The Forbidden Female: Epistemophilia in the Domestic Gothic Tradition

Katelyn Govoni

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The Forbidden Female:

Epistemophilia in the Domestic Gothic Tradition

A Thesis Presented

By

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DECEMBER 2021

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The Forbidden Female:
Epistemophilia in the Domestic Gothic Tradition

A Thesis Presented

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ABSTRACT

Women in eighteenth-century Gothic novels are often portrayed by scholars as mildly rebellious in their characters and behaviors, but ultimately submissive to male characters until eventually returning to domestic circumstances similar to their origins. I join these scholarly conversations about Gothic heroines through my analysis of female curiosity and epistemophilia as they are applied to the domestic sphere. I concur with the critics who see female knowledge and sexuality as inextricably connected and feared in the domain of patriarchal influence. I argue, however, that rather than being trapped in the domestic sphere, novelist Ann Radcliffe’s heroines apply epistemophilia—a drive to acquire knowledge—to the domestic sphere itself to uncover and acquire the secrets hidden from them by male authority figures.

This thesis begins by establishing the Biblical “Adam and Eve” account in *Genesis*, which brand Eve the untrustworthy transgressive female unable to command her blasphemous curiosity, as the precedent for all curious females that appear thereafter, acting as a blueprint for future heroines. Then, I look to the “Bluebeard” fairy tale to solidify the connection between female curiosity and sexuality as I note the similarity of the young wife’s actions in the fairy tale to those of Eve. I analyze the necessity of the wife’s transgression and disobedience in her journey toward obtaining knowledge that could act as equalizer in the power dynamics between men and women. Next, I situate my argument within historical context, discussing the rise of the domestic sphere, middle-class gender roles, the Gothic novel, and Enlightenment feminism. Finally, I follow with an extensive exploration of Radcliffe’s Gothic novels *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), arguing that her revisionary account of Eve’s
transgressive act rewards her heroines with knowledge and provides them with the intellectual capability necessary to enable their autonomous decisions.
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Introduction

Characterized by medieval settings, endangered heroines, supernatural occurrences, and the consequences of genealogy, the Gothic novel marked a notable divergence from the realist novel and acted as the antithesis to the works of the Enlightenment. The publication of *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 marked the inception of a frenzied literary movement; from that point onward, the Gothic became a fixture in literature and countless novels were added to the Gothic resume. Ann Radcliffe’s second novel, *A Sicilian Romance*, and her fourth novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), epitomize the characteristics of the female Gothic tradition. Deemed a landmark work in the “female Gothic” canon, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, exemplifies the male exercise of control over female knowledge and sexuality, a tradition first apparent in the story of “Adam and Eve” and introduced to the Gothic tradition through the “Bluebeard” fairy tale. While the female and her search for knowledge are depicted as inherently taboo in the Biblical story of “Adam and Eve,” the tradition of female transgression evolves from Eve’s swift temptation in the Garden of Eden, to the conscious, cognizant decision made by Bluebeard’s wife. Eve, as the first woman, lacked access to the experience of others, setting the precedent for curious women. Bluebeard’s wife, on the other hand, armed with empirical questions wondering at the fate of his previous wives, makes the informed decision to transgress her husband’s boundaries, deducing the dangerous plight of her marriage based on the disappearances of the women that came before her. Radcliffe uses her heroines, Emily St. Aubert and Julia Mazzini, to explore the legacy of Eve’s transgressive behaviors. While her patriarchal figures fill the roles of authority demonstrated by God and Bluebeard, Radcliffe’s females test the limits of patriarchal
authority, gaining knowledge of and within the domestic space, ultimately investigating
the conventions of power established in the story of Adam and Eve.

Over the past several decades, many works of scholarship exploring the Gothic
turn our attention toward the domestic within the Gothic tradition and the social climate
that allowed Gothic novels to flourish in the novel publication market. Nancy Armstrong
and Kate Ferguson Ellis provide insight into the rise of separate spheres and the domestic
space that allowed for the popularity of the novel during eighteenth-century
industrialization. Countless critics examine the female experience within the domestic
space of the Gothic, particularly regarding the control of information by parental figures,
the role of curiosity, and the role of the home’s physical structure in the heroine’s pursuit
of knowledge.\textsuperscript{1} Scholars are most often concerned with the motivation and intention
behind the Gothic heroines’ curiosity-related endeavors.

In consulting these works of scholarship, I propose my own argument concerning
the representations of women in both the Gothic novel and in the feminist criticism of the
eighteenth-century Gothic novel, as well as the portrayal of female curiosity in Biblical
and fairy tale texts. Women in eighteenth-century novels are often portrayed by scholars
as mildly rebellious in their characters and behaviors, but ultimately submissive to male
characters until eventually returning to domestic circumstances similar to their origins. I
join these conversations through my analysis of female curiosity and epistemophilia as
they are applied to the domestic sphere. I concur with the critics who see female

\textsuperscript{1} For example, Ford H. Swigart, Jr. provides extensive analysis of Radcliffe’s use of the veil motif, Simone
Broders traces the theme of curiosity and its link to gender, and Robert Miles examines the significance of
the mother figure in Gothic literature. Scholars such as Alison Milbank, Juliann Fleenor, and Maria Tatar
analyze the relationships between Gothic heroines and their connections to the Gothic home, in terms of
physicality and family structures.
knowledge and sexuality as inextricably connected and feared forces in the domain of patriarchal influence. I argue, however, that rather than being trapped in the domestic sphere, Radcliffe’s heroines apply epistemophilia—a drive to acquire knowledge—to uncover and acquire the secrets hidden from them. Heroines’ interactions with the sublime, uncanny, and explained supernatural are also crucial as they navigate through dangerous experiences and conclude in a happier version of the domestic sphere.

This thesis begins by establishing the Biblical “Adam and Eve” of Genesis, which brand Eve the untrustworthy transgressive female unable to command her blasphemous curiosity, as the precedent for all curious females that appear thereafter, acting as a blueprint for Perrault and Radcliffe’s heroines. Then, I look to the “Bluebeard” text to solidify the connection between female curiosity and sexuality as I note the similarity of the young wife’s actions to those of Eve. I analyze the necessity of her transgression and disobedience in her journey toward obtaining knowledge that could act as equalizer in settling the power dynamics between men and women. Next, I situate my argument within historical context, discussing the rise of the domestic sphere, middle-class gender roles, the Gothic novel, and Enlightenment feminism. Finally, I follow with an extensive exploration of Radcliffe’s Gothic novels The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) and A Sicilian Romance (1790), arguing that her revisionary account of Eve’s transgressive act rewards her heroines with knowledge and provides them with the intellectual capability necessary to enable their autonomous decisions.
Adam and Eve

The malevolence of female knowledge and sexuality have been mythicized in cultural tales for myriad generations, from religious parables to the earliest European fairy tales. In the story of “Adam and Eve” in the Biblical book of Genesis, God first creates Adam from dust and breathes life into him, soon after creating Eve to be Adam’s companion. While Adam sleeps, God creates Eve from a portion of Adam’s rib—the first factor of the story of “Adam and Eve” that portrays women as inferior; by creating woman from Adam’s rib, it is implied that Eve’s existence would not even be possible, or even necessary, without man. Eve was created solely for the purpose of providing companionship to Adam to prevent his loneliness and to submit to a role of servitude.

Adam and Eve reside in the Garden of Eden, a paradise, but soon the Bible portrays Eve as corrupt with sin—largely linked to her unchecked curiosity. Upon entering the Garden of Eden, prior to Eve’s creation, God speaks to Adam: “the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest eat freely: But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (King James Version, Genesis, 2.16-17). Though it is unclear who relays God’s prohibition of the Tree of Knowledge to Eve—God or Adam—both male figures act as patriarchs in Eve’s life. Just as Bluebeard commands his young wife not to open one specific door in his home, Eve is commanded not to eat from one specific tree. Eve parrots this command to the serpent, but he denies the validity of the threat of death. The serpent states, “Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (King James Version, Genesis, 3.4-5). Adam and Eve were both created as innocent beings; Eve, upon entering the Garden of Eden and visiting the tree of life, succumbs to
the serpent’s desire for her to eat the Forbidden Fruit, and as a result, becomes knowledgeable. Ultimately, Eve’s curiosity is her downfall. Tempted by the Serpent’s information and the idea of gaining knowledge, Eve, “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat” (King James Version, Genesis, 3.6). After gaining knowledge, Eve persuades Adam to eat the Forbidden Fruit, and therefore Eve is responsible for corrupting man. As punishment for their disobedience, God punishes the serpent, Eve, and Adam. The serpent is sentenced to a life without legs, Eve is condemned to the responsibility of childbearing, and Adam is punished with the obligation of hard work. Consequently, Eve, at this point the sole representative of the female sex, is blamed for corrupting man. The story of “Adam and Eve” certainly contributes to the belief that women were both inferior and corrupt, in comparison to men. This biblical tale inaugurates the belief that “Women’s humoral composition inclined her naturally towards every evil, where as man’s inclined him towards every good” (Corry 569). Eve’s corruption of Adam tainted the status of women, which also contributed to the idolization of the male body and sexuality, at the expense of the villainization of the female. The insinuation is that if Eve had controlled her curiosity and denied her transgressive thoughts, she would not have been punished and caused the downfall of herself, her husband, and future generations.
Bluebeard fairytale

Building on the Abrahamic story of “Adam and Eve,” the Bluebeard fairy tale tradition continues with the notion of the female pursuit of knowledge, and by extension, sexuality. There are numerous versions of the tale, but for the purposes of this thesis, Charles Perrault’s 1697 version is most important, given that it was the most widely known to eighteenth-century female readers and writers of the Gothic.² In this version of the text, the titular character is a presumably late-middle-aged man of sizable wealth, plagued by the ugliness associated with his blue beard. A man of considerable fortune, he offers a proposal to a neighboring family, allowing the mother to choose which daughter will be his bride. As the two elder daughters are exceptionally beautiful young women, not only are they perturbed by his age and physical appearance, but by the fact that his first seven wives disappeared, sentenced to an unknown fate. Eventually, the youngest daughter agrees to be his bride. Realizing that he needs to leave on business shortly after their marriage, he leaves his young wife with a handful of keys for locks throughout their manor, allowing her access to every lock except for one. He says, “But I absolutely forbid you to go into that one room, and if you open it so much as a crack, my anger will know no limits” (Perrault 176).

The “Bluebeard” fairy tale demonstrates the necessity of female curiosity, for though the young wife certainly faces danger as a result of her inquisitiveness, it ultimately prevents her from becoming her husband’s next victim. Though she promised Bluebeard that she would not use the key to open the forbidden lock, she quickly finds herself tempted: “When she reached the door to the room, she stopped for a moment to

² Maria Tatar cites the popularity of Charles Perrault’s version of “Bluebeard” across numerous regions, including England, France, Germany, Italy, and Scandinavia. Upon further investigation, Perrault’s version is the only one in Tatar’s bibliography that existed in the eighteenth century.
recall how her husband had forbidden her to open it, and she reflected on the punishment she might incur for being disobedient. But the temptation was too strong for her to resist. She took the little key and, trembling, she opened the door” (Perrault 176). At this point, the young woman discovers the corpses of Bluebeard’s seven missing wives, their throats slit, bodies mutilated. Upon escaping the room, she realizes the key is enchanted to permanently stain with blood upon insertion into the locked door. After returning home, Bluebeard requests the keys from his wife and, after initially hiding the blood-stained key, she is forced to give it to her husband, who realizes her disobedience. He sentences her to the same fate as his murdered wives, but he is eventually slain by her brothers.

In their extensive analysis of the “Bluebeard” mythos, Bluebeard’s Legacy: Death and Secrets from Bartok to Hitchcock, Griselda Pollock and Victoria Anderson identify the thread uniting “Adam and Eve” to the fairy tale:

This[…]relates to the original injunction—transgression, that of Adam and Eve, where the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is forbidden. By the same token, the opening of a door represents the pursuit of hidden knowledge in a precisely equivalent manner[…]Perrault’s ‘La Barbe Bleue’ reinstates transgression at the heart of the narrative[…]in the biblical tale, both Eve and Adam transgress the law of God, even if Eve is more commonly identified as being the culprit, and even though she is persuaded by the serpent. In Perrault’s tale it is a wife who transgresses the law set out by a husband, and although he is finally defeated, it is only because the wife’s brothers happen to arrive just in time to save her; and the story ends with her new marriage to an honest man who would help her forget about the whole thing. The wife is firmly contained by patriarchal structures and is in no way autonomous. (Pollock and Anderson 7)

Though I agree with the majority of Pollock and Anderson’s argument, I must state my opposition to the final claim: Bluebeard’s wife is certainly autonomous. Though she does rely on her brothers to physically escape from Bluebeard’s home, she uses her autonomy and agency to reach that final point. Without agency, she would not have decided to disregard Bluebeard’s initial warning forbidding her entry into the locked chamber. The
wife’s autonomous choice to seek knowledge enabled her ultimate escape from her dangerous spouse.

The “Bluebeard” text initially seems to reinforce the moral lessons first presented in “Adam and Eve;” a young woman, warned not to attempt to rise above her station and not to disregard and disobey the parameters established by her purported male superior, finds herself unable to quell her own rampant curiosity, eventually falling victim for her own sin and receiving a promise of punishment. It is notable that Eve’s punishment for disobedience and pursuit of knowledge is childbearing; there is an inherent connection established between knowledge and sexuality. Childbearing represents the result of female sexuality, the pursuit of desire and intercourse, and sexual acts performed on female bodies. Eve’s disobedience, curiosity, and knowledge are all interwoven, and in conjunction with her punishment of childbearing, female sexuality becomes synonymous with sin. Perrault’s version of the “Bluebeard” tale similarly utilizes this trope, as a “virginal and defenseless young woman” purposely disobeys orders given by a male figure of authority, imitating Eve’s sin of curiosity and pursuit of forbidden knowledge (Pollock and Anderson xxv). Pollock and Anderson summarize the trope: “The story hinges on the prohibition uttered by the father/husband about using a key to enter a secret chamber: the chamber being so often a metaphor for the hidden interior and sexuality of a woman, the key functioning as a masculine sign, the phallus that the woman should not herself insert to gain knowledge” (xxv). Bluebeard provides his young bride with multiple keys, allowing her to open every lock except for one, much like the serpent tempts Eve to pick fruit from the Tree of Knowledge (of Good and Evil), even though she is able to eat from all but that one specific tree in Eden. Faced with the Forbidden
Doorway, it is in this moment that the “virginal and defenseless young woman” decides
to reject the male control of female sexuality and knowledge, entering the room as Eve
consumed the fruit (xxv). Pollock and Anderson argue:

Shed but also irremovably stained blood introduces a count-colour,
transgressively associated not only with death, but with the female body, with
menstruation, defloration and childbirth. This has led many to see the tale as a
[sic] exemplary patriarchal story of the dangers of female curiosity which blames
the woman for her seeking for knowledge and links this tale with that of the
Hebrew Eve and the Greek Pandora. (Pollock and Anderson xxvi)

Not only does “Bluebeard” echo the gender power dynamics displayed in the myth of
“Adam and Eve,” but it also highlights the connection between corruption and the female
body. As stated by Pollock and Anderson, the blood-stained key can allude to
menstruation, defloration, and childbirth, a callback to Eve’s sin and sentencing of
females to a life of childbearing—a consequence of female desire and sexuality. In their
analysis of “Bluebeard,” Pollock and Anderson also include a section examining the
phallic implications of such a tale. They cite film theorist Laura Mulvey’s idea that, “the
threat posed by a more searching feminine curiosity[...]defined as feminine
epistemophilia—the desire for knowledge that might expose subjectivity’s fragile
foundations on a phallic illusion or[...]the illusoriness of the phallus” (xxiii). This notion
is reiterated, “Bluebeard’s secret both empowers him, and makes him paranoid: keeping
knowledge from his wife, and denying her spatial access to it, Bluebeard establishes an
epistemological imbalance to his advantage” (Bauer 10). The fact that Bluebeard’s bride
is directed not to pursue knowledge (and by extension sexuality) by a male figure and
then utilizes the forbidden key—a phallic symbol—highlights the legitimacy of Mulvey’s
claim; women are forbidden from interacting with or employing the symbolic phallus, for
fear that their desire for knowledge would lead to ideas of equality. As previously
mentioned, although the young wife’s brothers physically save her from the home, she
decides to prioritize her gaining of knowledge, changing the course of her fate by
restoring epistemological balance.

As was common of many fairy tales, a blatant moral was included following the
completion of Perrault’s “Bluebeard” to reiterate to young readers the important
messages of the tale. “Bluebeard” is followed by two morals, the first stating: “Curiosity,
with its many charms, can stir up serious regrets; thousands of examples turn up every
day. Women give in, but it’s a fleeting pleasure; once satisfied, it ceases to be. And
always it proves very costly” (Perrault 179). This moral leaves little to the imagination,
explicitly warning women against the dangers and consequences of curiosity. Beneath the
surface is an undertone of warning against sexual activity, a double entendre insisting that
“fleeting pleasure” is always “very costly.” In case any piece of that moral could be
misconstrued, a second moral is provided, stating, “They [husbands] toe the line with
their wives. And no matter what color their beards, it’s not hard to tell who is in charge”
(179). On the surface, it seems that these blunt morals leave little room for confusion;
audiences were meant to derive from the “Bluebeard” story a very specific meaning: Men
hold an undebatable position of authority over their wives and daughters, and should
women choose to submit to their curiosities and sexual desires, then they shall face the
consequences. However, this moral contains an undeniable ambiguity, in which wives
could be argued as currently “in charge.” The second moral begins with, “You surely
know that this tale Took place many years ago. No longer are husbands so terrible,
Demanding the impossible, Acting unhappy and jealous. They toe the line with their
wives” (179). To eighteenth-century readers, Perrault signals that this tale happened long
ago, insisting that marriage dynamics are much more equal. Given the ambiguity of the moral’s wording, both husband and wife can be argued as distinctly “in charge.”
Gothic: *The Mysteries of Udolpho, A Sicilian Romance*

**Home: Sanctuary and Prison**

Nancy Armstrong’s “The Politics of Domesticating Culture, Then and Now,” highlights the cultural shifts experienced in eighteenth-century British society that resulted in middle-class women’s responsibility for domestic issues and their roles in the home. With men viewed as the gender of the mind and women as that of the heart, it is no wonder that women were tasked with the emotional cultivation and nourishment of their families: “the household, leisure time, courtship procedures, and kinship relations, and under her jurisdiction the most basic qualities of human identity were supposed to develop” (Armstrong 3). Armstrong posits that the history of the novel is inherently linked with the history of sexuality, both of which became of interest with the rise of the middle class.

Other feminist literary critics have built on Armstrong’s work by examining the role of domesticity in the rise of the Gothic novel. In her groundbreaking book *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, Kate Ferguson Ellis argues that the Gothic tradition also arose in tandem with the ideal of the “domestic sphere”—the idea that the home was a separate, safe space from that of the work force—for middle-class families. This social shift opened a new realm of literary space: the woman novel reader. As socioeconomic practices began to shift during the rise of industrialization and capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, gender roles became increasingly present, as men joined the workforce and women maintained the domestic space. With this shift also came a rise in crime and the reinforcement of the home as a safe space. The cementing of the domestic sphere brought about the idea that women were best to stay at home in a bubble of safety, so as to avoid becoming victims...
in the man’s world of work and crime. Ellis discusses the discouragement of women working in the labor force, explaining that male society cited the increase of rape as a specific reason for women to remain within the safety of the domestic sphere. Despite this veneer of safety, wealthy women were sometimes targeted and raped so as to claim their virginity and tarnish their reputation, forcing the victim to marry her attacker and granting him access to her wealth. In this circumstance, “she was still a possible outlet for male frustration from which ‘the home’ could not adequately protect her” (xi).

Ellis hypothesizes that middle-class women were so drawn to the Gothic novel because they felt connected to the representation of “the home as a place of danger and imprisonment” rather than a place of safety (Ellis x). At a time when social structures were evolving, the importance of the female role in the domestic sphere was being reiterated at a high rate, so as not to allow extensive questioning of the legitimacy of the established gender roles. Ellis interestingly describes this trend as a need for men to keep “the domestic sphere impregnable” (xi). While in her use of “impregnable,” she was referring to the desire to maintain the home as a safe space amidst an onslaught of political and social change, the associations of the word cannot be overlooked. At face value, the word references the inability to penetrate, overcome, or defeat a given circumstance, but the visual similarity of “impregnate” is obvious as well. The possible duality of the word not only emphasizes the male control over the domestic sphere as a means to maintain safety and stasis from the threats of society, but also alludes to male control over their female family members’ sexualities and fertilities.

A wife’s behavior, her chastity (even regarding nonconsensual assaults), and her ability to maintain the home all reflected directly on her husband’s reputation, as, “A
well-regulated home, as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have argued, was an outward sign of male competence and trustworthiness, a valuable economic asset in a situation where traditional markings of reliability were inappropriate, inadequate, or breaking down” (Ellis x-xi). As women were increasingly forced to stay at home, supposedly under the guise of interest of their safety, their leisure time grew as well, creating the perfect storm for the Gothic novel market.

The rise of female readership prompted discussions about female education: “The debate about the nature and purpose of female education that proliferated in print during the second half of the eighteenth century made it clear that women’s reading was a matter of public concern, not just of private choice” (Ellis x). This was specifically due to the fact that the Gothic novel could be interpreted in two ways; on the one hand, women could interpret the texts as the amplification of gender roles and the encouragement of female submission to male authority in the face of possible dangers, or, as Ellis describes, the texts can be interpreted to, “subvert that construction[…]creating, in a segment of culture directed toward women, a resistance to an ideology that imprisons them even as it posits a sphere of safety for them” (x). The male imposition of separate sphere facilitates the male exercise of control over female pursuit of knowledge and sexuality so extensively portrayed in Gothic novels. I propose, however, that Radcliffe’s novels use this confinement within the domestic sphere to the advantage of her heroines, allowing them to gain knowledge about the home’s history and its previous inhabitants, providing them with a better understanding of patriarchy’s consequences.

_Elizabeth Wright_  
In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft published _A Vindication of the Rights of Woman_, the first work of feminist philosophy. Though she provided many specifics throughout
the work, her central argument called for educational equality between men and women. Published during the age of Enlightenment, Wollstonecraft utilized reason to convey and strengthen her arguments for women’s rational education. Given that women were viewed as the heart of the home, tasked with domestic responsibilities, child rearing, and emotional support of husband and children, Wollstonecraft posits that women’s education is necessary for the success and betterment of society. In other words, if women are equipped with the skills and resources of rational thought, their families will benefit, and society will only improve.

In the spirit of rational thinking, Wollstonecraft also argued for women to gain education equal to that of men, with the ability to train for a career outside of the home. In the case that her husband passed in a tragic, untimely manner, she would be able to financially support herself and her children, without falling into poverty and squalor. To confute claims of female inferiority regarding psychology and intellect at the biological level, Wollstonecraft presents the idea of nature versus nurture, arguing that women have the same potential for intelligence as men, but are trained by society to prioritize other endeavors. To close the educational gap between men and women, Wollstonecraft calls for boys and girls to attend public school together, receiving the same education with the same resources.

* A *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* begins with Wollstonecraft’s assertion that the ability to reason separates humanity from the beasts, establishing us as the superior species. Within the human species, she attributes virtue to be the determining factor in goodness between human beings. She concludes her third claim, “For what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of
knowledge denied to the brutes” (Wollstonecraft 19). Though reason is a gift to the human species, it is often used for manipulative purposes; society—namely, men, who are taught rational thinking—uses reason to enable prejudiced thoughts and actions. She condemns social relationships of unchecked power, as tyranny allows for the diminishment of morality in society. She concludes by arguing that, while animalistic strength of the body may have provided hierarchal power in the early days of the species, humans now possess the extensive ability to reason and that it is necessary to utilize this skill to persuade others. In other words, in the Age of Reason and Enlightenment, physical strength does not define power, knowledge and intellect do. And so, Wollstonecraft dismantles the single inequality between men and women that she acknowledged prior.

Calling upon the religious notions of the time, including the presence of the immortal soul in every person, Wollstonecraft questions, “If then women are not a swarm of ephemeron triflers, why should they be kept under ignorance under the specious name of innocence?” (28). Readers have no choice but to acknowledge that women have souls, and as soul-bearing humans, under Wollstonecraft’s train of thought, they also possess the ability to reason. She continues on, arguing that women are trained to think in a superficial manner by society; from childhood, they are discouraged from thinking for themselves. Instead, women are expected to defer thought to husbands, brothers, and eventually, husbands. Wollstonecraft concludes with reverse psychology, demonstrating her cunning humor, essentially asking, if men truly are the superior members of the human species, then why are women restrained so vehemently? If men are so naturally superior, then women should have access to equal education, and men will prove their
superiority without issue.

Wollstonecraft highlights the parallels between the plight of women and that of the lower class; both groups are oppressed, and wealthy men dictate their level of education (or lack thereof) and bar them from political involvement. She further emphasizes the negative effect on society caused by women’s lack of education. Many men argue that women hold power through attraction, with their physical appearances, and acknowledge that some women reject the thought of education, as their own social status would diminish if judged on intellect rather than their personal beauty.

Dedicating a chapter to childhood development and the importance of education during the developmental years, Wollstonecraft writes, “Is it surprising, when we consider what a determinate effect an early association of ideas has on the character, that they neglect their understandings, and turn all their attention to their persons?” (Wollstonecraft 144). She argues that, when women are denied a proper rational education in childhood, their development is forever stunted. When education is denied to girls during childhood, their intellectual minds are negatively impacted for the rest of their lives. This eventually results in unhappy marriages, as women become easily manipulated by men, as they do not have the skills necessary to deduce otherwise. Without the ability to recognize immoral men, women end up in poor circumstances, and their thoughts dictated by immoral husbands, they raise immoral children, and so society faces a threat of steady decline.

She recognizes that girls tend to receive the brunt of parental tyranny, conditioned from birth to take direction from authority without question, resulting in a life absent of autonomy and agency. Wollstonecraft discusses the “slavish bondage” that “cramps” a
child’s development, specifically females (Wollstonecraft 192). She believes that the “weakness” in women is caused by “curbed and humbled” minds as children, their spirits “abased and broken” (193). She reiterates the enslavement diction, stating that when women are “taught slavishly to submit to their parents, they are prepared for the slavery of marriage” (193). It is important to note that, as throughout the *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft is not arguing that marriage is inherently oppressive; instead, she posits that it becomes so due to the manner in which women are socialized: to be docile and submissive wives for their husband, not to seek equality to their partner.

Wollstonecraft’s call to action is most apparent in the final two chapters of the book, in which she establishes the necessity of public education for all girls and boys. Wollstonecraft radically claims:

to improve both sexes they ought, not only in private families, but in public schools, to be educated together. If marriage be the cement of society, mankind should all be educated after the same model, or the intercourse of the sexes will never deserve the name of fellowship, nor will women ever fulfil the peculiar duties of their sex, till they become enlightened citizens, till they become free by being enabled to earn their own subsistence, independent of men; in the same manner, I mean, to prevent misconception, as one man is independent of another. Nay, marriage will never be held sacred till women, by being brought up with men, are prepared to be their companions rather than their mistresses; for the mean doublings of cunning will ever render them contemptible, whilst oppression renders them timid. So convinced am I of this truth, that I will venture to predict that virtue will never prevail in society till the virtues of both sexes are founded on reason; and, till the affections common to both are allowed to gain their strength by the discharge of mutual duties. (Wollstonecraft 205-206)

Wollstonecraft boldly and plainly presents her radical call for co-education, utilizing reason and rational thought to present the argument. She believes that co-education will allow for mutual respect to build between the sexes early in life, and flourish as children age, until, eventually, respect is integrated seamlessly into marriages. Public day-schools would allow children to socialize with their peers, and benefit from the domestic life at
home with their families at night, while experiencing people and forces external to their
domestic space during the day.

Wollstonecraft’s call for education and rational thought naturally encompasses
inquisitiveness of the mind, for both men and women. As discussed in the “Bluebeard”
section, epistemophilia is defined as the desire for knowledge. The epistemological
“desire to know” may be assumed closely related to curiosity, as the Oxford English
Dictionary defines curiosity with an almost identical denotation: “a strong desire to know
about something” (Oxford English Dictionary). Maria Tatar directly connects the
curiosity of Bluebeard’s wife in Perrault’s version of the tale with Laura Mulvey’s
definition of epistemophilia, asserting, “This drive for knowledge turns the wife into an
energetic investigator, determined to acquire knowledge of the secrets hidden behind the
door of the mansion’s forbidden chamber” (Tatar 60). Tatar continues, “Oddly, this
spontaneous curiosity is often perceived as delinquent and marks her as a transgressive
figure courting danger,” vilifying the young wife due to her curiosity, and by extension,
her transgression of set boundaries (61). Simone Broders echoes the sentiment Tatar
addresses, discussing the long history of disapproval of female curiosity:

curiosity, however, was associated with “purposeless movement onward[…]Well
into the eighteenth century, curiosity continues to be regarded as an undesirable
motivation in the male traveller, a mere surrender to idle wanderlust, distracting
him from the true purposes of travelling, education and improvements—a double-
edged sword whose subversive qualities can be harnessed for social good, yet
simultaneously represent a danger both to the curious individual and to society.

Female curiosity is judged more harshly: religious rebukes of curiosity
such as Patrick Delany’s Revelation Examined with Candour (1745) underscore
the Biblical context of curiosity as desire for forbidden knowledge that requires
censure. This was symptomatic of a view that survived despite Enlightenment
protestations as to the necessity of an inquisitive mind to the improvement of
society through science. Curiosity equals transgression of the taboos of
knowledge. It is an intrusion into forbidden territory that will divert the mind from
its more immediate concerns, allow for an overactive imagination and will
ultimately result in a complete loss of a sense of reality and reason. While the patristic middle ages widely constructed curiosity as the original sin, a vice that could lead nowhere but into damnation, Enlightenment philosophy proved to be the prerequisite for this putative vice to be transformed into a virtue inherent in every human mind. (Broders 917-918)

Broders continues by distinguishing various types of curiosity:

“Aimless” curiosity, personal curiosity rather than epistemological desire to know, is mostly regarded as a female transgression: ‘Female curiosity was idle, ignorant, prurient, useless or even socially destructive…. Curiosity without method and without justification became female’. Thus “female” curiosity as a concept is frequently stigmatised as useless, even detrimental to the character of those exposed to its influence—a fate curiosity shares with the Gothic novel as a genre. (Broders 918)

Curiosity is inextricably linked to Eve’s initial transgression, and so had become inherently liked with the female. Eve’s transgression of the forbidden in the Garden of Eden as a result of her inability to control her burgeoning curiosity solidified female curiosity as dangerous. Marie Mulvey-Roberts also references epistemophilia in relation to Eve, Bluebeard’s wife, and Ann Radcliffe’s heroines, but, she defines it as “an excessive desire to know” (Mulvey-Roberts 98, emphasis added). Excessive implies lack of necessity, as if the curious heroine in question is greedy for more information than she deserves. I disagree with the assertion of the heroines’ excessive desire for information; instead, readers are granted access to the female mind, including questions and processes that we do not normally have access to. To imply that the curiosity is excessive is to say that it is unwarranted and undeserved. On the contrary, the heroines have been denied access to knowledge and rational thought by the patriarchal societies by which they are bound. Their curiosity is not only natural, it should be expected.

In the final chapter of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Mary Wollstonecraft provides her opinion of the novel form, specifically how the novel impacts female
readers. She feels that the “sentimental” novel is simply a euphemism substituted for the lack of female education that results in idealistic and unrealistic views of the world, enabled by lack of critical thinking. Wollstonecraft believes, “Women subjected by ignorance to their sensations, and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which lead them shamefully to neglect the duties of life, and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements they plump into actual vice” (Wollstonecraft 228-229). However, she does believe that women reading novels is exponentially better than women not reading whatsoever: “when I exclaim against novels, I mean when contrasted with those works which exercise the understanding and regulate the imagination” (229). Wollstonecraft believes the sentimental novel to be little more than indulgence, adding little to female education; however, she does see the benefit in young women reading such texts with a guide, highlighting the inaccuracies and discrepancies of the works to the reality of life. Wollstonecraft offers an interesting argument; I certainly agree with her disclaimer that a woman reading potentially frivolous material is better than reading none at all. For her eighteenth-century audience, the growing frequency with which women were reading novels was often viewed as dangerous. I cannot help but think back to the serpent’s claim to Eve that “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” With the hope of writers like Wollstonecraft that Enlightenment education and rational thinking would increasingly be granted to women during this time, fathers and husbands faced a threat to their positions of power. As Wollstonecraft argued throughout her Vindication, education leads to the discarding of female passivity. By gaining autonomous thought, women would have the
chance to redress the “epistemological imbalance” previously discussed, and so the patriarchal power would be shaken.

While Wollstonecraft’s argument regarding sentimental novels can be appreciated, the same notion applies to Gothic novels, especially those that utilize the explained supernatural, as does Ann Radcliffe. Referencing the sentimental novel and the belief that young women should read them with the guide of a rationally-minded person, Wollstonecraft writes, “if a judicious person, with some turn for humour, would read several to a young girl, and point out both by tones, and apt comparisons with pathetic incidents and heroic characters in history, how foolishly and ridiculously they caricatured human nature, just opinions might be substituted instead of romantic sentiments” (Wollstonecraft 231). The explained supernatural Gothic texts already exercise this philosophy; by the completion of the text, Radcliffe provides rational explanations for the strange occurrences and exposes the realities of romantic relationships, allowing her heroine to recognize her own foolish behavior and come to realize the necessity of her rational minds and the danger of her sentimental thoughts.

*Escaping the Home—And the Patriarchy—in Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic novels*

Throughout Ann Radcliffe’s novels *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *A Sicilian Romance*, the notion of separate spheres and the multilayered domestic interior are explored extensively, simultaneously illustrating the facade of safety advocated by male-dominated society and exposing the subsequent hypocrisies that exploited the women confined within the home. From the beginning of *Udolphi*, Radcliffe establishes La Vallee, home of the heroine Emily St. Aubert, as the ideal domestic space. The opening pages of the novel describe the cottage extensively, a house cherished and shaped into a family home within the countryside of France by Monsieur St. Aubert and his family.
Filled with a library and a greenhouse, La Vallee is established as a location teeming with the availability of knowledge and flourishing natural life—two sources readily available to the females of the home, Emily and Madame St. Aubert (2-3). The idealistic manner with which St. Aubert conducted his home and permitted his wife and daughter to behave are immediately highlighted by the contradicting views of Madame St. Aubert’s brother, Monsieur Quesnel. In contrast to his sister, Quesnel’s wife “by nature and education, was a vain and frivolous woman,” characteristics he felt much more suitable to women; even within his family-by-marriage, St. Aubert is progressive in his views on women’s intellectual capabilities (Radcliffe 11).

And yet, though St. Aubert provides a surplus of opportunities for Emily’s acquisition of knowledge regarding reading and the natural world, he discourages one crucial opportunity to gain knowledge about the family itself. On his death bed, St. Aubert asks a favor of Emily, in which she is to dispose of documents hidden in his chambers at La Vallee without looking at their contents, revealing a fissure of potential darkness and uncertainty in the seemingly perfect image of the cottage. Both tyrannical and protective father figures demonstrate the ability to inhibit acquisition of knowledge. St. Aubert is more concerned with Emily’s morality, or rather, her innocence, a dangerous metonymy to make. While morality relates to ethical decisions and the importance of goodness in a person, innocence relates to purity, both intellectual and sexual.

Upon the death of Madame St. Aubert and an onslaught of financial troubles, Emily and her father had left the freedom and safety of La Vallee, resulting in Emily’s exposure to other domestic spaces. Simone Broders believes that this relocation is
necessary for Emily’s forward development, as she must leave behind her childhood home to gain and pursue forbidden knowledge and escape patriarchal boundaries (Broders 920). This notion of the importance of forward development harks back to Wollstonecraft’s ideas on female intellect and development, in which she argued that women are encouraged to defer thought to male figures in their lives, rather than exercise the rational thought they were born with.

Emily’s first true interaction with the domestic plight of eighteenth-century women arises after the death of her father when she goes to live with her aunt, Madame Cheron, in Tholouse. As a widower and an independent female character in the novel, it may be presumed that Emily’s time with her aunt would be an extension of her life at La Vallee, but this is not the case. Madame Cheron, a traditionalist in her values, has begun a relationship with Signor Montoni, a tyrannical man whom she quickly marries, inflicting Emily with an uncle—a new male patriarchal figure, given the death of her father and her lack of husband. The Tholouse house is a place of transition, as Emily is forbidden by her aunt and Montoni from making her own choices, following her emotions, and even walking the grounds by herself. In Tholouse and then Venice (a relocation at Montoni’s will), Emily is denied her desire to court and marry Valancourt and is instead tricked into becoming engaged to Count Morano. In a desperate attempt to evade Montoni’s arranged marriage, Emily appeals to Monsieur Quesnel, her biological uncle; however, her pleas fall on deaf ears, as he warns, “your present disagreeable state of dependence will cease. As a relation to you I rejoice in the circumstance, which is so fortunate for you” (213). This period of transition—and Emily’s first exposure to the common realities of women’s domestic experiences—comes to a close as Montoni smuggles Emily and her aunt away
in the dead of night, bringing them to his castle Udolpho, a space of confinement and imprisonment.

While La Vallee was a sanctuary, and both Tholouse and Venice act as medians on the spectrum of patriarchal treatment of females in the domestic space, Udolpхо portrays the potential imperilment of women in the home, as so acutely analyzed by Ellis. Ellis hypothesized that the Gothic home often portrayed the locking-out of “fallen” men and the locking-in of “innocent” women, cementing the domestic space as both a place of safety and danger (ix). Robert Miles thought similarly, writing, “La Vallee and Udolphо are antithetical structures. The one is a pastoral retreat of bourgeois restraint and discipline, the other a medieval fortress located in the middle of the country (a holdover of what Matthew Arnold will later style England’s ‘barbarian’ aristocracy)” (48). He continues with his analysis of the domestic symbols with Chateau-le-Blanc, a house Emily encounters later in the novel: “The appropriately named Chateau-le-Blanc—the white house on which meaning shall be inscribed—is the mediating term between the antitheses, between the paternal ideal, as dream-like pastoral heaven, and its nightmarish opposite, Udolphо, replete with the differentially-locking door and complement of randy, roistering banditti” (49). Miles concludes that Chateau-le-Blanc exhibits qualities of both La Vallee and Udolphо, the ideal and the nightmarish, illustrating the ease with which a domestic space can balance precariously between danger and safety. Upon entrance into the castle, the servant, Annette, recounts to Emily the mysterious disappearance of Signora Laurentini, the original owner of the castle, and Signor Montoni’s possible involvement, which will be discussed in later pages. This history encourages the growth of fear toward Montoni that was already planted in Emily’s consciousness, and she
considers the precariousness of her position in Udolpho under Montoni’s jurisdiction:

When she was alone, her thoughts recurred to the strange history of Signora Laurentini and then to her own strange situation, in the wild and solitary mountains of a foreign country, in the castle, and the power of a man, to whom, only a few preceding months, she was an entire stranger; who had already exercised an usurped authority over her, and whose character she now regarded, with a degree of terror, apparently justified by the fears of others. She knew, that he had invention equal to the conception and talents of the execution of any project, and she greatly feared he had a heart too void of feeling to oppose the perpetuation of whatever his interest might suggest. She had long observed the unhappiness of Madame Montoni, and had often been witness to the stern and contemptuous behavior she received from her husband. To these circumstances, which conspired to give her just cause for alarm, were now added those thousand nameless terrors, which exist only in active imaginations, and which set reason and examination equally at defiance. (240)

In her short-term experience interacting with Montoni, Emily recognizes the potential danger he presents to herself and her aunt, as the figure of male authority now conducting the intricacies of their family life. The repetition of “strange” demonstrates Emily’s first instances of recognition of similarities between herself and the other women that contribute to the history of this castle. The final sentences in which Emily discusses the “observed” disposition of Madame Montoni of which she acts as “witness,” resulting in “just cause,” supported by “reason” and “examination,” establish a catalogue of empirical language of the Enlightenment. This passage uses the empirical language of the Enlightenment and its opposite, irrational imagination, to foreshadow the dangers Emily may face, just as the women who came before her. Though she is reluctant to allow her emotions and imagination to take hold (much in the way her father warned her to control), she cannot ignore her own whisperings of intuition, alarming her not to submit blindly.

This intrinsic fear of Montoni and his power in Udolpho prove to be well-deserved, as after waking from her first night in her new chambers, Emily realizes
doorways providing entry and exit to her room, had been tampered with while she slept. Emily notes, “The door of the corridor was locked as she had left it, but this door, which could be secured only on the outside, must have been bolted, during the night. She became seriously uneasy at the thought of sleeping again in a chamber, thus liable to intrusion, so remote, too, as it was from the family, and she determined to mention the circumstance to Madame Montoni, and to request a change” (242). Though the significance of doorways in the female experience has been discussed at length regarding the “Bluebeard” tale, and will be addressed in relation to Radcliffe’s works in the following section, it is important here to note that Emily’s fear is justified. Recalling Ellis’ discussion of women’s designated place within domestic life, under the pretense of safety from the external world within the home, exposes the inaccuracy and undependability of such a practice. Taken to Udolpho by Montoni to escape her engagement to a disgraced Count Morano, Emily is still at risk. Emily’s bedroom, the supposed place of utmost privacy and protection, has failed her. The logic thereby follows that if something as simple as the door to her private bedroom can be breached, what other boundaries may be crossed and exploited as well?

As the man of the home and the newly-crowned patriarch of the St. Aubert women, Montoni is tasked with the responsibility of keeping both women safe, as well as keeping them in order. As Ellis mentions, eighteenth-century readers would recognize the roles of separate spheres, and though the internal domestic space fell to the responsibility of women, the appropriate execution of female tasks reflected directly on the man of the home. As such, when Madame Cheron disobeys Montoni’s orders and refuses to sign over her estate ownership to him, he locks her in the castle’s tower, and so concretely
establishes the home as a place of internal danger, as well as safety from the external forces of unwanted marriages and impending battle. Cognizant of his power as the man in the home, Montoni states to Madame Cheron, “‘You shall be removed, this night,’ said he, ‘to the east turret: there, perhaps, you may understand the danger of offending a man, who has unlimited power over you’” (305). Conscious of his unchecked power, Montoni maintains his stance for numerous chapters, attempting to persuade Madame Cheron to sign over her property to him; however, Madame Cheron’s will is steadfast: her property is to be inherited by Emily upon her passing. Following another kidnap attempt and Madame Cheron’s ongoing imprisonment in Udolpho’s tower, Emily requests her leave of Udolpho from Montoni, which he quickly forbids. While to the external world, Montoni may appear to be a man of influence with the best interest of his family’s safety at heart, Radcliffe exposes the truth often hidden within the domestic space: women are powerless in their own homes, doomed to lives of submission to male figures granted such authority by societal beliefs.

Because Madame Cheron refuses to sign over her rights to Montoni, and instead leaves her estate to be inherited by Emily, Montoni’s pursuit of said property becomes Emily’s burden to endure. When she, like her aunt, refuses to sign over her inherited property, Emily spurs Montoni’s wrath. He threatens, “‘you shall remain my prisoner, till you are convinced of your error,’” followed by, “‘I must pity the weakness of mind, which leads you to so much suffering as you are compelling me to prepare for you[…]You speak like a heroine[…]we shall see whether you can suffer like one’” (380-381). The “weakness” of mind which Montoni identifies in Emily calls upon the eighteenth-century view of women that Wollstonecraft was assessing. A lack of intellectual strength
was associated with the female gender and used to justify the unequal treatment of women, as well as their assumed role within the domestic sphere. Montoni’s reference to Emily as a “heroine” creates a meta moment in the text in which Emily represents all curious women, both in the Gothic genre and in eighteenth century female society. The consciousness of the “heroine” archetype in the text welcomes eighteenth-century readers to consider themselves as a heroine in their own story, recognizing the potential dangers posed by the male tyrant, but, in the spirit of the female Gothic, also remembering that the heroine’s story concludes with triumph. Eventually, with the help of Du Pont, a man fond of Emily, she is able to escape Montoni’s clutches and the confinement of Udolphi. She seeks temporary safety with the Count de Villeforte and his family, before reuniting with Valancourt at the conclusion of the novel.

Notably, Radcliffe chooses to complete the novel and Emily’s experiences quite similarly to the manner in which they began: in domestic bliss at La Vallee. Following their marriage, Emily and Valancourt return to her beloved childhood home:

O! How joyful it is to tell of happiness, such as that of Valancourt and Emily; to relate, that, after suffering under the oppression of the vicious and the disdain of the weak, they were, at length, restored to each other—to the beloved landscapes of their native country,—to the securest felicity of this life, that of aspiring moral and labouring for intellectual improvement—to the pleasures of enlightened society, and to the exercise of the benevolence, which had always animated their hearts; while the bowers of La Vallee became, once more, the retreat of goodness, wisdom and domestic blessedness! (672)

Given the extensiveness of Emily’s suffering throughout Udolphi within the realm of various domestic spaces, it cannot be overlooked that she ends up exactly where she began, her place in the home even further solidified by her marriage to Valancourt. Since she becomes the owner of numerous properties by the end of the novel, including La Vallee, and chooses to dispose of various properties, does Radcliffe intend to show a
reversal of conventional roles in the separate sphere, or simply to showcase an attempt at some equality between genders, as women’s intellectual pursuits and educational rights gained some semblance of traction in the eighteenth-century? I am inclined to believe the latter, as Radcliffe made no further attempt to illustrate Emily and Valancourt’s life together following their marriage, simply that their lives at La Vallee brought inexplicable joy and contentment. Most likely, their marriage was to be assumed reminiscent to that of Emily’s parents, Monsieur and Madame St. Aubert, in which both husband and wife are allowed access to intellectual endeavors and curiosities, but the patriarch’s word remains supreme, as evidenced by St. Aubert’s deathbed command for Emily to dispose of his papers without learning of their contents. By the end of Radcliffe’s novels, her heroines choose to return to the domestic sphere, after gaining life experience and knowledge. In the chapter “‘Kidnapped Romance’ in Ann Radcliffe,” Ellis proposes that Radcliffe’s novels leave no desire for women to want to exit the home and enter the real world: “The household established at the end of a Radcliffean Gothic then becomes a microcosm of the larger societal ideal the novel presents: the home with its (mostly female) defenders, its assailants of both sexes, and its two harmoniously integrated classes, masters and servants” (“‘Kidnapped Romance’” Ellis 102). By choosing to conclude her novels in rural settings, Radcliffe’s heroines avoid the extremes of separate spheres, as domestic lines were blurrier in the countryside than in the industrialized cities (112). It is also important to note that the domestic spheres that provide happiness for the heroine at the end of Radcliffe’s novels are vastly different from the separate spheres of the 18th century. While women readers may recognize some similarities between the conclusions of Radcliffe’s novels and their own domestic
circumstance, they were certainly not identical. By the conclusion of Radcliffe’s novels, her heroines experience substantial personal growth—they have developed and matured after gaining a great deal of knowledge. They are not the childlike wives confined to slavery-like marriages, resulting in unhappy homes, as illustrated by Wollstonecraft. Instead, Radcliffe’s heroines use their gained knowledge to make informed decisions regarding their marriage partners, resulting in more equal unions.

Many of the themes and occurrences present in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* can also be found in Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance*. Though the circumstances—specifically the upbringing and family dynamics—of Emily St. Aubert differ from that of Julia Mazzini, their experiences are remarkably similar, as each heroine recognizes danger in her home and must make the decision to seek both safety and knowledge. Immediately upon the novel’s opening, the Marquis Mazzini is established as an “arrogant and impetuous character,” who, “operated powerfully upon the mild and susceptible nature of his lady; and it was by many persons believed, that his unkindness and neglect put a period to her life” (Radcliffe 3). Radcliffe also comments that Mazzini’s “heart was dead to paternal tenderness,” and so his children’s domestic environment is immediately illustrated as menacing and volatile (3). While Emily flourished at La Vallee with both her father and mother, encouraged to learn and explore, cushioned by a space of love and safety, Julia and Emilia Mazzini experience quite the opposite; their mother is presumed dead at the hands of their tyrannical father, and they live without proper parental guidance, entrusted to the care and tutoring of their mother’s distant relative, Madame de Menon. Emily and St. Aubert represent the optimal eighteenth-century-Enlightened father-daughter relationship, while Julia and Marquis Mazzini portray the conventional
Gothic relationship dynamics. While their brother Ferdinand is able to widely travel and receive an extensive education, Julia and Emilia are confined to the home. At twenty and eighteen years of age, neither Emilia, nor Julia, had ever left their father’s dominion of power. Recalling Wollstonecraft’s claims, it can be argued that Julia and Emilia provide representation of what women face becoming, when stunted developmentally. Though Emilia is described as having “a clear and comprehensive mind” and Julia as having a mind that “early exhibited symptoms of genius,” the girls are given few opportunities to develop intellectually, “Thus lovely, and thus veiled in obscurity[…]they were happy, for they knew not enough of the world seriously to regret the want of its enjoyments, though Julia would sometimes sigh for the airy image which her fancies painted, and a painful curiosity would arise concerning the busy scenes from which she was excluded” (Radcliffe 4, 7). The “painful curiosity” which Julia often exhibits evidences presence of her active mind. Though her father does not encourage such inquisitiveness, it is an inherent element of Julia’s internal world. Both Mazzini girls possess the rational faculties they were born with and the potential for strengthened intellect, yet, their father’s close containment has impeded their flourishing.

By the conclusion of both novels, Julia and Emily also demonstrate the superiority of female intellectual pursuit over seduction. Maria de Vellorno and Signora Laurentini act as foils to Julia and Emily, representing the dire consequences of a woman valuing the power of physical traits over that of their minds, just as Wollstonecraft warned. Wollstonecraft’s warning entailed that women were taught to prioritize seduction, with the intention of securing a husband, rather than nurturing their minds, and as a result, female morality would steeply decline.
Unlike *Udolpho*, *A Sicilian Romance* is largely concerned with the possible presence of the supernatural, particularly, an unknown inhabitant in an unused portion of the castle of Mazzini, and this plot development reveals the family’s gender dynamics. Spooked by the unknown in their own home, Julia and Emilia look to their brother, Ferdinand, for comfort. Uneasy in their own home—the only home they have ever known—Julia and Emilia value their brother’s character, “without whose protecting presence they declared it utterly impossible to pass another night in the apartments” (Radcliffe 35). An obvious dichotomy exists between the Marquis and Ferdinand, as both men act as strong male figures in the family, by two vastly different means. While the Marquis embodies an ominous authority, Ferdinand exhibits characteristics of a compassionate protector. Both authoritarian and protector are roles reserved for male family members; in theory, both roles should be filled by the same male—the patriarch—however, by portraying these two responsibilities as separate entities, Radcliffe highlights the stark contrast between the roles, revealing the difficulty in maintaining a semblance of balance and stability in the patriarchal figure. To be both authoritarian and protector is an almost unattainable existence in a single man.

The Marquis’ behavior and lack of parental affection is certainly a precursor of what was to come, as he chooses to betroth Julia to the Duke de Luovo, against her will and without her consent. The Duke is an echo of Bluebeard: a man with money and power who had been married twice previously, both wives younger than he and lost to mysterious deaths. While the Mazzini mansion is never boasted as a home in any sense beyond a place of dwelling, it becomes a blatant place of entrapment when the Marquis sends his son to the dungeons and Julia finds, “that her self was a prisoner in a remote
room” (Radcliffe 69). Understanding the current danger she is in under the authority of her father, and the probable danger she will be in if married to the Duke, Julia makes the decision to quit the Mazzini mansion and escape on her own. With the help of the servants, Julia makes her escape, recalling to Madam de Menon that, “‘I heard the door of my prison unlock, and found myself half at liberty!’” (Radcliffe 106). Julia possesses an awareness of her situation and the precariousness of her position, recognizing the signs of danger and taking the initiative to remove herself from said circumstance. The fact that both Julia and Emily understand the threatening nature of their patriarchal figures and the associated confinement within their homes, and choose to remove themselves from these domestic spheres, speaks volumes. Radcliffe’s intentions behind portraying these choices may remain unknown, but these plot points provide notable flags to eighteenth-century readers regarding the ambivalence of the home environment and the warning signs of danger.

In escaping Mazzini mansion and her father’s clutches, Julia assumes that she has finally achieved a status of safety, within the walls of a nearby abbey. Emily St. Aubert successfully found solace at the abbey following the death of her father, and again returned after her escape from Udolpho, when she learned of Sister Agnes’ secret history. For Emily, the abbey was a bubble of female protection, but for Julia, the abbey turns out to be a different prison. Under the direction of the Abate, the convent in A Sicilian Romance is simply a different setting of patriarchal control, as will be addressed in sections to come. In recognizing her transplanting from one prison to another, Julia makes yet another escape, avoiding the patriarchal threats posed by the Abate.

Eventually, Julia makes her way back to Mazzini mansion, travelling through
multiple cave systems until she reaches the underground dungeon. It is here that Radcliffe’s heroine comes to understand the full potential of danger in the home; Julia finds her mother alive, held captive in the dungeons for the past fifteen years by the Marquis. In case Radcliffe’s previous illustrations of the domestic space’s potential dangers proved too implicit, she delineates this fact with Louisa Bernini’s secret survival: this female figure has very literally been held prisoner in her home by her husband for a decade and a half, and no one was the wiser. Both the external world and the other occupants of the internal home (her children, servants, etc.) were unaware of her imprisonment. As patriarch of the home, the Marquis was granted complete dictatorship, left unchecked and unquestioned, despite his wife’s mysterious disappearance. Upon discovering her mother and attempting to escape with her, Julia finds the doorway she used for entry locked. Panicked by her daughter’s forced engagement to the Duke, Julia’s mother proposes that Julia stay hidden in the alcoves of the dungeon, so as to evade the impending marriage. Julia, distraught by the idea of marrying the Duke, states:

‘O! talk not, madam, of a marriage with the duke,’ said Julia; ‘surely any fate is preferable to that. I am condemned only to the sufferings which my mother has so long endured, and that this confinement will enable me to soften, by tender sympathy, the asperity of her misfortunes, I ought to submit to my present situation with complacency, even did a marriage with the duke appear less hateful to me.’ (Radcliffe 183)

Diction of imprisonment is used throughout this excerpt, as Julia discusses her impending “condemned” “sufferings.” Just as her mother was plagued with “misfortunes” that she “long endured,” Julia feels that she must “submit” to “complacency.” Recognizing the plight her mother has endured for so many years, and the possible similarity her own fate may emulate if married to the Duke, Julia decides to stay with her mother. She chooses one prison in place of another. While imprisoned in both situations, Julia understands that
her marriage to the Duke could very well end in death, just as it did for his previous wives; yet, she exercises agency and determines the direction her life will follow, no matter how grim that life may be.

Following the murder-suicide of Maria de Vellorno and Marquis Mazzini, Julia and her mother escape the dungeon on their own, to the discovery of Ferdinand. Eventually, Ferdinand is named the sixth Marquis de Mazzini and Julia and Hippolitus are married. The women are restored to the domestic environment, as Julia, Emilia, their mother, and Madame de Menon all reside together in a palace in Naples. Ferdinand, taking a post in the military, is absent from the home, even though he is the reigning patriarch. Though both Julia and Madame de Menon are married to men, the conclusion of the story highlights the importance of the female Mazzinis and their well-deserved domestic happiness. Radcliffe’s heroines experience interesting conclusions to their stories, in which both Emily St. Aubert and Julia Mazzini revisit some aspect of their childhood lives as married women. Emily ends up returning to La Vallee, married to a man similar to her father, and leading a life of “domestic blessedness” not unlike that of her childhood. Julia’s story, on the other hand, concludes in a way much different than that of the beginning, as she ends up happily married, in a safe home (different than that of her childhood) absent of a tyrannical patriarch; however, some aspects are quite reminiscent of her developmental years. In the beginning of A Sicilian Romance, Marquis Mazzini and his son Ferdinand are absent from the Mazzini mansion for many years, leaving Julia, Emilia, and Madame de Menon to themselves, in a home of relative safety and happiness until the Marquis’ destructive return. In the article, “The Attractions of “Bluebeard”: The Origins and Fortunes of a Folktale,” Maria Tatar hypothesizes that the
“Bluebeard” tales most often encourage the regression of the heroine back to her childhood, as they most often end up back in their childhood homes, surrounded by their mothers and siblings. That Radcliffe chooses for her heroines to return to their childhood homes and families cannot be incidental, a theory echoed by Nina DaVinci Nichols, in which she debates whether Emily’s “wholeness” at the end of *Udolpho* is a result of “a regression to infancy” or “an integration of childhood’s inheritance with adult experience” (Nichols 193). Wollstonecraft, in her call for female education, even ironically apologizes for treating women as “rational creatures,” rather than “in a state of perpetual childhood,” in which they would hypothetically be “unable to stand alone” (Wollstonecraft 13). Wollstonecraft’s solution for women to escape “perpetual childhood” is to gain an education and exercise rational thought, to be recognized as beings worthy of knowledge. Radcliffe chose to conclude her novels with her heroines in a domestic space relating to their childhood, to show not a regression, but personal growth. Her heroines leave their childhood domains and experience the world, gaining knowledge by their own agency and *choose*, to return to the domestic space. They take the knowledge they gained and make informed, rational decisions to end up in the domestic sphere.

**Doors: Protective and Repressive**

Throughout Emily’s time at Castle Udolpho, a recurring motif appears, strengthening the connection between the “Bluebeard” tale and the Gothic novel. In her chambers at Udolpho, Emily discovers a doorway that leads to an unused passageway. Throughout her stay at Udolpho, this door opens and closes, locks and unlocks, at various times. Emily, as the “virginal and defenseless young woman” (Pollock and Anderson xxv), must make her own decision whether or not to pursue the knowledge behind the
doorway. On her first night in the room, Emily sits silently, contemplating her forbidden relationship with Valancourt, dwelling on the fact that Montoni forbade their union. Immediately following her consideration of the forbidden marriage—in which the male authority in her life dictated her sexual pursuit—she notices the door ajar. Emily realizes that the wind:

had moved the chair she had placed as a fastening, and the door, leading to the private stair-case, stood half open. Her curiosity and her fears were again awakened. She took the lamp to the top of the steps, and stood hesitating whether to go down; but again the profound stillness and the gloom of the place awed her, and determining to enquire further, when day-light might assist the search, she closed the door, and placed against it a stronger guard. (Radcliffe 240-241)

As Emily is now in Udolpho, a domestic location completely under Montoni’s domain of power, Emily recognizes the precariousness and potential danger of allowing herself to become defenseless in her room as she sleeps. Though spooked by the “violence” of the wind, her curiosity persists, nonetheless. She is tempted to explore the mysterious passage to her room, though she acknowledges the two-sidedness of the passage’s existence. I find it notable that her “curiosity” and “fear” are acknowledged at the same time, as if they are inextricably entwined. To this point, Emily has been forbidden to satisfy her curiosities, even warned by her father on his deathbed. Though Emily was “hesitating” to enter the passage, she also “determined to enquire further,” with the help of daylight. While the secret passage certainly presents an opportunity, perhaps of escape or gained knowledge, it also acts as a secret entrance to her bedroom, while she sleeps vulnerably, accessible to anyone with malicious intent who may intend to harm her. At this point in the novel, Emily has not yet decided to pursue forbidden knowledge or attempt escape to explore her own sexuality, as represented by a future with Valancourt. Instead, “she closed the door, and placed against it a stronger guard,” dissuading herself
from exploring the passage any further at this point in time. In this initial moment, Emily chooses to leave the door be, submitting to the rules established by the male authority figure, thereby remaining ignorant and suppressing the sexuality forbidden by the disapproval of her marriage to Valancourt. The door remains a motif of knowledge and sexuality, as, while Emily sleeps in her chambers, Count Morano enters the castle through the door, attempting to kidnap Emily and take her as his bride. Fitting to the trend, Montoni appears in the nick of time, fighting off Morano and preserving Emily’s modesty. The men once again use the door to control Emily’s sexuality, and her knowledge is ultimately impeded when she later intends to search the passage and finds the door locked.

In addition to the door motif, the veil acts as another type of concealing entity, a threshold which Emily must decide to breach. Upon arriving at Udolpho and exploring the interior property with Annette, Emily comes across a mysterious image “concealed by a veil of black silk” (Radcliffe 233). She is immediately intrigued: “The singularity of the circumstance struck her, and she stopped before it, wishing to remove the veil, and examine what could thus carefully be concealed, but somewhat wanting courage” (233). Just as with the passageway door to her private chambers, Emily is provoked by curiosity, but impeded by fear and lack of resolve. These moments of uncertainty act as chances for Emily to exercise her pursuit of knowledge, but demonstrate her hesitancy to act on behalf of her own agency. In this scene, she does not want to lift the veil herself, but instead requests that Annette remove the veil. Annette adamantly refuses, but to Emily’s questioning, replies, “‘I don’t know what is the reason, ma’am[s]elle[…]nor any thing about the picture, only I have heard there is something very dreadful belonging to
it—and that it has been covered up in black ever since—and nobody has looked at it for a
great many years—and it somehow has to do with the owner of this castle before Signor
Montoni came to the possession of it” (233). Emily requests that another woman
exercise the agency that she is not ready to exhibit herself. Annette, notably, denies this
request, instead relying on hearsay, not empirical information she has gathered with her
own investigation. At this point in the novel, both women accept the unchecked
concealment of information, succumbing to the patriarchal monopolization of
information within the domestic space.

Shortly after, in the following chapter, Emily finds the courage while by herself
that she could not find with Annette, a potential witness of her transgression of
patriarchal authority. Radcliffe writes:

This brought to her recollection the veiled picture, which had attracted her
curiosity, on the preceding night, and she resolved to examine it. As she passed
through the chambers, that led to this, she found herself somewhat agitated; its
connection with the lady of the castle, and the conversation of Annette, together
with the circumstance of the veil, throwing a mystery over the subject, that
excited a faint degree of terror. But a terror of this nature, as it occupies and
expands the mind, and elevates it to high expectation, is purely sublime, and leads
us, by a kind of fascination, to seek even the object, from which we appear to
shrink. (248)

Again, Emily’s curiosity and pursuit of knowledge are innately linked with feelings of
terror. This terror both “occupies” and “expands” Emily’s mind, making not only
unavoidable, but also functional. This terror is necessary for intellectual “elevat[ion]” and
acts as an unbridled driving force; though Emily may “shrink” from instances of sublime
terror, she is propelled by “fascination,” gaining increased contemplation until they
become unavoidable. Wollstonecraft would likely argue that her terror reflects her
feminine sensibility, a result of her lack of use of her rational mind to its full potential—
her development has been stunted by the male figures in her life. Though scared, Emily ultimately makes the decision to lift the veil. This autonomy is a momentous feat for Emily, as she is able to shake the patriarchal chains with which she has been imprisoned, at least for this specific instance. Unfortunately, Emily still lacks the rationality necessary to come to a reasonable conclusion once she witnesses the contents behind the veil. Emily, “paused again, and then, with a timid hand, lifted the veil; but instantly let it fall—perceiving that what it had concealed was no picture, and, before she could leave the chamber, she dropped senseless to the floor” (248-249). Radcliffe’s diction here is important, as senseless can have two connotations; while it could simply imply Emily’s lack of consciousness, it also hints at her lack of good judgement. Radcliffe’s intentional use of this second meaning is further supported at the end of the novel, in which this moment is revisited. At the conclusion, the narrator explains the details of Emily’s fearful encounter with what lies beyond the veil: a decaying wax figure. Upon first glance, the narrator acknowledges that “a black veil, whose singular situation had excited Emily’s curiosity, and which afterwards disclosed an object, that had overwhelmed her with horror,” was to blame for her drastic reaction, as it resembled a human corpse overtaken by worms and decay (662). The narrator concedes that the sight was quite horrifying upon first glance, admitting that “no person could endure to look twice”; however, the narrator concludes that, “Had she dared to look again, her delusion and her fears would have vanished together, and she would have perceived, that the figure before her was not human, but formed of wax” (662). I argue that this is one of the most revealing statements in all of The Mysteries of Udolpho, as the narrator argues for Emily’s pursuit of curiosity and acquisition of forbidden knowledge, as it ultimately leads to rational
explanations in the context of seemingly irrational occurrences. Emily’s transgression of
the veil placed by patriarchal figures would ultimately lead to peace of mind, not descent
into feminine sensibility. Radcliffe is encouraging her eighteenth-century female readers
to always pursue their curiosities, no matter how hesitant or fearful they may be, as the
truth is more valuable than any imagined explanation. Her explained supernatural
demonstrates the importance of a woman’s autonomy of mind, a stance with which
Wollstonecraft would certainly agree. In enabling curious pursuits, women have the
chance to access truths forbidden to them within the domestic space, whether the truth of
their own sexual desires or the true history of the domestic space itself.

Just as Udolpho Castle presented possible threats both human and supernatural,
the Mazzini mansion houses both hypothetical and immediate risks. The secrets of the
home loom in the history, as the mother, Louisa Bernini is presumed dead, and in the
present, as an unknown inhabitant dwells in the mansion. As the main heroine, Julia
experiences an adventure similar to that of Emily St. Aubert. In the midst of young
adulthood, Emily begins to feel her first feelings of romance and sexual curiosity toward
Valancourt, and in *Sicilian Romance*, Julia experiences her first feelings of attraction
toward Count Hippolitus de Vereza. Notably, Julia experiences a similar threat in her
home; just as Emily’s bedroom door was corrupt at Udolpho, Julia’s room also has the
potential to be breached. Pondering access to the unused portion of the castle, “which had
for so many years been hid from the human eye,” Ferdinand hypothesizes Julia’s room as
an access point, as “Julia’s chamber formed a part of these buildings, it occurred to him,
that according to the mode of building in old times, there might formerly have been a
communication between them. This consideration suggested to him the possibility of a
concealed door in her apartment, and he determined to survey it on the following night with great care” (Radcliffe 37-38). Once again, Radcliffe is making clear to her readers that the domestic space is not to be automatically trusted at face value. While the home may provide safety from the external world, numerous dangers lie within.

Concerned for his sister’s welfare, Ferdinand finds a door in Julia’s room, hidden behind a hanging tapestry, and explores the mysterious passage within. Upon investigation, Ferdinand concludes that someone is residing in the tunnels leading to Julia’s bedroom, based solely on auditory evidence acquired during his solo exploration. When Julia and her sister go to the Marquis, making this claim, the marquis disregards their worries, assuming that their feminine sensibilities influenced their imaginations. It is not until Ferdinand states his support of his sisters’ theory to their father, that the Marquis believes the notion. While family history could fall under the realm of female responsibilities Ellis and Armstrong identify in their publications, Radcliffe illustrates family histories hidden from the females of the home. The Marquis chooses to privately relay to Ferdinand (behind a closed door) that the Mazzini family acquired the mansion decades prior, by unsavory means. Even within the domestic sphere, Julia and her sister are not granted the right to their own family knowledge—knowledge that has the potential to influence their safety; instead, the Marquis, “permitted his daughters to change their apartments, but he commanded Ferdinand to tell them, that, in granting their request, he consulted their ease only, and was himself by no means convinced of its propriety” (Radcliffe 54).

The motif of keys and locked doors is present throughout A Sicilian Romance, catalyzing the plot of the novel from beginning to end. The key motif is introduced in the
first chapter, when Madame de Menon spots light emitting from a window in the unused portion of the castle before abruptly disappearing. Concerned that an unwanted presence is inhabiting the apartments, she seeks out Vincent, who assumes she has allowed her imagination to get the better of her but nonetheless attempts to satisfy her fears and accompanies her to the other section of the castle. The “massey key, covered with rust,” is then “applied to an iron gate, which opened into a court that separated this division from the other parts of the castle” (Radcliffe 8). Though the gate would open with the found key, the same could not be said for the doorway providing entry into that portion of the castle: “All the different keys of the castle were applied to the lock, without effect, and they were at length compelled to quit the place, without having either satisfied their curiosity, or quieted their fears” (8).

The vast majority of A Sicilian Romance deals with the use of keys, the locking and unlocking of doors, and who has the power to cross the thresholds. In the beginning of the novel, Julia spots light coming from the uninhabited portion of the castle. Possibly alluding to Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, Julia is not yet ready to face mysteries and potential knowledge available within her own home, and so, she seeks out Madame de Menon and the castle servants to investigate for her. In the next instance of uncertainty provided by physical barriers, Julia allows her brother Ferdinand to attempt to open the door hidden in her chambers, and he eventually uses a knife to break the lock. Again, Julia hopes for entry into a forbidden area, but is not willing to do the work herself; she seeks assistance from others. We begin to see her self-restraint weaken when Julia happens upon a door held ajar and overhears a conversation between Ferdinand and Hippolitus in which they are discussing their eavesdropper. Though Julia knows that she
should not be privy to this information, she does not close the door and prevent herself from learning this information; yet, she does not open the door any further either.

After gaining this semi-forbidden knowledge, and possibly facing consequence for this first step toward transgression, Julia learns that the Mazzini betrothed her to the Duke de Luovo. Locked away in her room that night, Ferdinand opens the door to Julia’s room and offers her escape with Hippolitus, which she declines, for fear of ruining her reputation. Eventually, Julia makes the decision to open her first door, fully submitting to transgression by seeking forbidden knowledge, to exercise her own choice. Though timid, “She gently opened the door of her closet,” hoping to find Ferdinand and Hippolitus. At first, she is left with disappointment, but moments later Ferdinand emerges: “the door of her closet was gently opened[...]‘Come, my love,’ said he, ‘the keys are ours’” (Radcliffe 66). Obstacles plague the three as they navigate the subterranean tunnels, facing locked door after locked door, each more difficult to open than the next. Ferdinand has once again taken over the duty of inserting the keys and attempting to open the locks of each door; however, though her brother, a male figure of authority, Ferdinand is not the ultimate patriarch of the Mazzini family, and so, when in opposition to the Marquis Mazzini, he does not rightfully own the metaphorical keys to provide Julia escape from the domestic space and entry to her burgeoning sexuality with Hippolitus. On the verge of escape, Julia is captured by the Mazzini and imprisoned. It is not until she makes the autonomous choice, without direct pressure and influence of the men in her life, Ferdinand and Hippolitus, that Julia is able to escape from the Mazzini mansion.

The true power of Julia’s choice in opening doorways is revealed at the end of the novel, after escaping from the monastery, while attempting to outrun the Duke and the
banditti. When Hippolitus is struck down, Julia is truly on her own, forced to act completely on her own accord:

she entered the rock on her knees, for the overhanging craggs would not suffer her to pass otherwise; and having gone a few yards, perceived that it was terminated by a door. The door yielded to her touch, and she suddenly found herself in a highly vaulted cavern, which received a feeble light from the moon-beams that streamed through an opening in the rock above.

She closed the door[…] (Radcliffe 172)

Gaining unassisted access to this hidden chamber, is just the first of three doorways Julia encounters and must choose to open every single one. Before opening the second door, Julia hopes to regress backwards through the first door, but is unable to find it once again, reiterating the correctness of her choice in transgressing the doorway. The third doorway Julia passes through leads here to her assumed-dead mother, Louisa Bernini, and quickly, one of the doors provides refuge from her father, concealing her from his wrath when he visits Louisa’s cell. Hoping to escape from whence she came following the Marquis’ visit, Julia finds the door locked and resigns herself to physical imprisonment with her mother, rather than domestic imprisonment through a marriage to the Duke. This doorway marks Julia’s complete rejection of patriarchal authority, choosing imprisonment and probable death, rather than her father’s intended betrothal of her to another tyrannical man.

_Gothic Space and Architecture: The Female and Maternal Bodies_

Given the lengthy discussion of the door as an entity representing the protective and repressive practices of the Gothic family, attention must now be turned toward the Gothic structure as a whole: the home and all its many parts, both known and concealed. The Gothic house, specifically the architecture of the home, is certainly symbolic; however, _what_ the architecture symbolizes is a point of debate among scholars. In her
article, “Defiant Damsels: Gothic Space and Female Agency in Emmeline, The Mysteries of Udolpho, and Secresy,” Ellen Malenas Ledoux posits that Radcliffe predominantly uses the Gothic structure as a tool, a means by which to threaten women with sexual assault and steal their property (336). Ledoux argues that Emily’s rejection of Udolpho’s architecture is symbolic in terms of morality; as Emily rejects the Gothic castle, she simultaneously rejects the violence, corruption, and untruths associated with Montoni’s home, demonstrating a moral superiority starkly contrasted by her preferred La Vallee (338). While this may certainly be true, I do not believe that this is the primary importance of the Gothic architectural symbolism. Instead, I look to Juliann E. Fleenor’s groundbreaking work The Female Gothic. It is here that the imagery of Gothic architecture is astutely compared to female anatomy, specifically, the womb. Here, Fleenor argues that the spatial imagery and enclosed spaces depicted in Gothic novels reflect secrets repressed from the society outside the home, as well as information kept from the heroine herself (12-13). Unsurprisingly, this repression most often involves female sexuality, or the hopeful prevention thereof. Fleenor states her belief that Gothic spaces represent society’s denial of sex to women, a sentiment shared by Alison Milbank in the Victorian-literature-focused Daughters of the House (Fleenor 13, Milbank 1). The reason behind this symbolism can be found early in Fleenor’s book, in which she notes Ellen Moers’ characterization of “physiological fear and dread” as crucial to the Female Gothic. Psychoanalytically, in Freudian terms this “physiological fear and dread” would be linked to a fear of castration (Freud 140). Under Freud’s definition, women’s fear of knowledge most likely stems from their subconscious fears surrounding sexuality, resulting in penis envy, due to the lack of sexual phallic organ, as Freud assumed the
absence of a phallus equated the absence of sexual competency. Most interestingly, Freud hypothesized that many males connect the uncanny to female genitalia, as it reminds them of their original home in the womb. Eve Sedgwick echoes this sentiment with her proposed “vagina dentata,” in which the vagina illustrated in folklore can contain teeth, allowing for the possibility of castration by intercourse (35). If the fear of castration is relevant, and the connection is made between this fear, female genitalia, and the womb, Fleenor’s belief that the Gothic architecture represents the female body is crucial, and quite telling. Cynthia Griffin Wolff discusses Ann Radcliffe’s tendency to utilize the “‘inner space’” of Gothic architecture, such as “‘underground vaults [or] dark passages,’” as well as “‘sliding panels and trapdoors’” in bedrooms (Wolff 210). She states, “Thus the Gothic building (whatever it may be) that gives the fiction its name may become in this treatment of the tradition a way of identifying a woman’s body (in imagination, of course, the reader’s own body) when she is undergoing the siege of conflict over sexual stimulation or arousal” (210).

As the cave system in A Sicilian Romance is structurally comparable to the womb, its role in Julia’s journey to freedom is significant. Throughout the novel, Julia utilizes Gothic architecture to her advantage numerous times, always in the context of escape from patriarchal danger, whether it be her father and the Duke at the Mazzini mansion or the Abate and his ultimatum that Julia take the veil or be turned over to her father. When Ferdinand appears to smuggle her from the abbey, bringing news of Hippolitus’ survival, the brother and sister are forced to escape through the cave system bordering the abbey. In a desperate attempt to evade detection, after finding their horses gone, Julia and Ferdinand make a spontaneous decision:
Their only remaining chance of escape was to fly into the deep recesses of rock. They, therefore, entered a winding cave, from whence branched several subterraneous avenues, at the extremity of one which they stopped. The voices of men now vibrated tremendous echoes through the various and secret caverns of the place, and the sound of footsteps seemed fast approaching. Julia trembled with terror, and Ferdinand drew his sword, determined to protect her to the last. A confused volley of voices now sounded up that part of the cave where Ferdinand and Julia lay concealed. (Radcliffe 149).

This scene foreshadows Julia’s fate, as the caves provide her protection from the threat of male violence and impending doom. Her ultimate safety will be found metaphorically in the womb, or, more plainly, back in the presence of her mother. Radcliffe’s choice of diction in using “secret” and “concealed,” supports Freud’s notion of castration anxiety, and the lack of male understanding of female genitalia linked to their time in the womb. The female anatomy, specifically the reproductive organs, are linked to maternity and childbirth, which was an event surrounded by secrecy for men, a social and anatomical event completely removed from the male domain of influence (Anolik).

**Patriarchy and Paternity**

The male fears and insecurities discussed in the preceding section extended to concerns over paternity. Anolik elaborates on this male fear: “The patriarchal anxiety evoked by the mysterious female power of creation was further amplified by the mystery of paternity. Thus the mother was a female who had greater power and knowledge than the male: she could create life as he could not, and she could easily subvert the unwitting patriarchy through infidelity” (Anolik 84). While maternity is unquestionable, paternity is never certain: “This single absence of proof of paternity, jeopardising the legitimate transmission of property from generation to generation, was the ultimate justification for all restraints placed on women of the property-owning class” (Clery 79). This concept relates back to the male anxiety surrounding pregnancy and childbirth, as they were the
only domains of knowledge which belonged solely to the female. And so, coverture and primogeniture—the feudal practice of succession of property from father to eldest son—were introduced as means of balancing the playing field between husband and wife, though women faced disadvantages both before and after the introduction of these concepts to English common law.

When a woman married, her own property, even that inherited from her own family, thereby became the property of her husband, under laws of coverture. E. J. Clery posits that Gothic heroines act as “contributions to a history of women,” regarding property ownership, economic agency, and absorption into marriage (Clery 71). Women were doomed to relinquish their property rights or find themselves as property currency for their male family members, a claim reiterated by Nancy Armstrong, as she argues that gender-determined roles, spheres, and identities allowed women to become economic and political objects to be used for male gain (Clery 73, Armstrong 15). Both Clery and Kate Ferguson Ellis point to the development of capitalism as a major contributing factor to the female plight. Clery argues that, “the doctrine of coverture was one of those ancient feudal relics which were readily integrated within the new structure of capitalism,” and with this integration of coverture into English common law, came a “‘civil death’” for women (Clery 78). Similarly, Ellis recognizes the dangers of this practice from the medieval feudal system, believing that, “[Radcliffe’s] villains see the possibility of capitalism for making money out of money,” and that they will use any means, including the women over which they have political and economic control, to increase their wealth and assets (Ellis 100). This type of tyrannical control over women’s economic assets were justified through discussion of paternity. The patriarchy utilized the practices of
coverture and primogeniture to their advantage, erasing women from family histories, economically and politically, as illustrated in “Bluebeard” and Radcliffe’s novels.

As Maria Mulvey-Roberts aptly observes, “Bluebeard” was developed when women had no power or property once married off to a husband. As the precursor to Radcliffe’s Gothic texts, the tale sets the precedent for female experience in the Female Gothic. Many parallels exist regarding coverture and primogeniture, beginning with Bluebeard’s position as owner of the home. The young wife comes to dwell with him at his country house, a place over which she has no legal right to or authority. Similarly, both Montoni and Mazzini, the Bluebeard figures in Radcliffe’s texts, boast ownership over Udolpho and Mazzini castles, establishing Emily and Julia as the foreign residents in the homes to which they have no legal or economic claims.

Motivations behind Bluebeard’s wife’s decision to accept his marriage proposal is debated. Maria Tatar posits that it reflects the young woman’s “desire for wealth,” an idea with which I vehemently disagree (Tatar 16). Instead, I believe that the young wife was motivated by a desire for stability and security, which would be denied to her without marriage. The wife’s desire for access to wealth does not fit the parameters placed by society during that time or by her decision-making in the tale. The young wife has access to all of Bluebeard’s wealth, including gold and jewels, upon his journey away; yet, when in possession of the keys, she has no desire for material objects, but instead desires the knowledge forbidden to her.

Robert Miles spends a great deal of time analyzing the influence of patriarchal practices of coverture and primogeniture on protagonists Emily St. Aubert and Julia Mazzini. Ultimately, he argues that Radcliffe’s heroines are not motivated by notions of
desire, loss of virginity, and anxieties, as became common belief in the 1970s wave of feminist criticism, rather, that they were driven by the fear of loss of property, as would be a forefront concern in the 1790s. While I disagree with Miles’ dismissal of the heroines’ sexual fears and desires, I do believe there is some validity to his stance on 1790s property rights. Miles argues, “Emily’s electric fear, in catching a glimpse of her father’s secret manuscript, is that she is illegitimate, without title to the property Montoni will attempt to extort from her, and what is more, unsuccoured by a paternal image that would otherwise nourish her identity, feeding her resolve” (Miles 49). He goes on to elaborate, “A consequence of the glimpse is that the difference between Udolpho and Emily’s paternal home is effaced, with both presided over by sexually suspect paternal imagos, and both overtly hedged with threats to her property rights” (49).

The questioning of St. Aubert’s idealistic image is important, as it relates to the “Devil/Priest syndrome” Wolff discusses, in which women tend to view men as wholly good or evil, just as men project the “Virgin/Whore” dichotomy onto women. Though this refers to women’s feelings of sexual desire, in which she is hopelessly attracted to the “Devil” and disregards the “Priest,” the existence of this dichotomy is important, for it insinuates that men can be divided into two distinct moral categories. By contrast, I argue that Radcliffe portrays examples of these dichotomies in her novels, but simultaneously exposes the inaccuracies of these labels, for each man is not entirely good or evil, and the heroines must come to terms with the shortcomings of their “Priest” figures. Emily must learn that her seemingly wonderful father may have housed some secrets that he preferred to keep from her, and both Emily and Julia must come to exercise rational thought and understand that their lovers, Valancourt and Hippolitus, demonstrate faults of their own.
Ironically, the very basis of the “Priest” motif is questioned in *A Sicilian Romance*. After escaping from the Mazzini mansion, Madame de Menon convinces Julia to seek refuge at the monastery, as the Church has supreme power over all political and domestic authority and can provide her with protection from her father. Trusting in the empathetic abilities of the Abate, Madame de Menon reveals Julia’s true motivation behind seeking solace in the monastery and begs that he will keep Julia from the violent hands of her ill-meaning father. Unfortunately, the Abate proves to be unreliable, as he states, “‘You, Madam, will be sensible of this indulgence, and of the value of the sacrifice I make in granting it; for, in thus concealing a child from her parent, I encourage her in disobedience, and consequently sacrifice my sense of duty, to what may be justly called a weak humanity’” (Radcliffe 127). Julia immediately recognizes the danger of her circumstance, as “When madame related the particulars of the conference, Julia presaged from it only misery, and giving herself up for lost—she burst into tears. She severely deplored the confidence she had been induced to yield, for she now saw herself in the power of a man, stern and unfeeling in his nature” (128). Julia recognizes the Abate for what he truly is—another tyrannical patriarchal figure with the authority to exercise his choice over her at his will. In line with Wollstonecraft’s claims regarding the tyrannical behavior and baseless authority exhibited by Catholic clergy (Wollstonecraft 199), the Abate only agrees to secure Julia’s safety as a matter of pride, upon Mazzini’s questioning the Church’s power. The religious patriarchal figure of the Abate is questioned by the domestic patriarchal figure of Mazzini, creating a battle of power dynamics between the two men, with Julia as the pawn.

The validity of the “Priest” figure is further called into question when the Abate
attempts to exercise control over Julia’s sexuality, just as Mazzini and the Duke had attempted. Solidifying the patriarchal tyranny of the situation by referring to Julia as “Daughter,” both as Daughter of God and as a female below him in the patriarchal hierarchy, the Abate provides her with an ultimatum: he will provide her with safety from her father at the monastery, only if she denies her sexuality and assumes the veil (Radcliffe 141). While Radcliffe’s heroines are often preoccupied with the suspected supernatural, she ultimately wanted her readers to be aware of true dangers in the world, not just ghost stories. Anolik summarizes, “it is the realistic powers of the male—the legal and economic powers—that render him so dangerous to the woman” (Anolik 94).

However, the conclusion of the Bluebeard fairy tale and Radcliffe’s novels are quite telling. As Bluebeard failed to produce any heirs, specifically male heirs, his assets were bequeathed to his young wife, who inherited all his fortunes, just as Emily inherits from multiple sources by the end of *Udolpho*. Primogeniture proves to be inconsequential to Emily, as her brothers were deceased, and she had not yet produced heirs. Though Julia marries and her brother is marked as the new Marquis, he is notably absent from the conclusion, accepting a military post separate from his family’s residence, and so Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance* concludes with a matrilineal legacy, in which the women of the story gain money and autonomy.

*Hidden Female Histories: Shaping the Future*

While the patriarchal system allows men to control the social structure, it does not allow them to stifle and smother every detail of female histories. With access to unchecked power, male characters presumably control how much or how little is known of female characters, as they can rewrite stories and silence female legacies. Again, though eighteenth-century females were technically in charge of domestic proceedings,
the ultimate power fell to the patriarchal figure, and so female histories were often erased, destroyed, or misconstrued, at the patriarch’s will and for his benefit; however, Radcliffe’s novels demonstrate otherwise. And so, the domestic space becomes a vessel for containing and revealing female stories. While male figures attempt to contain female stories and histories, Radcliffe’s novels illustrate females revealing and unearthing their own stories within domestic spaces. They take control of their narratives, as stories are revealed between female characters within female spaces, demonstrating the dual function of the domestic space. Nichols aptly states, “Their [Gothic spaces] crumbling stone and mortar compress the histories of ghostly women and destructive powers, inimical to new life and vitality. At the same time, deformed and ravaged places exert a deeper and more mythical fascination upon the unformed and inexperienced young who respond preconsciously to such places’ hidden nature” (Nichols 190).

The tradition of hidden female histories can be traced back to the “Bluebeard” tale, in which mystery surrounds all females of the story, from Bluebeard’s many previous wives to his current wife. Notably, the tale focuses on Bluebeard, the abusive patriarch, while his victims—his wives—are shrouded in faceless anonymity. Maria Tatar cites scholars who are interested in this idea in her work, “The Attractions of ‘Bluebeard’: The Origins and Fortunes of a Folktale” from Secrets Beyond the Door. Tatar references Anatole France’s “Bluebeard and His Wives,” which highlights the focus on the titular Bluebeard character—his physical appearance, personality traits, and habits—while his wives are given no identities. In Perrault’s version of the tale, even the young bride (the protagonist) is given no name. Similar to some of the hidden stories of women in Radcliffe’s novels, the bride has no name, no face, and no identity, while
Bluebeard, Mazzini, and Montoni are graced with all three. Tatar also references Bela Bartok’s “Bluebeard’s Castle,” claiming that “the dwelling becomes the site of mystery and morbid fascination”; the Gothic home is a place that holds hidden knowledge that the female heroine must choose to explore (Tatar 53).

In Radcliffe’s works, hidden female histories are closely intertwined with the woes of the heroines’ mother-daughter relationships. Robert Miles argues that there are four conditions common throughout each of Radcliffe’s works, which define her specific brand of the Female Gothic genre, the last of which is that the mother is crucial due to “her supreme importance as a deferred object of the heroine’s unconscious search” (Miles 54). This sentiment is reiterated by other scholars, including Juliann Fleenor. Fleenor views the mother as the ultimate conflict figure in the Female Gothic because she represents the consequences of everything the female heroine can experience and become in her own life (Fleenor 16). The female identity and the heroine’s relationship with her mother are complex, and further complicated by tampering with the female history. Nichols posits that Gothic heroines, specifically Radcliffe’s, look for their lost mothers in order to find a model of positive female power, as the heroines’ interactions with non-maternal female power are often negative, as is the case with Julia Mazzini and her stepmother, Maria de Vellorno. Because the mother is so closely associated with the heroine’s self-discovery and provides a glimpse into her potential future, it is crucial that the heroines gain as much understanding as possible of their mothers’ lives.

Emily St. Aubert’s search for understanding in Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* begins in a rather unconventional setting for a Gothic novel. At La Vallee, the St. Aubert family is relatively picturesque, as Emily and her parents live peacefully in the
countryside, with more progressive views than those to which most eighteenth-century readers were accustomed. When Emily’s mother, Madame St. Aubert, dies suddenly from illness, it is incredibly sad and distressing to both Emily and her father, an unfortunate twist of fate, rather than a malicious act committed by the father, as is the standard for most Gothic novels. However, the first questions plague Emily’s mind after her father’s subsequent death, when he requests that she destroy papers in his chambers without looking at their contents. While attempting to dispose of the materials in St. Aubert’s bedroom cabinet, Emily discovers the miniature of a woman hidden amongst her father’s possessions. Before leaving La Vallee originally, she witnessed her father crying over the very same miniature, yet Emily never questioned this strange behavior:

St. Aubert had given no directions concerning this picture, nor had even named it; she, therefore, thought herself justified in preserving it. More than once remembering his manner, when he had spoken of the Marchioness of Villeroi, she felt inclined to believe that this was her resemblance; yet there appeared no reason why he should have preserved a picture of that lady, or, having preserved it, why he should lament over it in a manner so striking and affecting as she had witnessed on the night preceding his departure. (Radcliffe 104)

Though curious, Emily does not immediately become suspicious of her father’s relationship to the woman in the miniature upon its discovery. However, eighteenth-century readers would certainly suspect some manner of deplorable behavior on the part of St. Aubert. Weeping over a painting of a woman who is not your recently deceased, beloved wife, would raise reasonable questions regarding St. Aubert’s relationship to the mystery woman and fidelity to his late wife.

Further in the proceedings of the novel, Emily encounters Dorothée, a maid at Chateau-le-Blanc, who sees Emily and is immediately reminded of the Marchioness de Villeroi. Dorothée exclaims, “This young lady sometimes brings the late Marchioness to
my mind; I can remember, when she looked just as blooming, and very like her, when she smiles. Poor lady! how gay she was, when she first came to the chateau!’” (Radcliffe 491). Eager to learn more, Emily and Blanche request Dorothée to elaborate, but the maid declines, fearful of spirits that may haunt the chateau. Dorothée again comments on Emily’s similarity to the Marchioness when she discovers Emily in possession of the miniature from her father’s chambers. At this point, Emily’s suspicions regarding the identity of the woman in the miniature are all but confirmed, and she begs Dorothée to provide the information of the Marchioness’ life experiences, desperate to uncover the details of this mysterious woman’s life, and her connection to St. Aubert:

Emily[…]remembered the papers, with which the picture had been found, and had scarcely a doubt, that they had concerned the Marchioness de Villeroi; but with this supposition came a scruple, whether she ought to enquire further on a subject, which might prove to be the same, that her father had so carefully endeavored to conceal. Her curiosity, concerning the Marchioness, powerful as it was, it is probable she would now have resisted, as she had formerly done, on unwarily observing the few terrible words in the papers, which had never since been erased from her memory, had she been certain that the history of that lady was the subject of those papers, or, that such simple particulars only as it was probable Dorothée could relate were included in her father’s command. What was known to her could be no secret to many other persons; and, it appeared very unlikely, that St. Aubert should attempt to conceal what Emily might learn by ordinary means, she at length concluded, that, if the papers had related to the story of the Marchioness, it was not those circumstances of it, which Dorothée could disclose, that he had thought sufficiently important to wish to have concealed. She, therefore, no longer hesitated to make the enquiries, that might lead to the gratification of her curiosity. (Radcliffe 497-498)

Dorothée’s dialogue continues to encourage the question of Emily’s maternity, when she casually mentions, “‘if you were [the Marchioness’s] daughter, you could not remind me of her more’” (Radcliffe 498). Though incredibly reluctant and unwilling to relay the Marchioness’ history, Dorothée eventually agrees to disclose the story to Emily, and she describes the Marquis and Marchioness’ loveless marriage and her eventual death by
illness.

Though Emily never outwardly questions her maternity, some scholars have posed questions about Emily’s subconscious feelings, specifically Kate Ferguson Ellis, Robert Miles, and Nina DaVinci Nichols. Ellis believes that Emily failed to pursue questions about her legitimacy and her father’s fidelity to her mother because it would be considered improper, both to the sixteenth-century plot and the eighteenth-century reader. Similarly, Miles argues, “The novel is structured so that we speculate that the Marchioness is her father’s secret lover, possibly the adulterous mother of an illegitimate Emily” (Miles 49). While Miles connects Emily’s fear of illegitimacy to the detriment of her property rights, Nichols is concerned with psychoanalysis and the relationship between Emily’s mother and her development of identity. Nichols writes, “Similar ambivalence shows in Emily’s preoccupation with her dead mother’s identity, sought by the light of the novel’s dangerous and suffering women. The need to ‘find’ her mother and thus herself seems a remarkable foreshadowing of modern statements about women’s ailing condition” (Nichols 193). She continues, “At the same time, Emily’s quest never influences character. She neither questions her spiritual legacy, nor her attitudes toward false mothers, true mother, nor marriage” (193). Subconsciously, in compulsively attempting to uncover the hidden history of the Marchioness de Villeroi, Emily is attempting to quell her underlying anxieties of illegitimacy and simultaneously gain knowledge of any potential mother figures in her life, in order to learn from their experiences, and make suitable choices in her own life.

The question of the Marchioness’ hidden history is spurred by the revelation of another: Sister Agnes. When Emily first meets Sister Agnes, she seems coherent, yet
quickly evidences symptoms of derangement. Curious of the catalyst, Emily questions Sister Frances, who promises to reveal Agnes’ story to Emily in the secret of her chambers, away from other ears. Sister Frances reveals that Agnes was born into a rich family and fell in love with a poor man. Prioritizing wealth and status over his daughter’s happiness, Agnes’ father forced her to marry a rich man; however, Agnes continued her relationship with her poor lover. Discovering his daughter’s infidelity, Agnes’ father removed her from her husband’s home and sent her to the convent, to avoid her husband’s retaliation. At the conclusion of the novel, while visiting the convent, Emily meets Sister Agnes again, who reacts unexpectedly with such panic upon encountering Emily, that everyone assumes she must be in a fit approaching death. It is at this point that Agnes reveals her story to Emily—her true story, as the tale Sister Frances relayed was fictional, a story Agnes conveyed to “conceal[ed] her name and family, and, the better to disguise her real history” (Radcliffe 660). Agnes, on the brink of death, mistakes Emily to be the Marchioness, back from the dead to haunt Agnes for her sins. Agnes insists that Emily must be the daughter of the Marchioness, given her physical likeness, and reveals that she assumed the Marchioness was haunting her as punishment for her crimes. Agnes reveals to Emily that she is actually Signora Laurentini, the matriarch of Udolfo who was presumed dead for decades. In reality, Agnes was in love with the Marquis de Villeroi, who was already betrothed to the eventual Marchioness de Villeroi. Jealous and enraged, Agnes convinced the Marquis to poison his wife, using his pride to her advantage, convincing him of the Marchioness’ misplaced affections for another man. Sister Agnes finally reveals the truth of her history following the release of her final will and testament, in which she leaves one third of her personal assets to the nearest relative.
of the Marchioness de Villeroi—who turns out to be her niece, Emily St. Aubert. In revealing her true history, Agnes reveals the history of the St. Aubert female line, exposing Emily’s unbeknownst reality. In gaining understanding of Emily’s relationship to the Marchioness, the implied question of Emily’s maternity—a question that never truly came to fruition—is answered, satisfying any lingering questions in the reader’s mind. With uncertainties addressed, Emily gains access to knowledge of female histories, specifically her own female family histories.

Emily’s interaction with Signora Laurentini also calls to mind Wollstonecraft’s discussion of rumor and reputation and the importance of a woman’s rational mind in deduction of truth. In short, Wollstonecraft argues that women value reputation, rather than fact, above all else, given the dire consequences associated with rumor and reputation. Whether or not a rumor about a woman is fact or fiction—specifically regarding sexual promiscuity—her reputation is forever tainted in society, irrevocably dooming her life and marriage prospects, and even inviting the possibility of abuse or death. The validity of a rumor is irrelevant, but the consequences are quite real. Wollstonecraft believes that women need to exercise their rational minds in order to think critically and separate fiction from reality. In following intellectual pursuits, as Wollstonecraft proposed, women would be more likely to exercise rational thought, a concept as relevant to Radcliffe’s sixteenth-century-centered stories as to her eighteenth-century readers. Radcliffe demonstrates the dangers of rumor in both *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *A Sicilian Romance*, regarding hidden female histories. Both rumor and female hidden histories can manipulate information, blurring the lines between fact and fiction until all that remains is the story spread throughout society, regardless of accuracy.
or consequence. In *Udolpho*, Emily is exposed to the dangers of rumor regarding Signora Laurentini. Rumors swirled throughout the novel about how the woman disappeared, whether from foul play or suicide; in reality, she had created her own false story as Sister Agnes, spreading lies of her life story to the other nuns. The dangers of unverified rumor are also displayed in *A Sicilian Romance*, both in the Marquis’ ability to fake his wife’s death and in Cornelia’s immediate acceptance of Angelo’s supposed death. In both instances, rumors were taken at face-value, and the women involved (Julia, Emilia, and Madame de Menon and Cornelia) did not question the information provided to them.

*A Sicilian Romance* is also structured around the gradual revelation of female history. The novel opens with an anonymous narrator, who has spent time exploring the ruins of Mazzini castle and obtained history of the family from the local convent. In short, the physical degradation and destruction of the castle walls, the physical home structure, enables the revelation of concealed secrets. In breaking the structure of the house, secrets are broken wide open as well.

In the history related by the anonymous narrator, the heroine, Julia, upon finding a miniature of her mother looking sorrowful and resigned, questions Madame de Menon, her governess and her mother’s childhood friend. At eighteen-years-old, Julia has no knowledge or understanding of her mother’s young adulthood and turns to the only woman in her life who can provide adequate answers. Though reluctant at first, Madame de Menon does provide Julia and Emilia with some answers regarding their mother’s largely murky history. Following her “death” when they were young children, the girls have no information regarding their mother’s life, as Louisa Bernini’s existence has been hidden and overshadowed by Monsieur Mazzini. Interestingly, Madame de Menon is
hesitant to relay the happenings of their mother’s life because it would in turn evoke troubling memories of her own life. As will prove to be a commonality in Radcliffe’s novels, most often the only people who reveal women’s hidden histories are other women—usually women whose own histories have been concealed. Madame de Menon explains:

‘Alas! my dear children,’ said madame, deeply sighing, ‘you engage me in a task too severe, not only for your peace, but for mine; since in giving you the information you require, I must retrace scenes of my own life, which I wish for ever obliterated. It would, however, be both cruel and unjust to withhold an explanation so nearly interesting to you, and I will sacrifice my own ease to your wishes.’ (Radcliffe 28)

Unlike the male figures in their lives, Madame de Menon does not deny Julia and Emilia knowledge, especially regarding their mother’s hidden history, though she is unaware of the full truth of Louisa’s fate until the end of the novel. Eventually, as previously discussed, Julia’s mother is discovered at the conclusion, held prisoner in the dungeons of Mazzini castle for the past fifteen years. Falling in love, or rather, lust, with Maria de Vellorno, the Marquis Mazzini imprisoned his wife, staging her death, and burying the truth of her whereabouts. Given her subterranean imprisonment, Louisa Bernini was buried alive in the symbolic sense discussed by Eve Sedgwick who connects the symbolism of live burial to the notion of unspeakable truths, “buried in the past” (Sedgwick 31).

In addition to Louisa Bernini, another female figure appears, revealing her own hidden history. While at the monastery, Julia comes across a nun named Cornelia. Witnessing the nun’s declining health, Julia does everything in her power to nurse her newfound friend back to health. Cornelia reveals the root of her troubles: lost love. Cornelia was forbidden by her father to marry her love, Angelo, who was deemed
unsuitable in rank and social status. After some time, a marquis asked for her hand in marriage, and Cornelia’s father gave her two options: to marry the marquis and enter into a loveless, but socially acceptable marriage, or take the veil, and proceed with a life of religious duty. Bearing witness to her apparent unhappiness, her brother Hippolitus begged their father to allow her to marry her beloved Angelo. Unfortunately, she found that he was killed in battle, and so Cornelia accepted the veil. Some time after, she witnessed Angelo’s likeness while in confession, only to discover that, while he had been almost fatally wounded and on the brink of death, he recovered, and went to Hippolitus to ask his sister’s hand in marriage, only to find that she had already taken the veil. Unwilling to live a life without Cornelia, Angelo took his orders at the neighboring monastery. Eventually, Julia witnesses Cornelia’s death, as the nun takes her final breath under the gaze of her estranged lover. The purpose of Cornelia’s death is revealed soon after, as Radcliffe writes, “In the death of Cornelia, Julia seemed to mourn again that of Hippolitus. Her decease appeared to dissolve the last tie which connected her with his memory” (Radcliffe 137). At this point, Julia still believes Hippolitus to be dead at the hands of her father. Radcliffe most likely chose to conclude Cornelia’s story in such a manner as a lesson for Julia later in the novel: do not hesitate to act on behalf of love when given the chance; to wait is to invite the possibility that it will never be. In short, *denying* sexuality will ultimately result in a woman’s unhappiness.

**Radcliffe’s Supernatural**

Radcliffe’s heroines gain the autonomy and agency necessary to pursue forbidden knowledge and expose patriarchal systems of oppression through their confrontations with the sublime, the supernatural, and the uncanny. Radcliffe’s novels offer a sort of purge of the supernatural, which clears the heroine’s path to knowledge and her return to
a happier domestic home by the conclusion of the novels. For the heroine to obtain domestic bliss by the end, she must first demonstrate her ability to substitute rational thought for the three modes of experience: sublime, supernatural, and uncanny.

In order to analyze and affirm this proposed relationship between the pursuit of female knowledge, the exposure of patriarchal oppression, and Radcliffe’s representations of the sublime, the supernatural, and the uncanny, we first must establish an understanding of the meanings of these concepts. In the second edition of her 2009 reference book, *The Handbook of the Gothic*, Marie Mulvey-Roberts provides definitions for all three concepts from numerous Gothic scholars. In her entry on “The Sublime” Alison Milbank traces the concept to its classical Greek and Roman origins. In this initial use, “sublime” is a concept linked to aesthetics and power, in the sense that instances of the sublime have the ‘power’ to transport a person: physically, emotionally, or spiritually. From this classical use came the English tradition of the sublime, in which vivid emotions such as terror, horror, joy, and melancholy became synonymous with the term, in opposition to the rational values of the Enlightenment championed during the eighteenth century. Edmund Burke’s landmark study *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* differentiates between these two titular terms, arguing that while the ‘beautiful’ may provoke a sense of appreciation from a person, the ‘sublime’ will always involve some sort of a power exercised over the person, evoking a sensation of simultaneous pleasure and fear. In short, a ‘sublime’ circumstance will cause a person to have some sort of transcendent experience, while beauty will not. Most importantly, Burke believed that the ‘power’ in question would always register as a sense of terror. Milbank writes, “Burke, unlike some contemporary
aestheticians, locates the sublime purely in terms of fear, the source of which is the ‘king of terrors’ himself—DEATH—and a sense of possible threat to the subject’s self-preservation” (Milbank 236). In Radcliffe’s novels, the unknown surrounding the particulars of life and death—specifically life after death—act as the epitome of forbidden knowledge for humankind, the ultimate example of the unknown.

Later in the century, a Kantian train-of-thought began to reign supreme, in which it was believed that, “the sublime becomes a capacity of thinking in the human subject which enables it to rise above its physical limitations, after an initial check to its vital forces,” and while Gothic novelists most likely were not familiar with Kant specifically, there is evidence of “a dialectic between the Burkean model of endangered subjectivity, and what one might interpret as a Kantian or idealist belief in the power of the mind to ‘sublime’, to rise victorious over opposition to desire or imagination’s reach” (237). Milbank’s belief in this connection supports the social and cultural implications of the eighteenth-century as well as the argument of this paper: in a world of Enlightenment thinking, Radcliffe utilized the sublime to allow her heroines (and encourage her female readers) to begin to access their intellectual potential. Radcliffe’s novels specifically utilize sublime fear (as opposed to other manners of sublimity) to demonstrate her heroines’ journeys toward exercising rational thought; fear catalyzes the rational thought process until the inexplicable become the explained sublime, supernatural, and uncanny. Radcliffe’s novels align much more closely with Kant’s ideas of the sublime, rather than Burke’s. Under the notions of these Burkean and Kantian beliefs of the sublime, Radcliffe’s heroines were able to expand their minds and begin to attain the knowledge forbidden to them by patriarchal forces. It is notable, however, that Radcliffe did not
blindly subscribe wholeheartedly to Burkean belief; she persistently conveyed her own ideas about the distinct differences between the effects of terror and horror in her essay “On the Supernatural in Poetry,” arguing that terror enabled intellectual expansion, while horror prohibited it. Radcliffe writes, “‘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’” (“On the Supernatural in Poetry” 6). She resumes, “‘I apprehend, that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree 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?’” (6).

Radcliffe is also famous for her “explained supernatural” resolutions. In his entry on “The Supernatural,” Clive Bloom recognizes the wide array of beliefs associated with the supernatural, influenced differently by cultures, religions, and social norms, but ultimately identifies these unifying characteristics: “creatures and forces of the supernatural have the specific abilities to transcend both time and space, cross the divide between life and death, move between the invisible and the visible and travel freely within both the spiritual and the material” (Bloom 241). He goes on to recount how the supernatural being’s ability to move across natural space and time evokes a sense of fear and awe from the non-supernatural—a remarkably similar phenomenon to the uncanny and the sublime. Bloom describes how supernatural entities make themselves known to humanity and cross spiritual boundaries into the human plane and “the world of the everyday in the form either of the miraculous or the horrific” (242). Though Radcliffe’s
texts utilize the ‘explained supernatural’ style of writing by the conclusion of her novels, the suspected instances of the supernatural are manifested in “the world of the everyday,” a concept that will be analyzed with the aid of Terry Castle’s scholarship later in this paper. Notably, Bloom explains that spiritualists and occultists believe in the elevation of the mind and intellect through interactions with the supernatural, a thought reminiscent of Burkean and Kantian ideas of the sublime.

In addition to overviews of “sublime,” and “supernatural,” Mulvey-Roberts’ reference book also includes a definition of “Unheimlich (The Uncanny)” by Avril Horner. Horner explains that the word “uncanny” is derived from the German term unheimlich, as discussed by Sigmund Freud in his 1919 essay “The Uncanny.” Amidst numerous translations of similar words ranging from Latin to Greek to English to Arabic, Freud concludes that the word unheimlich is ultimately synonymous with “unhomely,” “uncanny,” and “unfamiliar,” while the term heimlich (the opposite) means “familiar” and “belonging to the home” (Horner 250). In this entry, Horner also discusses Freud’s analysis of the doppelganger, an uncanny figure in the Gothic tradition that unites the heimlich and the unheimlich. Radcliffe’s use of the doppelganger is of particular interest in reference to the mother-daughter relationship of her heroines, as we have seen.

Freud’s notions about the uncanny are complex to say the least; he argues that fear will always be brought about by the “unknown” and “unfamiliar,” yet, not all new, unfamiliar things will be perceived as frightening. Ultimately, the “uncanny” must be something that encompasses both novelty and familiarity (125). The uncanny has long been associated with the Gothic tradition, and Freud makes specific arguments in his essay that are relevant to Radcliffe’s Female Gothic. Freud states, “One would suppose,
then, that the uncanny would always be an area in which a person was unsure of his way around: the better oriented he was in the world around him, the less likely he would be to find the objects and occurrences in it uncanny” (125). In Radcliffe’s Female Gothic, heroines are often confined within a domestic space—either their family homes or an unfamiliar estate—facing the threat of rape, incest, arranged marriage, and lost property ownership. In these narratives, the heroines find themselves controlled and manipulated by the patriarchal structures into which they were born and must find in themselves the will and tenacity to overcome said structures, to harness autonomy and exercise agency in their own lives. In Freudian terms, these women find themselves in unfamiliar locations and dangerous circumstances, becoming disoriented. In their disorientation, the heroines often encounter instances of the uncanny, which arise given the frightening, unfamiliar perils they encounter. To become “oriented […] in the world around [them],” Radcliffe’s heroines must gain familiarity with their universes; to do so, they must embrace curiosity and pursue forbidden knowledge. By gaining intellectual knowledge, the heroines will begin to better understand the world and, following Freud’s hypothesis, interactions with the uncanny will accordingly diminish.

In Ann Radcliffe’s novels *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *A Sicilian Romance*, Emily St. Aubert and Julia Mazzini experience various encounters with the sublime, the supernatural, and the uncanny—most often in, or relating to, domestic spaces. These encounters evoke fear and anxiety in the heroines, emotions that arise as a result of the dangerous patriarchal system portrayed in the texts. Fear is closely linked to these three phenomena, an emotion relating to sensibility, specifically feminine sensibility. Radcliffe’s heroines must utilize rational thought and begin to disregard the patriarchal
structures in place and pursue curiosity and knowledge, to find agency within the social sphere and escape domestic dangers. Notably, one of the most significant pieces of forbidden knowledge Radcliffe’s Emily and Julia explore is the ultimate forbidden secret: the intricacies of life, death, and the afterlife. In pursuing the Ultimate Forbidden Knowledge of life and death, Radcliffe’s heroines must face their own trauma and loss, which manifests in the form of sublime, supernatural, and uncanny encounters.

In the essay “The Spectralization of the Other in The Mysteries of Udolpho,” Terry Castle argues that in Ann Radcliffe’s novels, “Home itself becomes uncanny, a realm of *aprophrades*. To be ‘at home’ is to be possessed by memory, to dwell with spirits of the dead” (Castle 234). In ancient Athens, *aprophrades* referred to days designated in the calendar in which the spirits of deceased loved ones would return to their family homes, a concept Castle astutely argues is displayed in Radcliffe’s *Udolpho*. Castle’s proposed relationship between the home (the domestic space) and the supernatural and spiritual is a concept reminiscent of the Freudian uncanny. As mentioned, Sigmund Freud utilized the concept of heimlich and unheimlich as the basis of his study on the uncanny. While these terms are predominantly understood to mean familiar and unfamiliar, Freud also provided slight variations of these definitions, including “belonging to the house” (Heimlich) and “unhomely” (unheimlich) (Freud 126). Freud strengthens his association between the uncanny and the home, stating, “Starting from the homely and the domestic, there is a further development towards the notion of something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret” (133). He also cites his predecessor, German philosopher F. J. W. Schelling, who claimed, “‘Uncanny is what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open’” (132). Terry Castle embraces
Freud’s established connection between the uncanny and the unfamiliar domestic, arguing that Radcliffe’s Emily St. Aubert is “haunted” by love lost, be that by physical death, as is the case with her parents, or separation by circumstance, like the disintegration of her relationship with Valancourt. Castle writes that the figurative hauntings in *Udolpho*, “are the products of refined sentiment, the characteristic projections of a feeling heart. To be haunted, according to the novel’s romantic myth, is to display one’s powers of sympathetic imagination” (Castle 234). While this claim is certainly true—Emily’s ability to experience supernatural encounters do delineate her elevated sympathetic capacity—the importance of this concept extends even further. I posit that Emily’s ability to encounter the supernatural, specifically her loved ones, demonstrates her pursuit of transcendence of patriarchal powers, by way of seeking knowledge.

Throughout the entirety of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe’s Emily St. Aubert demonstrates the processing of loss and grief. Specifically, her narrative portrays the journey of a young woman as she begins to recognize the corruption and unfairness of the patriarchal system into which she was born. In this recognition, Emily is able to begin to overcome the obstacles of this system and find her place in society. At the beginning of the text, readers see Emily St. Aubert and her parents happily living at their home, La Vallee. It is established quite early on that the St. Auberts raised Emily somewhat unconventionally in her youth. While many parents of this time period (and of Radcliffe’s readers in the eighteenth-century) limited their daughters to delicate educations catered to domestic success, M. St. Aubert decided otherwise. When raising Emily, St. Aubert abandoned conventional docile teachings of his daughter, and instead:
He endeavored…to strengthen her mind; to enure her to habits of self-command; to teach her to reject the first impulse of her feelings, and to look, with cool examination, upon the disappointments he sometimes threw in her way. While he instructed her to resist first impressions, and to acquire that steady dignity of mind, that can alone counterbalance the passions, and bear us, as far as it is compatible with our nature, above the reach of circumstances, he taught himself a lesson of fortitude; for he was often obliged to witness, with seeming indifference, the tears and struggles which his caution occasioned her. (Radcliffe 5)

Emily’s childhood upbringing allowed her a safe place to practice these traditionally non-female qualities. While Montoni commented on Emily’s “weakness of mind” as a “heroine,” St. Aubert intends to instill values and skills to “strengthen her mind.” The “self-command” and rejection of “the first impulse of feelings” works to dispel any habits of sensibility. Her father allowed her the guidance and access to knowledge necessary to enable her to exercise deductive reasoning and critical thinking. The diction buttresses this notion; in the spirit of Enlightenment empiricism, St. Aubert encourages Emily to “reject,” “examin[e],” “resist,” “acquire,” and “counterbalance” her emotional responses to arrive at reasonable conclusions. In short, Emily’s education was unconventional to say the least, preparing her to exercise rationality even in the face of the seemingly supernatural.

Upon the immediate death of her mother, Emily and Mr. St. Aubert travel the countryside together as a hoped-for remedy for the grief so drastically affecting St. Aubert’s health. It is at this point in the text that interactions with the supernatural become increasingly prevalent. While Emily’s first encounter with death occurred with her mother, she was still under the guidance and protection of her father, emotionally, spiritually, socially, and financially. Plagued by grief, St. Aubert’s impending death reveals an uneasiness, an anxiety that Emily will associate with the death of her father. Seeking shelter at the cottage of a peasant named La Voisin, the three discuss the
uncertainties of death and the afterlife. Sensing his impending death, St. Aubert claims, “I hope we shall be permitted to look down on those we have left on the earth, but I can only hope it,” he continues, “We are not enjoined to believe, that disembodied spirits watch over the friends they have loved, but we may innocently hope it. It is a hope which I will never resign[…]; it will sweeten the bitter moments of death!” (68). And so Radcliffe sets the scene for the seeming reappearance of deceased loved ones, later in the text. In the following pages, St. Aubert passes away with Emily by his side.

Realizing the precariousness of her position as an orphaned daughter with no prospects facing potential financial ruin, Emily decides to actualize St. Aubert’s final wish: to destroy the materials hidden in his home chambers. She recalls the conversation about departed spirits between St. Aubert and La Voisin, before entering her father’s chambers and immediately becoming spooked by something in the room. Radcliffe writes, “The subject she had been considering, and the present tone of her spirits, which made her imagination respond to every impression of her senses, gave her a sudden terror of something supernatural” (95). Too unsettled by the potential supernatural, Emily retires and decides to try again the following day. It is in St. Aubert’s chambers the next day that Emily experiences the supernatural and uncanny first-hand, while searching for the hidden documents. In the bedroom, Emily becomes unsettled; “this infirm state of her nerves may be attributed what she imagined, when, her eyes glancing a second time on the arm-chair, which stood in an obscure part of the closet, the countenance of her dead father appeared there” (102-103). It is notable that St. Aubert’s ghost appears to Emily in a moment of uncertainty. She is struggling to decide whether or not to follow the curiosity she feels—a trait instilled by her father throughout her life; however, to pursue
this particular line of curiosity would mean disregarding her father’s dying wish and reading the papers he forbade her to acknowledge. This is the first time in Emily’s life when she finds herself lacking in parental guidance; she no longer has someone to look toward to tell her what to think or how to act. And so, Radcliffe provides readers with one of the first instances of recognition of damaging patriarchal structures. While alive, St. Aubert (as the patriarch) made the decision to allow his daughter unprecedented education, yet, on his deathbed, he exercised his role as patriarch and forbade her from utilizing the very knowledge and curious nature he always cultivated in her and encouraged her to pursue. His final wish stripped Emily of agency in her own intellectual endeavors, situating her as a female denied autonomy in the patriarchal system, not once again, but all along, as she was only granted choice and intellectual pursuit thus far because her father deemed it so.

In a tearful exchange, La Voisinn and St. Aubert discuss their views on life-after-death, specifically the ability for a departed soul to return to earth and visit their loved ones via spirit form. While neither man has a definitive stance on this spiritual ability, they both hold onto hope, dreaming of reuniting with lost loved ones in the afterlife. It is this sentiment that introduces the motif of strange music in The Mysteries of Udolpho. St. Aubert recognizes the strum of a guitar and questions its origins to La Voisinn, who responds:

‘It is an echo, monsieur, I fancy. That guitar is often heard at night, when all is still, but nobody knows who touches it, and it is sometimes accompanied by a voice so sweet, and so sad, one would almost think the woods were haunted.’ ‘They certainly are haunted,’ said St. Aubert with a smile, ‘but I believe it is by mortals.’ ‘I have sometimes heard it at midnight, when I could not sleep,’ rejoined La Voisinn, not seeming to notice this remark, ‘almost under my window, and I never heard any music like it. It has often made me think of my poor wife till I cried. I have sometimes got up to the window to look if I could see any body, but
as soon as I opened the casement all was hushed, and nobody to be seen; and I have listened, and listened till I have been so timorous, that even the trembling of the leaves in the breeze has made me start. They say it often comes to warn people of their death, but I have heard it many years, and outlived the warning.’ Emily, though she smiled at the mention of this ridiculous superstition, could not, in the present tone of her spirits, wholly resist its contagion. (Radcliffe 68)

Though Emily recognizes the irrationality of the premonition, she is unable to shake her emotional reaction. This “contagion” of “ridiculous superstition” is an irresistible thing outside her control. La Voisin has now cemented Emily’s mental association between the music and death, resulting in assumed supernatural occurrences. Her rational and sentimental minds are in opposition with one another, and she does not yet know how to coalesce her visceral reactions and logical reasoning. Both La Voisin and Emily dismiss St. Aubert’s assumption of “mortals” haunting the woods, calling into question both the stability of socioeconomic boundaries and father-daughter power dynamics, as Emily chooses to believe La Voisin, an uneducated peasant, over the opinion of her father. Though minute, this acts as an introductory moment of transgression for Emily, her first rebellion against her father. She eventually discovers the factuality of St. Aubert’s claim when she regains rational thought at the end of the novel, however, at this moment, La Voisin’s speculation of the music’s relation to death establishes melodies as supernatural symbols in Emily’s mind. This belief is cemented when St. Aubert’s ghost visits Emily in her dreams, and instead of speaking, only a melody leaves his mouth. The next day, La Voisin confirms that the music was not part of her dreams, but was heard by him as well, at the same hour.

While visiting her father’s grave in the middle of the night, Emily wonders if she sees a shadowy figure, but decides against it, when she realizes she hears no sound, no
footsteps. An ironic relationship has formed between sound—an empirically verified phenomenon—and the irrational supernatural, as Emily now associates spiritual presence with music. It is interesting that Emily utilizes hearing, one of her five senses, to attempt to rationalize the irrational. Her first sense, sight, alerted her to a possible threat, but when she rationally defers to hearing to confirm her suspicion, and comes up short, she decides her imagination must have been overpowering her sensibilities. Later, trapped in Udolpho castle with Madame Cheron imprisoned and Annette locked away, Emily is completely at Montoni’s mercy, when she recollects St. Aubert and La Voisin’s conversation on departed souls. At this moment, Emily hears the sounds of music: “A superstitious dread stole over her; she stood listening, for some moments, in trembling expectation, and then endeavored to re-collect her thoughts, and to reason herself into composure,” recognizing the irrationality of her fear (Radcliffe 330). Emily validates her fear nonetheless, stating, “but human reason cannot establish her laws on subjects, lost in the obscurity of imagination, any more than the eye can ascertain the form of objects, that only glimmer through the dimness of night” (Radcliffe 330). Emily’s encounters with the sublime and supernatural are triggered by fear—specifically fear of the unknown. Emily must procure as much knowledge and information as possible, to elevate herself to a rational mind and provide explanations for these mysterious events. In utilizing rational thought and explaining the previously inexplicable, Emily moves away from sentimentality and toward Enlightenment ideals.

In addition to the extensive use of the supernatural—or what is eventually identified as the ‘explained supernatural’—Ann Radcliffe also makes significant use of the sublime in The Mysteries of Udolpho. Influenced by Edmund Burke’s ideas of the
sublime, in which an aesthetic experience prompts the evocation of awe, terror, confusion, and distress, Radcliffe’s characters delineate the importance of this powerful dynamic. As discussed, Radcliffe believed in the importance of terror (rather than horror) in establishing the sublime, which, in turn, allowed space for the expansion of the mind. Though there are endless instances of sublimity throughout Udolpho, especially the natural sublime of Emily and St. Aubert’s countryside travels, we must look toward Emily’s sublime experience inside of Udolpho Castle, her place of domestic imprisonment. Held captive along with her aunt by Montoni for refusal to sign over their inherited properties and fortunes, Emily begins to sneakily explore the castle. She is “haunted” by her own imagination, just as Freud and Castle hypothesized, imagining apparitions and horrible scenarios that arise from her own fears and anxieties, specifically involving the threat of her own death. Particularly, Emily is both fascinated and perturbed by the myth of Signora Laurentini. As the most recent legitimate owner of Udolpho, her mysterious disappearance is suspicious, given Montoni’s proposal of marriage to Laurentini (to gain ownership of Udolpho) and her subsequent denial. The servants and Emily wonder if the woman was murdered at the hands of Montoni, so that he could gain ownership of the property despite her marriage rejection. Fearful for her aunt’s safety after once again refusing to sign over her property to Montoni and hearing his continuous threats, Emily meets with the servant Bernadine in the hopes of visiting the imprisoned Madame Cheron. While waiting for this meeting, Emily wanders the castle.

Witnessing what she assumes to be torture machinery, Emily feels ill, fearing for Madame Cheron’s life, and finds herself preoccupied “in wonder and apprehension” at a curtain concealing half of the room. Emily, filled with curiosity and nervousness:
wished, yet dreaded, to lift it, and to discover what it veiled: twice she was withheld by a recollection of the terrible spectacle her daring hand had formerly unveiled in an apartment of the castle, till, suddenly conjecturing, that it concealed the body of her murdered aunt, she seized it, in a fit of desperation, and drew it aside. Beyond, appeared a corpse, stretched on a kind of low couch, which was crimsoned with human blood, as was the floor beneath. The features, deformed by death, were ghastly and horrible, and more than one livid wound appeared in the face. Emily, bending over the body, gazed, for a moment, with an eager, frenzied eye; but, in the next, the lamp dropped from her hand, and she fell senseless at the foot of the couch. (Radcliffe 348)

Though not relating to nature in the way sublimity is often conceptualized, this moment certainly exhibits distinct characteristics of the sublime. As discussed earlier in this paper, Milbank explained that Burke, Radcliffe’s main influencer of the sublime, “locates the sublime purely in terms of fear, the source of which is the ‘king of terrors’ himself—DEATH—and a sense of possible threat to the subject’s self-preservation” (Milbank 236). Prior to this sublime interaction, Emily was conscious of the dangers facing her as a young, unmarried, orphaned woman possessing property, connecting Signora Laurentini’s speculated demise to the potential dangers to herself and her aunt. Emily, consumed by curiosity and fear of what she would find beyond the curtain, knows that she must gain this knowledge for the sake of her own survival; she is motivated by the threat of death, just as Burke argued. Suspecting Signora Laurentini’s death by Montoni and the possibility of Madame Cheron’s murder by the same man, Emily decides to use the intellectual pursuit her father encouraged for so long, to gage her own level of danger. Once she discovers that her aunt is in fact still alive, Emily assumes the corpse to be Signora Laurentini, cementing the notion that Montoni is capable of killing unmarried women for the sake of property ownership. In the article “Rethinking the Sublime in the Novels of Ann Radcliffe,” Donna Heiland argues that Signora Laurentini is “a threat to the patriarchy” due to her sexual prowess and unwillingness to sacrifice her property
rights (Heiland 73). As punishment for her sexual transgression and failure to submit to the role as the female in a patriarchal society that largely prohibited women from property ownership except by way of inheritance, she eventually becomes “a kind of *memento mori*,” exiled to a life of nunhood, loss of identity, and loss of property (73). Emily’s sublime encounter with what is eventually revealed to be a wax corpse, an actual memento mori, allows her mind to expand from the “apprehension,” “desperation,” and “eager[ness]” with which she decides to view the secret corpse behind the curtain. In doing so, Emily gains additional awareness about the violence against women in patriarchal society, even when supposedly protected by the law, and the potential demise of women that follows such violence. Through desperation brought about by confinement in Udolpho, Emily enables this sublime encounter and comes closer to attaining the Ultimate Forbidden Knowledge of the realities of life and death.

In contrast to the distinct sense of impending danger and violence associated with the aforementioned scene from *Udolpho, A Sicilian Romance* handles sublimity a bit differently. Radcliffe’s second novel follows heroine Julia Mazzini, daughter of Marquis Mazzini, as she and her sister Emilia navigate life in their home estate upon the return of their father. With the reinstitution of their patriarchal figure comes mysterious activity in abandoned portions of the castle, prompting speculations of supernatural beings. While hoping to find answers about the home’s supposed hauntings, Julia finds herself experiencing love for the first time, with Count Hippolitus de Vereza. Unfortunately, Julia’s sublime experience proves early in the text that she doubts the likeliness of a

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3 Burke’s discussion of the sublime requires the accompaniment of pleasure with sublime astonishment. Given the lack of evidence in the text regarding Emily’s satisfaction at this precise moment, the pleasure can be inferred to be experienced by the reader, who experiences danger only in a distant, mediated way.
lasting union with Hippolitus—a fear that is soon realized when the Marquis denies her true love and instead promises her hand to the Duke of Luovo, a man her father’s age.

After her first interactions with Hippolitus, Julia feels:

The passions which had hitherto lain concealed in Julia’s heart, touched by circumstance, dilated to its power, and afforded her a slight experience of the pain and delight which flow from their influence. The beauty and accomplishments of Vereza raised in her a new and various emotion, which reflection made her fear to encourage, but which was too pleasing to be wholly resisted. Tremblingly alive to a sense of delight, and unchilled by disappointment, the young heart welcomes every feeling, not simply painful, with a romantic expectation that it will expand into bliss.

Julia sought with eager anxiety to discover the sentiments of Vereza towards her; she revolved each circumstance of the day, but they afforded her little satisfaction; they reflected only a glimmering and uncertain light, which instead of guiding, served only to perplex her. (Radcliffe 21)

This passage demonstrates many of the ideals Burke considered to characterize the sublime, differentiating it from encounters with the beautiful. Julia’s reaction to Hippolitus exhibits not only an appreciation, but an overwhelming reaction. She is completely taken by him, and their time spent together, and while the possibility of a relationship certainly evokes pleasure, it also produces a sense of fear and anxiety. It is important to remember that Burke’s definition of the sublime underscores the presence of power that the sublime exercises over the person experiencing it; the person feels some sort of reverie or transcendence. This power will often manifest in the form of fear or terror, combining with the pleasure of aesthetics. This moment exemplifies the awe, joy, anxiety, confusion, hope, and apprehension Julia experiences for the first time in her life, and she is conscious of the emotional stakes this failed relationship could perpetuate.

Given the apparent reciprocation of Hippolitus’ feelings toward Julia, it is fair to argue that Julia’s fear and apprehension come, not from the possibility of unrequited love, but from her consciousness of lack of autonomy. Julia spends years with Emilia and Madame
de Menon, gaining a sense of independence, but that false reality was removed with the return of her tyrannical father. The sublime experience of her initial encounter with Hippolitus acts to remind Julia of the patriarchal family and society which she cannot escape. And so her fears are justified with the arrangement of her marriage to the Duke, sans her consent or input.

While Radcliffe incorporates both supernatural and sublime moments in her texts, it is the combination of these features, and the disorientation caused by the uncanny, that intensifies the heroines’ experiences in Radcliffe’s novels. As Emily and Julia find themselves in simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar worlds, they must pursue intellectual curiosity to situate themselves in their societies. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *A Sicilian Romance*, the uncanny appears most often by way of the doppelganger motif. In both texts, though not entirely identical, the staggering similarities between heroines and maternal figures prove to be uncanny. In “The Uncanny,” Freud references the doppelganger, hypothesizing that it is “traced back to infantile sources” and that the double has been linked to “the fear of death” and is considered to be “an object of terror” (Freud 141, 142, 143). Castle comments that “Characters seem uncannily to resemble or to replace previous characters,” situating the doppelganger motif in Radcliffe’s texts, while Heiland argues that “Radcliffe’s novels clearly place mother-daughter relationships at their center, exploring the workings of this relationship in a patriarchal society” which essentially “insists on rather than obscures difference, as a way of allowing the daughter, whose story is always at the center of the novel, to separate from her mother and take her place in that larger society” (Castle 239, Heiland 58). In *Udolfo*, Emily appears uncannily similar, not to her own mother, but to the woman depicted in the miniature
portrait hidden away with the secret materials in her father’s chamber—the very materials she was sworn to destroy and the same portrait she witnessed her father weeping over soon before his death. Interestingly, Emily did not recognize the likeness herself, but both Dorothée (the servant at Chateau-le-Blanc) and Sister Agnes (later identified as Signora Laurentini) immediately noticed the resemblance. Sister Agnes is so distraught by the resemblance that she believes Emily to be the spirit of the Marchioness returned for “retribution” of the affair between the Marquis de Villeroi and Signora Laurentini, and the Marchioness’ subsequent murder, prompted by Signora Laurentini (Radcliffe 644). The comparison of Emily to the Marchioness is notable regarding female sexuality in patriarchal society. For a brief period, Emily wonders if perhaps the Marchioness was actually her biological mother, wondering if her father had been unfaithful. The similarity of Emily to the Marchioness can also be viewed as a forewarning: Signora Laurentini was driven by uncontrolled sexual desires—completely unacceptable for women of Emily and Radcliffe’s times. Laurentini’s hypersexuality not only damaged her own morality—but destroyed a marriage. Her jealousy that arose from the Marquis’ return to his wife prompted her to create a damaging lie about the Marchioness’ fidelity, which ultimately resulted in her murder by her husband’s hand. Emily’s likeness to the Marchioness’ acts as a deterrent, a reminder to keep her sexuality in check by patriarchal standards, and to remember the potential danger of rumors and reputation—as even when inaccurate, the consequences can be fatal.

Regarding the relationship between Julia and her mother in A Sicilian Romance, Heiland believes that the “recovery of the mother [is] the necessary first step in the heroine’s emergence as a distinct individual” (62). Upon finding her mother in the
dungeons, Julia “examined the features of a stranger; which were now rekindling into life, she thought she discovered the resemblance of Emilia!” (Radcliffe 174). The uncanny resemblance occurs not between Julia and her mother, but between her mother and her sister. In making this distinction, Radcliffe allows Julia a degree of familiarity with her estranged mother, recognizing the likeness to her sister, but not to herself. Metaphorically, Emilia becomes synonymous with the mother and Julia is able to recognize the danger of the future. Julia is not yet uncannily similar to her mother and her mother’s plight, as is her docile, submissive sister; instead, in this uncanniness, Julia is witnessing a choice for her future: to submit to her tyrannical father and the patriarchal system and be dealt the same fate as her mother—the same her sister is on track to share—or to subvert the system, disregard her father’s wishes to marry the Duke, and follow her heart with Hippolitus, thereby escaping the threat of imprisonment imparted on her mother.

As the originator of the Female Gothic, Radcliffe demonstrates extensive recognition and commentary on the plight of women in the eighteenth century in The Mysteries of Udolpho and A Sicilian Romance, though they depict life from centuries prior. In creating texts that expose the dominating, repressive nature of patriarchal society on women, she encourages a sort of Enlightenment-era feminism. Under this notion, Radcliffe’s heroines portray the importance of female pursuit of knowledge, in order to escape the dangers of confinement in the domestic space. Acknowledgement of these life-threatening dangers would not be possible, or nearly as effective, without Radcliffe’s use of the sublime, the supernatural, and the uncanny. Radcliffe purges these otherworldly concepts from the heroine’s domain of thought, by providing reasonable
explanations and arming the heroine with rational thought. In confronting the sublime, the supernatural, and the uncanny, the heroines of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *A Sicilian Romance* are able to work through trauma and begin to situate themselves in society.
Conclusion

Ann Radcliffe created the Female Gothic tradition to provide eighteenth-century women with fictional models of real-life circumstances demonstrating the female experience. Though riddled with archaic castles and suspected supernatural incidents, Radcliffe’s novels provide her readers with familiarity, as they portray eighteenth-century problems in her sixteenth-century plots. Radcliffe’s heroines act as paradigms for her audience, exposing the dangers of patriarchal control and the importance of female pursuit of curiosity and knowledge. In embracing inquisitiveness and adopting the empirical investigation habits encouraged during the Age of Enlightenment, Radcliffe’s heroines demonstrate agency and autonomy, provoking questions of transgressive behavior, as exhibited in “Adam and Eve” and “Bluebeard,” two myths that influenced Radcliffe’s texts.

As a result of feminist literary critical projects, Radcliffe’s novels have received an increased amount of scholarly attention. These works of scholarship predominantly look to domesticity and the eighteenth-century social shift that resulted in separate spheres for men and women in family dynamics. The rise of the middle class allowed for an increase in women’s education, literacy, and leisure time that enabled the growth of novel publication. These works of scholarship deepen our understanding of the relationship between Radcliffe’s novels and eighteenth-century domestic spheres.

In this thesis, I provide a unique analysis of female epistemophilia as it is portrayed in Ann Radcliffe’s novels *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *A Sicilian Romance*. Drawing on the curious, transgressive females of the biblical and fairy tale traditions, Radcliffe’s texts utilize the domestic space for heroines to gain knowledge and experience, eventually recognizing the dangers of patriarchal control. Eve inherently
linked curiosity and female sexuality, which both become loci of fear, threats to male power. Scholars most often argue that Radcliffe’s heroines exemplify roles of submission to male counterparts and are forced to return to nearly identical domestic circumstances from their origins. However, the domestic sphere becomes the setting for the pursuit of knowledge and the revelation of repressed female histories. I have worked to prove that Radcliffe’s heroines apply the pursuit of curiosity and acquisition of knowledge to uncover the secrets of the domestic space, and ultimately decide to return to domestic spaces comprised of increased safety and equality for women. Though the novels conclude with seemingly conventional endings of matrimony and domestic bliss, the marriages transpire between a hero and heroine who has developed autonomy and agency, choosing her partner and making the decision to marry, resulting in a union built on emotional and intellectual respect, rather than tyrannical power.
WORKS CITED


