

# GOTHIC NATURE



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## The Value(s) of Landscape: The Sublime, the Picturesque, and Ann Radcliffe

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### ABSTRACT

Critics and scholars have long noted the way Ann Radcliffe makes use of landscape aesthetics throughout her Gothic novels, especially *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Despite this, there remains a striking dearth of scholarship on Radcliffe's use of landscape within the realm of eco-criticism. This paper seeks to fill that gap and to begin to reposition Gothic landscape within the eco-critical debate. Tom J. Hillard (2009) and Simon Estok (2009), among others, have theorised Gothic landscape as spaces within which terror and horror are achieved, produced, and enacted. To be sure, Radcliffe's 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' finds value in such spaces, at least for the purposes of terror, yet Radcliffe does not offer only one vision of landscape in her Gothic. Instead, she insists on a distinction between Gothic sublime landscapes, which are patriarchal spaces that seek to control, dominate, and subjugate both women and nature, and picturesque landscapes, which seek harmony between genders and balance between humans and nature. The Radcliffian heroines' preferment of the picturesque then becomes more than just an aesthetic choice because Radcliffian landscape choices reveal moral and ethical character. In sum, Radcliffe offers two visions of nature: one in which human beings can continue to attempt to dominate and control nature, and an alternative in which they attempt to live in harmony with it. Such a reading of an important early Gothic practitioner like Radcliffe suggests that we may want to broaden our conception of Gothic landscapes.

## Introduction

Any discussion of the role of nature in Gothic fiction must eventually wend its way to the works of Ann Radcliffe. Radcliffe's novels, especially *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794),<sup>1</sup> have long been looked to as novels rich in eighteenth-century aesthetic theorisations, specifically the sublime of Edmund Burke and the picturesque of William Gilpin. The scholarship of Charles Kostelnick (1985), Jayne Lewis (2005), Donna Heiland (2004), and Maggie Kilgour (1995), among others, has come to see much of Radcliffe's work as deeply informed by and invested in these aesthetic theorisations. Yet little has been said in the way of how these aesthetic theorisations can inform our readings of Radcliffe when it comes to *gender* and *ecocriticism*. What I wish to suggest in the following pages is that Radcliffe positions the sublime and the picturesque not only as competing aesthetics in the novel but as the foundations of competing worldviews between the human and the nonhuman world. Through the use of Burkean masculine sublime, Radcliffe illustrates the patriarchal reality for women in the eighteenth century, rendering the sublime as a space that sees both women and the natural world as little more than resources to be exploited. On the other hand, through the picturesque, Radcliffe offers us a vision of a different kind of world: one that insists on a place for the feminine and an appreciation of natural landscape not for its capitalistic value, but rather for its beauty, its majesty, and its spiritual consolation.

In her essay 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', published posthumously in 1826, Radcliffe makes explicit what her novels had made implicit: she was intimately familiar with and fully invested in the aesthetic theorisations of the sublime and the picturesque. Most likely written around 1802, the essay was intended as a prologue to her posthumously published novel, *Gaston de Blondville* (1826) and as an apology for its use of the supernatural. Using Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* as her literary guides, and Burke as well as, to a lesser extent, Gilpin as her aesthetic guides, Radcliffe describes in her essay what I call an 'atmospheric sublime' that insists on the use of certain consistent elements to create terror in

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<sup>1</sup> In order to avoid confusion, I have placed the original publication date of eighteenth-century works in parentheses after their first appearance in the text. With the exception of William Gilpin, whose works have not been printed in modern editions, all page numbers and other citations are from the modern editions of the texts listed on the References page.

the mind of the reader.<sup>2</sup> Radcliffe looked to Shakespeare as the master of the atmospheric sublime, arguing that Shakespearean terror, like her own, thrives upon the use of consistent elements: darkness, obscurity, dreariness, solemnity, and the like. Radcliffe (2000) writes that in order to achieve this kind of sublime, the author can ‘never shock the understanding by incompatibility’ (p. 166), but rather that all elements must come together in order to create terror in the mind of the reader.

Radcliffe’s contemporaries also responded to the use of landscape in her novels, particularly her utilisation of the atmospheric sublime and Gilpin’s theorisation of the picturesque. Perhaps the best example of this is to be found in Jane Austen’s satirical Radcliffian Gothic novel, *Northanger Abbey* (1818), a novel that Austen first began in 1798,<sup>3</sup> just four years after the publication of *Udolpho*. The experiences with landscape and place of Catherine Morland, Austen’s heroine, while at the modernised Northanger Abbey pale in comparison to the sublime terror imposed upon Emily St. Aubert, the heroine of *Udolpho*, by Udolpho castle, which is described by Radcliffe (1998) as ‘gloomy and sublime’, and seems more of a fortress than a home (p. 216). When read against Radcliffe’s text, Catherine’s entrance to Northanger Abbey can be described as both satirical and anticlimactic: ‘To pass between lodges of a modern appearance [...] without obstacle, alarm or solemnity of any kind, struck her as odd and inconsistent’ (Austen, 2005: p. 127). Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s review of *Udolpho* in the August 1794 edition of *The Critical Review*, while not altogether flattering of the novel or Radcliffe’s extended landscape descriptions, picked up on her use of the picturesque, and noted that the novel contained ‘much elegant description and picturesque scenery’ (2000: p. 361). Yet despite the modern and contemporary emphasis on landscape in the novels of Radcliffe, the Ecocritical community has surprisingly not turned its attention to her work or the work of many Gothic novelists – hence the introduction of this journal.

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<sup>2</sup> Radcliffe’s (2000) notion of what I am calling her atmospheric sublime is held together by a unity of elements, or what she calls ‘a sublimity of attendant circumstances’ (p.164). For Radcliffe, when certain elements are consistent and unified throughout a piece of literature, each element engages in a reciprocal process of ‘heightening their effect’ on one another (p.163). Take her description of the relationship between the sublime and the natural world that surrounds the witches in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* for example: ‘Shakespeare delighted to heighten the effect of his characters and his story by correspondent scenery: there the desolate heath, the troubled elements, assist the mis-chief [sic] of his malignant beings’ (p. 164). She goes on to object to contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare that made *Macbeth*’s witches look like ‘mere human beings’ and ‘downright Scotch-women’, thus ‘withdrawing [...] that strange and supernatural air which had made them so affecting to the imagination’ (p. 165). For Radcliffe, to withdraw any single element that contributed to the sublime was to diminish the ability of all remaining elements to create the sublime at all.

<sup>3</sup> When Austen began writing what would become *Northanger Abbey* in 1798, the Gothic was the most dominant literary form in England, representing approximately 30 percent of the market share of novels published in England between 1788-1807 (Miles, 2002).

The lack of attention paid to the Gothic by the Ecocritical community is at least in part, as suggested by Tom J. Hillard (2009), an avoidance of what he, following the lead of Simon C. Estok, calls Ecophobia.<sup>4</sup> According to Hillard, ‘Throughout its relatively short life, ecocriticism has largely overlooked representations of nature inflected with fear, horror, loathing, or disgust’ (p. 688). Hillard goes on to suggest that the Gothic is ripe for this kind of Ecophobic interpretation: ‘the Gothic provides a useful lens for understanding the ways that many authors—regardless of when they are writing—represented fears and anxieties about the natural world’ (p. 689). Hillard is, I think, correct for the most part in this assessment, but another contributing factor to the lack of EcoGothic studies is the difficulty of defining ‘Gothic’. Certainly, the late eighteenth-century Gothic novels produced by Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, Matthew Lewis, and Radcliffe observe, even as they help to define, the conventions of an emerging genre, but from the nineteenth century onwards, the Gothic has existed as more of a mode than a genre. And even when we think of it as a mode, defining it is akin to attempting to nail Jell-O to a wall. Timothy G. Jones (2009), in his attempts to wrestle with the term Gothic, borrows the notion of habitus from Pierre Bourdieu, and proposes, ‘Perhaps the Gothic is something which is *done* rather than something that simply *is*’ (p. 126).<sup>5</sup>

Radcliffe’s novel (1998) suggests as much with the inclusion of a valuable environmental counterpoint to the Ecophobic sublime in *Udolpho* with her inclusion of the picturesque. As earlier noted, much of Radcliffe’s work is invested with the aesthetic theorisations of Burke and Gilpin, but *Udolpho*, with its lush landscape descriptions, is almost an aesthetic treatise in its own right. The novel tells the story of Emily St. Aubert, who is raised at the picturesque La Vallée by her mother and father. After the death of her mother, the health of her father, St. Aubert, begins to fail, and she undertakes a picturesque journey with him in the hopes it will improve his health. Along the way, she meets Valancourt, her eventual husband, who begins a courtship with her shortly after St. Aubert’s death. Although Emily and Valancourt share much in common, her aunt, Madame Montoni (Cheron) forbids the match and insists Emily travel to Italy with her aunt’s new husband, the villainous Montoni. Montoni

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<sup>4</sup> Here, I should point out that this is beginning to change. Recent scholarship such as the edited collection of Dawn Keetley and Matthew Sivils, *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2017), is beginning to move the ecocritical conversation towards the Gothic and its landscapes of terror.

<sup>5</sup> What I mean to suggest is that the problem of definition by its nature indicates that the Gothic is roomy and inclusive, able to adapt and transform over time, thus my hesitancy to give credence to any one ecocritical theory as the means by which *the* Gothic can be explained or interpreted.

attempts to auction Emily and her control of La Vallée, the family home St. Aubert made her swear to never sign over on his deathbed, to a potential suitor. This eventually falls through, and Montoni takes Emily to the sublime Udolpho Castle, his own personal stronghold. While there, Emily encounters a number of terrifying elements and discovers the true nature of Montoni's villainy, which is most clearly revealed in his callous treatment of Emily's aunt before her eventual death. After the death of her aunt, Emily escapes from Montoni and Udolpho, originally to take up residence in a picturesque convent. At the convent, she meets Count de Villeforte and his daughter, Blanche. Ultimately, she reunites with Valancourt and they are married and take up residence at the picturesque La Vallée.

Whereas the sublime world of Udolpho castle functions as a site of patriarchal control and domination of both nature and the female body, seeing both as a resource to be exploited for personal gain, the picturesque La Vallée, the ancestral home of Emily St Aubert and the place she and her husband Valancourt ultimately return to, is constructed as a space of gendered harmony that seeks a balance between male and female and humans and nature. Here, Ecofeminism can be a useful critical tool for understanding the picturesque world envisioned by Radcliffe. David Del Principe (2014) observes that Ecofeminism works 'by exposing interlocking androcentric and anthropocentric hierarchies, misogyny and speciesism', and that it 'seeks to question the mutual oppression of women, animals, and nature' (p. 1). Similarly, Mary Phillips (2016) contends that Ecofeminism seeks to reverse the Cartesian perspective that privileges the rational mind over the natural world, arguing that it is this perspective which is responsible in large part for the subjugation experienced by women and nature: 'Those things which supposedly give humanity its defining characteristics, such as rationality, freedom and capacity for abstraction (and which are all traditionally viewed as masculine), are not shared with nature or the body or the feminine' (p. 60). Radcliffe's picturesque fits nicely within this definition in that it privileges gender balance and harmony with the natural world, rather than the control and exploitation of women and natural resources found in Burkean Ecophobic landscapes.

### **The Sublime and the Picturesque**

Before diving into a reading of Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, let me step back a moment and briefly discuss the two competing aesthetic theorisations in the novel and their relationship to gender and the natural world. Radcliffe's novel presents the sublime as an overpowering masculine

force that requires and indeed forces the feminine and the natural world into submission. Radcliffe presents the picturesque, on the other hand, as a space of harmony between genders that allows the empowerment of the feminine and envisions a sustainable natural world.

Radcliffean sublime is heavily influenced by the aesthetic theorisations of Edmund Burke (see: Norton, 1999; Heiland, 2004; and Kilgour, 1995), outlined in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). Although the sublime had been a subject of great discussion in the eighteenth century prior to Burke, his aesthetics differ markedly from the theorisations of Longinus (1739),<sup>6</sup> John Dennis (1704), and Joseph Addison (1712), which had dominated eighteenth-century theorisations of the sublime before the publication of his *Enquiry*. Samuel H. Monk (1935) describes the effort undertaken in the *Enquiry* as almost wholly original, marking Burke as ‘original as none of his predecessors had been’, and praising the *Enquiry* as a ‘new departure in aesthetic thought’ (p. 92).

Indeed, for Burke (1998), the sublime is a sudden empirical force, usually the product of terror and pain. It is produced by loud sounds, infinite objects, obscurity, vastness and other empirical experiences, many of which are found in nature (pp. 53-79). This description of the sublime lends itself quite nicely to Estok’s theory of Ecophobia, because the source of sublime terror is, for Burke, related to the idea of death (1998). Burke’s theorisations of the sublime see nature as a dangerous force that can rob of us of everything, including our ability to reason and even our lives.

For Burke (1998), the sublime astonishes the mind of the perceiver to such an extent that ‘all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror’ (p. 53). Ronald Paulson (1983) describes Burkean sublime as ‘alienating and diminishing’, before going on to argue that Burke sees the confrontation with power as ‘the essence of terror’ (p. 69). Paulson here makes an important point in his insistence on the sublime nature of power in Burke. Burke (1998) writes of the sublime as if it were a kind of physiological force of nature that overwhelms its object, yet for Burke the source of that overwhelming emotion is terror: ‘whatever is in any sort

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<sup>6</sup> The edition of Longinus that I cite here and in the References is the 1739 edition translated by William Smith. My decision to use William Smith’s translation is due to its enormous popularity in the eighteenth century. Monk (1935) notes that there were no fewer than five editions of Smith’s translation between its first appearance in 1739 and 1800 (p. 10).

terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*' (p. 36). Hugh Blair, in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), finds much to value in this theorisation, but he offers a critique of Burke on the subject of power in the sublime: 'mighty force or power, whether or accompanied with terror or not [...] has a better title [...] to be the fundamental quality of the sublime' (2005: p. 30).

For modern readers, it is no great leap to see the connection between Burkean sublime and patriarchal domination. For Burke (1998), one of the essential differences between the sublime and the beautiful is the power relationship between them. According to Burke, we submit to what is sublime, while what is beautiful submits to us. Also, Burke allows no space for the sublime and the beautiful to mix, arguing that to mix the two is to diminish them both. When we apply this to gender, it suggests that the feminine beautiful is forced to submit to the masculine sublime, and that there is no natural space in which the masculine and feminine can mix. Thus, Burkean sublime becomes a space in which Ecophobia and patriarchal domination come together to inspire terror in the female mind, to dominate the female body, and to circumscribe female existence.

Yet Radcliffe provides a counterpoint to this through the picturesque world of La Vallée. This turn to the picturesque is more than an indication of aesthetic preference on the part of Radcliffe. While the sublime is an irrational world of domination and control, the picturesque serves as a rational world of gendered harmony. The picturesque rose to prominence at the end of the eighteenth century as a result of the writings of William Gilpin, who wrote several essays and recorded his picturesque tours of the English countryside. The term itself underwent a massive aesthetic transformation from its original definition in Gilpin's 1768 *Essay Upon Prints*, which defined it as, 'a term expressive of that particular kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture' (p. xii), to its eventual definition, which combined the sublime and the beautiful and offered a kind of corrective to Burke.

While Burke claims that the sublime and the beautiful cannot be mixed, Gilpin insists upon the mixture of the two in his essay 'On Picturesque Travel' in *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape: to Which is Added a Poem on Landscape Painting* (1792). Here he argues: 'Sublimity alone cannot make an object *picturesque*. However grand the mountain, or the rock may be, it has no claim to this epithet, unless it's [sic] form, it's [sic] colour, or it's [sic] accomplishments have *some degree of*



*beauty*' (p. 43). Gilpin is then simultaneously building on and correcting Burkean aesthetics. In doing so, he has created a space in which the masculine sublime and the feminine beautiful can and must work together. When we survey the picturesque through the lens of Ecofeminism, the picturesque, with its insistence on a balance between masculine and feminine, becomes a space which reclaims the natural order and, importantly, serves as a world diametrically opposed to the world of ecophobic Burkean sublime. In short, Gilpin's aesthetic opened a door which both Radcliffe in the eighteenth century and Ecofeminists in the twenty-first are able to peer through in order to find a truly rational space that empowers and enables women and the natural world.

Gilpin's aesthetic also represents an important break from Burke in that he encourages the viewer of picturesque scenery and the picturesque tourist (his most important works are intended as guides for tourists) to embrace the scenery rather than be overpowered by it. Unlike Burke, whose *Enquiry* is filled with dangerous Ecophobic visions of the natural world that rob the 'victim' of such landscapes of the use of the reason, Gilpin's tours are filled by a natural landscape that is enchanting and invites reflection on the part of the viewer. Writing on the eve of the Industrial Revolution, which had and continues to have devastating consequences for the natural world, Gilpin presents his picturesque tours of the English countryside as opportunities for moral, rational, and physical exercise, which offer the viewer the chance for wonder, awe, introspection, and even religious reflection. Kostelnick (1985) rightly observes of Gilpin's picturesque, 'His tours and treatises explore the interworking of a range of faculties—intuitive, intellectual and moral—exercised by nature enthusiasts, primarily through the medium of "picturesque travel"' (p. 31). In *Three Essays* (1792), Gilpin also reinserts reason into aesthetics, encouraging the viewer of picturesque scenery to engage with landscape and to view it with an eye towards 'rational amusement' (p. 41) and 'high delight' (p. 50). What emerges, at least for Radcliffe's novel, is an aesthetic that not only insists upon a place for the feminine, but also seeks harmony and balance between the genders as essential to its formation.

### **A Taste of the Picturesque: A Landscape of Peace**

Although the picturesque world of La Vallée is not thrown into relief until the introduction of the Burkean sublime world of Montoni's Udolpho, the novel's opening at La Vallée proves important as it establishes the picturesque as a setting of harmony and equality, two things traditionally denied women in patriarchal societies. Other critics have pointed to the importance

of La Vallée in the novel and have likened it to a sort of paradise on earth: Kilgour (1995) describes it as ‘an Edenic world of innocence, and harmony between parents and child, humans and nature’ (p.115), while Kostelnick (1985) describes La Vallée as ‘the picturesque ideal in *Udolpho*’ (p. 33). That La Vallée is the aesthetic center of the novel is hardly to be debated and Radcliffe (1998) peppers the early part of the narrative with picturesque descriptions of this Edenic world, illuminating its ‘magnificence’ and ‘grandeur’ (p. 30). Radcliffe demonstrates her indebtedness to Gilpin’s ideas by slightly altering his description of the picturesque in *Observations on Several Parts of England, particularly the [...] Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland* (1786) in which Gilpin describes the picturesque as ‘Beauty lying in the lap of Horror’ (p.183), while Radcliffe describes a particularly picturesque landscape near La Vallée as ‘a perfect picture of the lovely and the sublime, of “beauty sleeping in the lap of horror”’ (1998: p. 55; see also: Norton, 1999).

Moreover, the ability to appreciate picturesque landscape serves as a litmus test for various characters throughout the novel. Those able to appreciate it, Emily and her father, St Aubert, chief among them, form what Kostelnick calls ‘an intuitive web of sensibility’ and are further linked ‘through the intuitive perception of external objects’ (1985: p. 38). Indeed, it is from St. Aubert that Emily learns to appreciate landscape, and it is also from St. Aubert’s relationship with Madame St Aubert that Emily learns about gendered harmony and its place in the natural world. La Vallée is a home in harmony with nature: St Aubert’s library opens onto a grove of trees, and Emily’s room is positioned between a lawn and a greenhouse. Emily’s ‘native genius’ is informed by the teachings of both her father and her mother (1998: p. 7),<sup>7</sup> and she is taught to cherish nature and her natural surroundings as well as to reflect rationally upon them. Unlike the landscape of the Ecophobic Burkean sublime she encounters later in the novel, La Vallée is part of the natural landscape, almost built into and around it, rather than a dominating force that attempts to subjugate the landscape and those around it. It is also a space, unlike *Udolpho*, which allows for and even enables rational reflection.

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<sup>7</sup> One of the more interesting departures in *Udolpho* from Radcliffe’s other novels is the fact that Emily’s mother is alive at the beginning of the novel and takes an active role in her education. The Radcliffian heroine’s absent mother was such a well-developed trope that Austen, in listing the faults of Catherine Morland as an heroine at the beginning of *Northanger Abbey*, includes the following lines about Catherine’s mother: ‘She had three sons before Catherine was born; and instead of dying in bringing the latter into the world, as anybody might have expected, she still lived on...to enjoy excellent health herself’ (p. 9). While Austen’s thoughts on Catherine’s mother are enough to make even the most self-serious literary critic smile, the inclusion of a living mother is a bit of an oddity in Radcliffe’s fiction. One way of reading the inclusion of Emily’s mother certainly seems to suggest the importance of balance between the genders at La Vallée.

Importantly, this insistence on rational reflection opens up a space for religious devotion within the picturesque. The marriage of rationality and religion, while foreign to many modern readers, was part and parcel of Radcliffe's Rational Dissenting background.<sup>8</sup> Rational Dissenters viewed advancements in science and a deeper understanding of the natural world through the early development of biology, botany, and ecology as proof of a rational creator (Fitzpatrick, 1990). Moreover, according to Mark Philp (1985), 'For Rational Dissenters natural religion and religious science [...] were seen in terms of reason gradually uncovering God's will' (p. 37). Anne Chandler (2006) argues that this kind of religious devotion engendered by the natural world is a key aspect of the Radcliffean heroine: 'we see her protagonists achieving a sense of spiritual consolation through a reverent appreciation of natural phenomena' (p. 135). Yet, as we shall see, this appreciation of nature is only possible in picturesque landscapes.

From the early pages of *Udolpho*, Radcliffe (1998) continually insists upon the connection between the spiritual and picturesque. She describes the landscape as able to produce 'sublime reflection, which soften while they elevate the heart, and fill it with the certainty of a present God!' (p. 30). She also describes the effect of the picturesque on individual characters: 'All nature seemed to have awakened from death into life; the spirit of St Aubert was renovated. His heart was full; he wept, and his thoughts ascended to the great creator' (p. 38). In *Three Essays* (1792), Gilpin himself suggests that picturesque scenery can serve as the medium of religious inspiration: if 'the admirer of nature can turn his amusements to a higher purpose; if its great scenes can inspire him with religious awe [...] it is certainly the better' (p. 47).<sup>9</sup> This is indeed a key part of the picturesque communities created in *Udolpho*. When Emily and Valancourt, her eventual husband, first meet, they are on a picturesque tour undertaken by St Aubert after the death of his wife. An early scene of connection between Emily and Valancourt comes when Valancourt looks over the picturesque landscape and declares: 'These [picturesque] scenes [...] waken our best and purest feelings, disposing us to benevolence, pity, and friendship' (1998: p. 46). The reverent appreciation of natural landscape

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<sup>8</sup> Although little is known of Radcliffe's life, nearly all critics place her religious background and aesthetic within the confines of Rational Dissent (See: Norton, 1999; Miles, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Gilpin was not the first eighteenth-century aesthetic theorist to suggest this connection. Joseph Addison, whose much celebrated 'The Pleasures of the Imagination' (*Spectator* 411-421, June 21-July 3, 1712) brought together empiricism and the sublime, removing the sublime from the purely rhetorical conceptions of Longinus and John Dennis. Addison had made a similar point to Gilpin's in *Spectator* 413 when he writes that the delight we take in the presence of nature can have a religious aspect to it: 'The Supreme Author of our Being has so formed the Soul of Man, that nothing but himself can be its last, adequate, and proper Happiness' (1788: p. 74).

codes Valancourt within the picturesque community of the novel precisely because of this ability to find harmony and rationality with the natural world.

From an Ecofeminist perspective, such a home harmonises masculine and feminine as well as humans and nature.<sup>10</sup> Yet Radcliffe is doing something far more radical here: Rather than attempting to destroy the worldview that has propped up Cartesian thinking, with its insistence on rationalism, as the height of humanity—a worldview that has consistently, as Mary Phillips (2016) and Val Plumwood (1991) point out, kept women and nature subjugated under patriarchal control—Radcliffe here is making space within Cartesian thinking for women and suggesting that patriarchal control and domination of women and nature is irrational and thus not sufficiently or properly Cartesian. In short, Radcliffe’s project is to associate both women and nature with rationality and suggest that anything that exists outside of a system that holds gendered harmony with the natural world as its pinnacle is irrational.

Radcliffe (1998) hints that this view is at odds with much of the world that surrounds La Vallée before she even introduces the Burkean sublime world of Montoni. During a visit from Monsieur and Madame Quesnel, the brother of Madame St Aubert and his wife, St Aubert is disappointed to learn of the ‘improvements’ Monsieur Quesnel has made to an estate he acquired some years back from St Aubert. Upon learning that Monsieur Quesnel intends to cut down trees that, in a move that would make Washington Football Team owner Daniel Snyder proud,<sup>11</sup> ‘interrupt’ his ‘prospects’ for the estate (p. 16), St Aubert expresses his outrage that he should destroy the natural scenery in an attempt at progress. That their taste should be at odds is no great surprise considering the kind of worldly concerns that dominate Monsieur Quesnel in Paris. Radcliffe’s narrator records: ‘By a man [Monsieur Quesnel] of such disposition, it is not surprising that the virtues of St Aubert should be overlooked; or that his pure taste, simplicity, and moderated wishes, were considered as marks of a weak intellect, and of confined views’ (p. 16). While Monsieur Quesnel represents the prevailing proto-capitalistic view, St Aubert understands far better the rarity and fragility of what has been created at La

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<sup>10</sup> While Ecofeminism has been sometimes criticised as essentialist, this scene cannot be regarded as essentialist precisely because it insists on a place for the masculine as well as the feminine.

<sup>11</sup> In 2004, Washington Football Team owner Daniel Snyder clear cut over 130 trees on his estate to improve his view of the Potomac River. This clear cutting included trees on federally protected land (Craig, 2006). The inspector general of the Interior Department issued a report in 2006 that, while it cleared Snyder of wrongdoing, noted that federal officials should have followed the advice of park biologists and horticulturalists, who advised against the destruction of the trees. The same report found that a Park Services employee acted inappropriately when he intervened on Snyder’s behalf (Craig, 2006).

Vallée, and it is St Aubert and Emily's view of nature—that it is worthwhile on its own and without need for 'improvement'—that rules this early part of the narrative. While Emily may be unaware of the terrors that await her, St Aubert is a man who understands too well the world of men like Quesnel and the villainous Montoni, which is why he extracts a vow on his deathbed from Emily that she should 'never, whatever may be your future circumstances, *sell* the chateau' (p. 76). This underscores both the fragility of the world created at La Vallée and its place in the novel as a bastion of physical, moral, religious, and rational reflection and contemplation.

### **The Sublime Udolpho: A Landscape of Terror**

Although the novel is bookended by scenes in the picturesque La Vallée, La Vallée only comes into focus through its juxtaposition against Udolpho castle, a place saturated with Burkean sublime. After the death of her father, Emily is sent to live with Madame Cheron, her aunt, who marries the villainous Montoni, the owner of Udolpho castle. Just as the landscape in the early sections of the novel reveals the nature of individuals and their values, the same is true in the Ecophobic landscapes of the Burkean sublime realm of Udolpho castle. In stark contrast to La Vallée, which is situated within the natural world, Udolpho castle dominates the landscape around it: 'Silent, lonely, and sublime it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all, who dared to invade its solitary reign' (p. 216). On this front, Kilgour (1985) calls Udolpho a 'gothic version of La Vallée' (p. 119), and Mary Poovey (1979) suggests that 'Udolpho is the sinister inverse of La Vallée' (p. 319). But La Vallée and Udolpho represent more than just a contrast in taste; they are opposing ways of theorising landscape that offer markedly different relationships and lives for women: La Vallée blends into landscape whereas Udolpho dominates it.

The values of this world become apparent even before Emily is taken to Udolpho by Montoni. Burke's alignment of the sublime with masculinity here is crucial because it codes spaces that engage in Burkean sublime as patriarchal by their very nature. Kilgour (1995) rightly posits of Udolpho castle: 'The castle's sublime rule over the natural world mirrors Montoni's total authority over Emily within it' (p. 119). Thus, Udolpho comes to represent a world out of balance, unable to engage with the natural landscape and only intent to dominate it as, in Burke's formulation, the sublime (masculine) dominates the beautiful (feminine). Here, I should pause a moment to explore the link between the oppression of women and the

subjugation of nature. Ecofeminist critic Mary Mellor (2003) argues that there is a strong connection between the two, contending that both women and nature, because they are devalued by Western socioeconomic systems or only thought of as resources to be exploited, 'are thrown into a contingent relationship as the despised and rejected by-products of (or precursors) of "modernity"' (p. 16). Read this way, Udolpho's domination of the natural world around it is a mirror image of Montoni's domination of Emily.

Like landscape, Emily—as a woman—is simply an asset that can be traded in order to further Montoni's ambitions. She is forced to submit to his will regardless of her own wishes. For Montoni, she is little more than a means to increase his own fortune, as she is due to inherit all of her father's estates on his death. Initially, it appears as if Montoni is simply content to auction her off to Count Morano, who appears to be the highest bidder, but when that plan is thwarted, Montoni removes her to Udolpho and keeps her a prisoner. Either way, she is dominated by male will and is left devoid of agency, as she seemingly has no power to determine her own fate. Count Morano, although eventually removed from the narrative, is hardly a better masculine option for Emily or La Vallée since anyone willing to participate in this kind of exchange with Montoni would almost certainly view both Emily's body and La Vallée equally as a resource to be exploited for personal pleasure and profit. In short, Morano would simply reenact the patriarchal oppression of Burkean sublime visited upon Emily by Montoni. And it is in the domination of patriarchal Burkean sublime that Radcliffe locates much of the terror in the novel.

The role of Ecophobia in this landscape comes into focus once Montoni removes himself and his 'family' to Udolpho castle. Shortly before arriving at Udolpho, which is situated on a peak in the Appenines, her carriage traverses forbidding and indeed dangerous landscapes: 'they entered a narrow pass of the mountains, which [...] exhibited only tremendous crags, impending over the road, where no vestige of humanity, or even of vegetation, appeared, except here and there the trunk and scathed branches of an oak, that hung nearly headlong from [a] rock' (1998: p. 215). To put it bluntly, this is what Yi-Fu Tuan (1979) would term a landscape of fear informed by Burke's theories on the sublime. Radcliffe's description of Udolpho includes such terms as 'solitary', 'obscurity', as 'silent' (pp. 215-216), all of which directly echo terms associated with the sublime in Burke (1998: pp. 65-66, 69). The castle and its surrounding landscape, combined with her justified fears of Montoni, render Emily's imagination uncontrollable: 'her imagination, ever awake to circumstance, suggested

even more terrors, than her reason could justify' (Radcliffe, 1998: p. 217). Despite the novel's early picturesque sections, this is the landscape that we often think of when considering Gothic nature.<sup>12</sup> Forbidding, foreboding, and dangerous, the landscape of Burkean sublime is a landscape of terror.

This landscape of terror and Udolpho castle itself engender Estok's (2009) aforementioned theory of Ecophobia. According to Estok, 'Ecophobia is an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world' that is often at the root of 'what makes looting and plundering of animal and nonanimal resources possible' (p. 208). Unlike St Aubert, who inhabits an estate that finds balance with nature, Montoni's Udolpho castle is reminiscent of its owner, only valuing its landscape for the ways in which it can be exploited for his own personal gain. Montoni might not hate landscape, but he is not indifferent to it either. To him, it is something to be controlled, traded, or destroyed according to his own needs. This is seen through his willingness to destroy the landscape around it when his enemies lay siege to the castle. He protects Emily in the process, but only because Emily's worth to Montoni is based on her value to him because of the estates she controls, and Montoni has no qualms about destroying the landscape around Udolpho in order to protect himself and the riches he can access through Emily from his enemies.

Additionally, the landscape creates terror in Emily and in anyone who stumbles upon it, a terror that Montoni wields as a means of control. Estok (2014) argues in another article that Ecophobia derives much of its power from its association with pain and death, contending that it is nature's ability to kill or injure us that drives our attempt to control it. Burke's *Enquiry* makes much the same point about the empirical sublime: 'For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain' (1998: p. 53; see also: p. 119). The association between death and Ecophobia, and death and Burkean sublime is a demonstration of the ways in which landscape is conceived in the minds of many: it is not something to be cherished, treasured, and nurtured, but rather it is something to be controlled, contained, and exploited for personal gain.

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<sup>12</sup> This term was first coined by Tom Hillard (2009) in his article, "'Deep into that Darkness Peering": An Essay on Gothic Nature'.

Moreover, the landscape around Udolpho also serves to entrap Emily both psychologically and physically. On a psychological level, the landscape, by its Burkean nature, removes Emily's ability to reason, and on a physical level, both its remote location and its dangerous cliffs keep Emily within its walls even before Montoni makes her his literal prisoner. Important to this is the notion of forced submission; Madame Montoni, echoing instructions from her husband, commands Emily to '*submit* to those, who know how to guide you better than yourself—I am determined that you shall be *conformable*' (1998: p. 137, emphases added). Just as Montoni attempts to make landscape submit and be conformable to his own needs, he expects the same from Emily. Unlike other Radcliffe novels in which rape/forced marriage is the key point of terror, Montoni's goal in exploiting her body for profit has to do with the lands she controls, and her body is, nonetheless, simply another natural resource to be exploited for his own gain. Yet, like other Radcliffean heroines, Emily resists the patriarchal Burkean sublime world of Montoni. Heiland (2004) describes Radcliffean heroines as female protagonists who are forced to 'display a calculated resistance to the patriarchal plots of Burkean sublime' (p. 58), and Emily is no different from her counterparts in this regard, though perhaps her will to resist is even stronger because of her prior experiences with the picturesque world of La Vallée.

Despite Emily's best efforts to resist the patriarchal sublime, her time at Udolpho takes its toll on her and continually interrupts her ability to reason. Udolpho castle itself serves as the place where Emily is robbed of her ability to reason and Radcliffe appropriates Burkean sources of the sublime in order to describe these phenomena. Radcliffe (1998) writes of Emily's experiences at Udolpho, 'reason cannot establish her laws on subjects, lost into the *obscurity* of imagination' (p. 310, emphasis added), and later Emily thinks of Udolpho as an '*obscure* and *terrible* place' that confuses her to the point that she is 'overwhelmed with *terror*' and



becomes ‘unable to determine what conduct to pursue’ (1998: pp. 326-327, emphases added).<sup>13</sup> The ability of Burkean sublime to disrupt Emily’s reason only becomes more pronounced as her stay at Udolpho continues and poses a greater threat than any other posed in the novel because she, like all good Radcliffean heroines must rely on her reason to escape.

The impact of Udolpho is the most dangerous element with which Emily must contend because her loss of reason dangerously interrupts her spiritual practice, growth and development. This comes into clearest focus just before Emily’s escape from Udolpho when she is removed because the enemies of Montoni have come to lay siege to the castle. Radcliffe takes that opportunity to lay siege to Burkean sublime and its ability to arrest religious practice. After her initial terror is removed and she leaves the Burkean landscape around Udolpho behind, she is able to experience natural landscape and the spiritual/religious renewal that comes with it: ‘The melancholy sighing of the wind among the pines, that waved high over the steeps, and the distant thunder of a torrent assisted her musings, and conspired with the wild scenery around to diffuse over her mind emotions solemn, yet not unpleasing’, yet even these thoughts are arrested by Burkean sublime and she is ‘soon interrupted by the distant roar of cannon echoing among the mountains’ (1998: p. 379). Visually, this return to picturesque landscape is striking to Emily and allows her mind to wander, indeed to be transported, towards higher thoughts.

For the first time since she arrived at Udolpho, Emily is able to positively experience the natural world and to embrace it and the godhead until it is interrupted by Burkean sublime, significantly, in the form of a cannon. In the *Enquiry*, Burke (1790) specifically points out ‘the successive firing of cannon at a distance’ (p. 76) as a cause of the sublime and employs artillery as an example of what he terms ‘excessive loudness’, which is ‘sufficient to overpower the

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<sup>13</sup> I should note that there is a rhetorical component to the disruption of reason. Earlier theorisations of the rhetorical sublime, such as the rhetorician known to eighteenth-century audiences as Longinus in his *On the Sublime* (1739), had indicated that truly sublime writing had the ability to transport the reader. Dennis (1704) and Addison (1712) had agreed with this conception of the sublime in at least part of their theorisations. Yet Burke removes the notion of transport entirely in his empirical aesthetic. Emily, an avid reader at La Vallée, finds herself unable to take solace in books at Udolpho. Radcliffe (1998) fills Emily’s failed attempts at reading with phrases that demonstrate her inability to focus on the text at hand, such as, ‘her attention wandered from the page’ (p. 236). Furthermore, Emily realises that she must be at peace to enjoy the rhetorical sublime that Longinus describes: ‘Emily sought to lose the sense of her own cares in the visionary scenes of the poet; but she had again to lament the irresistible force of circumstances over the taste and powers of the mind; and that it requires a spirit at ease to be sensible even to the abstract pleasures of pure intellect’ (p. 362). Such interruptions of transport can be read as yet another way that Burkean sublime disrupts the ability to engage with the rhetorical sublime for those within its grasp.

soul, to suspend its action, and to fill it with terror' (p. 75). In short, we see the overpowering and overwhelming nature of Burkean sublime and its ability to interrupt reason. For a Rational Dissenting author like Radcliffe, religious devotion was primarily achieved through a combination of reason and revelation (Philp, 1985), so any force powerful to interrupt to reason could also interrupt religious practice.

### **Escape to the Picturesque: The Return of Natural Order**

When Emily is finally able to escape Udolpho and the tyranny of Montoni and the Ecophobic Burkean sublime, she is almost immediately able to experience again the wonders of picturesque landscape. She is able to behold 'all the charms of sylvan and pastoral landscape united', (Radcliffe, 1998: p. 428), which leads her to become 'thoughtful and silent' (p. 429). This, when read against the passage above, makes clear the role of the picturesque in religious practice. Moreover, her travels lead her to a relationship with Count de Villefort and his daughter Blanche, who share her taste for picturesque landscape and who represent many of the same values Emily enjoyed at La Vallée, including the insistence on balance between genders that marks the earlier sections of the novel.

Blanche and Emily quickly become friends and share the joy that the picturesque landscape brings to them both. Blanche also demonstrates an ability to find religious consolation in picturesque landscape. Radcliffe's narrator records a scene in which Blanche looks out over a picturesque landscape at dusk and reflects, 'The shadowy earth, the air, and ocean – all was still. Along the deep serene of the heavens, a few light clouds floated slowly, through whose skirts the stars now seemed to tremble, and now to emerge with purer splendour. Blanche's thoughts rose involuntarily to the Great Author' (1998: p. 446). Given this similarity of spirit and the shared values between them, it is little wonder that Emily and Blanche become fast friends. Moreover, this friendship blossoms in a picturesque landscape, reiterating the relationship between the picturesque and communal bonds, especially between women.

Count de Villefort also exhibits the generosity of spirit, appreciation of natural landscape, and gendered harmony that defines the picturesque world of the novel. The Count has recently inherited the picturesque lands of Languedoc that Emily escapes to when she flees Udolpho. The Count remembers these lands from his youth and it is noted that 'the scenery had never been remembered by him with indifference' (1998: p. 437). His appreciation of

picturesque landscape and his conviction that such land should be appreciated rather than exploited recalls St Aubert. Interestingly, it is this benevolent paternal figure that reunites Emily with La Vallée and Valancourt. Here it is important to contrast the benevolence and disinterestedness of the Count with the selfishness and tyranny of Montoni: for de Villefort, neither Emily nor her lands are, as they were with Montoni, mere resources to be exploited through an Ecophobic capitalistic exchange. This is essential because it both affirms his place in the picturesque community and reaffirms this community's commitment to the equitable treatment of women and landscape.

Furthermore, because he is part of the picturesque community of the novel, the Count is able to participate in the process of reunion and recovery of rational happiness; whereas Montoni, as representative of Burkean sublime, is only able to disrupt and intercept rational happiness. This contrast can then be read as another instance of Radcliffe's aesthetic knowledge guiding the narrative and privileging the picturesque over Burkean sublime precisely because the picturesque insists on a space for the feminine and all things connected to it.

Radcliffe's last endorsement of the picturesque in the novel occurs in the final pages where we see Emily and Valancourt united in marriage at La Vallée. Radcliffe's narrator describes them as restored 'to the beloved landscapes of their native country' and links their restoration to picturesque landscape to 'aspiring to moral and labouring for intellectual improvement – to the pleasure of enlightened society', while 'the bowers of La Vallée' became, once more, 'the retreat of goodness, wisdom and domestic blessedness' (p. 632). Kostelnick (1985) observes of this scene, 'And thus *Udolpho* comes full circle: the rudimentary vision of the picturesque ideal that Emily and Valancourt indulge in with their moral innocence at the outset [...] now reaches full fruition' (p. 46). The novel has, at this point, indeed come full circle and returned to picturesque landscape.

It may seem that little has changed from the beginning to the end; after all, unlike other Radcliffian texts, we end up where we began in many senses. Yet Radcliffe seems to acknowledge her role as interrogator of aesthetic values, and she clearly privileges the picturesque over Burkean sublime. For at this point, not only has the picturesque prevailed but Burkean sublime has entirely disappeared from the novel in the person of a now dead Montoni, who, along with Udolpho, never reappears in the text once Emily makes her escape. The end

of the novel only leaves us with the picturesque because that is the only space in which the novel can end well. Gone are the solely masculine sublime aspects of Burke's theorisation; they have been replaced with an aesthetic that allows and, in some respects, insists upon rational engagement with the natural world and a harmony between male and female achieved through the picturesque.

## Conclusion

Allow me to step back for a moment by way of conclusion and make a couple of final points about *Udolpho* and Gothic landscapes more broadly. *Udolpho* is unquestionably Radcliffe's masterpiece and has survived as a shining example of the so-called Female Gothic (Moers, 1976). But, for me at least, *Udolpho* is as much aesthetic treatise as it is a novel. Radcliffe demonstrates through it and other novels, most notably *The Romance of the Forest* (1791),<sup>14</sup> her deep understanding of and engagement with the eighteenth-century aesthetic theorisations of Burke and Gilpin. In Burke, Radcliffe finds the perfect outlet for Gothic terror: a series of forces so overwhelming as to render characters helpless in the face of them. In Gilpin, however, she finds a design for rational living and a space safe from exploitation by patriarchal desires for sex and money through the possession of women and the plundering of natural resources.

Yet Radcliffe is doing more than simply rehearsing aesthetics; instead, she is using them as the basis for social commentary. Indeed, the association of irrationality with the masculine sublime may represent Radcliffe's most radical statement in the novel. Ecofeminist critics have long noted the association of reason and masculinity, and the ways that association has sought to dominate, subjugate, and exploit both women and nature. Yet Radcliffe, by coding patriarchy and Ecophobic relationships with the natural world as *irrational*, places them outside of the bounds of the Cartesian conception and, more importantly for my purposes, reiterates the need for the inclusion of women and the natural world in any rational system. In short, Radcliffe's novel suggests, its sixteenth-century setting aside, that the patriarchal status quo is not a rational system because it depends on the exploitation of women and natural

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<sup>14</sup> *The Romance of the Forest* includes many of the same aesthetic distinctions as *Udolpho* and even includes a fairly long section on the wonders of natural religion. Chloe Chard (2009) finds several resonances in these sections of the novel with Rousseau's Savoyard Vicar from *Emile* (1764). She goes on to argue that Radcliffe draws on these sections from Rousseau's text in the formation of the character of La Luc, a character not dissimilar from the Count de Villefort and St Aubert in *Udolpho*.

resources. Radcliffe, through the picturesque, offers a vision of harmony between women and men, humans and nature as the height of humanity precisely because it enables reason.

I should also point out that this view of the world seems to be a particularly eighteenth-century conception. That is, Radcliffe wrote during a brief period when science and religion walked hand-in-hand. As the Scientific Revolution wore on and helped to fuel the Industrial Revolution, religion and science became further and further divorced from each other. As Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983) points out, the early days of the Scientific Revolution were able to ‘reclaim [nature] as an icon of the divine reason manifest in natural law’, but eventually became consumed by a, ‘strict dualism of transcendent intellect and dead matter’ (p. 19). Radcliffe was an active writer in the last days of ‘divine reason manifest in natural law’. It would only be centuries later, and really only in the last 40-plus years, that we would return—and even then, only some of us—to a place of gendered harmony and respect for the natural world.

Yet Radcliffe was not naïve. She understood the world in which she lived, and she understood that world was patriarchal to its core. Little could she have imagined the horrors Ecophobic patriarchy has inflicted on the natural world for profit and for sport, and yet her novel demonstrates the sad gendered reality of the world in which she lived. Throughout the novel, sublime terror always destroys picturesque reflection. The masculine continually disrupts and defeats anything that contains rationality or femininity. The truth is La Vallée will remain an oasis and a world almost defying description due to the patriarchal dominance that surrounds it. Perhaps that is why these picturesque, protestant paradises of Radcliffe are never narrated in any of her novels. Emily and Valancourt do not go out into the world to preach the picturesque gospel, but rather they retreat from it so as not to become corrupted by it.

The final point I would like to make is that Radcliffe seems to be often remembered but seldom thoroughly read when it comes to Gothic novels. What I mean by that is that she is remembered far more for her terrifying landscapes than her picturesque ones. Too often, when we think of Radcliffe’s landscapes or of the landscapes in Gothic novels more broadly, we think of a kind-of spooky laundry list of terrifying and sublime landscapes that include something akin to John Dennis’s list of rhetorically sublime elements in his *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704): ‘Gods, Daemons, Hell, Spirits and Souls of Men, Miracles, Prodigies, Enchantments, Witchcrafts, Thunder, Tempests, raging Seas, Innundations [sic],

Torrents, Earthquakes, Volcanoes, Monsters, Serpents, Lions, Tygers [sic], Fire, War, Pestilence, &c' (p. 361), but the landscapes of Gothic novels are more than that, at least in Radcliffe. Moreover, even her terrifying landscapes are not mere parlor tricks as they are in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) or Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). For Radcliffe, aesthetic choices demonstrate character, virtue, morality, and values, and they reveal an individual's character at least as much as they shape it.

This, to me, suggests that we should broaden our understanding of the uses of landscape in Gothic fiction and come to view Gothic landscapes as more diverse than simply spooky, haunted, and damned. Part of what makes the Gothic so enduring is that it is so flexible and malleable. The Gothic can be whatever we need it to be, and it can fit into whatever mold we choose. It can be camp, and it can be serious. It can find its way into horror movies and detective novels. It can meet the needs of our own moment and, indeed, of any moment. Because it is so broad and inclusive, we should search for that diversity in our search for its landscapes and what those landscapes tell us about our own world or the one we might create. Our exploration may yield surprising results.

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