Women in Early Gothic fiction: From submissive females to Subversive Rebels

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Abstract

Throughout human history women have often been seen under a binary system as the inferior 'other'. Female subordination might be as old as the belief in the original sin. While both Adam and Eve sinned, the latter is held more responsible for the deterioration of human fate. For most recorded history very few voices were raised against women's subordination. It was only towards the sixteenth century with the publication of Il Merito Della Donne (The Worth of Women) that it was believed that women could do better if given a chance. However, as Caine explains, women's rights, their equality to men and their status became a cultural issue only in the eighteenth century. The debate about women's issues or feminism was certainly reflected in literary genre, and Gothic fiction was said to be the best vehicle successfully used to depict women's questions. It was in that period that women started on their way to freedom, and that Gothic fiction was born with Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis as its main founders. The conventional representation of femininity in their novels hides a subversive nature in reality. The apparently weak and submissive females are in reality endowed with challenging power that subverts the whole image of the female and destroys thus the whole patriarchal order carefully constructed by men. The conventional women submission becomes an invitation to challenge that established order. This idea recapitulates my whole thesis in which I attempt to see how the Gothic submissive females are transformed into subversive forces that paved the way to women's empowerment.

Keywords: Female empowerment – Patriarchal order – Gothic fiction – Subversion – Women subordination – Feminism.

The most important remark we can make is that underneath Radcliffe's passive females in her *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Lewis's evil ones in his *The Monk,* lie the seeds of a revolutionary woman who resists the will of men around her and shows an unconventional determination to affect not only her own fate, but also that of the men around her. This might be seen, in the socio-cultural context of the nineteenth century, as a logical consequence of the patriarchal domination. As Michel Foucault put it: "where there is power there is resistance" (qtd. in Mills 198). Thus, the attempt of the female characters in Gothic novels to break the rules of submissiveness could be seen as a form of résistance to the male order. Yet, we still need to find to what extent this résistance could go. Could we speak of a revolutionary attitude aiming at subverting the whole patriarchal order? Or was it a simple reaction in order to better some of women's socio-economic conditions at that time?

Lewis seems to go farther than Radcliffe in moving away from the conventional feminine character. The extravagant sexuality, the temptation of a male and the evil deeds, make of Matilda the anti-feminine figure. However, it is also interesting to see how powerful Lewis makes this female. Matilda is introduced at the beginning of the novel in a tricky game of disguise. When her reality is discovered, she imposes her will on Ambrosio and obliges him to accept her, leaving him no choice after her threat to kill herself if he refuses. Later, we discover that she saves him from death as she says: "I have sacrificed a pebble, and saved a diamond. My death preserves a life valuable to the world, and more dear to me than my own - yes father, I am poisoned, but know that the poison once circulated in your veins" (Monk 79). From this moment, we feel that Matilda, being Ambrosio's saviour, is endowed with a certain power that gives her advantage over him. Then, the more we read, the more powerful Matilda becomes. She uses different means to dominate Ambrosio and lead him to his final fate. In the second part of the novel, most of her discourse is in the imperative form, giving Ambrosio directions on how to behave and what to do. We read:

> 'Beware of what you do', interrupted Matilda, 'your sudden change of sentiment may naturally create surprise, and may give birth to suspicions which it is most our interest to avoid. Rather redouble your outward austerity, and thunder and menaces against the errors of others, the better to conceal your own. Abandon the nun to her fate [...] Give me the lamp Ambrosio I must descend alone into these caverns; wait here and if any one approaches warn me by your voice'. (Monk 199)

This is just one example of the frequent instances that relate the unconventional way in which a female dominates and leads a submissive and passive male. His inferiority to Matilda and his total dependence on her reaches its utmost when she manages to manipulate his sexual desires and promises to satisfy his lust for Antonia whom he saw naked in Matilda's magical mirror. He cries: "I yield [. . .] 'dashing the mirror upon the ground: 'Matilda I follow you' Do with me what you will!" (Monk 233). She succeeds to do with him what she wants indeed. Thus, even if Lewis intended to make of Matilda the incarnation of evil and represent in her the female temptress, we must not ignore the image of the powerful and dominating woman in this heroine at a time when femininity was synonymous with weakness and submissiveness.

We might need to prove that Lewis intentionally made his female characters more powerful than his male ones. In order to do that, we can mention the example of Agnes. She, too, is made more powerful than her male counterpart. In her love relationship with him, we

see that it is she who thinks, plans and decides. These capacities are conventionally male rather than female. She says "Flight is my only resource from the horrors of a convent; and my imprudence must be excused by the urgency of the danger. Now listen to the plan by which I hope to effect my escape" (130). Again, the imperative form is used by a woman; the words 'plan' and 'escape' are in themselves a transgression of the conventions of femininity. We are presented with females who are able to reason, decide, plan and even lead males. In brief, they are empowered women.

It is worth mentioning that if Lewis was able to go to that extent in this representation of such revolutionary females, it was in a way due to Radcliffe who, before Lewis, represented her female characters in such a way that they could be said to hold the seeds of a subversive attitude of the patriarchal order.

Emily, the heroine in whom the reader might see the ideal feminine according to the eighteenth-century conventions, seems to be endowed with other characteristics which make her not only different from that conventional image of femininity, but even a real subversion of it. Underneath that passive and submissive woman lies another one strongly determined to face all dangers, real and superstitious, and ready to challenge the male power in its most terrifying forms incarnated in the villain Montoni. Emily is thus given new dimensions, and her femininity needs to be seen under a new angle, different from what the nineteenth century readers would expect.

To come closer to this new image of this heroine, we need to focus on two main points. First, we need to find what makes of Emily a character different from the eighteenth century expectations in her love relationship with Valancourt. Secondly, we will try to study her attitude towards males in general and mainly towards Montoni who represents male power, and see what image Radcliffe intends to convey through such an attitude.

One of the most important components of the main plot in *T.M.U* is Emily's love relationship with Valancourt. Naturally, particular attention was given in the eighteenth century to female emotionality as it was an evident factor in the determination of the female's future happiness. John Gregory, From a *Father 's Legacy to his Daughters* 1774, says: "There is one advice I shall leave you, to which I beg your particular attention. Before your affections come to be the least engaged to any man, examine your tempers, your tastes, and your hearts, very severely and search in your own minds, what are the requisites to your happiness in a married state" (qtd. in Jones 52). Emily faces this dilemma of accepting to marry Valancourt or not towards the end of the novel when she meets him again after a long time of separation and suffering. Their relationship starts at the beginning of the novel. She and her father, Mr. St Aubert, meet Valancourt by chance wandering in the Pyrenees and after a short moment of separation, an accident joins them together. Thus, Valancourt and Emily get the chance to know each other better. The first love declaration comes without delay:

> Valancourt understood her feelings, and was silent; had she raised her eyes from the ground she would have seen tears in his. He rose, and leaned on the wall of the terrace, from which, in a few moments, he returned to his seat, then rose again, and appeared to be greatly agitated [. . .] Valancourt again sat down, but was still silent, and trembled. At length he said, with a hesitating voice, 'this lovely scène! - I am going to leave - to leave you — perhaps for ever! These moments may never return; I cannot resolve to neglect, though I scarcely dare to avail myself of them. Let me, however, without

offending the delicacy of your sorrow, venture to declare the admiration I must always feel of your goodness, - O! That at some future period I might be permitted to call it love! (*T.M.U* 106)

We need to underline here Valancourt's tears, his trembling, hesitation and agitation resulting from his excessive emotionality, a characteristic conventionally attributed to females. We need to stress that, because at that moment, Emily's reaction was surprising

> Emily made another effort to overcome the confusion of her thought, and to speak. She feared to trust the preference her heart acknowledged towards Valancourt and to give him any encouragement for hope, on so short an acquaintance. For though in this narrow period she had admired much that was admirable in his taste and disposition, and though those observations had been sanctioned by the opinion of her father, they were not sufficient testimonies of his general worth to determine her upon a subject so infinitely important to her future happiness as that, which now solicited her attention" (*T.M.U* 106-07).

We have here a woman who tries to overcome her feelings in favour of her reason. She tends to be more attentive to her future happiness than readers would expect a female to be. The male-female roles seem to be reversed; while Valancourt is unable to conceal his tears and is so explicit in his emotionality, Emily is so thoughtful about her future.

Once again, Valancourt stands motionless and passive in front of Emily's decision when Emily has to follow her aunt Madame Cheron and Montoni in their voyage to Italy. All that Valancourt could do is to say to her: "It would be impossible for you to reason thus coolly, thus deliberately if you did. I am torn with anguish at the prospect of our separation, and of the evils that may await you in consequence of it; I would encounter any hazards to prevent it - to save you" (158). Indeed, Valancourt was able to predict the evils that were to happen to Emily; however, he was unable to save her; neither could he change anything in the course of events. All he could do was to lament his disability "I am a wretch - a very wretch, that have shewn the fortitude of a man, who ought to have supported you, I have increased your sufferings by the conduct of a child! Forgive me Emily" (*T.M.U* 159). Emily's decision was taken and she indeed left Valancourt, overcoming her emotions and went on her way to an unknown fate. Valancourt disappears from the course of events and Emily continues alone to face new horrible circumstances and to go through difficult experiences. Yet, Valancourt's love still lingers in her heart and she patiently awaits the moment of meeting him again. Finally, after a long period of despair and disappointment, they meet each other. Unfortunately, it is a new Valancourt that she finds, different from the one she loves.

Valancourt reappears towards the end of the novel but with a new character that is described to Emily by the count:

> 'I soon learned that these, his associates, had drawn him into a course of dissipation, from which he appeared to have neither the power, nor the inclination, to extricate himself. He lost large sums at the gaming-table, he became infatuated with play; and was ruined. I spoke tenderly of this to his friends, who assured me that they had remonstrated with him, till they were weary. I afterwards learned, that, in consideration of his talents for play, which were generally successful, when unopposed by the tricks of villainy, - that in consideration of these, the party had initiated him into the secrets of their trade, and allotted him a share of their profits'. (*T.M.U* 506)

Emily's expected reaction of shock and disappointment after such a long time of patience and expectations, is a natural reaction of any female in similar circumstances. However, readers would be astonished at the decision Emily takes with an unexpected determination to reject this fallen Valancourt. Her irreversible decision comes:

> Spare me the necessity of mentioning those circumstances of your conduct, which oblige me to break our connection forever. We must depart, I now see you for the last time'. 'Impossible' cried Valancourt, roused from his deep silence, 'you cannot mean to throw me from you forever!' 'We must! Repeated Emily, with emphasis - and that forever! Your own conduct has made this necessary'. (*T.M.U* 514)

This could be seen as a strange strength of character and determination to overcome feelings in favour of reason. This instance could be considered as the most important didactic message to the females of that time. Valancourt admits his fall, accepts his inferiority and begs Emily to save him. "Tis true, I am fallen - fallen from my own esteem! [. . .] would you not otherwise be willing to hope for my reformation - and could you bear, by estranging me from you, to abandon me to misery - to myself! If you still loved me, you would find your own happiness in saving mine" (*T.M.U* 515). Despite the strong love that still exists in Emily's heart, she doesn't regret her decision to reject the fallen Valancourt. "The strength of her mind had enabled her to triumph over present suffering" (*T.M.U* 584). Emily is made stronger than the circumstances and neither her love for Valancourt, nor the hard moments she experiences could change her decisions. On the contrary, she continues in a self-determination that adds much to the didactic dimension of her story. The compensation cornes without delay, at the end of the novel. Indeed, Valancourt is reformed; he is saved by Emily who accepts him and their story ends by marriage. It is A long story of love, separation, suffering and finally happiness. Yet, throughout the whole of it, it is Emily who decides and dominates, subverting the stereotypes of female emotionality and passivity.

However, Radcliffe tends to concentrate her greatest efforts in the representation of femininity in her novel, on the male-female relationship established between her female heroine and her male villain. Indeed, from the time he appears in the novel, Montoni is endowed with all the masculine characteristics of power and physical harshness which are reinforced by a clear tendency to dominate all the females around him. Montoni's first contact is with Mme Cheron and his interest in her is spurred by her would be heritage. Emily is forced to follow him to Italy, but her relationship with him at the beginning is characterized by a total absence of communication.

> Montoni and his family drew round the fire. Madam Montoni made several attempts at conversation, but his sullen answers repulsed her, while Emily sat endeavouring to acquire courage enough to speak to him. At length, in a tremulous voice, she said, 'May I ask, sir; the motive of this sudden journey?' - After a long pause, she recovered sufficient breath to repeat the question. It does not suit me to answer enquiries! Said Montoni.' Nor does it become you to make them. (*T.M.U* 230)

Montoni's behaviour here is typical of the male desire to keep women under control, passive and ignorant of any serious matter of life. His repulsive attitude may also be explained by his deep deception when he discovered that his wife was not as rich as he expected. This increased his determination to dispossess her of her estates, her sole property.

This same cause was at the origin of the struggle between Montoni and Emily as "although she fears sexual violation or worse at his hands, Montoni's interest in her is more economic than libidinous, he simply wants her money" (Terry Castle. Introduction.*T.M.U* 10). That was indeed the main cause of the male- female struggle in this novel.

Montoni's reaction to his wife was to imprison her to death. This attitude was not really awkward from the eighteenth century point of view. However, what was odd and unexpected is the wife's ability to say no. Madam Cheron was able to refuse Montoni's requirements despite threats, torture and even death. It is an exceptional strength of character and determination with which Radcliffe intentionally endowed this female character in an attempt to say no to males and to oppose their will. This, in itself was a kind of résistance which was intensified by Emily's similar attitude. The beginning of Emily's struggle against Montoni starts when she decides to leave Udolpho: "I can no longer remain here with propriety, sir 'said she, and I may be allowed to ask, by what right you detain me'. 'It is my will that you remain here' said Montoni" (*T.M.U* 361). This is the male will opposed by a female transgression. Inheritance will once again be the cause of much more struggle. After her aunt's death, Emily became the new proprietor of the estates.

> She began to hope he [Montoni] meant to resign, now that her aunt was no more, the authority he had usurped over her; till she recollected, that the estates, which had occasioned so much contention, were now hers, and she then feared Montoni was about to employ some stratagem for obtaining them, and that he would detain her his prisoner till he succeeded. This thought instead of overcoming her with despondency, roused all the latent powers of her fortitude into action. (*T.M.U 379*)

That was the first moment we see such a determination of Emily emanating from her self-confidence. That feeling was translated later into action when, despite the different means

Montoni used to convince her to give up, ranging from threats to flattery, Emily's answer was: "I am not so ignorant, Signor, of the laws on this subject, as to be misled by the assertions of any person. The law, in the present instance, gives me the estates in question, and my own hand shall never betray my right" (381). Emily will persevere to preserve her right until the end of the novel. Yet unlike her aunt, she was victorious in the end. She manages to preserve her economic independence which was one of the most basic needs of the eighteenth century 'feminist requirements' as women were becoming aware that any betterment of their conditions, essentially needed a guarantee of a minimum economic independence.

Another level at which Radcliffe highlights her heroine's ability to oppose men's will, is that of the refusal of arranged marriages. Despite the numerous attempts of Montoni to arrange a marriage for her that would serve his own benefits, she remained determined not to resign, following her own decision to wait for Valancourt, which she did and ended up by achieving her own happiness in the end.

Emily's power to resist Montoni's attempts to dispossess her of her property and oblige her to marry, is intensified by her particular ability to deal with difficult situations and to solve problems. She soon becomes an active doer instead of that passive and submissive woman. Emily's weakness and inferiority is subverted into a strength and superiority when she gets into contact with the other males in the novel. When Morano is wounded by Montoni

"the count's servants having declared that they would not move him till he revived, Montoni's stood inactive, Cavigni remonstrating, and Emily, superior to Montoni's menaces, giving water to Morano, and directing the attendants to bind up his wound" (*T.M.U* 267). Emily's superiority could be seen here in her disobedience to Montoni, her ability to direct attendants and also her ability to forgive Morano and save him.

Once again, Emily takes the initiative when Cavigni and Verezzi were in dispute. She "went towards them, in the hope of conciliating their difference [. . .] Emily joined her entreaties to Cavigni's arguments, and they at length, prevailed so far, as that Verezee consented to retire, without seeing Montoni" (*T.M.U* 271) Emily no longer cares about her own problems only; she is no longer ignorant of what happens around her in the castle. She helps those who need assistance and reconciliates those in dispute.

Towards the end of the novel, other females join Emily in this transition from passivity to activity. It is a female, Dorothy, who saves ail her companions from death by banditti. The significance of such incidents emanates from the fact that females are enabled to take the initiative, to be active and to have the power to affect the course of events. Being active, able to resist men's will and daring to say no in the context of the eighteenth century, was in itself a transgression and a subversion of the male and female roles.

Despite the major differences we can find between Walpole, Radcliffe and Lewis the three   share one main point: All try to use literature as a space of challenge in which they handle such an important topic, as the status of woman at that time. Even though literature has always been used as a "site of résistance to ideological positions as well as a means of propagating them" (Ellis, Introduction), what those three Gothic novelists did was to use this new genre in order to deal with a topic that was more or less a taboo in a deeply rooted patriarchal structure. The social context of the eighteenth century was so much based on the male order that no realistic literary work could deal with women's conditions or promote any changes of the status quo. Through blending reality and fiction and melting the natural and the supernatural, Gothic novelists managed to safely criticize woman's conditions of subordination and subvert the established patriarchal order. In *The Contested Castle,* Ellis explains that the subversive nature of the Gothic is made acceptable also through moving the stories back to the Middle Ages. The evil in the characters, their fall and transgression is seen by readers with a distance in order to avoid negative reactions.

However, despite the attempts to hide the subversive nature of Gothic novels, everything shows that they were written with the intention of highlighting some aspects of the eighteenth century society. Speaking about the main themes in *T.M.U,* Howard states that:

> Many, if not most, of Emily's terrors and imaginings are of sexual violation, confinement, loss of rights and property, and death. We can then claim that the author was using superstition, presentiment, and hints and tales of the supernatural to acknowledge the powerful desires and fears which lay just below the surface of the eighteenth century British society. (131)

The main theme expressed in Radcliffe's novel is based on the struggle of Emily against the domination of Montoni. The focus on the fears of male domination and the desire for escape make of *T.M.U* a subversive novel, as Howard argues. This may enable us to place this novel in what Gilbert and Gubar categorize as "both revisonary and revolutionary, even when it is

produced by writers we usually think of as models of angelic resignation" (80). The female submission that we might find in some sequences of Gothic novels is just an apparent facet that hides the subversive reality. This double-faced nature of these novels is made clear at the level of characterization.

Isabella, Emily, Agnes or any other Gothic heroine, who may be seen as typically conventional females, tum out after closer examination to be symbols of résistance to the male power. Their courage and their desire to escape and overcome their fears of the real and the supernatural terrors around them become symbolic of the female desire for emancipation. The Gothic heroines are thus presented as the best vehicle for feminist aspirations.

The elaboration of suitable adventures for such a heroine that is of dangers which left the heroine essentially unscathed, being rooted in fantasy rather than reality, led to the development of the Gothic mode. And the Gothic mode eventually became the vehicle for feminism, since it provided a radical alternative to the daylight reality of conformity and acceptance, offering a dark world of the psyche in which women were the imprisoned victims of men. (Figes 57)

The Gothic heroine endowed with so much courage and determination, can become the alternative for the eighteenth century submissive and subordinated women. Emily's female power is best described by Ellis who in the nineteenth century wrote that "we see that the female virtue coupled with initiative is capable of prevailing over its enemies. It must be strengthened through tests, until knowledge that was nominally forbidden cormes to the surface as evidence of the guiding hand of providence, concurring finally with the heroine's own voice of reason" (131). The female's virtue, knowledge, experience and reason enable her to resist male domination and subvert the patriarchal order. The general overview of the whole process of female résistance enables us to see a quick evolution from the simple criticism at the beginning to the radical change brought up later:

> When women did begin to comment on the social system in fiction their outlook was essentially humanist. Leaving aside isolated statements on the position of their own sex, which occur in the writings of all women, from Jane Austen to Mary Wollstencraft, they tended to stand aside from and, indeed, distrust political Systems and solutions and view the problems they described in terms of human relations they tended to blame male behaviour, and see the solution in terms of the feminisation of society. (Figes 153)

This is the most extreme form of female struggle presented in the destruction of the male. It is becoming more and more evident that women have overcome most of the difficulties on their way to freedom and equality with men. Very few socio-cultural or economic difficulties can still resist the process of women's emancipation. Man is no longer that subordinating enemy of woman. However, women still have so much to discover, not in their external world but in their inner one. This too was another challenge that Radcliffe, for example, included in her novel. Emily's struggle is not only against Montoni; she has also other inner difficulties to overcome.

An important characteristic of Gothic novels is the use of very particular spaces chosen by the authors to shape the thematic dimension of the texts. It is not haphazardly that the three novels we have in hand are set in similar spaces of churches, castles and graveyards, all of which share the characteristic of being closed and limited spaces. Females are often brought

into these places by force and during their stay or rather imprisonment they never feel at ease there. "For if the female is the 'other' of 'male' culture, so must culture - the house -be 'other' to her (Williams 44). The Gothic heroines have to struggle not only against the male villain around them, but also against the space where they are put. Their struggle is clearly seen in their attempt to discover the world, which makes their reality both outside and inside them. These heroines are all the time trying to escape that reality and sometimes they manage to subvert it.

In TMU, Emily is first presented in her family environment and in a natural landscape where her happiness is clearly felt. Yet, her world quickly falls apart and she is transplanted and dragged to the other world of Udolpho, which is not different from the villain Montoni. From the first sight, she feels "as if she was going into her prison" (TMU 227). It is in this place that Emily has to face all sorts of danger in her outside world and her inner world as well. This place is best described by Figes who wrote that:

> Udolpho also flirts with sexual danger [...] But Emily, trapped in architectural maze of stairways and corridors, underground passages and hidden shadows, anonymous and unknown. Just as the surreal building is full of unknown perils, illusionary and real, so its inhabitants are made up of friends and enemies, and Emily must learn to tell them apart. It is the subconscious world not just of sexual danger, but of desirable danger. (73)

Terms such as 'dangers, peril, trapped and unknown...' show the challenge that Emily has to face in her experience in the world of Udolpho and in her inner world as well.

It is useful to note that the process of learning how to distinguish good people from bad ones is synonymous to Emily's struggle to discover the other, including the space and people around her. We can even say that it is a challenge to discover the inner world, as the castle's corridors and its secret passages are often likened to the female world. "[...] whereas its [the castle] dungeons, attics, secret rooms, and dark hidden passages connote the culturally female, the sexual, the maternal, the unconscious" (Williams 44). This challenge to discover the secrets of the world and to enlighten its dark sides starts early in the novel, but like any other process of learning, Emily begins with the easier secrets and the further we read, the more difficult her task becomes and the more threatening the dangers around her become.

From the very beginning of the novel we are made to know that the struggle between Emily and her surrounding world is inevitable. We are presented with a female character who is irresistibly curious. At his death, her father left some mysterious papers and ordered Emily to burn them without reading them.

Emily turned to the papers, though still with so little recollection; that her eyes unvoluntarily settled on the writing of some loose sheets, which lay open; and she was unconscious, that she was transgressing her father's strict injunction [...]. Then reanimated with a sense of her duty; she completed the triumph of integrity over temptation, more forcible than any she had ever known. (*T.M.U* 103)

It is the female irresistible curiosity and desire for knowledge which force females to transgress the patriarchal order. It is the curiosity to know and to discover the unknown or to go beyond the limits set by men. Emily is like any other "woman [who] is constructed as

'naturally curious in the Bluebeard tale and [her] story centers on the conflict between the irresistible force of female curiosity and patriarchal law" (Du Maurier 105). The Bluebeard tale mentioned here might be the best illustration of the inevitable conflict between the curious female and the male order. It is the story of a wife who despite her husband's warnings, could not resist the temptation of discovering the secret of the forbidden door behind which she discovered the bodies of Bluebeard's murdered wives.

> After a month of marriage the bridegroom departs 'to take a country journey... about affairs of great consequence'. Leaving his wife with keys to every door, and a strict prohibition that forbids only one of them to her: he tells her that if she uses the key to that door he will punish her in terrible but unspecified ways. Despite this stern injunction, however, his wife cannot resist the temptation to explore all her husband's possessions and to learn what secret he wishes to conceal from her. She opens the door and discovers the bodies of Bluebeards' murdered wives. (Williams 40)

However, it is worth saying that unlike those murdered wives, this curious wife, as Williams explains, was not murdered by Bluebeard; on the contrary she managed to kill him, inherited his fortune which she spent wisely and married another man with whom she lived in happiness. It is a clear didactic message that teaches women that being curious to the point of transgressing the male order is no crime; on the contrary it could be the most certain way to happiness. However, Williams argues that Emily's curiosity never leads her to destroy the other. It is "a desire to comprehend the other rather than to mount an implacable rebellion against it [. . .]. When she takes the lamp and enters the shadowy chamber she is enacting a process of 'enlightenment'" (*T.M.U* 160). This reveals Radcliffe's viewpoint about the male/female conflict which lies in understanding the other rather than eliminating him.

This desire to understand the other, to discover the world and to know one's inner self is clearly manifested by Emily from the time she arrives at Udolpho:

> '0! 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. [...] 'Why do you hesitate?' said Emily, Let me see wither this room leads'. (*T.M.U* 232)

The fear expressed by Annette who represents here the voice of the conventional wisdom, is faced by Emily's determination to move forward with her lamp, to enlighten the darkness around her and to see where that way leads. In her act she at the same time transgresses the patriarchal order by going beyond the limits set by males, and she is also exploring her inner world still unknown to her.

The association of women with houses and rooms is frequently used in literature: "Women themselves have often, of course, been described or imagined as houses" (Gilbert and Gubar 88). Figes, too, gives the example of a heroine who rebels against her master and is locked in a red room. "The room is the hidden, crimson inner space of woman's sexuality [...]" (128). It is, thus, a double edged process of enlightenment through which Emily tries to discover the unknown. No mystery resists her curiosity. She unfolds all secrets. She discovers the identity of the woman upon whose portrait her father wept before his death and the identity of Laurentini who murdered her aunt. And even the would-be horrors of dead bodies of Udolpho turn out to be mere wax figures. She even manages to overcome the hardships imposed on her by all the males of Udolpho. While she lives under a constant fear of sexual

rape at the beginning of her sojourn at Udolpho to the point that she faints in front of any potential sexual threat, towards the end of the novel, Emily shows a clear ability to master the threatening males and she even manages to reform Valancourt.

This process of enlightenment is so successful, that Emily manages not only to understand the surrounding environment, which was once a threatening prison, but she can even possess that space, as in the end she becomes the owner of Udolpho. She also manages to overcome the difficulties of her inner world. She escapes temptation and uses reason to determine her own fate. She is ultimately, rewarded with the long cherished happiness.

Again, the didactic message of Radcliffe is made clear. Her heroine is the opposite image of what Plato described: "take the following parable of education and ignorance as a picture of the condition of our nature. Imagine mankind as dwelling in an underground cave..." (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 93).

Radcliffe's heroine cannot be that woman of the Tunisian cave described by Simone de Beauvoir:

> I recall seeing in a primitive village of Tunisia a subterranean cavern in which four women were squatting: the old one-eyed and toothless wife, her face horribly devastated, was cooking dough on a small brazier in the midst of an acrid smoke, two wives somewhat younger, but almost as disfigured, were lulling children in their arms- one was giving suck; seated before a loom, a young idol magnificently decked out in silk, gold, and silver was knotting wool. As I left this gloomy cave - kingdom of immanence, womb and tomb in the corridor leading upward toward the light of day I passed the male, dressed in white, well groomed, smiling, sunny. He was returning from the market place where he had discussed world affairs with other men. (94)

This is the whole difference between the stereotypical female placed in the underground cave, while the male cornes back from the market place. The female is silent, whereas the male discusses. The females are preoccupied with housework and child-rearing and the male thinks about world affairs. Even in their appearance the females are disfigured whereas the male is sunny and smiling. Radcliffe, like de Beauvoir, rejects that image of the female and presents us with Emily who subverts the whole patriarchal order, starting from her inner world, through a process of enlightenment, leading to her emancipation.

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