

Designing and Undrawing Veils:
Anxiety and Authorship in Radcliffe's *The Italian*

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On the final page of *The Italian* we are confronted with a paradox in the guise of a comic Shakespearean epilogue. The loyal and rustic Paulo, giddy at the end of the novel's terrors, begins making quasi-sensical exclamations: "May fly in the sea, or swim in the sky, or tumble head over heels into the moon! For remember, my good friends, we have no lead in our consciences to keep us down!"¹ When pressed as to his meaning by a "grave personage," Paulo responds:

"Pshaw!... who can stop at such a time as this, to think about what he means! I wish that all those, who on this night are not merry enough to speak before they think, may ever after be grave enough to think before they speak! But you, none of you, no! not one of you! I warrant, ever saw the roof of a prison, when your master happened to be down below in a dungeon... But no matter for that, you can be tolerably happy, perhaps, notwithstanding; but as for guessing how happy I am, or knowing any thing about the matter.—O! It's quite beyond what you can understand."²

On its own, this improvised philosophy would not seem to contradict itself. Indeed, placed as it is as a sort of moral for the story, one would expect it to tie together the

novel's philosophical or ethical loose ends—and yet this is precisely the contradiction. The moral of the book is something much closer to the exact opposite of Paulo's epilogue: *think before you speak*.

The novel begins with a demonstration of exactly this moral: “innocent and happy in the silent performance of her duties and in the veil of retirement, lived Ellena Rosalba, when she first saw Vincentio di Vivaldi.”³ Ellena is “struck by the spirit and dignity of his air” and his countenance “which announce[d] the energies of the soul.” And yet, acting according to the rule of Paulo's “grave” interlocutor, “she was cautious of admitting a sentiment more tender than admiration, and endeavored to dismiss his image from her mind, and by engaging in her usual occupations, to recover the state of tranquility, which his appearance had somewhat disrupted.” The work that gives her such tranquility is what would be called, then and now, *design*: she draws up plans for furniture and embroiders dresses. Because Ellena has a veritable “genius” for this art she is able to sell her “designs”⁴ to local nuns (a community of women, perhaps resembling Radcliffe's reading public also primarily composed of female readers), thus enabling her to earn money, practice her art, and maintain a quiet, unobserved existence. Indeed, we learn that Vivaldi is unable to perceive Ellena through her “veil of retirement”—he has many times observed her products and designs, but has never seen the artist behind the veil. An admission of her authorship, in fact, would have served only to “encrease the passion... it would have been prudent to discourage.”⁵ Thus it is not merely an inherent

desire for tranquility that compels Ellena into seclusion, but also a “disparity of fortune” and a pressing social concern to maintain the status quo.

Situated at the very beginning of the novel, the phrase “veil of retirement” is especially provocative for several reasons, foremost among them being that the phrase implies a sort of “false-retirement” in which a bourgeois artist, though apparently inactive, is at work behind the scenes. In his book *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress*, Robert Miles reiterates the common belief that *The Italian* is a more or less conscious “last book.”⁶ It would seem, therefore, entirely reasonable to read this “veil of retirement” as relating not only to Ellena, but to Radcliffe, dodging the “cult of celebrity” as she was. Many critics have suggested that the gothic novel, and Radcliffe’s *The Italian* in particular, are “self-conscious,” meticulously constructed narratives that inevitably end up revealing that their narratives are, in fact, constructed—constructed from other narratives, constructed by a writer, and constructed for a particular reason.⁷ Indeed, as Foucault says of Radcliffe in his famous “What Is an Author?”: “her function as an author exceeds her own work.”⁸ I shall argue that Radcliffe is very much aware of her position as an author, not only as the active and quasi-masculine “initiator of a discourse,” but also as a woman passively observed and scrutinized because of this authority, just as Ellena is pursued by Vivaldi. Vivaldi becomes both the hysterical seer of ghosts and a model of the (male) voyeur-reader. This role lasts up until the marriage at the end of the novel when Vivaldi (and the reader) glimpse “the tender complacency of Ellena’s, which her veil, partly undrawn, allowed him to observe.”⁹ But just as the reader

begins to see the author/heroine behind the veil we are given a description, two pages later, of Vivaldi and Ellena's villa of retirement which "resembled a fabric called up by enchantment, rather than a structure of human art."¹⁰ The narrative has moved from the psychological chasms of pits and dungeons and into the complacency of the villa's fairy tale setting and Paolo's nonsensical monologue: the author reveals herself precisely at the moment when there is nothing left to reveal, when "human art" has become anonymous "enchantment."

So, given the novel's opening and closing portraits of the veiled artist, one might ask whether this Rosalba-Radcliffe / Vivladi-voyeur hypothesis hold up through novel's middle passages. In this essay I shall suggest that not only is there a reading one can do of *The Italian* as a book about writing and writers, but also that this reading makes sense of Paolo's paradox of "speaking before you think." My reading will be composed of essentially two critical strategies. Following Watt's suggestion that the Gothic is essentially a genre built upon "the often antagonistic relations between different writers and works," my first strategy is by and large comparative. I compare Radcliffe's novel to several other texts most of which she demonstrably read: Schiller's *Der Geisterseher*, Burke's *Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* and *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, as well as some philosophical writings by Kant and Schiller.¹¹ Through these various comparisons I hope to show that Radcliffe's text is very consciously intertextual. This intertextuality, in turn, will give us novel insight into Radcliffe's relationship to her time's political context—that is, the aftermath of the

French Revolution—and into her own position as an author. My second, related strategy might be called “philological”¹² for the reason that much of my analysis is dependent upon tracing the distribution and genealogy of several important “code words” in Radcliffe’s text: *design*, *veil*, *genius* and *evil* (an obvious anagram of *veil*), and *evil genius*. These shibboleths tie Radcliffe’s work to the fictional and philosophical discourses of her time, but also work to signal her own problematic placement within those discourses.

Through these two, often overlapping, critical strategies I hope to demonstrate that in fact Ellena’s “veil of retirement” closely resembles the pre-Enlightened state which Burke, seven years earlier (1790), called “the decent drapery of life.”¹³ Anticipating Lacan and other critics of the Enlightenment, Burke describes the “new conquering empire of light and reason” as “rudely [tearing] off” the “wardrobe of the moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature.” The Enlightenment here becomes its diabolical double, the Sadean Torturer or Inquisitor who observes and orders its subjects and objects according to the dictates of an arbitrary, “vacuous” and inhuman Reason.¹⁴ We need not look far into Radcliffe’s novel to see that light and reason can be violently dislocated and directed towards diabolical ends, that it sees all veils as mere “chaotic matter” to be thoughtlessly lifted and pierced. Facing the Inquisition, an innocent and astonished Vivaldi disbelievingly asks himself:

'Can such horrible perversion of right be permitted! Can man, who calls himself endowed with reason, and immeasurably superior to every other created being, argue himself into the commission of such horrible folly, such invertebrate cruelty, as exceeds all the acts of the most irrational and ferocious brute.'¹⁵

This "barbarous" and "mechanic" philosophy,¹⁶ as Burke would call it, "remains for man only, man, proud of his prerogative of reason, and boasting of his sense of justice, to unite the most terrible extremes of folly and wickedness!"¹⁷ Reason becomes its Sadean inverse, in which laws have no divine or customary support, but merely "their own terrors."¹⁸ That is, in a fundamental way Burke fears Law in and of itself, such as the (perverse) Kantian moral law disentangled from habit and custom.¹⁹

And yet, conflating the violent and secular reason of the French Revolution with the superstition of the Inquisition, Radcliffe complicates Burke's reading of the Enlightenment. For Radcliffe, reason and observation are not so secular and bestial²⁰ as they are in Burke's *Reflections*. Rather they are posited as potentially "supernatural" and diabolical, even if they are later shown to be secular. We see this when, for example, we learn that the Inquisitors appear to have a "supernatural power" and that their visages are "stamped with the characters of demons."²¹ Consequently the extent to which Radcliffe adheres to this politically reactionary side of Burke remains unclear. Much of the novel seems aligned with the younger, more liberal Burke, as represented in his *Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1759), a book Radcliffe knew very well.²² In this early, "more enlightened" Burke, darkness and superstition can play

essentially two roles: they can be used as tools of “despotic governments” and religions “founded on the passions of men, and principally upon the passion of fear.”²³ Or, alternatively, obscurity and superstition, both in the empirical and epistemological senses, can also act as a means of elevating one towards the sublime: “It is our ignorance of things that causes all our admiration, and chiefly excites our passions... the mind is hurried out of itself, by a croud of great and confused images; which affect because they are crouded and confused.”²⁴ Thus, for the early Burke, obscurity and superstition serve not the stabilizing, regulatory function that they serve in his *Reflections*. Through their affiliation with *fear* and *terror*, obscurity and superstition serve precisely the opposite function of either quickening the passions and “transporting” one towards a beatific vision of the sublime, or of despotically oppressing one.

As I shall argue, Radcliffe does not dogmatically adhere to any particular reading of Burke (or anyone else), but negotiates her own path through, one might say, strategic misreadings of the sublime, the gothic, and the discourse of obscurity and enlightenment. This path, as it winds its way through the novel, is essentially uncalculable, taking and transforming discourse and genre to suit its own needs and ends. Through this picking and choosing Radcliffe brings certain things to light (despotic power structures and superstition, the male and female tendency towards hysteria and exaggeration, the artificiality and constructedness of the novel, the particular *gendering* of the Burkean discourse of pain and pleasure) at the same time that she attempts to veil others (her heroine’s bourgeois art, Radcliffe’s particular authorship). In this sense Radcliffe’s novel

is far more governed by tensions than it is by a single ideology: tensions between the masculine and the feminine, light and dark, knowledge and obscurity, truth and falsity, good and evil, tranquility and activity, authorship and autonomy. As in Kafka's "A Report to an Academy,"²⁵ Radcliffe's narrative seeks, like so many of her characters, a *way out*: a way out not only of the pain and terror of suspense and uncertainty, but also a way out of the vulnerable role of her function as an author.

I. Positing the Supersensible (and then Reneging)

Before getting started, it will be helpful to lay out some assumptions this essay will be making. The first assumption is that one of Radcliffe's prime narratological techniques is to draw out what Lacan calls "the time for comprehending"—that is, the uncertainty and painful suspense upon which the very genre of the gothic is based. The second assumption concerns this essay's use of the work of Kant. For the most part, the work of Kant is used to represent an Enlightenment position which Burke fears and Radcliffe posits. Thus in many ways Kant acts as a critic of Burke's reading of the secular Enlightenment, and Radcliffe, in turn, acts as a critic of Kant.

On a superficial level, the narrative of *The Italian* would seem to play a particularly simple game of alternately suggesting and then retracting the existence of what we might call the "supernatural." Radcliffe does this through a typical formula involving three steps: 1) something indistinct happens and a character perceives this "incomplete" object through a veil of "sensory deprivation"²⁶; 2) the character overreacts,

falls back on a curiously strong and weak imagination (strong in its intensity, weak in its control) and posits something such as a ghost or a demon in place of the absent substance or incomplete sense data; and then 3) the character either learns of his or her mistake, or the narrative corrects it. In either case, it is eventually clearly related to the reader that no, Vivaldi did not just see an inhuman form, but rather, he misperceived a human form. The problems Radcliffe addresses arise neither in part 1 (imperfect perception, which is empirically inevitable) or in part 3 (the skeptical conclusion—which, thanks to an elaborate legal system is also inevitable), but in the second part: the understanding.

It is possible to map this tripartite formula onto many different features of Radcliffe's novel, and I shall do so according to an analogous formula suggested by Lacan's analysis of hesitation. My use of Lacan here is far from arbitrary. Much of his thought on time comes by way of *Hamlet*, whose presence in Radcliffe's Shakespearean universe is all but palpable.²⁷ Again, Lacan's formulation of hesitation has three temporal aspects: 1. the instant of the glance; 2. the time for comprehending; 3. the moment of concluding.²⁸ It is important, following Ricoeur among others, to distinguish here between two types of narrative time: the *Aktzeit* as the time in which the events in the book take place (that is, the time as perceived by the characters in the fiction), and the *Textzeit* as the time in which the events are narrated (or the time during which the events are related to the reader).²⁹ In terms of both *Aktzeit* and *Textzeit*, Radcliffe's narrative tends to overemphasize Lacan's second temporal stage of hesitation, the time for understanding. And indeed, this is the place where hesitation actually takes place for

Lacan—the act of perception and the moment of judgment are instantaneous. Even if they often jump to hasty conclusions, Radcliffe’s characters and readers spend quite a bit of time in limbo, hesitating between contradictory options, both on a macro- and micro-scale: either Schedoni is an evil genius (as we believe in the beginning), or he is a pitiful human (which we learn much later); either that is a human skeleton disguised beneath the black veil in *the Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), or it is (we discover hundreds and hundreds of pages later, as though in an afterthought) merely a wax figure; either that was a ghost that just rushed by in the darkness, or a really fast monk. In this way Radcliffe’s protagonists (and her ideal readers) are hysterical or neurotic in the Lacanian sense, always waiting, always trying to fix the truth of the situation in the time of another (like Schedoni or the author).³⁰ In other words, the agenda is set by an Other envisioned as transcendental and the hysterical characters and readers cannot freely act / decide until subjective action / conclusion is sanctioned by this Big Other in what Lacan calls “the hour of truth.” What ultimately ends up mattering is not whether a particular assumption or conclusion is correct, “not the truth but the hour [*l’heure*] of truth”—in short, the structure of how one comes to conclusions rather than the specific outcomes of those conclusions.³¹ Radcliffe’s fiction consistently dares the reader to bypass this painfully suspenseful delay-time and leap to a false—and thus structurally *reactive*—conclusion. That is, it dares us to speak (or gasp) before thinking. How many times, for instance, do we hear a character, miming our own thoughts, lamenting the delay and uncertainty of

their situation? One wonders whether Radcliffe, the author of these astoundingly persistent iterations, thought the same.³²

So the question returns: why so much emphasis on this time of hesitation if Radcliffe always undermines any possible response other than one that is completely rational, empirical and skeptical? In other words, why posit the possibility of the supernatural at all if, in the end, all of that will be deemed excessive? Lacan's notion of time provides an answer: because the moment of concluding is an essentially *subjective* and *assertive* act, whereas the other two times are not, strictly speaking, active. They are, again, *reactive*:

I characterize it [the moment of concluding] as *subjective assertion*, the logical subject here being but the *personal* form of the knowing subject who can only be expressed by "I." Otherwise stated, the judgment which concludes the sophism can only be borne by a subject who has formulated the assertion about himself, and cannot be imputed to him unreservedly by anyone else—unlike the relations of the *impersonal* and *undefined reciprocal* subjects of the first two moments [the instant of the glance and the time for comprehending] that are essentially transitive, since the personal subject of the logical movement assumes [*assume*] them at each of these moments.³³

What is truly radical (and ultimately transcendental) about this position is not that subjects make decisions, but rather that subjectivity itself can only be constituted *through* the act of decision. As Kierkegaard has noted, a truly subjective act can never have a

purely logical or empirical foundation: “the moment of decision is madness.”³⁴ Recall, for example, Paolo’s “mad” soliloquy at the end of *The Italian* which encourages us to speak (act) before we think (passively comprehend). Perhaps another way of formulating this hypothesis is to say that there is nothing within the understanding itself, or anything that can be discovered within the time of comprehending, that can force an individual to act (or speak) freely. Something like will, transcendental freedom, or practical Reason in the Kantian sense is needed, or else one will stand motionless like Hume’s mule trying to decide between two equally appealing bales of hay. When Schedoni is about to murder Ellena what holds him back is not his will, but somehow the passivity of delay itself: “his agitation and repugnance to strike, encreased with every moment of delay, and, as often as he prepared to plunge the poniard in her bosom, a shuddering horror restrained him.”³⁵ Schedoni acts “morally” *not* through active (mad) decision, but by way of passively rational hesitation. In this way the novel is in some sense anti-Kantian—unlike Byron’s Cain who gains freedom by acting before he thinks, Schedoni (passively) thinks and forecloses action.³⁶

Transcendental philosophy, particularly that of Kant and his notion of the sublime, has become an all too common theme in discussions of the gothic and the supernatural. Many critics would agree with Marshall Brown when he argues that the very crudeness in imagining what can never be experienced constitutes gothic novels as pure speculative instruments that investigate the origins of experience. From the supernatural of the novelists to the transcendental of the philosophers is

thus no greater distance than from a nouminous object to a noumenal one: both the self-indulgent frivolity of the gothic and the self-sacrificing seriousness of philosophy were dedicated, at least in part, to imagining the unimaginable powers surrounding and conditioning our everyday world.³⁷

For Brown and other critics, this path is generally one that leads (again, three steps) from the “frivolous” anxieties of gothic writers to some sort of vision of the Kantian sublime which then leads, ultimately, to a formulation of the Kantian moral law and the apprehension of radical freedom.

In terms of Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, this more or less analogous relationship between transcendental philosophy and the gothic is much more complicated. Radcliffe is far more “self-sacrificing” than “self-indulgent” and ends up far more Burkean than Kantian. It is true that Radcliffe puts forth as possibilities several very Kantian notions, albeit in slightly distorted ways. For, we must remember, she had not read Kant (in 1794-6), but, rather, was anticipating Kant through her close reading of Burke and her appropriation of Schiller’s *Der Geisterseher*, a popular (though unfinished) translation of which had come out in 1795, the year when Radcliffe began working on *The Italian*.³⁸

Radcliffe addresses and reworks at least four distinctly Kantian possibilities: fidelity to Truth or the Law; the Sublime; the supernatural or supersensory; and radical Evil. Most often Radcliffe’s fiction works to provide the reader (and her characters) first with the idea or possibility of these concepts, and then leaves us (and them) in suspense for several hundred pages. And yet, by the end of the novel, she retracts each one and

returns to her own, more skeptical position. Ann McWhir argues that the plot of gothic fiction, particularly Radcliffe's, simultaneously "works towards entrapment and enlightenment... Thus it tends to subvert both disbelief and belief: we imaginatively participate in unfamiliar feelings and attitudes, but we simultaneously judge those very beliefs from a position of superior understanding."³⁹ The problem with McWhir's reading is that such a judgment is by no means "simultaneous," but is rather, in the case of *The Italian*, consecutive. It is only *after* participating in the unfamiliar feelings and attitudes that we can judge them to be false or odd. The author, not the reader, stands at the Lacanian "hour of truth." In this way Radcliffe's novel is didactic. Like Richardson's *Pamela* it aims not only to correct the errors of its characters through its narrative (which is in large part Schedoni's and which the other characters read), but also to instruct the reader; a workbook for hysterical readers of romance rather than a handbook for virtuous maids.⁴⁰

II. "A Violent Conflict of Feelings"⁴¹: The Sublime and the Supernatural in Kant and Burke

In order to figure out exactly how Radcliffe's revision of Burke's aesthetics and politics works, let us begin where Burke begins: with the phenomenology of the "passions." According to Burke, there are three primary states of the human mind: pain, pleasure and indifference or tranquility. The first two states, pain and pleasure, are what he, following Locke, calls "simple ideas"—meaning that they are "incapable of

definition.”⁴² Locke states that all simple ideas are “positive,”⁴³ going so far as to ask this exceedingly gothic question: does “the shadow of a man... when a man look on it, cause as clear and positive an *idea*, a man himself, though covered in clear sunshine? Thus one may be truly said to see darkness.”⁴⁴ Burke makes it a point to indicate that the opposed states of pleasure and pain are not passive, but “positive” qualities as well. Thus neither is dependent upon the other and both pleasure and pain can be present at the same time. Indifference, on the other hand, is a “negative” quality in that it is wholly dependent on the absence of pleasure and pain. On this phenomenological level, Radcliffe is in essential agreement with Burke—it is possible that Radcliffe might assign a positive value to tranquility, but for the most part Radcliffe’s critique begins only when Burke moves on to analyze the *causes* of the passions as they exist.

For Burke, there are two fundamental sources of the passions in a society: a) *general society* “which we have with men and with other animals, and which we may in some sort be said to have even with the inanimate world”: these passions belong solely “to the preservation of the individual,” and “turn wholly on pain and danger;” and b) *the society of the sexes*: “those [passions] which belong to *generation*, have their origin in gratifications and pleasures.”⁴⁵ Because pain and pleasure are positive qualities, even a stilted lover (such as Vivaldi or Schedoni) is not affected by the positive effect of pain, but is simply enlivened by a desire for pleasure:

when men have suffered their imaginations to be long affected with any idea, it so wholly engrosses them as to shut out by degrees almost any other, and to break

down partition of the mind which would confine it... but this at most can only prove, that the passion of love is capable of producing very extraordinary effects, not that its extraordinary emotions have any connection with positive pain.⁴⁶

Thus sexual deprivation is not exactly pain, but strangely enough deprivation of “general society” is: “absolute and entire *solitude*, that is, the total and perpetual exclusion from all society, is as great a positive pain as can almost be conceived.”⁴⁷

It is unclear whether Burke contradicts himself on this point, but in any case Radcliffe greatly revises his analysis of society—or rather, she spells out the consequences of his ideas. The first part of her critique should be apparent: Burke’s analysis of sexual pleasure is entirely male in as much as it is based upon the notion of pursuit and capture. The male pursues the female and gratifies his pleasure, leaving little room for the female to experience any sort of pleasure in a society. Indeed, when Burke speaks of the pleasures of a society they are mere “heightenings” and “habitudes” of more primal pleasures. Excluded from society because of her “disparity of fortune,” Ellena would seem to have no opportunity for pleasure, but would remain a victim of the “designs” of men. And indeed, several different men have designs for her in which her fears concerning her “self-preservation” end up serving as means to an end (i.e., the gratification of the “passion of generation”). The subject nearest Vivaldi’s heart, for example, is “to represent the evils, that might overtake them, and to urge an immediate solemnization of their marriage.”⁴⁸ Or, slightly later, we see this situation again in which the satisfaction of the male sexual passions creates the possibility for female tranquility:

Vivaldi “had little doubt of prevailing with one [of the Benedictine brothers] to solemnize the nuptials, which he believed would place *his happiness* and *Ellena’s peace*, beyond the influence of malignant possibilities”⁴⁹ (my italics). Female happiness or female pleasure drops out of the equation and becomes, like indifference, a negative or neutral quality. Instead, the model is one in which female (bourgeois) tranquility is disturbed by male (aristocratic) desire. In Freudian terminology it is the problem of the pleasure principle and the death drive. In Burke’s terminology, it is the problem of the absence of pleasure (Vivaldi’s desire) and the absence of pain (Ellena’s tranquility). The state of male pleasure and the state of female tranquility are dependent upon one another—the only way that Ellena can maintain her tranquility is through remaining hidden, that is, through (weaving) a veil. This Penelopean weaving of delay secures not only Ellena’s neutral tranquility, but also her position as a self-sufficient bourgeois artist.

This conundrum is posed formally in the novel when Ellena has to choose between “three evils”: a) the forced confinement by Schedoni; b) the “threatened marriage”; or c) taking the veil—i.e., “a formal renunciation of the world.”⁵⁰ Surprisingly, of the three, Ellena decides to choose the first, imprisonment, perhaps because it allows her—paradoxically—the most freedom. By vowing to place herself in a state of eternal suspense, Ellena asserts her own “dignity” and “dignified tranquility”⁵¹ and declines to bow to “the vehemence of passion” or the “weakness of fear.”⁵² In this way she can meet the “designs formed against her” with fortitude.

At times like this it would appear that Radcliffe borders on positing something along the lines of the Kantian moral law in which one is not necessarily happy, but becomes “self-content.” In this reading, Ellena’s “dignified tranquility” resembles not only Burke’s primary state of the absence of pleasure and pain, but also goes a step beyond this in positing a state that is an active abjection of these two feelings as is found in the Kantian notion of respect:

Respect, in contrast to the gratification or enjoyment of happiness, is something for which there can be no feeling basic and prior to reason, for such a feeling would always be sensuous and pathological. Respect as the consciousness of the direct constraint of the will through law is hardly analogous to the feeling of pleasure, although in the relation to the faculty of desire it produces the exact same effect.⁵³

According to Kant, “self-contentment,” like the Burkean notion of tranquility, “refers only to the negative satisfaction with existence in which one is conscious of needing nothing.”⁵⁴ In her captivity, this seems to be Ellena’s primary goal, her “dignified tranquility.” And indeed, only a few pages later Ellena has her first encounter with Kant’s bridge to the moral imperative, the “painful pleasure” of the sublime. It is not at all clear that the encounter is in line with the Burkean description of the sublime as merely an overburdening of the passions, or whether it leads to a Kantian version of transcendental freedom and “subjective assertion.” This turn in the novel to the discourse

of the sublime only further complicates Radcliffe's idiosyncratic melding (and mimicry) of Burke and Kant.

For Burke, the sublime is “productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling”⁵⁵ and leads to a “delight” and “elevation of the mind”⁵⁶ only if “it does not press too close.”⁵⁷ When the sublime is too close it produces only terror, but when contemplated from afar produces the famous “dreadful pleasure”⁵⁸ of rapture. In contrast to Kant's abstract and indefinite “purposiveness” that foreshadows merely our own radical freedom, for Burke the sublime is not only a window into the mind but is also a window on work of God: “The more accurately we search into the human mind, the stronger traces we every where find of his wisdom who made it... the use of the passions, which are the organs of the mind, cannot be barren of praise to him.”⁵⁹ Through this “contemplation of the works of infinite wisdom” we discover our own weaknesses and imperfections, and “adoring their profundity where we are lost in our search, we may be inquisitive without impertinence, and elevated without pride; we may be admitted... into the counsels of the Almighty by a consideration of his works.”⁶⁰

Significantly, in describing this religious revelation of the sublime, Burke uses two descriptions that are important for Radcliffe. First, the “work” of god is *designed* to affect the “rationale of our passions.”⁶¹ This phraseology is important not only because it directly references the theological debate over the “argument from design,” but also because it gestures in the direction of Radcliffe's particular appropriation of the term *design* as representative of authorial design. Indeed, in Burke's discussion of sublime

terror leading up to his argument from design, he brings up fiction as a mode of distancing oneself from terrible events. Through “sympathy,” we can consider “that so melancholy a story is no more than a fiction” and contemplate “our own freedom from the evils which we see represented.”⁶² As we shall see, this disinterested contemplation is directly analogous to Ellena’s gazing “beyond the awful veil which obscures the features of the Deity, and conceals Him from the eyes of his creatures, dwelling as with a present God in the midst of his sublime works; with a mind thus elevated, how insignificant would appear to her the transactions, and the sufferings of this world!”⁶³ This “veil of fiction” thus refers not only to the designs of God, but also to the designs of Ellena, Schedoni, Vivaldi, and Radcliffe herself.

Secondly, in describing the sublime perception of the work of God, Burke employs the image of *piercing* “into the inmost, and what might appear inaccessible parts of our nature.”⁶⁴ The discourse of penetration pervades the entirety of Radcliffe’s novel, most often in relation to an “impenetrable veil” or a “penetrating glance.”⁶⁵ This “piercing” or “penetration” refers, of course, not only to penetrating the “veil of nature” and looking upon the work of God (i.e., that which is designed to affect the passions), but also, of course, to reading the thoughts of an individual, or penetrating the veil which Ellena draws over herself, the “veil of retirement” (i.e., the “genius” of Ellena’s designs). The sexual overtones present in Burke’s description of the ravaged queen in the *Reflections* thus gain a more epistemological scope in *The Italian*, perhaps reaching their apex in Shelley’s sonnet “Lift not the painted veil,” or the *Defense*’s declaration that “veil

after veil” of a poem “may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed.”⁶⁶ Shelley was a close reader of Radcliffe, and his phrase obviously echoes and plays upon *The Italian*’s “tender complacency of Ellena’s, which her veil, partly undrawn, allowed him to observe.”⁶⁷

To return to our comparison of Burke and Kant, we might ask whether in contemplating the sublime Ellena ends up merely contemplating the work of God, or whether she does in fact posit some sort of inner, moral law. In Kant, the sublime “raises the energies of the soul above their accustomed height and discover in us a faculty of resistance of quite a different kind. We measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature.”⁶⁸ In other words, in our failure to comprehend the sublime, we recognize within ourselves a radical freedom distinct from the objective universe of cause and effect—we recognize ourselves as radically free subjects. In Burke, our failure is finite and empirical and dependent upon “our own imperfections”⁶⁹ —in Kant, our failure is infinite. I have already suggested that perhaps Ellena, by contemplating her own “dignified tranquility,” is in fact perceiving her radical freedom. The question then arises: is this Ellena’s ultimate discovery? For Kant, there is nothing beyond the moral law and radical freedom—the *idea* of a benevolent deity exists for Kant, but, as he says in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, the idea of God is dependent upon the experience of transcendental freedom, and not the other way around.⁷⁰

It is true that the beginning of Ellena’s contemplation of the sublime begins with the realization of her own freedom, her “dignified tranquility,” but it ends up being not a

positive freedom as it is for Kant (I create my own law), but rather a *negative* freedom⁷¹ closer to Burke's conception (I am free from the law of someone else). Consequently in Radcliffe the sublime is not used as a stepping stone to the realization of radical freedom, but precisely the opposite—the naturalization and secularization of the supernatural and, conversely, the deification of the natural. It is only when she tranquilly contemplates the veil of nature and the work of God that Ellena realizes her “negative freedom”—that is, her liberty from the designs of man:

How poor the boasted power of man, when the fall of a single cliff from these mountains would with ease destroy thousands of his race assembled on the plains below!... Thus man, the giant who now held her in captivity, would shrink to the diminutiveness of a fairy; and she would experience, that his utmost force was unable to enchain her soul, or to compel her to fear him, while he was destitute of virtue.⁷²

This experience of the sublime, though it is purely subjective in the Kantian sense, is not so much a discovery of the radical freedom of her own soul, as it is an unmasking of the illusion of radical evil—that is, of the designs of men, of what Radcliffe calls the “invisible hand” that guides Ellena's course.⁷³ Through this Burkean experience of the sublime one trains oneself not to look into the great beyond, but precisely the opposite: one discovers that there is no great beyond, there is no “evil genius” or invisible hand except for the hand of God. One becomes, above all, disinterested. In this way the sublime acts as a type of good or beneficial limbo time (the Lacanian “time for

comprehending”) where one can reflect and gain perspective on one’s individual situation. It is one of the few times in the novel where one is overloaded with, rather than deprived of, sense data.⁷⁴

This sacralization of perception is also a sort of secularization or normalization—there is *only* God. It colors all other examples of the supernatural in the book and lies in direct contrast to Kant’s notion. Through depictions of the hell, heaven, ghosts and the supernatural more generally Kant believes that the imagination is able to “strive beyond nature” and free itself—and thus the radically free subject—from “the law of association.”⁷⁵ Radcliffe, indeed, takes an entirely opposite, perhaps Lockean or Humean, view: by imagining the supernatural, you are not defying the law of association, but rather adhering to it in its strictest sense, bypassing the “time for understanding” and arriving directly at a conclusion. Schedoni so easily leads Vivaldi astray because Vivaldi’s tragic flaw is a

susceptibility which renders [him] especially liable to superstition... what ardent imagination ever was contented to trust to plain reasoning, or to the evidence of the senses? It may not confine itself to the dull truths of this earth, but, eager to expand its faculties, to fill its capacity, and to experience its own peculiar delights, soars after new wonders into a world of its own.⁷⁶

For Kant, this would be a step in the direction of comprehending or discovering the *Geist* (both ghost and spirit), and thence the moral law. In her critique, Radcliffe follows the early Burke more than Kant.

And yet, at the beginning of the novel one of the things that Ellena must learn is precisely self-sufficiency: “Her mind was not yet strong enough, or her views sufficiently enlarged, to teach her a contempt of the sneer of vicious folly, and to glory in the *dignity* of virtuous independence.”⁷⁷ In this sense the novel is a *Bildungsroman*: Vivaldi must strengthen his mind and his sensibility so as to no longer posit the supernatural; Ellena must attain the strength to endure her bourgeois independence and industry—in other words, her very own authorship. For at the beginning of the novel “Ellena could have endured poverty, but not contempt; and it was to protect herself from this effect of the narrow prejudices of the world around her, that she had so cautiously concealed from it a knowledge of the industry, which did honor to her character.”⁷⁸ This anti-aristocratic, bourgeois self-sufficiency sounds a great deal closer to the Kantian (Enlightenment) ideal than to the early Burke, and lies in direct opposition to Burke’s critique of the Enlightenment in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Indeed, following his Enlightenment prerogative, Kant makes an explicit comparison between divine and secular authorship that remains implicit in Radcliffe’s discussions of *veils* and *designs*: “Freedom and the consciousness of freedom... is analogous to the self-sufficiency which can be ascribed only to the Supreme Being.”⁷⁹ With this quote in mind, let us now turn to a closer examination of Radcliffe’s uses of the words *design*, *veil* and *genius*, particularly as they relate to the problems of evil raised in the novel.

III. Diabolical Design and Radical Evil

According to Alenka Zupancic Kant envisaged four distinct types of evil: 1. human *frailty* in which “we yield to pathological motives *in spite of* our will to do good”; 2. the *impurity* of the human will, in which we do good, but for the wrong reasons—for example, in the case of self-love; 3. *radical evil*, in which “we make the incentives of self-love the *condition* of obedience to the moral law... it does not refer to an empirical act, but to the root of all pathological, non-ethical conduct”; and finally 4. *diabolical evil*, reserved for non-human beings, such as demons.⁸⁰

In the beginning of *The Italian*, among the ruins, the indistinct figure of Schedoni is first encountered as quite possibly ghostly or inhuman, informing Vivaldi of events that appear to exist beyond the realm of earthly knowledge. It is as though Schedoni had a window into the divine, or as if he perhaps had designed and authored these events himself. Just before his first formal meeting with Schedoni, Vivaldi declares: “This man crosses me, like my evil genius... but I will know whether he deserves my suspicions before I leave the room.”⁸¹ Within this passage there is an odd play on the word *cross*. Schedoni not only contradicts and meets up with Vivaldi, but marks him, both in the sense of making a Christian cross over him, but also in the sense of physically marking him as with lines. And indeed, in the next sentence, Vivaldi reverses this situation and examines Schedoni’s “countenance... tracing subjects for curiosity in its deep lines.” In

an archaic usage, they *design* one another—that is, they both mark (designate), as well as integrate each other into a larger plan or scheme.

Vivaldi's plan is short term and seemingly spontaneous—to make Schedoni atone for the affront—whereas Schedoni's scheme is presented to us as an example of radical evil. In other words, Schedoni's plan arises not from a particular circumstance, as does Vivaldi's, but from a fundamental principle in existence prior to, and presumably alien to, Vivaldi's arrival: “the confessor perceived his power, and the character of Vivaldi lay before him as a map. He saw, or fancied he saw every line and feature of its plan, and the relative proportions of every energy and weakness of its nature. He believed, also, he could turn the very virtues of this young man against himself.”⁸² Outwardly, this dark plan is directed at the “outrage” allegedly perpetrated by Vivaldi, but, this early in the book and due to Schedoni's earlier appearances, it is unclear how far Schedoni's powers extend. Can he read souls? By “ruminating evils,”⁸³ can he also design or author events, as a deity might?

A fruitful way for understanding Vivaldi's description of Schedoni as an “evil genius” can be found in Descartes' First Meditation. In this passage, Descartes seeks to expunge everything from his mind which is subject to doubt, and conjures up the idea of a *mauvais genie* (translated as “malignant demon,” “malignant deity,” and, more commonly, “evil genius”):

I will suppose therefore that not God, who is supremely good and the source of all truth, but rather some malicious demon [mauvais génie] of the utmost power and

cunning has applied all of his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds, and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgment. I shall consider myself as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood or senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things. I shall stubbornly and firmly persist in this meditation; and, even if it is not in my power to know any truth, I shall at least do what is in my power [to “suspend my judgment” in the French version], that is, resolutely guard against assenting to any falsehoods, so that the deceiver, however powerful and cunning he may be, will be unable to impose on me in the slightest degree.⁸⁴

Descartes’ scenario, which he later describes as being that of “a prisoner who is enjoying an imaginary freedom while asleep,” plays out the paranoid fantasies of *The Italian* to their logical conclusion. Evil genii are necessary for clarity of thought and judgment. It is through submitting oneself to such radical doubt (which in Descartes’ doubt amounts to also a radical *belief* in such a deity) that one can attain the “strength of mind” towards which both Ellena and Vivaldi are working.

It is probable that Radcliffe’s positing Schedoni as an “evil genius” and author of events is borrowed more or less directly from Schiller’s novella *Der Geisterseher* (translated as *The Ghost-seer* in 1795). And in fact, Schiller’s book takes its title from an extended essay by Kant called *Träume eines Geistersehers* (translated as *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*).⁸⁵ As Geoffrey Buyers points out, Radcliffe’s Schedoni seems at least

partially based upon Schiller's Armenian: "The motive of the mysterious and prophetic stranger is common to the opening of both works; and Schedoni shares many traits with Schiller's Armenian. They both have strange personalities, uncanny fits, mysterious absences; and they are both predictors of death."⁸⁶ There are dozens of other coincidences: both Schedoni and the Armenian are described as "men of the world,"⁸⁷ Vivaldi and Schiller's Prince are both hysterical seers of ghosts because of their weaknesses and their "immature minds;"⁸⁸ there are "guide" characters named Jeronimo/Jeronymo in both works; both Schedoni and the Armenian have countenances upon which "all the passions seemed to have left their ravages... and then departed;"⁸⁹ and, most importantly, both Schedoni and Schiller's Armenian are posited as *omniscient* authors controlling and designing events: evil genii.

At the beginning of *Der Geisterseher* the Prince worries that "A higher power is pursuing me. Some all-knowing shape is hovering around me. An invisible being from which I cannot escape is watching over my every step. I must track down the Armenian and get him to shed light on the subject."⁹⁰ And soon, as in the case of Vivaldi, the Prince suddenly assumes that it is in fact the Armenian who is the supernatural agent. He hears stories of the Armenian disappearing every night at midnight to "discourse with his genius [*seinem Genius*]."⁹¹ Finally, at the end of the first book (all that was published before the publication of Radcliffe's novel in 1795), the Prince begins to call into question the omniscience of the Armenian who, through his "designs" had "me duped, whilst he himself, unobserved and unsuspected, bound me in invisible ropes."⁹² The

Armenian is posited as potentially the omniscient author of the events in the novella, even though this positing is later rescinded for a realist, empiricist position.

This discussion of “invisible ropes” and “invisible beings” should call to mind Ellena’s ruminations on “the invisible hand” that guides her course and Vivaldi’s positing of Schedoni as an evil genius. Indeed, it seems that Radcliffe borrowed this vein of her story more or less directly from Schiller, and it is even likely that she borrows her phraseology (*design* and *genius*) from the Schiller. Radcliffe uses the term *genius* only three times in the novel⁹³: the first time is when Vivaldi suspiciously marks Schedoni as his “evil genius” who lurks behind the supernatural events; the second time is when a monk in the “fire of genius,” with “designs” that are potentially “evil,” helps to save Ellena and Vivaldi⁹⁴; and finally, near the end of the novel we learn that Ellena has a “genius” for embroidery and “design.”⁹⁵ Through these three uses of *genius*, the fundamental connection between the idea of “authoring” events and a sort of bourgeois art or design becomes clear.⁹⁶

In a way, this comparison between an omniscient, evil character and the author herself makes complete sense: just as Schedoni or Schiller’s Armenian lead various characters into states of uncertainty and hysteria, Radcliffe also leads her readers into those states. The author participates in creating the very same “evil designs” as Schedoni. We might ask, then, if, as Walpole explains in the preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, the author of a modern romance must represent his/her characters as believing in the supernatural while the author him/herself does not (just as Schedoni and the

Armenian do not believe in the supernatural but nonetheless employ it), why does the author compel the reader to participate in the belief in the supernatural? The reason is precisely the same as the reason the characters participate in such belief: they must learn their weaknesses and strengthen their minds, just as Vivaldi learns his weakness and Ellena learns how to take pride in the dignity of her “virtuous independence.” Thus the “evil genius” is something that must be defeated, tamed, pacified. As in Descartes it is a necessary process of doubt through which one must pass in order to achieve a higher reason and an immunity to superstition. Schedoni is first presented as possibly an evil genius, practicing a radical evil that borders on the diabolical, and then is quickly, and literally, domesticated. In this same way, the reader learns that the text is a self-conscious production: through the quotations at the beginning of each chapter; through the overt intertextual borrowings within the story itself; through the relatively overt comparison between the “designs” of Schedoni and the “design” of the text; and, ultimately, through the conspicuously artificial comic epilogue in which Paulo suggests that we “speak before we think.” Just as Ellena, through her experience of the sublime learns of her radical freedom from the designs of man, so too does the reader learn of his/her own freedom from the lesson of text (*speak before you think*) by choosing its opposite.

IV. Conclusion: “No Power to Hasten His Decision”

Zupancic has argued that the “ultimate act of terror, the most radical terror, is when we are *forced* to subjectivize ourselves, where we are forced to choose.”⁹⁷ To some extent, this is what Ellena experiences when she is given the three “evil” alternatives of perpetual confinement, “a formal renunciation of the world,” or a “threatened marriage.” Zupancic narrows this definition when she gives a specific example taken from Lacan: at gunpoint, someone demands of you, *freedom or death*. According to Lacan, the only way that you can choose *freedom* (your right to choose) is by choosing *death*. For by choosing *freedom*, you would be forfeiting your freedom: “the only way the subject can stay true to her Cause is by betraying it, *by sacrificing to it the very thing which drives her to make this sacrifice.*”⁹⁸ A similarly dire situation arises in *The Italian* when Vivaldi is forced to choose between *lying* and *torture*:

“If you torture me till I acknowledge the justness of this accusation... I must expire under your afflictions, for suffering shall never compel me to assert a falsehood. It is not the truth which you seek; it is not the guilty, whom you punish; the innocent, having no crimes to confess, are the victims of your cruelty, or, to escape from it, become criminal, and proclaim a lie.”⁹⁹

As in the case of Ellena’s imprisonment, it is only by submitting to the superficial law (of torture) of the Inquisition that Vivaldi can assert his freedom from the underlying law (of producing truth from lies). And through this adherence to such a double law, enlightenment/entrapment, both Vivaldi and Ellena work towards the “disinterestedness”

that allows them to judge events and superstition from a standpoint of pure reason: that is, through submitting to the law of the Other, they give the law to themselves and stand at their own “hour of truth.”

Phrased as both a critique of superstition and “ancient institutions”¹⁰⁰ as well as of the possible misuse of enlightenment, Radcliffe bypasses both Burke and Kant. In other words, she both launches a critique of reason as an institution (contra Kant) and also a critique of superstition and conservatism (contra Burke).¹⁰¹ And, on the other side, she both advocates the adherence to a moral law (pro Kant) and the institution of aristocratic marriage (pro Burke). Thus, before the final epilogue we are left with the image of an ideal which closely resembles Schiller’s Prince, spending large amounts of money and scrutinizing the world around him.¹⁰² And yet the Prince of *Der Geisterseher* is cynical and angry—his friends dislike him and he dislikes himself because he has submitted to the law of reason. In the end, he gives up both his belief in the supernatural and in the power of skeptical reason, and becomes Catholic. He falls back on Burke’s “mysterious wisdom of institutions.”

It is clear that Schiller’s ending is entirely ironic (in spite of the greater irony that so many of the German Romantics ended up converting to Roman Catholicism late in life), and it would be easy to read Radcliffe’s comic epilogue in the same way. I believe, however, that one can also read Radcliffe’s ending as completely serious in that it overturns the law written by the book. In his comprehensive study *The Gothic Sublime*, Vijay Mishra argues that “all of Radcliffe’s works explore the same theme, and each later

text is a revision of the one before” and that her work, particularly in *The Italian*, becomes “an endless deferral of the principle of life as life seeks to evade the embassy of death.”¹⁰³ Through the comic epilogue the novel in effect defers a final conclusion and provides a *way out* for both the author and the reader. By calling the “moral lesson” of the novel into question at the very end, the novel (and the author) forsake any sort of final responsibility, but choose to hand over such responsibility to the reader. Indeed, by voicing this revision through a minor, lower class character, even the main characters are absconded. Both the veil of retirement and the decent drapery of life are restored, and yet the possibility for the Kantian adherence to a moral law is maintained—in fact, this law is maintained precisely through the exception to the law.¹⁰⁴ Ellena finds her “dignified tranquility” and pride in her designs only by abandoning them and abandoning her bourgeois position of “industry.” Certainly, this is a conservative ending in which female, bourgeois tranquility is restored only through male, aristocratic gratification.¹⁰⁵ And yet, in the end, it is the reader who retains the freedom to decide—the author has fled behind the veil.

¹ Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents*, ed. Frederick Garber (New York, 1992), 414.

² *Ibid.*, 415.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 383.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶ “*The Italian* (1797 [*sic*, it was actually published in late 1796]) was the last novel produced by Radcliffe during her lifetime. Three years had elapsed since the publication of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, two since her book of travel writing, *A Journey Down the Rhine*. Given the frantic pace of Radcliffe’s early career—five books in six years—the two allotted to the relatively slim *Italian* gives the impression that this was a final, considered text, one putting her earlier work in a measured, self-conscious perspective.” Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (New York, 1995), 149-50.

⁷ James Watt argues that Gothic fiction “constituted or structured by the often antagonistic relations between different writers and works”. The Gothic, in other words, functions as a self-consciously intertextual genre, and thus keenly aware of its own status qua fiction. See *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre, and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* (Cambridge, 2006), 6.

⁸ Michel Foucault “What Is an Author?” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, 1977), 132.

⁹ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 411.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 413.

¹¹ Although it is unlikely that Radcliffe was directly familiar with these writings, she in many ways anticipates and responds to what they say—they are helpful, therefore, for this reason.

¹² Following Edward Said I am using the term *philology* as a term akin to *genealogy*: “as Nietzsche was to put it... the truth concerning human history is ‘a mobile army of metaphors and metonyms’ whose meaning is to be decoded by acts of reading and interpretation grounded in the shapes of words as bearers of reality, a reality hidden, misleading, resistant, and difficult.” *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York, 2003), 58.

¹³ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven, 2003), 66.

¹⁴ For reference to Kant and Sade in particular, see for example, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*: “For subjectivity, reason is the chemical agent which absorbs the individual substance of things and volatilizes them in the mere autonomy of reason. In order to escape the superstitious fear of nature, it wholly transformed objective effective entities and forms into mere veils of chaotic matter, and anaesthetized their influence on humanity as slavery, until the ideal form of the subject was no more than unique, unrestricted, though vacuous authority.” Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London, 1997), 89-90.

¹⁵ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 198.

¹⁶ Burke, *Reflections*, 66.

¹⁷ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 198.

¹⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 66.

¹⁹ This reading of Kant has become relatively standard. See, for example, Žižek’s essay “Kant and Sade: the Ideal Couple”: “Via the reference to Sade, Lacan reads absence in Kant as an act of rendering invisible, of “repressing,” the moral Law’s enunciator, and it is Sade who renders it visible in the figure of the ‘sadist’ executioner-torturer—this executioner is the enunciator of the moral Law, the agent who finds pleasure in our (the moral subject’s) pain and humiliation.” *Lacanian Ink* 13, 12-25.

²⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 66. “On this scheme of things, a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order...”

²¹ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 197—it is significant that Vivaldi reads this in their faces, since, in the rest of the novel, faces are windows into the soul. Even if this “supernatural” aspect of reason is overturned later in the novel, it is important that it is first posited as supernatural.

²² See the Introduction to Malcolm Ware, *Sublimity in the Novels of Ann Radcliffe: a Study of the Influence upon her Craft of Edmund Burke’s Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Upsala, 1963).

²³ Edmund Burke, *Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful and other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, ed. David Womersley (New York, 1998), 103. In *The Italian*, Schedoni is an obvious example of this type of veiled despotism.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 105-6.

²⁵ Franz Kafka, “A Report to an Academy” in *The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York, 1971), 257. “There was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason... the line I was to follow had in any case been decided, once and for all.”

²⁶ Syndy Conger argues that “sensory deprivation” is a fundamental aspect of *The Italian*, if not all of Radcliffe’s fiction: “light is absent, sounds are muffled, and figures are shadowy and often seemingly substanceless.” Syndy Conger, “Sensibility Restored: Radcliffe’s Answer to Lewis’s *The Monk*” in *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition / Transgression*, ed. Kenneth Graham (New York, 1989), 131.

²⁷ See Jacques Lacan, “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*,” trans. Jacques-Alain Miller and James Hulbert, *Yale French Studies*, no. 55/56: “Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise” (1977), 11-52.

²⁸ Jacques Lacan, “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism” in *Ecrits: the First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bernard Fink (New York, 2007), 167.

²⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume II*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, 1985), 70-1.

³⁰ Lacan, “Desire and Interpretation,” 17: “In neurosis, on the contrary, the very basis of the relationships of subject to object on the fantasy level, is the relationship of the subject to time. The object is charged with the significance sought in what I call the hour of truth, in which the object is always at another hour, fast or slow, early or late... Hamlet is constantly suspended in the time of the Other, throughout the entire story until the very end.”

³¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

³² For more on delay in *The Italian*, see Mark M. Hennelly Jr., “‘The Slow Torture of Delay’: Reading *The Italian*,” *Studies in the Humanities* 14.1 (June 1987), 1-17.

³³ Lacan, “Logical Time,” 170.

³⁴ Quoted in Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago, 1995), 67.

³⁵ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 238.

³⁶ Kim Ian Michasiw argues that such a moment of hesitation would indicate that evil within *The Italian* is in fact institutional (and thus Burkean) rather than transcendental: “In Schedoni’s fall we observe the denial of individual evil and the logical consequent to the demystifying conclusions of the earlier novels. The person who inspires terror does so only through the observer’s nescience; institutions that terrify do so because they are the true locus of power and the more accurately they are known the more terrifying they become.” See “Ann Radcliffe and the Terrors of Power,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 6.4 (July 1994), 342.

³⁷ Marshall Brown, “A Philosophical View of the Gothic Novel,” *Studies in Romanticism*, 26 (Summer 1987), 279-80.

³⁸ Rictor Norton, *The Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London, 1999), 125.

³⁹ Ann McWhir, “The Gothic Transgression of Disbelief” in *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition / Transgression*, ed. Kenneth Graham (New York, 1989), 32-3.

⁴⁰ We might note that Lacan refers to the process of neurosis as a process of reading: “This is at the base of neurotic behavior, in its most general form: the subject tries to find his sense of time [*lire son heure*] in his object, and it is even in the object that he will learn to tell time [*lire l'heure*].” Lacan, “Desire and Interpretation,” 17.

⁴¹ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 73.

⁴² Burke, *Enquiry*, 80.

⁴³ “Concerning the simple *ideas* of sensation ‘tis to be considered, that whatsoever is constituted in nature, as to be able, by affecting our senses, to cause any perception in the mind, does thereby produce in the understanding a simple *idea*; which, whatever be the external cause of it, when it comes to be taken notice of, by our discerning faculty, it is by the mind looked on and considered there, to be a real *positive idea* in the understanding, as much as any other whatsoever; though, perhaps, the cause of it be but a privation in the subject” It is unclear whether Locke believes that there could be such a thing as a *negative idea*. John Locke, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Kenneth Winkler (Indianapolis, 1996), 47.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 87.

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- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 84.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 85.
- ⁵³ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York, 1956), 121-2.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.
- ⁵⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 86.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.
- ⁵⁸ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 90.
- ⁵⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 98.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.* Gary Gautier gives another formulation of this difference: “To give a political edge to the contrast, the Kantian sublime empowers the subject at the expense of the presumably awe-inspiring object, while the Burkean sublime reinforces the power of the awe-inspiring object at the expense of the terrified subject.” See “Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* in Context: Gothic Villains, Romantic Heroes, and a New Age of Power Relations,” *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture* 32.3 (October 1999), 215.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 91.
- ⁶³ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 90-1.
- ⁶⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 98.
- ⁶⁵ See, for example, *The Italian*, 49, in which Vivaldi employs a “penetrating glance” to read the countenance of Schedoni; or 35 when Schedoni is described as having eyes so piercing that they seemed to penetrate, at a single glance, into the hearts of men, and to read their most secret thoughts.”
- ⁶⁶ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defense of Poetry in Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, Second Edition, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York, 2002), 528. The phrase also turns up in *Epipsychidion*, l. 472.
- ⁶⁷ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 411.
- ⁶⁸ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (New York, 1987), 183.
- ⁶⁹ This would seem to relate to what Burke describes as the “discovery of our own imperfections”—Burke, *Enquiry*, 98.
- ⁷⁰ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 4. Kant uses the term “transcendental” freedom, though I am translating this as “radical” in order to draw a comparison with his discussion of “radical evil.”
- ⁷¹ I am here, of course, following Isaiah Berlin’s famous formulation in his “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958), where defines *negative freedom* as “not being interfered with by others,” remarking that this is the conception of freedom used by “the classical English political philosophers.” Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, ed. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York, 1997), 197.
- ⁷² Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 91.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 61.
- ⁷⁴ And in fact, this description occurs not only in the *Akzeit* of the character’s time, but also in the *Textzeit*, the long passages describing nature and landscape.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.
- ⁷⁶ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 397-8.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 9—my italics.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁹ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 123.
- ⁸⁰ Alenka Zupancic, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, (New York, 2000), 88-9.

⁸¹ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 48

⁸² *Ibid.*, 52.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ René Descartes, *Meditations on the First Philosophy* in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol. II*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoof and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge, 1984), 15.

⁸⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, trans. Emanuel Goerwitz (New York, 1900). In the preface to the book, Goerwitz indicates that he had translated *Geistseher* as “spirit-seer” and not, as is more common, as “ghost-seer” because had Kant intended the meaning “ghost” he would have used the term *Gespent* (see vii). In either case, the possibility to interpret *Geist* as “ghost” certainly exists for the simple reason that the entire book is devoted to an examination of Swedenborg, who was precisely a seer of ghosts—and indeed, in Schiller’s borrowing of the title, he seems to have taken this approach.

⁸⁶ Geoffrey Buyers, “The Influence of Schiller’s Drama and Fiction upon English Literature in the Period 1780-1830,” *Englische Studien* 48 (1915), 385-6.

⁸⁷ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 48;

⁸⁸ Friedrich von Schiller, *The Ghost-Seer*, trans. Andrew Brown (London, 2003), 5.

⁸⁹ See Schiller, *The Ghost-Seer*, 13 and Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 35: Schedoni’s physiognomy “bore the traces of many passions, which seemed to have fixed the features they no longer animated.” Syndy Conger in her essay “Sensibility Restored” points out this particular coincidence, 131.

⁹⁰ Schiller, *The Ghost-Seer*, 13.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 33. For the German, see Friedrich von Schiller, “Der Geisterseher” in *Historische Schriften und Erzählungen II* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), 621. It might also be of interest to read Schiller’s allegory of the two genii on this point in his essay on the sublime: “Nature has given us two genii [*zwei Genien*] as companions in our life in this lower world. The one, amiable and of good companionship, shortens the troubles of the journey by the gaiety of its plays. It makes the chains of necessity light to us, and leads us, amidst joy and laughter, to the most perilous spots, where we must act as pure spirits and ourselves of all that is body, on the knowledge of the true and the practice of duty... at this moment the other companion steps upon the stage, silent and grave, and with his powerful arm carries us beyond the precipice that has made us giddy.” “On the Sublime” in *Aesthetic and Philosophical Essays, Vol. I*, ed. Nathan Haskell Dole (Boston, 1902), 126.

⁹² Schiller, *The Ghost-Seer*, 51. It should also be noted that the 1800 translation also uses the term “design.” Friedrich von Schiller, *The Armenian; or, the ghost seer. A history founded on fact*, trans. Rev. W. Render. Vol. 1. (London, 1800), 147.

⁹³ She does use it a fourth time in a quote from Milton, 179.

⁹⁴ In the paragraph before we learn that the monk is in the “fire of genius,” Vivaldi, “endeavoring to penetrate the farthest gloom of the chamber” with a lamp asks: “If your designs are evil—tremble, for you shall find I am desperate,” 140-1.

⁹⁵ “When Ellena was of an age to assist her [aunt], she resigned much of the employment and the profit to her niece, whose genius having unfolded itself, the beauty of her designs and the elegance of her execution, both in drawings and embroidery, were so highly valued by the purchasers at the rate of the movement, that Bianchi committed to Ellena altogether the exercise of her art,” 383.

⁹⁶ This seems particular to Radcliffe’s novel. I have done a meticulous search through Lewis’ *The Monk* (a text against which Radcliffe is consciously writing and which also self-consciously appropriated Schiller), and I have discovered that Radcliffe uses at least two meanings or connotations of the term design which are absent in Lewis’ novel: that is, the idea of *design* as the work of an *omniscient*, evil author; and the self-reflexive notion of *design* as a work of art.

⁹⁷ Zupancic, *Ethics of the Real*, 213.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁹⁹ Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 203.

¹⁰⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 67.

¹⁰¹ Burke raises the question of whether the clergy truly were, as the French claimed, “monsters: an horrible composition of superstition, ignorance, sloth, fraud, avarice, and tyranny” and answers decidedly in the negative—Burke, *Reflections*, 122.

¹⁰² It is unclear whether Radcliffe had read or heard of the second volume of *Der Geisterseher*, but in any case she certainly anticipates its narrative direction.

¹⁰³ Vijay Mishra, *The Gothic Sublime* (New York, 1994), 234.

¹⁰⁴ This is somewhat similar to Derrida’s critique of JL Austin in “Signature, Event, Context” in which Derrida argues that a speech act can only be felicitous if there exists a real possibility that the speech act will fail, that “failure is an essential risk in the operations” of any act of communication. Derrida advocates placing the speech act *in suspense* just as judgments in the novel are constantly in suspense. Indeed, speech acts in *The Italian* are a complex issue worthy of further study. See Jacques Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context” in *The Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1972), 323.

¹⁰⁵ It thereby conforms to what Rhonda Batchelor criticizes in the novel: “Feminine intervention is either disguised (as Radcliffe’s own is) or made passive (as Ellena’s is) when woman is reduced to the figure for whom men act, speak, and transform self and society.” “The Rise and Fall of the Eighteenth Century’s Authentic Feminine Voice,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 6.4 (July 1994), 366.