danse*

macabre. It illustrates what becomes of all of us: in the face of death, the great leveller, the prince, the monk and the pauper will all meet the same end. When death comes, rank and position are no more. A “character” is no more, it is reduced to flesh, same for everyone, prey to worms, subject to the processes of putrefaction that decompose and annihilate the body, and with it the character.

From the twentieth-century, phenomenological Merleau-Pontean perspective, Emily’s is “perceptual consciousness” and her gaze is at grips “with a visible world.” Her phenomenal body – perceiving, imagining, fainting – is “that knowledge-acquiring apparatus” (Merleau-Ponty 2010: 409), “a composite of functions” (Merleau-Ponty 2010: 231). Her experiences, perception of objects and others is not limited by the constrictions of time. Once present, the body of the other is always present because “each moment of time calls all the others to witness” (Merleau-Ponty 2010: 79) and “past time is wholly collected up and grasped in the present” (Merleau-Ponty 2010: 80).

The physical and moral hideousness of the reality in *Udolpho* makes Emily resort to evoking images of her childhood and parents. These memories make her dwell on the bucolic existence she once led and produce escapist phantasmata that counterbalance her present experience. Thanks to the psychological insight and focus on Emily, as Terry Castle has demonstrated, it was possible for Ann Radcliffe in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, to capture a new historical phenomenon taking root in late eighteenth century, namely, the spectralisation of the other, and to indulge in the “new obsession with the internalised images of other people” (Castle 1995: 125). In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* especially, because of its narratorial management of character, “[t]o be a Radcliffean ... heroine” means to “find oneself obsessed by spectral images of those one loves” (Castle 1995: 123).

Whereas in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, as Castle observes, Radcliffe “flirts with an image of physical dissolution, then undoes it” (Castle 1995: 130), in *The Italian*, she does not. In this last novel published in Radcliffe’s lifetime, emotional insight and psychological interest shift from the central innocence of the persecuted damsel towards the probing of the interiority and consciousness of the villains, afforded a degree of license unprecedented in her earlier novels, depicted here as a pair of power abusers, the Marchesa (who wants to prevent the union of her son, Vivaldi, with Ellena) and her confessor Schedoni. Their perversity comes out in the reasons why they determine to eliminate Ellena, a socially insignificant, muted character, who, quite unintentionally, trespasses on their territories. The Marchesa is determined to preserve the glamour of her social position, the monk Schedoni is determined to please his aristocratic beneficiary and thus fulfil his overriding ambitions of advancement in the church hierarchy. The engineering of Ellena’s death becomes the driving force of the story, the mystery of how it will be executed and the uncertainty as to whether this master plan will be accomplished – the source of the novel’s desired suspense.

The fact that *The Italian* is a literary response to *The Monk* considerably affects its aesthetics and the way the body, dead or alive, is used as a character message

board, and the locus of Gothic conventions of mystery and terror. Firstly, as has been said, the novel's composition centres on the elimination of the main female character, creating suspense rooted not in tracking down the criminals – as these are known here from the start – but in following the main character in her desperate flight from them, and in the uncertainty as to whether their plan will ever succeed. The main character of *The Italian*, Ellena, unlike Emily from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, is orphaned and poor. Therefore, whereas Emily may eventually lose her life because of her property, Ellena is very likely to die because of her lack of it. And, unlike in *The Mysteries*, the death of the distressed female heroine is not a fact which remains in the sphere of conjecture but is a premeditated arrangement, the execution of which is articulated by the villains of the story. Secondly, the narratorial manoeuvre of letting the hidden recesses of the villainous minds ooze out affords a greater insight into their motivations, the weaving of criminal endeavours and their consequences, but at the same time, in comparison with *The Mysteries*, as has been said, it entails a considerable narratorial withdrawal from the detailed probing of the persecuted heroine's mind. One of the reasons for such a shift can be accounted for by the fact that *The Italian* is a response to *The Monk*, whereby the titles of both novels unmistakably suggest the axis of narratorial interest in the villain. As a consequence, the communication of Ellena's thoughts and emotions remains largely undisclosed.

Since neither her heart nor her mind receive the same degree of attention that Emily's do, at first Ellena does not articulate either her story or her feelings. Veiled, pious, poor and chaste, she remains a mere visual presence, as Diane Hoeveller has aptly put it, "the spectacle of the text" (1998: 103), who communicates through her body and garment, for whom song and prayer remain the only channels of public utterance. This initial character management can also be seen in the light of the curious correlation with Lewis's text. Since *The Monk* heavily relies on imagery and is a text in which perception, seeing and being seen, constitute its textural core, then Radcliffe in *The Italian* in her own way accommodates and responds to such Lewisean management of action and the exposition of characters.¹

That Ellena is "the spectacle of the text" is made evident right from the opening scenes of the novel. She is introduced as a faceless and therefore mysterious persona. Ellena gets the attention of Vivaldi who is attracted by the "sweetness and fine expression of her voice," her face famously being "concealed in her veil" (Radcliffe 1998: 5), just as in a parallel scene in *The Monk*, where Antonia is spotted by Lorenzo in the Capuchin Church. For Vivaldi the magnetism of Ellena's voice speaks of her "devotion almost saintly" (Radcliffe 1998: 11), a fact which reveals a common cognitive process, whereby the existence of one human quality is assumed to entail others. Here the timbre of the woman's voice is translated into

¹ For the analysis of the importance of seeing and being seen, but also of the way Lewis deals with the representation and perception of the classical ideal of feminine beauty, see: Łowczanin, A. (2014): "Antonia and the Male Gaze: Imaging Femininity in M. G. Lewis's *The Monk*", in: *All that Gothic*. Łowczanin, A., Wiśniewska, D. (eds.). Frankfurt: Peter Lang. 124-137.

her religious devotion, and that, in turn, into chastity, a desirable female attribute, the essence of woman-ness. This chain of associations arouses in Vivaldi a desire to get the confirmation of his conjectures by other senses: he wants to see her face, now concealed behind a veil. The semiotics of the veil in this context reads both as a symbol of innocence incarnate, another label of woman-ness – as Barthes would have it, “the mainspring of the Spectacle – the *sign* – operating in the open” (1993: 26) – but also as a garment which, because it envelops and conceals what is underneath, signifies mystery, teases and thus provokes to action, arouses the imagination and the desire to explore erotically the unknown. Merleau-Pontean phenomenology explains this perception of the other as a composite of “functions,” “a cluster of third person processes” (2010: 230) – sight, motility, sexuality – and the difficulty of limiting “experience to a single sensory department.” The “sensory experience,” as evidenced in this scene, “spontaneously overflows towards all the rest” (Merleau-Ponty 2010: 264).

Finally a breeze catches Ellena’s veil and reveals “a countenance more touchingly beautiful than he had dared to image.” In his mind’s eye, Vivaldi forms an image of her face on the basis of the working of his active imagination, then of scraps of impressions. Above all, he enters into this first face to face encounter loaded with the cultural weight of imagistic expectations expressive of the aesthetic canons of the 1790s, still steeped in admiration for classical proportions. Thus, to point out another parallel with *The Monk*, where Lewis has Lorenzo perceive Antonia as Venus de Medici, a figure tellingly stripped of garments, Radcliffe cautiously tones down this ancient metaphor, and when nature does the job of unveiling she endows Ellena with more socially-acceptable features of “the Grecian outline.” At the same time, Radcliffe does justice to her female character and goes further than Lewis when she equips her not only with physical beauty that subscribes to the currently binding classical canon, but also with a suggestion of her mental exquisiteness: Ellena’s features, “expressed the tranquillity of an elegant mind, her dark blues eyes sparkled with intelligence” (Radcliffe 1998: 6). Ellena is thus stamped to be a true “spectacle of the text”: everything about her, her brainpower included, is visible, is an image, is what Vivaldi chooses to make of her.

Radcliffe summons one more classical reference in response to the imagery of *The Monk*. When, after comparing her figure to Venus de Medici, Lorenzo gazes at Antonia, Lewis describes her as “light and airy as that of an Hamadryad” (1998: 9). Hamadryads were a type of dryad which were nymphs attached to the trees they inhabited. Replying to this Lewisean classical comparison, Radcliffe again resigns from the particularity of detail by going up the scale of categorisation: Ellena’s “whole figure, air, and attitude, were such as might have been copied for a Grecian nymph” (Radcliffe 1998: 12). The use of these particular references by both authors are indirect indications that, hidden behind the fascination with surfaces, lies their male characters’ desire to unclothe, to peep underneath the veil and the garment and see their objects of adoration as culture has demonstrated nymphs are to

be seen: unclothed. At the same, time the choice of distinct typology by Lewis and Radcliffe can be read to reveal the subtle differences these signs convey. The comparison of Antonia to a Hamadryad, which is believed to die together with the tree she has been attached to, may be read as a sign foreshadowing her death, whereas seeing Ellena as a nymph, a creature endowed with a degree of independence, may encode her independence of mind, and prefigure her ability to say “no.”² Given that nymphs occupied a no man’s land between human beings and gods, not fully identifiable with either, transcribed in this cultural code may also be Vivaldi’s anxiety about Ellena being outside his own class, and therefore, of the impossibility of their union. This semiotic ambivalence of the body testifies to the impossibility of unambiguous communication. A character comes into being when others look at him or her; Ellena is what others make of her, she is subject to the interpretative power of the gaze of others. The physical manifestation of identity is questioned, as it depends on the one who looks: at the same moment Ellena can be a source of admiration for Vivaldi and a repulsive usurper to his mother and her accomplice, Schedoni.

As an image, a spectacle, Ellena at first can only express herself through images, earning a living embroidering silks and making “copies of the antique” that she sells to the rich (Radcliffe 1998: 9). Little do the members of the Vivaldi family realise that some of the paintings that ornament their cabinets were actually created by her hand. Before Ellena steps into the life of this family in person, she sneaks into their realms with the products of her imagination, anonymously winning their admiration with the images and scenes she envisions and depicts. Although essentially material, these objects acquire almost preternatural qualities, are as if uncanny roots which, upon the Vivaldis’ volition, establish themselves in their territory before Ellena crosses their threshold, images which foreshadow the materialisation of her entry to this family. Here the character speaks through the products of her skills and imagination. Ellena’s canvasses, and the embroidery on the Marchesa’s dresses, which perversely envelop her as she is planning the murder of the author of these patterns, are images with the capacity to go beyond the body and as if speak out for this silent, absent and unwanted character.

Images in Radcliffe’s novels more often communicate from the past to the present. Such communication takes place especially when the body of the dead is frozen in time in a miniature portrait. Iconic images representing dead loved ones are preserved to inspire their visions, making at least partial cancellation of death possible. Especially in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* there is an abundance of such miniature portraits which “inspire visions of the dead or absent,” and, as Terry Castle points out, “characters habitually use small painted portraits, of loved ones

² Later on in the text, upon the directives of the Marchesa, she is imprisoned in a convent where she will repeatedly declare “I protest ... I protest” when threatened with the prospect of taking the veil forever (Radcliffe 1998: 119).

to evoke nostalgic thoughts” (1995: 236). In *The Italian* the miniature portrait of Ellena’s uncle, Schedoni, which quite by chance falls into her hands, from the very beginning has an ambiguous status. Ellena mistakenly takes it to represent her own father, in fact, the miniature she cherishes turns out to depict his brother, his own murderer, rapist and nearly the murderer of her mother. As the representation of a villain, it should have never been kept for posterity, yet it survives, against all odds, as if only to play a critical function in the characters’ lives. When Ellena retrieves the portrait after her aunt’s death, it begins its independent existence, and mutely yields to interpretation, acquiring a new identity, first for Ellena, then for Schedoni. The moment Schedoni draws aside her dress as he prepares to plunge the dagger into Ellena’s chest and uncovers this miniature, the portrait enters into a voiceless monologue with him. Its mere sight provokes Schedoni to put together scraps of his past to conjure up a story which erroneously bestows a new identity on Ellena, making her his daughter, and him her parent, a fact which saves her life, and a mistake he will die believing is true.

Images of the dead which trespass on the fictitious present accommodate not only these engineered artefacts but also self-produced apparitions: the best examples here are the night visitations which plague Schedoni’s accomplice, Sapatro. His phantasmata, a dreadful hand with a blood-stained finger beckoning him, are no products of refined sentiment or projections of a feeling heart. In a curious response to the Bleeding Nun episode from Lewis’s *The Monk*, where murder is similarly committed because of forbidden love, for Radcliffe these spectral visitations are also disturbingly real, but here they live within man and reveal this era’s growing indulgence in the “obsession with the internalised images of other people” of which Castle spoke (1995: 125).

The Italian illustrates that sensual perception of the death of the other, the sight but also music that has been culturally associated with it, communicate its finality. It is evident in the way Ellena’s aunt’s, Signiora Bianchi’s death is depicted. The natural hideousness of its physiology is here further aggravated by the unnatural blackness, suggesting the reason for her death by poison. Stunned by the stillness of the body of a person who is no longer a character, Vivaldi summons “an effort of reason” which was “necessary to convince him, that this was the same countenance which only one evening preceding was animated like his own” (Radcliffe 1998: 55). That Radcliffe does not undo physical dissolution in *The Italian*, but uses its visuality to inflict moral justice is also evident in the gore which haunts Sapatro. He was an accomplice murderer, and after the body of his victim had been interred, he disturbed its “mangled remains” (Radcliffe 1998: 361) and, to eliminate evidence, dug them out and buried them under the flooring of the house he inhabited. During the protracted scene of preparation for Ellena’s murder, Sapatro confesses to Schedoni of being visited by the “bloody hand” of one of his victims. This image of a truncated body part becomes a synecdoche for the murdered body, which in turn serves as a metonymy for the committed crime. By

depicting the physical hideousness of murder, Radcliffe conveys the story's ethics: the hideousness of crime and the impossibility of ever escaping its consequences. Spalatro's conscience cannot rest because the image of "the bloody hand" that is always before him produces a domino effect of recollections:

'... I remember it too well, I wish I could forget; I remember it too well. – I have never been at peace since. ... often of a night, when the sea roars, and storms shake the house, they have come, all gashed as I left them, and stood before my bed! I have got up, and ran out upon the shore for safety!'

(Radcliffe 1998: 230)

A touch of humanity is introduced to the character of the villainous Marchesa by the sensations she experiences during the requiem mass she hears. The sombreness of the music makes her imagine a dead body about to be interred and realise the physical finality of death. In her vision, the other becomes, as Castle would have it, a "mental effect," "an image, as it were, on the screen of consciousness itself" (1995: 125). The Marchesa's imagination works to digest death's unpleasant, life-cancelling reality which she internalises: in her mind's eye she sees the stillness she is planning for Ellena:

'That body is now cold,' said she to herself, 'which but an hour ago was warm and animated! Those fine senses are closed in death! And to this condition would I reduce a being like myself!'

(Radcliffe 1998: 177)

Most importantly, the image of this dead, anonymous body functions here like the wax figure from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*: a *memento mori*. However, the vision brings no religious reflection on the afterlife, but rather the blunt realisation of the sensations of death. In her subconscious, the Marchesa as if unites with Ellena, and, in line with the medieval *danse macabre*, death again becomes the great social leveller.

According to Peter Brooks, the Bleeding Nun episode takes *The Monk* from being "largely natural and social" to a new dimension, and demonstrates that "the world has expanded to accommodate itself to shadows from without this world, and the consciousness of both characters and reader must expand to encompass this new dimension of experience" because "we do live in a world charged with forces beyond our rational grasp" (1973: 256). Radcliffe seems to fully acknowledge that, as manifested in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, at the heart of which lies the spectralised presence of the other. However, in contrast with Lewis, in her novels the dead, who in various forms and guises encroach upon the reality of the living, are relegated to the sphere of the subconscious, because death is sifted through perceptive abilities. Her character management reveals her grappling with Cartesian dualism. On the one hand, a dissociation from corporeal reality means that the manifestation of existence is not limited to the body but effectively extends it, on the other hand, the experience of the world comes through the body, as it plays a crucial part in expressing and perceiving it. The body is ceaselessly fashioned, veiled from head to foot, it is never taken for

what it is, it is always a sign to be decoded, and thus it communicates through these external artefacts and the messages they connote. One's existence, however, depicted as an image can also be successfully compacted to its representation, a miniature portrait that has the power not only to transcend death but also to assume a new identity. And the coding and encoding of identities has become one of the driving motifs and paradigmatic conventions of Gothic fiction.

For decades trivialised by academics, Gothic fiction is now experiencing a critical revival. Since its inception, it has not only been a barometer of cultural and social changes, but it has also registered early writers' struggles with one of the pivots of the new-fangled genre of the novel, the character, whose delineation already at this early stage was subject to well-established expectations. Juggling with the shifting aesthetics and the genre's conventions, by focusing on the ambivalence of the semiotics of the bodies of her characters, Ann Radcliffe's last two novels not only contribute to character reinvention but fully register the cognitive and ontological shift taking place at that time in Western culture. By focusing on the body and grappling with the problems of perception and representation connected with the problematics of consciousness as experience, her novels contribute to paving the way towards modern phenomenological concerns and in this respect must be seen as truly post-Enlightenment endeavours.

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