

Ann Radcliffe's
Female Counter-
Publics

by

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There are only two known samples of Ann Radcliffe's handwriting, and one is a snarky letter to her mother-in-law. Radcliffe's suggests that "if the supplies which William [her husband] sends are not sufficient, we can only desire you to come and live with us, where you shall always find plenty, whatever you may do elsewhere" (qtd. *The Guardian*). Radcliffe's irritation is clear and suggests that her ability to write so convincingly about overbearing mothers-in-law may have been grounded in first-hand experience. Snark aside, Radcliffe invites Mrs. R to join Ann and William in their domestic sanctuary separated from the concerns of the work for pay lifestyle. While Ann's letter demonstrates her engagement with "private" concerns, her success as a novelist and poet reminds us that she was well-versed in commerce and publishing. Ann Radcliffe's career defies easy categorization of public/private and masculine/feminine—such binary social constructions can erase the real complexity of these authors' lives and, as this thesis will show, the lives they create for their female characters.

We know so little about Ann Radcliffe's life that it is difficult generate a complete image of who she was. We can, however, situate the few facts of her life within the context of her gender, class, and historic moment. First, while Radcliffe achieved notoriety and influence within the dominant, male-centered, bourgeois public sphere, she began and ended her life in country retirement. Her fiction, often contrasted with the "low" Gothic of Matthew Lewis, features smaller public spheres of women—what I will call counter-publics—that speak to her real-life subject position as a woman writer of the middling class. Unlike other scholars, who restrict their critical frames to categories such as male/female or horror/terror Gothic, this thesis will turn its attention to the nuances of Radcliffe's work, examining the ways in which the women of these counter-publics engage in education, commerce and politics—all in opposition to the patriarchal public. When we examine these counter-publics outside of the binary

constructions that have come to dominate literary criticism about the Gothic, new readings of Radcliffe can emerge. In particular, the marriage plots of *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Italian* begin to look less stereotypical and more political, linking women's happiness to alternative communities made possible only by the unique dynamics of Radcliffe's counter-publics.

A Sicilian Romance (1790) presents itself as a "found" text whose narrative takes place in the sixteenth century. It opens with protagonist Julia and her sister Emilia living in harmony with their governess in a counter-public they have created at the Castle Mazzini. When Julia's tyrannical father and her hedonistic step-mother arrive at the castle with a group of partygoers, they disrupt this harmony by stealing her space, preventing her from marrying Hippolitus, the man she loves, and imprisoning her. Over the course of the novel, other women help Julia to safety and enable her to reunite with Hippolitus. While, on the surface, this seems like a traditional marriage plot, we will see that Julia's experience in and connection to the other women of her counter-public are also integral to her happiness, rendering her wedding secondary to her reunion with her lost mother, sister and governess.

Radcliffe's final novel, *The Italian*, is another *bildungsroman* of sorts, which depicts Ellena di Rosalba's perilous shift into adulthood. As the novel opens, Ellena is living a comfortable middle-class life with her Aunt Bianchi in Naples. Ellena secretly supports their lifestyle by selling her embroidery to local nuns. One day, at church, Ellena attracts a young nobleman, Vivaldi, who proceeds to pursue her relentlessly. Vivaldi's mother, the Marchesa, disapproves of their match, and arranges for Ellena's kidnapping with the Abbess of a mountain convent. And when Ellena escapes captivity, the Marchesa arranges her death. By the end of the novel, the Marchesa, literally sick with guilt, actually encourages the marriage, but unlike Julia of *A Sicilian Romance*, Ellena does not retain a connection with the women of her counter-

public. Her future is more isolated and thus more perilous, suggesting a regression on Radcliffe's part to a more traditional, patriarchal imagining of her heroine's fate—one that, this thesis will suggest, has something to tell us about Radcliffe's authorial identity.

* * *

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas documents the rise of the bourgeois public sphere in the 18th and 19th centuries. He documents the way developing public forums “facilitated the emergence of powerful new social norms of discourse and debate that mediated between private interests and the public good.” As such, they “functioned as mechanisms to disseminate information and help freely form the public political will needed for collective self-determination” (Cherum). Habermas's argument hinges upon the distinction between the public and the private. He explicitly states that the public sphere “may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public” (27). Habermas's concept appears democratic and equalitarian. Ideologically, every private voice carries equal weight, they have unrestricted access to all public arenas, and “public opinion” applies to all citizens.

The problem with Habermas's conception of the Public Sphere is that it does not account for marginalized citizens within a stratified society (Fraser 59). In fact, women, people of color, and any non-landowning citizen were excluded from public discourse. Further, this definition creates a rigid distinction between “public” and “private” that further devalues the role marginalized people play in upholding an unequal society. Habermas's equalitarian idea is really a form of oppression that has left “traces in western culture as a network of dualisms, and the logical structure of dualism forms a major basis of the connection between forms of oppression”

(Plumwood 2). Members of the dominant sphere silence women and other marginalized people by relegating them to the private sphere.

Nancy Fraser dismantles Habermas's concept of the public sphere in her article, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." She acknowledges the critical necessity of Habermas's idealistic conception of the public sphere but points out that the public/private ideology rests "on a class- and gender-biased notion of publicity, one which accepts at face value the bourgeois public's claim to be *the* public" (61). She demonstrates how the bourgeois public existed alongside "a host of competing counterpublics, including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women's publics, and working class publics" (61). These counter-publics operate as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (67). Accepting Habermas's concept of the public sphere requires us to adhere to problematic dualistic thinking that silences members outside of the bourgeois public. Fraser declares that critical theory should denounce the binary of "public" and "private" because they are merely "cultural classifications of rhetorical labels" (73). We must reevaluate our perspective to recognize the ubiquity of competing counter-publics. By identifying counter-publics, we can analyze the ways they interact with each other as well as the public sphere in Radcliffe's fiction, for in *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Italian*, Radcliffe develops rich communities of women who participate in educational, economic, and political endeavors separate from the influence of the public sphere.

* * *

Ann Ward Radcliffe was born in 1764 to the emerging middling class of the late-eighteenth century (Napier). “The middling sort comprised the people who conceived and executed the bulk of the projects, large and small, successful and unsuccessful, tangible and intangible, that combined to make up the world of eighteenth-century commerce” (“The Middling Sort” 20). Radcliffe’s father, William Ward, was a modest haberdasher, but he benefitted from his connections to prominent doctors in his family. Likewise, the Wards enjoyed a relationship with a wealthy pottery manufacturer, Thomas Bentley. Bentley was a well-connected member of the middling class. Britain’s vast empire and stake in the slave trade precipitated “a new system of stake-holding capitalism, with trading companies owned by groups of investors. Investors soon included many landowners as well as members of the urban commercial and professional classes” (Irvine). For the first time, wealth ceased to depend upon inheritance, and the newly established “middling sort” eroded the rigid social stratification of feudalism through intermarriage and commerce. Therefore, Radcliffe spent much of her childhood surrounded by intellectual discourse, influential people, and high society (Napier).

Women in the middling class could enjoy the luxuries of wealth without the repressive restrictions of aristocratic women. I do not suggest that middle-class women were free from strict gender stratification; on the contrary, the success Ann Radcliffe and other women writers of the long eighteenth century are exceptions that prove the rule of gender oppression. However, women writers of middling class like Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Jane Austen demonstrate how such women benefited from access to commerce and multiple strata of the social sphere. Radcliffe’s father exposed her to the life of modest but respectable business; her uncles exposed her to the lives of high-status professionals; and Thomas Bentley introduced her

to the highest of the middling class who connected themselves to the unattainable aristocracy. She understood the value of money and the nostalgia of a world defined by feudalism.

In 1787, Radcliffe married a law student turned journalist, William Radcliffe, and published her first novel, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne: A Highland Story* in 1789. Although she enjoyed immense popularity, she disappeared into obscurity after she published *The Italian* in 1796 (Napier). Radcliffe received £800 for *The Italian* and never wrote another novel; her retreat from the public eye sparked rumors that she was “incarcerated in a lunatic asylum, and by 1806, she was dead” (Groom ix). In reality, she spent the last two decades of her life travelling the country with her husband and writing poetry. Before then, however, Radcliffe would cultivate an unparalleled reputation transforming the culture of fiction within the popular, but often misunderstood Gothic genre.

Horace Walpole published the first gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. The novel is a counterfeit medieval text that Walpole originally subtitled, “A Gothic Story.” (Counterfeit 284). However, as Mullan notes, that subtitle seems to have been a joke signifying “something like ‘barbarous’, as well as ‘deriving from the Middle Ages’” (Mullan). The gothic in and of itself “is the refaking of a fake designation that was used by Italian neo-classicists of the Renaissance to describe the ‘low-culture’ qualities of much medieval architecture, as though these had been produced by Germanic ‘Goths’” (“Counterfeit” 284). The ghosts of late-eighteenth century gothic are counterfeits of a by-gone past, reminders of a world lost to capitalism and urbanization. Classic gothic tales typically take place in an antiquated space such as a castle, foreign place, or convent; within these spaces “are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise at the main time of the story” (“Gothic in western culture” 2). Gothic characters are people “caught

between the attractions or terrors of a past once controlled by overweening aristocrats or priests (or figures with such aspirations) and forces of change that would reject such a past yet remain held by aspects of it (including desires for aristocratic or superhuman powers)” (“Gothic in western culture” 3). As several critics have shown, this pattern can be detected in many Gothic novels from this time, including works by Eliza Parsons, William Godwin and Friedrich Schiller¹.

Twenty-seven years after Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto*, Britain went through a gothic craze that coincided with the French Revolution (Miles 42). Ann Radcliffe and her contemporary, Matthew Lewis, are the most famous figures from this movement in which “the bloody horrors of the revolution pushed novelists to new extremes of imaginary violence, as they strove to compete with the shocking reality” (Miles 43). However, while Radcliffe and Lewis depict violent and haunted struggles between the antiquated, tyrannical institutions and young, revolutionary waves of change, they approach these issues differently. And because of these authors’ popularity and eventual canonicity, their differences would become the foundation of a series of inter-related categories used to classify the genre: high/low, female/male, horror/terror. Jerrold Hogle asserts that Lewis’s “horror-gothic” enacts “gross violence of physical or psychological dissolution,” and Radcliffe’s “terror-gothic” “holds readers mostly in anxious suspense about threats to life, safety, and sanity” (“Gothic in Western Culture” 3). Lewis is undeniably more violent than Radcliffe, but Maximilian Novak suggests that terror/horror is “merely a distinction based on explicitness, which is a very separate matter from a difference in kind” (52). The terror/horror distinction places the two styles in opposition to one another, which

¹ Jenny DiPlacidi discusses gender and sexuality in Parson’s work.
 Kenneth Graham analyzes the Gothic in Godwin’s “Caleb Williams.”
 Jefferey High discusses the way the High Romantics received Schiller’s German Gothic.

undermines the reader's ability to generate horrifying images from terror techniques. Moreover, such binary classification reduces these works to their explicitness, ignoring the nuances of Radcliffe's work.

For example, Matthew Lewis describes the climactic rape scene of *The Monk* in gruesome detail. The monk, Ambrosio, "heedless of her tears, cries and entreaties, . . . gradually made himself Master of her person, and desisted not from his prey, till He had accomplished his crime and the dishonour of Antonia." (295). The gross violence of this moment signifies Ambrosio and Antonia's physical and psychological dissolution, and it is explicit enough to shock modern readers. More importantly, Lewis uses synecdoche to refer to Antonia, thereby dehumanizing the victim while demonstrating Ambrosio's predatory mentality. Radcliffe, on the other hand, suggests that rape is not just an individual crime but also an institutional form of violence. Such nuance is easy to miss, especially compared to Lewis, but in *The Italian* an old priest repeats the fifteen-year-old confession of the rapist monk, Schedoni. According to the priest, Schedoni confessed to raping his widowed sister-in-law, Olivia, after she rejected his advance: "my passion would no longer be trifled with. I caused her to be carried from her house, and she was afterwards willing to retrieve her honour by the marriage vow." (322). By refraining from explicit violence, Radcliffe preserves Olivia's personhood; and by disclosing her rape within the context of Schedoni's confession, she calls attention to institutional and social structures that would forgive rape.

Radcliffe understood the popular demand for gothic fiction, and she understood the form's reputation as a low art form, but she painstakingly grounded her hauntings within the natural world to differentiate herself from Lewis's embrace of the cheap gothic devices whereas "sophisticated" readers believed that hauntings, ghosts and demonic possessions cheapened the

romantic form (“Counterfeit” 284). Radcliffe troubles this “manufactured” gothic by grounding her hauntings, ghosts, and “deal with the devil” contracts within the corporeal and psychological worlds. For example, Lewis’s rapist monk makes a literal deal with the devil to satisfy his earthly desires. Ambrosio’s downfall is a disturbing indictment of man’s folly, but it is grounded in the supernatural world. Radcliffe’s Schedoni deals with the devil of human desire and ambition turning his downfall “into an inner conflict between the intentions of the cheater and his body, which betray him through his gut feelings and ties him into the social contract” (Lothe and Hawthorn 193).

In addition, Radcliffe blurs the line between the Gothic and the Romantic. High Romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge situated themselves as high artists by explicitly distinguishing themselves from the gothic form, arguing that the gothic’s ““multitude of manufactures,”” cheapens how ““we estimate romances in general”” (qtd. In “Counterfeit” 284). They believed artists like Lewis pervert the Romantic form by relying on cheap thrills and ghosts to attract readers. In contrast, Radcliffe grounds her hauntings within the natural world to differentiate herself the “dimension of the Gothic which is supremely intriguing and repellent to those we now call ‘Romantic’ poets” (“Counterfeit” 284). Radcliffe’s elevated prose and corporeal grounding within the gothic form disrupts the high/low binary of Romantic/Gothic and illuminates her authorial ambition.

Reputation mattered to Radcliffe, and to appeal to all readers, she often promoted “aristocratic as well as bourgeois values, [that] demonstrate both progressive and conservative political beliefs and are at once feminist and anti-feminist” (Schmitt 856). She wove opposing ideologies into her narratives that allowed her readers to derive meaning according to their personal worldviews. Additionally, Vartan Messier suggests that Radcliffe calculated the

potential reception of her work and carefully selected material that would not come under attack from the institutions of cultural power “which in turn, would ensure the reputation of her work and secure its place in the canon of popular literature” (38). Radcliffe’s ideological ambiguity gave her the respectability needed to reach a wide variety of readers, including British women, during a time of great social upheaval.

The gothic craze of the 1790s coincided with both the French Revolution and an economic “juncture between the aristocratic advance of the mid eighteenth century and the triumph of the middle class in the nineteenth” (Schmitt 855). The fabric of society was shifting, and Radcliffe was uniquely poised to contribute to Britain’s national identity. Radcliffe sets her novels in ancient, foreign lands to provide her British readers an exotic escape and the ability to ascribe monstrous behavior to the otherness of the actor. Radcliffe’s heroines embody proper Englishness who “incarnate a national archetype rather than espouse nationalist (or anti-nationalist) beliefs” (Schmitt 858). The heroine opposes the villainous “other” who exemplifies un-Englishness. To conservative readers, Radcliffe instructs readers how to be “English,” but radical readers might also detect more subversive pedagogical aims. In this way, Radcliffe effectively instructed female British identity within the established parameters of society and the emergent democratic philosophies of the French Revolution.

The central conflicts of *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Italian* concern the invasions of tranquil, sequestered spaces within which women thrive—counter-publics that exist within the patriarchy but beyond its reach. Prior to their marriages and within the context of these spaces, Radcliffe’s young heroines enjoy free discourse and unmolested harmony. The young heroes, while chivalrous and emotive, seek to relocate their brides to a traditional patriarchal context. Thus, while they would seem to value the individuality and personal freedom of the heroines

after their weddings, these young women transition into the obscurity of inconsequential retirement. Still, we can detect a subtle resistance to this fate in Radcliffe's depiction of these characters' relationships to their social contexts, their female counter-publics, and the ways they relate to the public sphere.

* * *

To address the ways Radcliffe develops female counter-publics in *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Italian*, it is necessary to situate the female characters within Radcliffe's conversation with the sublime. An essential element of the early gothic setting explores the ways humans experience the sublime. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Edmund Burke identifies various origins of the sublime that rely upon a subject's experience with a sublime object. The sublime is "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling," that is, "whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates analogous to terror" (Burke I.vii). For example, Burke discusses the way nature's enormity manufactures sublime astonishment, or "a state of the soul in which all its emotions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other" (Burke II.i). A subject's astonishment is predicated on the object of experience.

In *The Critique of Judgement*, Immanuel Kant asserts that while nature is beautiful, it is not sublime. The sublime "is a pleasure that only arises indirectly, being brought about by the feeling of momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful, and so it is an emotion that seems to be no sport, but dead earnest in the affairs of the imagination" (50). In other words, the human mind generates the sublime when it contemplates

the incomprehensible. Essentially, the sublime is a psychological process that occurs when the subject considers their utter insignificance upon reflection of the object. The object itself is not sublime, so one can conjure the pleasure of sublimity anywhere, and under any circumstances. Critics often hold Burke and Kant's concepts in opposition to one another, and when they discuss Radcliffe, they situate her within one school or the other².

However, within these counter-publics, Radcliffe suggests that Burke and Kant are not mutually exclusive. The heroines consistently return to nature to escape the confines of the public sphere, thus seeking out sublime objects, but they also engage with the sublime of imagination as they navigate their perilous paths to adulthood. For example, the Marchesa's hired banditti kidnap Ellena and convey her, by carriage, to the threatening convent of San Stefano. They travel through a mountain pass, and all she sees are "pinnacles and vast precipices of various-tinted marbles, intermingled with scanty vegetation," which give "dark touches to the many-coloured cliffs, and sometimes stretched in shadowy masses to the deep vallies, that, winding into obscurity, seemed to invite to explore the scenes beyond" (*The Italian* 61) Here, we see how, when Ellena experiences her own terrible insignificance in the natural world (along the lines of Burke's formulation), it provides her with comfort. The pinnacles and precipices Ellena traverses are to become her prison, yet she exalts in the feeling they give her.

In *A Sicilian Romance*, Julia accesses the Kantian sublime when she hides in the convent of St. Augustin from her father and her villainous fiancé. She contemplates her sorrows for the first time since fleeing her counter-public to avoid a forced marriage to a murderous Duke.

² Charlie Bondhus acknowledges Radcliffe's intimacy with Burke but ultimately aligns her with Kant. Nicola Gess suggests that Radcliffe conforms to Burkean sublime. Kristin Girten explores the Kantian sublime in Radcliffe's Work. Robert Miles wholeheartedly attributes Radcliffe's sublime to Edmund Burke.

Furthermore, she mourns the supposed loss of her true love, Hippolitus, who was stabbed by her father during her first escape attempt. Julia surveys the ancient edifice of the church and revives “in the mind of the beholder the memory of past ages;” as the “solitude and stillness conspired with the solemn aspect of the pile to impress the mind with religious awe” (116-7). Julia becomes so overcome with emotion that she repeats an ode dedicated to sublime landscapes. She weeps “to the memory of times past,” with a “romantic sadness to her feelings, luxurious and indefinable” (118). Julia is a prisoner of patriarchy, yet her imagination allows her to discover freedom through the sublime. Julia mentally achieves the sublime in the same way Ellena experiences it in the material world. In both instances, the heroines engage with the sublime to experience transcendent freedom from captivity. Critics like Messier claim that Radcliffe “embodies the archetypal persecuted female of the late eighteenth century, whose writing further reinforced the conventions of the patriarchal social order” (39). However, in these scenes, Radcliffe is not upholding patriarchy; she is acknowledging the reality of patriarchal domination—a domination escaped (albeit temporarily) through the sublime.

Radcliffe deliberately sets her novels in exotic lands that not only evoke the sublime, but that also seem designed to satisfy her audience’s fetishization of the other, to create distance between the narrative and her social commentary, and to define public discourse of the British counter-publics. Canon Schmitt notes the suggestion of the novels “that the text in its entirety should be taken as emblematic of Italianness, Catholicism, a mysterious and un-English way of life,” but really “the text presents in its heroine an incarnation of Englishness” (853). (This aligns with the biographical fact that Radcliffe never set foot in Italy.) In this way, novels like *The Italian* operate, as Schmitt suggests, as more effective versions of conduct book because they “enact” the values they promote (856). Canon’s argument also places Radcliffe in literary history

as a definer of proper British femininity, focusing on the ways in which the educational spheres in *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Italian* operate.

In both novels, the heroines learn the tools for survival from older, more experienced women, but in *A Sicilian Romance*, Radcliffe foregrounds the educational relationship as essential to genuine happiness. Radcliffe spends significant time exploring the education of Julia and Emilia in the novel. After the supposed death of Louisa, Julia and Emilia's mother, the evil marquis and his new wife commit "the education of his daughters to the care of a lady, completely qualified for the undertaking, and who was distantly related to the late marchioness" (3). The governess, Madame de Menon, has a working knowledge of the public sphere's discourse and trains her pupils to navigate their subjugated position in society. She molds Julia and Emilia into accomplished musicians, artists, and readers, and she works to "counteract those traits in the disposition of her young pupils, which appeared inimical to their future happiness" (4). In short, madame trains her students how to navigate their futures in ways designed to maximize their happiness, no matter what might befall them.

Madame de Menon teaches Julia and Emilia to understand the social expectations of their culture, providing them with the necessary tools to engage in intrasphere discourse, and when Julia finds herself alone, her education saves her life. Intrasphere discourse is the communication and negotiation between separate counter-publics. Because she has the skills to hone a strong relationship with her servant Catarina, she is able to call on Catarina to help her escape her forced marriage to the Duke. When madame and Julia reunite in the wilderness, Julia explains that Catarina "obtained from her lover, a servant in the castle, that assistance which gave me liberty;" Catarina offers her asylum "in the cottage of her parents" (106). Julia attempts to hide her identity from Catarina's parents, but in her mother, Julia says she "read a degree of surprise

and admiration which declared she believed me to be of superior rank” (108). Julia, who has never left home, demonstrates well-honed social skills that allow her to relate to women in different spheres, and she possesses the refinement and grace of an upper-class woman to such a degree that she cannot conceal her station in life.

The way Radcliffe demonstrates the value of education in a counter-sphere in *The Italian* is more subtle but more impactful. Ellena’s middle-class aunt, Signora Bianchi, provides Ellena with a lady’s education. Further, Bianchi teaches Ellena a marketable trade, salesmanship and the discretion to participate in the marketplace while maintaining her reputation. Radcliffe situates the reader in a voyeuristic examination of Ellena’s unique education through Vivaldi’s gaze. One night, Vivaldi spies on Ellena while she sits in a room playing the lute. Later, he walks through the same room and explores the artifacts of her education; “he trembled as her took up the lute she had been accustomed to touch, and, when he had awakened the chords, her own voice seemed to speak. A drawing, half-finished, of a dancing nymph remained on a stand, and he immediately understood that her hand had traced the lines” (25). Vivaldi’s sexual reaction to Ellena’s acquired talents sheds an uncomfortable light on the ultimate goal of women’s education in the eighteenth century: to become, through marriage, the most attractive piece of art in a man’s collection. However, while Signora Bianchi trains her female student in the art of self-objectification, she also teaches her how to secure independence through the economy. Ellena exercises her independence until she is kidnapped, and Radcliffe never mentions it again suggesting that work is virtuous only when it is necessary.

While Ellena enjoys some autonomy over her labor, for most men and women in Radcliffe's world labor was an inescapable necessity. Servants are woefully underrepresented in Radcliffe’s novels even though working for pay was the way of life for men and women in

eighteenth century England. In fact, “in London in the period 1695 to 1725 at least seventy-two per cent of women worked for pay, and spinsters (at eighty-three per cent) and widows (at eighty-five per cent) were especially likely to do so” (*Women in Eighteenth Century* 169). The ubiquity of working women demonstrates how porous the gendered boundary between public/private could be. In *A Sicilian Romance*, Radcliffe capitalizes on servants’ intrasphere mobility to create a realistic character who demonstrates how cooperative economic discourse benefits society as a whole.

Julia’s servant, Catarina, and Ellena’s housekeeper, Beatrice, are the only named serving women in *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Italian*. Catarina represents “the very common ‘life-cycle’ type, a young girl went into domestic service around the age of fifteen,” and typically “would have migrated from some rural area in search of a place.” (*Women in Eighteenth Century* 174). Catarina has physical mobility, but she is financially caged, therefore she has a unique understanding of Julia’s plight. Julia has financial mobility, but she is physically caged. The morning after her failed escape attempt, Julia awakes “in a small room, of which she had no remembrance, with her maid weeping over her” (68). Catarina, by virtue of her menial position, provides Julia with emotional support and the means to escape successfully.

I do not suggest, however, that Catarina’s motives are purely altruistic. She has a financial interest in Julia’s safety. Domestic maids earned an average of £7.5 annually between 1700-1857, which constituted about one half of their wages when we consider their room and board (Field 255). Economics and the cost of living in the late eighteenth century differ so greatly from the modern world that it’s almost impossible to translate £15 to modern currency³.

³ Elizabeth Gilboy concludes the results of her study on the cost of living in England with, “crude as our index is, it is based on the most complete continuous, and homogenous series now available” (141) The inflation calculator on the UK National Archives website includes the following disclaimer: “Our calculations are intended as a general guide to historical values, not a statement of fact” (nationalarchives.gov.uk).

However, the fact remains that “almost everywhere servants tended to be very poor, and they were often quite vulnerable to exploitation, especially if they were very young” (*Women in Eighteenth Century* 174). Saving Julia will likely lead to job security for Catarina and her lover, Nicolo, and perhaps a life-changing financial reward for their service to Hippolitis’s new wife.

Conversely, the servants in *The Italian* are Radcliffe’s most poorly drawn characters. They have no power to drive the plot like Catarina, and they have no depth. They function like Shakespearean clowns; they provide comic relief, observe and report on the lives of their employers, and they draw attention to the absurdities of aristocratic culture. Sandro Jung perfectly articulates the late-Radcliffian servant in her analysis of Annette, the female servant in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. She identifies Annette’s “loquacity, her trust in the unrestrained verbalization of feelings, fears and anxieties, as well as her melodramatic procrastination of the narrative” (“Sensibility, the Servant and Comedy”). Servants ramble in stream of consciousness during important moments of exposition that creates narrative tension and also diminishes their intelligence. For example, Beatrice’s report to Vivaldi of Signora Bianchi’s death consists of several lengthy paragraphs full of exclamation marks and run on sentences:

“I was waked out of my first sleep by a noise in my lady’s chamber. It is a grievous thing to me, Signor, to be waked from my first sleep, and I, Santa Maria forgive me! was angry at being disturbed! So I would not get up, but laid my head upon the pillow again, and tried to sleep; but presently I heard the noise again; nay now, says I, somebody must be up in the house, that’s certain.” (43).

Beatrice’s rambling personal narrative, in this scene, establishes the suspicion that Signora Bianchi was murdered, a narrative thread that Radcliffe drops almost as quickly as she

introduces it. In fact, Beatrice's social knowledge and position as a servant is only narratively significant when she recognizes the nun, Olivia, for Ellena's mother.

Radcliffe's decision to depict her servants as grotesque buffoons makes the reading experience more enjoyable, but it diminishes an already marginalized counter-public. Beatrice is an amusing set piece, but she has no value to the public sphere or the feminine counter-public of the middle- and upper-class. It is disappointing that Radcliffe, a working woman, who writes about Ellena, a working woman, cannot muster any sympathy for the serving class beyond the quick observance that "old women now-a-days are not much thought of; out of sight out of mind with them, now-a-days!" (354). Beatrice is certainly forgotten for the majority of the text even though her labor supports the fabric of the setting.

The most interesting commercial dynamic in *The Italian* is Ellena's work. Her middling status allows her to understand the principles of capitalism, but decorum and reputation restrict her open participation in the marketplace. In fact, the necessity of Ellena's earning is a well-kept secret. Vivaldi's learns quite a lot about Ellena's circumstances through neighborhood gossip, "but he was ignorant of what was very true, though very secret": that "she passed whole days in embroidering silks, which were disposed to the nuns of a neighboring convent, who sold them to the Neopolitan ladies, that visited their grate, at a very high advantage," and "that a beautiful robe, which [Vivaldi] had often seen his mother wear, was worked by Ellena; nor that some copies from the antique, which ornamented a cabinet of the Vivaldi place, were drawn by her hand" (10). Signora Bianchi provides Ellena with a lady's education which includes the art of embroidery, however, since using her skills to earn money is considered base and unacceptable for an eligible woman, it must be kept a secret.

The public sphere thrives on excluding marginalized counter-publics, so Ellena's participation in economics threatens the notion that women belong at home. Ellena is painfully aware of her precarious reputation. Ellena has no shame in her poverty, "or of the industry which overcame it, but her spirit shrunk from the senseless smile and humiliating condescension, which prosperity sometimes gives to indigence" (11). It makes sense, then, that Ellena operates exclusively within female counter-publics to protect her reputation. She is the manufacturer, the nuns are in sales, and the upper-class Neapolitans are the consumers. The nuns intentionally remove themselves from the man's world, so their public reputation is inconsequential; they develop a discreet and profitable female marketplace.

By creating this counter-sphere, Radcliffe wholeheartedly rejects the position that work is shameful, particularly for middle-class women. In contrast, the narrator reflects on Ellena's admirable pride and asserts that her industry does "honor to her character" (11). When Beatrice inadvertently reveals the secret to Vivaldi, he agrees; "the circumstances of Ellena's fortune, her conduct heightened the tender admiration, with which he had hitherto regarded her" (46). Ellena's ability to earn a living and her willingness to do so endears her to Vivaldi but does not negate the natural conclusion of the gothic marriage plot: "peaceful" retirement to the domestic sphere. And even though Ellena does not need Vivaldi to live comfortably, she craves respectability and retirement. She decides to remove herself from the practical struggles of independent living, but in giving up her financial independence she also relinquishes the freedom to choose how she will spend her life.

Despite these counter-spheres, the narrative politics in *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Italian* predominantly operate within the public sphere and in religious institutions scattered about the Italian countryside. To be political, these novels suggest, a woman must either

assimilate or remove herself from society completely. As I previously mentioned, Julia and Catarina engage in political negotiation, in *A Sicilian Romance*, to secure Julia's safety and Catarina's economic mobility. Their relationship is easy to overlook because it is so common, but it completely dismantles the public/private binary. If the home contains economic and political relationships, then it is a type of public.

Madame Menon is the most accomplished politician of the novel. She interacts with the servants of Castle Mazzini, advocates for Julia and Emilia to the Marquis, and negotiates with the *Padre Abate* at the monastery of St. Augustin on Julia's behalf. Prior to the Marquis invasion of the Castle, Madame de Menon runs the castle alongside Vincent, the Marquis's head servant. In response to the strange light appearing in the abandoned wing of the castle, Madame de Menon relates the vision to Vincent and orders "and immediate search to be made for the keys of those apartments" (8). Vincent is concealing the marquis's first wife in those apartments, and his first concern is to preserve the secret. He laughs at the madame and tries to convince her that she is imagining the lights, but she persists "in her purpose; and after a long and repeated search, a massey key, covered with rust, was produced" (8). Madame understands how to compel a person to act against their own interests. She lobbies against Vincent's protests and gets her way.

Significantly, Madame de Menon has made herself indispensable to the marquis. The marquis has no paternal fondness for his daughters, but he does value his property. He entrusts Madame de Menon to oversee his income-generating estates and to mold his daughters into marketable wives, destined for alliances that will generate assets. The madame's position vis-a-vis the marquis becomes clear when the marchioness attempts to eliminate her. The marchioness rules her husband and manipulates him so successfully that he thinks "himself most independent when he was most enslaved" (3). The only exception to the marchioness's hold over the marquis

is Madame de Menon. The marchioness uses Julia's escape to accuse Madame of encouraging Julia's brother, Ferdinand, "to disobey his father's commands, and had been an accessory to the elopement, she accused her of these offences, and stimulated the marquis to reprehend her conduct. But the integrity of Madame de Menon was not to be questioned with impunity" (74). Madame refuses to respond to the allegations and resolves to resign instead, but the prospect of losing the madame is so distressing that the marquis defies his wife and debases his own vanity, and he makes "such ample concessions to madame, as induced her for the present to continue at the castle" (75). To be clear, this man is so enamored with the marchioness that she convinces him that she's faithful after her catches her with another man, but she cannot make him dispose of madame.

Madame leaves the castle after she witnesses the marchioness's infidelity and fears for her life. In typical gothic fashion, she happens to travel through the same remote village in which Julia is hiding, and they reunite. Madame conveys Julia to the monastery of St. Augustin and secures entry by appealing to the head of the monastery, the *Padre Abate*. While the Abate contemplates Julia's fate in the convent, the marquis's men surround the monastery and demand the *Abate* return Julia; the Abate is enraged and resolves to keep Julia at the monastery. Madame is overjoyed until she recollects that she had counseled Julia to escape the convent, and "ere this time Julia had quitted the abbey, and thus the very precaution which was meant to ensure her safety, had probably precipitated her into the hands of her enemy" (130). The madame must find a way to demonstrate appropriate gratitude to the Abate and get to Julia before she attempts her escape. When she fails to demonstrate acceptable supplication, she begs, "punish not Julia for the offence which I only have committed; her heart will bless her generous protector" (131). The

madame achieves both her goals by asking this. The Abate is appeased and dismisses her to fetch Julia who is still in her room.

Madame de Menon politically maneuvers herself throughout the novel with integrity, dignity, and prudence. She demonstrates ways to conform to social norms while maintaining political agency. Madame de Menon is the only major female character who justly applies politics within society at large, but she is also the only unmarried (or uncloistered) political actor in the novel. Her status as an unmarried, employed woman affords her the rights of self-determination that the heroines sacrifice for love.

The completion of a marriage plot features heavily in *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Italian*, but Julia and Ellena's happiness is not a foregone conclusion. The narratives end at the point of marriage, which allows the reader to imagine a "happily ever after," but the reality is that Julia and Ellena's marriages represent the end of independence and the beginning of stifling isolation. In fact, happily married women in both novels are almost nonexistent. (The only intact married women we meet is Catarina's mother). Essentially, when obedient women accept their subjugated position within the Public Sphere, they disappear.

The narrative arc of their coming-of-age stories begin with a physical and emotional separation from their homes, followed by budding sexual desire. Facing an impending loss of freedom, they must choose whether to live under the gendered norms of the public sphere or revoke it entirely. Anna Shajirat identifies this journey as "the physical and mental decay the Gothic heroine undergoes on the path from childhood innocence to adult experience" (383). Both Julia and Ellena choose romantic love over freedom, placing their faith in the benevolence of their inexperienced young husbands. However, since neither Hippolitus nor Vivaldi have

experienced the world as adults there is no way to know how they will navigate the public sphere, either. We never meet Hippolitus's father, and Vivaldi's father is rigid, proud, and neglectful of his wife. The only time the Marchese di Vivaldi visits his wife is on her deathbed, and it is a reported action. Vivaldi's voyeurism, his manipulation of Signora Bianchi, and the coercion of marriage does not bode well for his character.

Radcliffe's awareness of this tragedy is reflected in the description of marriage in *A Sicilian Romance*: "the nuptials of Hippolitus and Julia were celebrated. The recollection of the difficulties they had encountered, and of the distress they had endured for each other, now served only to heighten by contrast the happiness of the present period" (198-9). The crux of this sentence is the phrase, "present period." Radcliffe acknowledges the temporary flood of happiness at a wedding and is careful to note that a lifetime of joy is not guaranteed for our heroine. Marriage is an inevitable conclusion of the character's traumatic adventure, but Radcliffe barely acknowledges their romantic bond. Interestingly, Radcliffe instead devotes the last paragraph of the novel to the reunification of Julia's counter-publics. She reunites with her mother; Emilia devotes herself to Julia's children, and Julia, "*surrounded by her children and friends...seemed to forget that she had ever been otherwise than happy*" (199, my emph.). Hippolitus factors into her happiness such that he allows her to engage with her community. Julia's happy ending is her freedom from complete isolation.

Ellena's happiness is less certain. She walks down the aisle, reflecting on her journey to this moment. She thinks about her first wedding that ended with her second kidnapping and Vivaldi's arrest, and the "character of those, which her present situation opposed them, drew tears of tender joy and gratitude to her eyes" (390). Ellena is full of tender joy and gratitude, but she is not full of love; she is relieved. In the final scene of *The Italian*, which takes place at

Vivaldi and Ellena's wedding reception, Radcliffe describes the picturesque setting, the clothing of the aristocratic attendees, and Vivaldi and Ellena's benevolence in inviting commoners to the celebration. Vivaldi's clownish servant Paulo is the only character who seems overjoyed and regales the other commoners when the happy couple approach. He exclaims, "here I am, sure enough! dancing by moonlight, in my own dear Naples, with my own dear master and mistress, in safety, and as happy *almost* as myself" (392). Vivaldi's response is unenthusiastic and lackluster. He rejoices in Paulo's happiness almost as much as his own, but says, "I do not entirely agree with you as to the comparative proportion of each" (392). Paulo is dancing, drinking, and toasting them, and Vivaldi wanders around the party telling people he is happy. Ellena does not even respond to Paulo's comment. She merely thanks him for his loyalty. The couple wanders off, and the final paragraphs consist of Paulo's philosophical speech about pain and happiness.

As this scene portends, Ellena's future is far more isolated than Julia's. It is true that she has reconnected with her mother, Olivia, but Olivia is a nun, and an outsider. She never has and will never occupy the same counter-public as her daughter, so they cannot support each other like the women in *A Sicilian Romance*. Olivia rejoices that she will not lose Ellena "since the vicinity of Vivaldi's residence to La Piéta, would permit a frequent intercourse with the convent" (390). They will be able to maintain a relationship, but multiple social constructs will keep them apart. Ellena is more likely to end up like the Marchesa: surrounded by men, ignored by her husband, and obsessed with locating fragments of agency at the expense of innocent people.

* * *

The marchioness (*A Sicilian Romance*) and the Marchesa (*The Italian*) demonstrate that isolation from counter-sphere discourse can be fatal in Radcliffe's novels. These female villains, arguably the most compelling characters in *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Italian*, force the reader to think critically about women's place in the Public Sphere. The power, intelligence, and ambition they exhibit does not exceed that of the male villains in the novel, but they stand out because of their sex. While their brand of cruelty may be unremarkable in the male characters, the fact that they are women draws attention to the systemic cruelty of gender oppression. By transposing traditional patriarchal evils onto the marchioness and the Marchesa, Radcliffe demonstrates how gender roles might be defied as well as the ways in which a bifurcated, patriarchal society can also pervert femininity. The marchioness uses her sexuality to manipulate her husband and subjugate his daughters while the Marchesa rejects her sex in order to master the nuance of political discourse for her personal gain. Radcliffe may sufficiently punish the marchioness and the Marchesa for their transgressions with death and disgrace, but not before their villainy is unleashed.

Deniz Kandiyoti defines patriarchal bargains as the strategies women employ within a set of concrete constraints that "exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women's subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts" (275). In other words, subjugated women living within the constraints of the public/private binary internalize and perpetuate the abuses of the patriarchy to protect their own position within that society. In Kandiyoti's frame, women in the public sphere actively collude "in the reproduction of their own subordination. They would rather adopt interpersonal strategies that maximize their security through manipulation of the affections of their sons and husband" (280). Armed with this understanding, the marchioness and the Marchesa's conduct makes sense. Julia and Ellena

threaten their financial and social security and they remind the corrupted, isolated villains of the counter-publics from which they are excluded. In this way, it makes logical sense for them to protect their interests, even at the expense of other women.

The marchioness is a “woman of infinite art, devoted to pleasure and of unconquerable spirit” (*A Sicilian Romance* 3). She uses her sexuality to dominate her husband, and her hold over him is so strong that she can openly cuckold him without suspicion or reproach. The marchioness lusts after Hippolitus, whose attraction to Julia sparks her rage. She helps arrange Julia’s marriage to the Duke de Luovo who is “of a character similar to that of the marquis;” he is “delighted in simple undisguised tyranny. He had been married twice, and the unfortunate women subjected to his power, had fallen victims to the slow but corroding hand of sorrow” (56-7). The Duke’s cruelty to his wives provides a glimpse into the marchioness’s experience. She is the second wife of the marquis, whose first wife mysteriously “died” and who rules his domain like a dictator. Perhaps she is devoted to pleasure so she can avoid the slow but corroding hand of sorrow assigned to women like her—a sorrow she seeks to replicate in Julia by appropriating the traditionally patriarchal prerogative of arranging a marriage.

The marchioness also appropriates the physical space of the Mazzini counter-public in a misguided attempt to belong. Noticing the picturesque view from Madame de Menon’s apartments, she decides to claim the space for herself. She informs “this intention to madame, for whom other apartments were provided. The chambers of Emilia and Julia forming part of the suite, they were also claimed by the marchioness” (27). The marchioness correctly identifies the communal ethos of the castle’s counter-sphere, but she attributes it to the physical space rather than the group of women who live within the space. The novel suggests that, in this case, the marchioness’s education has failed her. Because she never learned to develop emotionally

enriching counter-publics within the confines of her own inescapable subjugation, she has never experienced genuine human connection. In response, she lashes out much like a toddler, with neither subtlety nor emotional intelligence. Her cartoonish cuckolding, open hostility, and outlandish murder-suicide plot cheapen the tragedy of her position and her character. She is a flat, grotesque cliché whose motivation is underexplored, deficiencies that may speak to Radcliffe's youth and inexperience. By the time she wrote *The Italian*, however, it is clear that she had amassed the skill and experience to depict a villain that acts according to type without sacrificing her humanity.

The Marchesa is an attentive listener and a persuasive speaker, and she takes advantage of the misogyny in her relationship with the monk, Schedoni. She establishes a relationship with the respectable and mysterious holy man because she recognizes that each possess “in a considerable degree, the power of assisting the other; Schedoni had subtlety with ambition to urge it; and the Marchesa had inexorable pride, and courtly influence” (36). Schedoni's status as a holy confessor permits private conversations with the Marchesa. Under the pretext of confession, “they concerted in private, and unknown even by the Marchese, the means of accomplishing their general end” (36). But while Schedoni and the reader assume he controls the relationship, the Marchesa is merely waiting for her opportunity to permanently reverse their power dynamic.

Chapters three and four of Volume II depict the Marchesa's political and rhetorical genius. When Vivaldi and Ellena escape from San Stefano, the Marchesa and Schedoni consult about the best course of action. Schedoni wants Ellena dead because Vivaldi offended him, and the Marchesa wants her dead because she is middle class. In chapter three, Schedoni steers the discussion; he manipulates the distressed woman into verbalizing her wish first, and then he

argues in favor of “her” suggestion. He argues that the law of God supersedes the laws of man, and the law of God mandates Ellena’s murder. He makes a fatal error when he tells the Marchesa that “you, my daughter, even you! Though possessed of a man’s spirit, and his clear perceptions, would think that virtue bade her live, when it was only fear” (162). When he calls her “daughter”, he places her beneath him by reminding her of his holy authority. He cuts her down further by reminding her of her femininity (despite her resistance). Schedoni intent is to strip her confidence and surrender her will, but his comment provides the Marchesa with the opening she has been waiting for:

‘Hah!’, exclaimed the Marchesa, in a low voice, ‘What is that you mean?’

You shall find I have a man’s courage also.’

‘I speak without disguise,’ replied Schedoni, ‘my meaning requires none.’

The Marchesa mused, and remained silent.

‘I have done my duty,’ resumed Schedoni, at length. ‘I have pointed out the only way that remains for you to escape dishonour. If my zeal is displeasing—but I have done.’

‘No, good father, no,’ said the Marchesa; ‘you mistake the cause of my emotion. New ideas, new prospects, open!—they confuse, they distract me! My mind has not yet attained sufficient strength to encounter them; some women’s weakness still lingers at my heart.’ (162).

Radcliffe’s choice to juxtapose “exclaimed” with “low” is interesting. Exclamations are “the loud articulate expression of pain, anger, surprise” (OED). Because she is exclaiming, the Marchesa’s voice is not “low” as in quiet, but low in tone. Schedoni reminds her of her femininity, and she responds with a more masculine voice. Schedoni thinks he has achieved the

effect, so he doubles down by saying that he speaks without disguise. Of course, everything he says is in disguise--that is the basis of his relationship with the Marchesa--but with those words, he inadvertently validates the Marchesa's conclusion that he considers her inferior to him. She muses and stays silent while she processes the enormity of murder and calculates her next move.

Despite her desire for power within the public sphere, the Marchesa is conscious of the moral consequences of her actions. She must grapple with her desperate urge for Public power and the consequences of forsaking her morality. Her decision to forsake Ellena represents her complete divorce from female connection, a separation that haunts her to her death. When she sanctions Ellena's death, the Marchesa reflects that "those fine senses are closed in death! And to this condition would I reduce a being like myself!" (170). Radcliffe does not punish the Marchesa for her patriarchal bargaining, but for her complete rejection of femininity. When she decides to act on Schedoni's scheme, she employs her masterful rhetoric and knowledge of Schedoni's character to achieve the most advantageous position in the conspiracy. The Marchesa speaks the truth when she tells Schedoni that "new ideas, new prospects, open!—they confuse, they distract me!" (162). Schedoni's suggestion that genuine morality is a symptom of feminine weakness troubles her.

When the Marchesa tells Schedoni, "some women's weakness still lingers at my heart," she invites him to convince her further. He emphatically lays out his argument about the righteousness of Ellena's murder from several different angles before they part. When they meet to solidify their plan, the Marchesa uses his own words to convince him of the necessity that *he* handle the act itself. She expresses displeasure at the idea of hiring an assassin to kill Ellena, and he remonstrates her asking, "Why should we hesitate to do what we judge to be right?" (167). When Schedoni grasps that she wants him to kill her, and balks, she appeals to his vanity and

then retorts “upon him his former words. ‘Why should we hesitate to do what we judge to be right?’” (169). He cannot refuse her; he bows “his head, in signal of consent to her wish (169). Schedoni is a liar; his consent means nothing, but he *has* accepted full responsibility to arrange the murder. Furthermore, his bowed head denotes supplication. He has gone from calling her “daughter,” to submitting to her. The battle of rhetoric is over, and she wins. Schedoni’s involvement in Ellena’s second kidnapping exposes him to the Inquisition and causes his sensational downfall, and the Marchesa is legally clear of wrongdoing.

While the Marchesa escapes any legal punishment, she is clearly haunted by her betrayal of Ellena. The Marchesa retreats to her beautiful villa “situated on an airy promontory, that overhung the water, and was nearly embosomed among the woods, that spread along the heights, and descended, with great pomp of foliage and coloring” (277). The beautiful scene hints at a moment of humanity until the narrator reveals that the Marchesa “was wretched amidst all these luxuries of nature and art” because “her heart was possessed by evil passions, and all her perceptions were distorted and discoloured by them” (277). The Marchesa’s perceptions are distorted by her addiction to power and control, so her villa which “resembled the palace of a fairy,” fails to provide her with relief from her confinement (277).

In contrast, we have already seen how Ellena is able to find a sense of freedom, even when confined to her jail cell. At San Stefano, she approaches her jail window, and “beheld thence an horizon, and a landscape spread below, whose grandeur awakened all her heart. The consciousness of her prison was lost, while her eyes ranged over the wide and freely-sublime scene without” (86). The Marchesa lacks the ability to engage with nature and aesthetics which compounds her confinement.

Radcliffe devotes significant space discussing the Marchesa's unnatural separation from nature, and when she holds that mirror to Ellena's ending, she calls the happy ending into question. Ellena's marital home is "at a delightful villa, belonging to Vivaldi, a few miles distant from Naples, upon the border of the gulf, and on the opposite shore to that which had been the frequent abode of the Marchesa" (390). Radcliffe is not subtle; their homes literally mirror each other. She even uses the same descriptive language calling Ellena's home the "scene of fairy-land" (390). Ellena has the same name, will inherit the same title, and now she lives in the same house- but on the opposite shore. Ultimately, the Marchesa is the person who liberates Ellena from the patriarchal bargain and her own miserable fate, only to leave her, quite literally, in her former place.

Radcliffe ties Ellena and the Marchesa together to demonstrate the cycle of subjugation in a patrilineal society and differentiate their fates through their opposite approaches to female natural discourse. Both women are inextricably tied to the Vivaldi family, and after the Marchese dies, Ellena and Vivaldi will supplant his parents as the new Marchese and Marchesa di Vivaldi and move to the next station of the patriarchally extended family. I do not suggest that Ellena will have the same fate as the Marchesa; in fact, it is clear that Ellena's fate is mitigated by her virtuous personality and her marriage of affection. Radcliffe places Ellena and the Marchesa as a mirror to instruct her readers how to escape the Marchesa's fate.

Ellena is not the only character affected by the Marchesa's ambition. Radcliffe mirrors Ellena and the Marchesa's intrapublic discourse with nuns to define fulfilling female relationships and to demonstrate how the public sphere can pollute counter-public politics. Their relationship is important because Radcliffe shows the reader that female discourse is not universally beneficial to all women. Women are as corruptible and selfish as men, and their

relationships inform their personalities as well as feed their character defects. The Marchesa's only female relationship is with the ambitious, rigid, and controlling Abbess of San Stefano who believes "that of all possible crimes, next to that of sacrilege, offences against persons of rank were least pardonable" (64). The Abbess clearly has distorted ideas about justice and morality. She imprisons Ellena within the convent and participates in the Marchesa's scheme to force Ellena into accepting "the veil, or the person whom the Marchesa di Vivaldi had, of her great goodness, selected for her husband" (80). The Abbess's lust for power and warped sense of justice feeds the Marchesa's quest to dominate her family and direct her fortune.

Ellena's convent connections, in contrast, are more in line with an egalitarian intrapublic discourse reminiscent of her life with her aunt. She develops a relationship with the Abbess of the convent Santa della Piéta, who sells Ellena's embroidery, offers her asylum after Signora Bianchi's death, and invites Olivia, (Ellena's mother), into the convent despite the impropriety of such a change. The Abbess creates the conditions for a functioning female counter-public: the "wisdom and virtue of the Superior, the sisterhood was principally indebted for the harmony and happiness which distinguished them" (285). Ellena's association with the Abbess seems to key to any hope of preserving Ellena's free and complete subjectivity after marriage. Because she has engaged with an egalitarian female community, and because she has a relationship with her mother, her future promises to be less isolated than the Marchesa's present.

A gothic formula predetermines the Marchesa's death, and it is unremarkable. Schedoni's arrest, trial, confession and suicide span twenty-nine pages of text. By contrast, Beatrice relates secondhand news of the Marchesa's death in three and a half pages. The Marchesa had been sick for years, and she had been very sick for a month; she called a confessor and her husband to her deathbed, confesses her crimes, and dies peacefully (354-57). On one hand, it seems like

Radcliffe quickly punishes her sins and moves on, but if we look a little closer at the circumstances of her death, a more benevolent reading emerges. Beatrice reveals that the Marchesa ““had been poorly a long time, but it was the *conversazione* at the di Voglio palazzo, that she came home so ill”” (355). A *conversazione* is a gathering ““an intellectual character, in connection with literature, art, or science”” (OED). Radcliffe presents the Marchesa as devoid of joy or desires beyond wealth and circumstances. It’s significant that she takes ill in an intellectually stimulating setting where people share ideas and thoughts separate from rank and title, for she seems to crave genuine connection and intellectual stimulation. It’s no mistake that the *conversazione* takes place at the di Voglio palazzo. ““Di voglio” literally translates to ““I want”” (Cambridge Dictionary). Radcliffe clues the reader into the real person behind the villain. She has genuine, reasonable desires that will never be realized. She discovers that murdering Ellena to secure her finances and position in society will not secure her peace of mind and genuine human connection. Her patriarchal bargaining has isolated her and prevented her from living a fulfilled life.

Beatrice reveals that the doctors ““found out that she had been dying, or as good, for many years, though nobody else had suspected it”” (355). This information is crucial to our understanding of the Marchesa’s character. The Marchesa’s physical illness is a manifestation of the mental decay precipitated by her isolation in the Public Sphere. Her desperate struggle for consequence and comfort in a society that denies her, turns her into a monster. Her murder conspiracy with Schedoni is the pinnacle of monstrous behavior, and it causes her final descent into death. She has spent her adulthood acting contrary to her counter-public education and egalitarianism, and she can no longer live with herself. The Marchesa’s conscience tortures her so badly that she confesses her sins, and she becomes ““as anxious to promote the marriage of

Vivaldi and Ellena as she had ever been to prevent it” (365). The Marchesa’s final act is to break her patriarchal bargain to support the tenants of conjugal fulfillment. She learns her lesson too late to save herself, but she liberates Ellena from the shackles of the patriarchal bargain. The Marchesa can save Ellena from identity loss, but she cannot save her from marriage.

The female characters in *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Italian* cannot escape the confines of patriarchal domination, and their coping strategies reveal how oppression corrupts or erodes female identity. By understanding the way Radcliffe explores counter-public discourse and patriarchal bargaining, we can see the subtle ways women successfully resist ultimate domination within socially constructed gender hierarchies. The marchioness and the Marchesa are unsuccessful because they perpetrate crimes against their sex for their own gain, yet Ellena and Julia face isolation and inactivity by accepting marriage contracts. Ellena stands out because she participates in commerce and politics before she chooses the retirement of marriage.

Read in this light, we might see how Radcliffe uses Ellena’s career to defend her own. Radcliffe lived comfortably and seemed to “take up writing out of boredom,” and find such success in her hobby that “the profits from *The Mysteries [of Udolpho]* enabled William to quit his job and the two of them undertook a tour of the Netherlands and Germany” (Introduction xxi). Radcliffe’s money gave her family physical and social mobility, but at the cost of her reputation. High Romantics derided her ability to appeal to all readers; the public were fascinated and scandalized by her imagination and couldn’t believe that “at the age of 32, simply retired into genteel affluence and obscurity” (Introduction ix). In fact, her death was falsely reported in 1800, 1810, and 1816 (Chronology li-liii). Radcliffe’s readers could not conceive that a woman could weave such scandalous stories without losing her mind. It was even more inconceivable

that a woman could peacefully retire after establishing herself as a public figure. Insanity and death are the only explanations for a woman leaving the public sphere after she managing to break into it. Radcliffe's relationship with commerce and her retreat from notoriety shed light on the way she develops of counter-public utopias in the convents of her novels.

The only women who maintain significant, sustained independence are the women who remove themselves from society completely. Radcliffe's most harmonious and successful female counter-publics are in the convents of the novels. The nuns of St. Augustin in *A Sicilian Romance* possess "pensive manners," and are "uncommonly amiable, and the dignified sweetness of whose manners formed a charm irresistibly attractive" (113). They live harmonious lives spent in study, prayer and conversation. Similarly, the nuns at Santa della Piéta in *The Italian* "appeared like a large family, rather than an assemblage of strangers" (285). Even the nuns inhabiting the perverted counter-public at the convent of San Stefano raise their voices in beautiful music that touches Ellena's "heart, and soothed and elevated her spirit" (82). The nuns can live in harmony because they shun their sexual urges which, in turn, prevents their containment in the domestic sphere. However, these counter-publics are a fiction. Radcliffe was a Protestant and knew little about Catholicism or monastic life. She invented harmonious female counter-publics that were as foreign to British readers as Schedoni's character, thus, demonstrating the impossibility of insular female discourse within British society. Further, Radcliffe imagines utopian counter-publics in alignment with her longing for public discourse within peaceful retirement.

Understanding the ways Radcliffe explores female counter-publics is necessary to deconstruct the limiting binaries that plague our understanding of Radcliffe and the Gothic genre. Radcliffe's work suffers from misogynistic and reductive interpretations that undermine her

significance as an innovator, a businesswoman, and artist. This thesis has demonstrated that Radcliffe developed an intricate pedagogy for British woman to survive their stifling lives without losing their identity. Furthermore, she managed to do so without compromising her readability or her reputation as a “high” artist. We must reframe our understanding of Radcliffe so that we can fully understand how her fiction operates and shapes the culture of Western fiction.

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