While the significance of many aspects of Gothic space has been extensively explored and analyzed, the same cannot be said for the way in which the self-actualization of Ann Radcliffe's heroine is directly enabled by the various spaces within which the plot plays out—spaces that are deliberately feminized or masculinized. This reading of Radcliffe's *The Italian* argues that its gendered spaces function as important sites of discourse about a young woman's subject-in-process. As apparently "self-possessed" as Ellena (di) Rosalba always is, she does not at first possess a self: fatherless and ignorant of her identity, she is precariously situated outside the dominant and oppressive patriarchal hierarchy. By the novel's close, however, she has achieved self-knowledge and is thus prepared to assume membership in society as a fully sovereign subject. Ellen Moers (126) was among the first to highlight this author's latent feminism when she said that "Ann Radcliffe began to write fiction at almost the same moment as Mary Wollstonecraft, and she too had an idea of female selfhood." Radically, Radcliffe presents this female subject as accessible not through the father, exposed as a false parent, but rather through the mother and other representatives of a rediscovered female lineage. In the search for selfhood, Ellena travels from the female-dominated asylum of childhood through increasingly hostile male-dominated spheres, ultimately attaining her true identity and subjecthood when she re-enters a highly feminized, nurturing space.

Gendered Space and Subjecthood: Ellena's Quest For Identity in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*

Valerie Henitiuk
University of Alberta
vhenitiuk@shaw.ca

The great French spatial theorist, Gaston Bachelard, teaches that setting is not merely the ground against which other elements play out, but can instead function as figure against the larger ground of the text, or even as the armature around which the text is built. Feminist geographer Gillian Rose argues that any conceptual model of space will be inherently gendered, and never transparent or innocent, and that we ignore this fact at our peril. And, as philosopher Henri Lefebvre points out, social space is not a passive, neutral locus, a "contenant indifférent au contenu"

(xvii); instead, a given space is created by and interacts with those occupying it. Moreover, while the significance of many aspects of Gothic space, such as the frequently claustrophobic and labyrinthine settings, has been extensively explored and analyzed, the same cannot be said for the way in which the self-actualization of Ann Radcliffe's heroine in *The Italian* (1797) is directly enabled by the various spaces within which the plot plays out—spaces that are deliberately feminized or masculinized. This reading draws upon the ideas of the theorists mentioned above to argue that the gendered spaces of Radcliffe's novel function, structurally, as important sites of discourse about a young woman's subject-in-process. As apparently "self-possessed" as Ellena (di) Rosalba always is, she does not at first possess a self: fatherless and ignorant of her identity, she is precariously situated outside the dominant and oppressive patriarchal hierarchy. By the story's close, however, she has achieved self-knowledge and is thus prepared to assume membership in society as a fully sovereign subject. Ellen Moers was among the first to highlight this author's latent feminism when she said that "Ann Radcliffe began to write fiction at almost the same moment as Mary Wollstonecraft, and she too had an idea of female selfhood" (126). Radically, Radcliffe presents this female subject as accessible not through the father, exposed as a false parent, but rather through the mother and other representatives of a rediscovered female lineage. In her search for selfhood, Ellena travels from the female-dominated asylum of childhood through increasingly hostile male-dominated spheres, ultimately attaining her true identity and subjecthood when she re-enters a highly feminized, nurturing space.[1]

The conventional Gothic setting is medieval, often in Spain or Italy, and it typically involves a haunted castle, gloomy chateau, or ruined abbey, complete with dark dungeons and secret passages. These places are "[a]ll more or less exotic settings where the requirements of conventional domestic realism can be ignored and where occasions of melancholy, mystery and terror may credibly be contrived at will" (Kelly 53). Much Gothic romance criticism has emphasized the persecuted heroine's negotiation of such menacing, imprisoning spaces in her desperate attempt to flee the forces of evil, and the generic formula has even been termed "maiden-plus-habitation" (Holland and Sherman 281). Feminist theory has also drawn attention to the female Gothic paradigm (Moers and Gilbert and Gubar are pioneering examples), which it interprets as a challenge to the existing gender hierarchy and patriarchal values. This scholarship views the genre's salient characteristics as textualization of women's repressed sexuality and privileges its interiority as a psychological model of the female self. The omnipresent castle has also been read as

a womb image (e.g., Greenfield), with the heroine's struggle functioning as her attempt to distinguish herself from an engulfing maternal figure.[2] Kate Ellis' 1989 *The Contested Castle* offers a reading of both male and female Gothic where the notion of home as sanctuary is undermined and subverted. My argument is related to these critical approaches, but I aim to fill a perceived gap in our understanding of spatial meaning in this genre. In 1968, Maurice Lévy posited that architecture is the essential element in Gothic: "le genre... se caractérise, de façon primordiale à nos yeux, par le rôle déterminant qu'y jouent les *demeures*. L'imaginaire, dans ces romans, est toujours *logé*" (qtd. in Delamotte 6-7). In contrast, this essay examines the "demeures" inhabited by the heroine of Radcliffe's *The Italian* in terms of their relationship to her acquisition of sovereign subjectivity, highlighting how and why they are represented as gendered.

My analysis is also indirectly informed by Foucault's notion of heterotopias, the counter-sites of cultural representation. In contradistinction to the inclusive utopia, heterotopia is inverted, a site where positions, places, and actions excluded from normative society are contested.[3] All of Foucault's work is concerned with how power is exercised, focussing on where power meets resistance. The gendered settings that Radcliffe creates are intimately connected with Ellena's resistance to arbitrary power and how it tries to represent her within social norms. The action of the story has the heroine stolen from her home in the dead of night and locked away in a distant convent, where she comes agonizingly close to knowledge about who she is. In a still unenlightened state, however, she is then taken to an ominous seaside dwelling, where she is granted an identity within the patriarchal structure, albeit one that turns out to be false. Moreover, the process of acquiring subjecthood through and within the patriarchy is fraught with danger to her person. It is only after Ellena arrives at the explicitly female-gendered refuge of the Santa della Pieta convent, and thus that the male-dominated norms have been effectively challenged via heterotopic inversions, that she becomes a secure subject in her own right.

This is a text implicitly and explicitly concerned with the naming of Ellena, with how her social self is continually problematized and represented by others. Female family members originally conceal who she is from herself and everyone else, causing her to bear a false name. The Marchese inadvertently underscores her untenable position by repeatedly drawing attention to how she is known. His words to his son during their first interview are as follows: "there is a young woman, <u>who is called</u> Ellena Rosalba,—<u>I think that is the name</u>;—do you know <u>any person of the name</u>? ... It is said, that <u>a young person of this name</u> has contrived to fascinate your

affections" (28; emphasis added). His insinuations concerning "the slander, that affected her name" (31; emphasis added), exacerbating Ellena's perceived undesirability as a marriage partner, drive her lover Vivaldi to swear to vindicate her by clearing that name. Later in the story, a second false name is ascribed to Ellena by Schedoni. At last, one day at Santa della Pieta, she is truly named by her long-lost mother, which authentic name gives her access to another, final name: the Marchesa di Vivaldi. Each step in this rather convoluted process of "naming" Ellena is intertwined with her attainment of self-knowledge and emergence as an autonomous subject, capable of functioning successfully within patriarchal society.

Robert Miles defines subject formation as follows: "the process by which society moulds us, as individuals, as 'selves,' but the process is more subtle than a simple shaping by external forces, for it also involves unconscious, or even unwilling, internalisation of value" ("Radcliffe and Lewis" 42). Further, Foucault's work has demonstrated that this shaping of the subject is inseparable from knowledge (which is itself inseparable from power). Ellena originally does not know who she is—she is not only self-less, but also worthless to the patriarchal powers that be (on several levels, including economically, as I touch on below), although she remains internally convinced of her own inherent value as a human being, which she terms her "pride" (32 and *passim*) and "dignity" (85 and *passim*). Far from passively internalizing societal values, the heroine participates in her own moulding into a sovereign subject by engaging with social forces in various and variously defined spaces. This mutually informing pairing of locus and self is, of course, a commonplace in Romantic literature:

> Perhaps the archetypal post-Reformation subject is... the Romantic artist, paying homage to nature, and coming to self-knowledge and self-regulation through that worship. The self is expressed, or rather, reproduced, in the locodescriptive poem, where the poet's experience is given form and order in the terms of the predominant aesthetic categories of eighteenth-century landscape description—the sublime, the beautiful and the picturesque. (Keane 35)

While the Romantic subject is often constructed through his sensibility in the presence of an impressive natural setting, additional gendered dynamics come into play in the formation of the specifically female Romantic subject. Anne K. Mellor argues that while their male counterparts were concerned with "the development of

an autonomous self," independent of relations to others, women Romantic writers "typically endorsed a commitment to a construction of subjectivity based on alterity" (3). Ellena's own subject-making process is governed by her original alterity and indebted to her relationship to a larger female community, although this does not necessarily preclude a certain autonomy.

As the novel opens, seventeen-year-old Ellena is living in the villa Altieri, her childhood home, which she has shared with Signora Bianchi, her maternal aunt, and the house-keeper Beatrice.[4] Although felicitous, Altieri has to this point been functioning primarily as a space of stasis, where Ellena must wait until her readiness for the role of romance heroine (i.e., the reaching of a marriageable age) allows her story to begin. Eve Sedgwick (155-56) has pointed out the recurrence of the "blank" beginning in Gothic, particularly for female characters: the heroine's "mother, if known, has disappeared temporarily, and an aunt may substitute" (155). The invented family name Rosalba signals this blank slate, the Italian *alba* is literally the dawn, the beginning, and if we look back to the Latin etymology, Ellena is a white rose on which no identity is inscribed. Further, the villa's designation, Altieri, strongly suggests Otherness.[5] This community of women exists separate from the patriarchal world of Naples, "at a short distance to the west of the city" (10). They live quietly in a female-gendered sphere, enveloped in "the veil of retirement" (9) and virtually cut off from the outside world—unknown and undisturbed but for occasional visits from a nun, Bianchi's cousin Signor Giotto (whose appearance in the text is comprised of one or two brief mentions), and various tradespeople. The villa is a prime example of the supposedly "Edenic home" where women learn to their dismay that they are there no less vulnerable than "in the savage wilds of nature where banditti roam freely" (Mellor 94).

The start of Ellena's romance and inadvertently her path toward sovereign subjectivity is the intrusion of a male hero, Vincentio di Vivaldi, into her heretofore feminized world. More than one critic (e.g., Miles, *Great Enchantress* 159) has explained that Radcliffe reverses the stereotypical pattern of the Gothic heroine encumbered with a family urging a match she does not desire, in that it is instead Vivaldi who is pressured to marry against his own wishes. His cold and devious mother has been especially fiercely opposed to the love match he prefers, upholding the feudal value system that she has internalized. In a single phrase, Radcliffe hints neatly at the Marchesa's error in believing that she has a true stake in supporting patriarchal interests: she is said to be fighting for "the imaginary dignity of her house" (35). As well, the patriarchy has attempted to assert its authority by labeling

Ellena a whore—the Marchese offers "to allow her a small annuity as some reparation for the depravity into which [Vivaldi has] assisted to sink her" (29). The heroine's vulnerability to such a range of assault (verbal, physical, social) will increase upon the death of the foster mother figure, a fact recognized by the ailing Bianchi:

> she must very soon, in the course of nature, leave Ellena a young and friendless orphan; still somewhat dependent upon her own industry, and entirely so on her discretion. With much beauty and little knowledge of the world, the dangers of her future situation appeared in vivid colours to the affectionate mind of Signora Bianchi. (24-25)

Despite the drawbacks of Ellena's lowly and lonely position, there are certain benefits. She is apparently free to choose her spouse, at least until discovered much later in the story by her "father," who wastes no time in beginning to plot how she can be married off to his benefit (the fact that his choice of husband happens to coincide with Ellena's is irrelevant to his plans). As Miles comments, "like any feudal genealogist, he immediately sets about restoring the fortunes of his house" (*Great Enchantress* 163)—Ellena has been subsumed into a masculine world that pays little heed to her wishes and accords her no dignity.

Because of Vivaldi's stubborn attraction and his parents' equally stubborn opposition, one night the aunt's dire predictions come true and Ellena finds her home invaded and herself kidnapped and bundled off to a convent in the northern Italian Alps. This second locale is also managed and occupied by women, but the sisters and especially the abbess of San Stefano are depicted as complicit with malevolent patriarchal forces. In fact, the isolated nunnery is a place where superfluous or recalcitrant women are hidden away from the outside world and so its role in supporting an oppressive agenda is made explicit.[6] Its gendered nature is problematized in that a convent should logically be female-gendered, whereas this one actually functions as a space of imprisonment and mortal danger, whose inmates remain victims of the patriarchy's machinations. Deeply unhappy, Olivia has voluntarily taken refuge there, but it has been and remains far from hospitable. The femininity and integrity of this religious community are further compromised as it holds Ellena captive, seeking to force her to become a nun against her will: "The sanctuary is prophaned,... it is become a prison" (84), as she soberly comments.

The heroine, however, finds unexpected support in her battle with oppression. The presence of a kindly older woman with whom Ellena feels an instant bonding

teases the reader with hints of Ellena's identification. Olivia (who will turn out to be the long-lost mother) acts as a lone voice of kindness and mercy in this place, and she does manage to create for the as-yet-unknown prisoner a secure asylum, albeit a tiny one high up in a turret and still behind a locked door, within the confines of the convent. We can read Olivia's actions as an attempt to encourage Ellena's subject formation. This turret representing a pocket of feminine security surrounded by evil is a typical Radcliffean strategy whereby a particular room serves as a retreat for her heroines, "an antidote from the miseries of the social world" (Murray 151), where she can recover herself and strengthen her resolve.

More importantly, the turret room has windows through which Ellena is able to view sublimity and thus approach the classic Romantic subject-formation scene: "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" (90). Olivia also eventually equips the room with reading material—including poetry by Tasso, so inspirational to other Romantic selves—to help Ellena pass the hours productively. These elements combine to create a space of resistance: "Hither she could come, and her soul, refreshed by the views it afforded, would acquire strength to bear her, with equanimity, thro' the persecutions that might await her" (90). Indeed, the patriarchy's despotism is revealed for the paltry thing it really is, put into perspective by the sublime landscape that now falls within our heroine's gaze: "man, the giant who now held her in captivity, would shrink to the diminutiveness of a fairy" (91). But Ellena still has no identity of her own and thus must face further tribulations before becoming fully a subject.

This convent may reveal "Ellena as a figure outside the community in need of conversion" (Canuel 525), but it is an internal conversion of self-recognition rather than entrance into the noviciate that she will undergo. She does not play the passive victim here, but rather actively resists being forced into a false relationship with society. Becoming a nun would admittedly grant her an identity, and a secure, valued position, if only a marginal one, both within and without the patriarchal structure (within, because convents function inside social and religious hierarchies, and without because nuns decline marriage and childbearing). However, this is not the identity that she is to attain, it is not her true self that is waiting to be found or constructed now that she has been thrown into "a new and homeless world" (60). Ellena is indisputably a Romance heroine, and the conventions of the genre call for her subjecthood to be signaled by marriage rather than religious vows.

Despite Olivia's attempts to protect and succour her, Ellena's vulnerability has gathered increasing momentum during her last days in the villa Altieri and her captivity at San Stefano. Her next stop on the gendered path to selfhood is almost fatal, pitting her alone against two representatives of a murderous patriarchy in a "lonely dwelling,... near the margin of the sea" (210). This space is explicitly male-gendered, inhabited by the evil Spalatro and evidently owned by Schedoni—not a woman in sight, which fact is given vital importance in the text:

> The appearance of this house, and of the man who inhabited it, with the circumstance of no woman being found residing here, each and all of these signified, that she was brought hither, not for long imprisonment, but for death. (213)

As a beautiful, accomplished, sexually mature female, Ellena is a dangerous element threatening the system of power and wealth controlled by men, and since she has refused to become a nun, murder is the only option. Of course, the death sentence is miraculously averted just in time: her would-be murderer becomes convinced of his paternity and, overcome by remorse as well as the realization that this woman is now useful to him, declines to kill her. What Radcliffe is making literal here is that Ellena gets co-opted into the patriarchal system, ascribed an identity as long-lost daughter to Schedoni. It should be noted that his very first words to her are "Whither do you go, and who are you?" (221)—an insistence on where she fits in his world, on her status within the patriarchy's hierarchy. An ironic note is struck by the fact that prior to and throughout the revelation scene she repeatedly addresses him as "Father," in deference to his monk's robes. The reader later discovers that the identity Schedoni gives her is false: she is in fact merely his niece, and this more distant relationship removes the moral stain of association with evil, by making the heroine innocent of any close genetic link to malevolence. What is being exposed in this fallacious parentage is the fiction of patriarchal reality, as Radcliffe undermines masculine hegemony, its self-proclaimed authority to define and name (which role I have already discussed as utterly central to the text). Regardless of its misrepresentation, the identity Ellena is granted is sufficient for the patriarchal forces to suspend the death sentence—they no longer "disdain to receive her" (14)—and determine instead to manipulate her ascension to the very position from which they were previously seeking to bar her. Her blood tie to the supposed father turns woman-as-threat into woman-as-tool.

Sparing her life is therefore not a merciful act so much as an ambitious, self-serving one. Mark Canuel points out that it is not familial affection—Schedoni's belief in his parental relationship to her—that saves Ellena from being murdered. Rather, his decision to cast the knife aside is a reflection of his will-to-power, and it is precisely the fatherly role that he assumes that accords him the power to control her life and future in a more manipulative way than merely by killing her. Allowing her to live is not an essentially different act than plunging the blade into her heart—both acts assume the patriarch's rights over women, and both reduce the woman to a pawn in a battle for dominance. The miniature that Ellena wears

> is not so much a sign of security in one's lineage as it is a sign of past and future obligations. Even though the portrait initially saves Ellena's life, it is nonetheless a reminder that the lineage that produces one's security can also lead to one's death—one's inability to escape the obligations incurred by that lineage. (Canuel 524)

I would push the argument further and suggest that the chain around the heroine's neck symbolizes the stranglehold patriarchal forces have on women, and that Radcliffe is here presenting the father's identifying image as a sham, thus imbued with false obligations. It is not an autonomous, subjective self that Ellena acquires at this time, but rather a wholly dependent, social one. The identity Schedoni tries to impose upon Ellena is made up of her place within relationships governed by societal conventions and duty. To become a sovereign subject, she needs first to gain autonomy, to possess some sort of rights as an individual.[7] Clearly, Schedoni's recognition of his child confers on her very few rights—she may now be pawn rather than prey, but nonetheless remains his victim.

It is within the Santa della Pieta convent that Ellena finally accesses the information allowing her to discard this wrongly imposed social identity for a true sovereign subjectivity. A site of tolerance and free will, representing order and stability, the second convent counteracts the first, and Canuel correctly explains that the "piety" of its designation "is equated with a form of supervised freedom from doctrinal prohibition" (526). Here we have a heavenly sanctuary under a benevolent female reign, where the wise, gentle leader respects the right of each inmate to self-determination. The community in fact functions as "a large family, of which the lady abbess was the mother, rather than an assemblage of strangers" (300), what one critic has called a "female family of choice" (Mellor 84). It is a place of reason, of

freedom, with none of San Stefano's ritual persecution. Accordingly, it is also a site of subversion as, unlike her evil counterpart, the Pieta abbess refuses to act in line with the repressive authority of the church. Ellena is therefore allowed respite from oppression within this feminized space until the time comes to discover her true identity as daughter to Olivia and deny her erroneous relation to Schedoni.

Significantly, our heroine is not allowed to pass directly from the almost mortal, masculine-gendered dwelling into this paradise on earth, but must instead return briefly to her childhood home.[8] By bringing us full circle, is Radcliffe suggesting a more direct path to female selfhood existed all along—a path from Altieri (Otherness) to Santa della Pieta (where her true self awaits)—if only the patriarchy had not interfered? After all, Ellena was intending to withdraw to that convent to mourn her aunt's demise, and it is only the need to inform Vivaldi that kept her at home and thus available to the abductors in the first place. In any event, this last overnight sojourn functions as a rebirth image, a purification ritual readying her for genuine subjectivity. It cannot be overemphasized here that Ellena is left alone at the villa Altieri to make the trip to Santa della Pieta independently: it was in fact her own idea to retreat to the nearby convent, although she has, with all due respect for propriety, sought and obtained permission for the relocation from her putative father. Schedoni deposits her at Altieri "at the close of evening" (289) and continues on his own ambitious journey, leaving the heroine to her own devices, with Beatrice for chaperone. Interestingly enough, we later learn that it is Ellena herself who sees him out that night, rather than delegating the task to her servant: "she had herself opened the door for her protector" (377). Our heroine is gaining in agency as she ushers out this ironically termed "protector" and prepares to achieve subjecthood. No one violently kidnaps her; no one drugs her and then hustles her off into a carriage at midnight; she simply wakes up in the morning, packs some necessaries, and sets off: "Ellena, obedient to the command of Schedoni, withdrew from her home on the day that followed her arrival there, to the Santa della Piéta" (299).

Ellis notes that "[m]obility is a defining condition of (male) bourgeois subjectivity shaping, and being shaped by, the bourgeois revolution" (172), and it helps shape this female subject as well. Ellena's other experiences of traveling are more typical of the besieged Gothic heroine, abducted and forced to endure an arduous journey through unfamiliar territory, in that she instigates none but the last of these displacements. The heroine's lack of agency is indicated by her submission to those forces beyond her control that take her from place to place. Nevertheless,

Moers argues for "traveling heroinism," even in this apparently passive way, as the single most subversive technique defining "Radcliffean Gothic" (127), where the author titillates her readership with a risk-taking heroine:

> For Mrs. Radcliffe, the Gothic novel was a device to send maidens on distant and exciting journeys without offending the proprieties. In the power of villains, her heroines are forced to do what they could never do alone, whatever their ambitions: scurry up to the top of pasteboard Alps, spy out exotic vistas, penetrate bandit-invested forests. And indoors, inside Mrs. Radcliffe's castles, her heroines can scuttle miles along corridors, descend into dungeons, and explore secret chambers without a chaperone because the Gothic castle, however much in ruins, is still an indoor and therefore freely female space. (126)

The voyage also clearly functions as access to the sublime and thus to the critical subjective experience: a character's sensibility and moral worth are revealed by how s/he reacts to the extravagantly described landscapes through which s/he passes. Similarly to Romantic subjects elsewhere, it is by viewing and responding to nature during her enforced dislocations that Ellena begins to construct her self.

The economic foundation for the various spaces discussed above as linked to the construction of self is worthy of comment, especially given the way women are exchanged as chattel in the feudal society represented in Gothic writing.[9] Several analyses have noted that Radcliffe's fiction is about proprietorship as much as, or perhaps more than, love.[10] Her heroines frequently possess property but lack the requisite power to manage it without self-serving interference by their male relatives and suitors and, metaphorically, the threat to a woman's person is often transposed into a threat to her property.[11] Ellena has little, if any, inherent economic value and thus no way to ensure her own security. Alone among Radcliffe's heroines, she is actually forced to earn her own living, and indeed her aunt's: "she assisted to support this aged relative, whose sole property was the small estate on which they lived" (9). Separated from both parents and from her own true name, she is simultaneously alienated from her property rights, and must contribute to the household expenses at villa Altieri by selling drawings and needlework. The labour itself is clearly female-gendered, and thus falls within the realm of acceptably feminine behaviour, but the act of marketing the product of that labour (albeit in a discrete manner, mediated through the purifying hands of Santa della Pieta, where

Ellena does not even have to venture outside to sell her goods, but waits decorously indoors for a nun to come and collect them) constitutes a transgression against gender roles. Ellena appears here as solidly a member of the capitalist—as opposed to the feudal—system, an individual taking charge of her livelihood. Nonetheless, there is likely some significance to the fact that the drawings she sells are copies: a sovereign subject would be able to produce unique, original work.[12] She is denied access to a fully actualized and productive self; marginalized by society in terms of both economics and social status, she is ineluctably Other.

While the two convents are self-supporting institutions, Ellena does not join either one as a fully contributing member of the community during her associations with them. She is, instead, first a prisoner, reliant on the labour of others for minimal food and shelter, and later a guest (although presumably a paying one) on the receiving end of the comforts provided by the happy inmates. These economies exist as part of the emergent capitalist system of exchange to which Ellena belongs, and yet the extent to which the convents are allowed independent participation is clearly constrained by the fact that any income is allocated first to communal subsistence and then to charitable works. No individual within a convent is permitted to accumulate riches in her own name, and neither can any nun employ personal wealth to rise above a certain socially regulated station. All funds and property belong ultimately to the Church, personified by the Pope and miscellaneous high-ranking (necessarily male) members of the Catholic hierarchy, and therefore these self-sufficient women constitute no threat to the paternalist status quo described in *The Italian*.

Although the text is vague on this point, the one explicitly male-gendered space appears to be owned by Schedoni—with a single glance Ellena can tell that the house where Spalatro lives "had evidently never been designed for the residence of peasants" (210)—with the underling assassin handling the day-to-day upkeep. The confessor after all reveals himself (in a mutually manipulative conversation with the Marchesa on pages 171 through 178) as intimately acquainted with its location, its layout, and even the existence of a secret door opening on a passage that leads to the sea. Furthermore, the reader later learns that Schedoni possesses his own chamber (225) and keeps the set of keys to at least one suite of rooms (232). Given the villain's past, this would mean that the dwelling by the Adriatic, textually aligned with masculine power, might well have been financed to some degree by ill-gotten gains, by the spoils of murder and rape. Spalatro, whom Ellena immediately but only in part correctly conjectures is the "servant of some cruel agent" (210) of her lover's

mother, ostensibly makes a meagre living by fishing, an occupation ironically rich in symbolism for Christianity (a fact that Schedoni is likely exploiting on page 175, as he seeks to convince the Marchesa that the murder of Ellena would be no sin). The building itself has fallen into disrepair: it has "an air strikingly forlorn," is surrounded by "a deep bed of weeds," and "the gates, which should have closed against intruders, could no longer perform their office" (210), thus again hinting at the ruinous corruption and decay of the feudal/patriarchal economic system. Whereas Ellena has an interest, born of righteous pride, in concealing the labour that maintains her own home—"She was not ashamed of 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" (9)—it is conceivably the vile acts Schedoni has committed that oblige him to keep secret this property, which is tied up with his nefarious past.

The entire novel is fundamentally concerned with exposing secrets in order to establish the identity of both Schedoni and Ellena, and in so doing it undermines paternal privilege. Ellena's lost identity is regained only through exposure of the villain's counterfeit identity first as a simple monk and later as her father. Moreover, Schedoni may well combine secular with spiritual authority (being to all appearances both her parent and a religious man), and may well force her to submit to patriarchal authority as the San Stefano abbess was unable to do, but he is a false father on several levels. He is a black or evil priest, viciously twisting the religion he is sworn to uphold, counseling and even ordering murder (Spalatro had been hired to kill Schedoni's brother). Prior to taking vows, he has abducted and raped his widowed sister-in-law, so that she will marry him in a pathetic bid to "retrieve her honour by the marriage vow" (340). Therefore, even the child he does biologically father upon her makes of him a perversion of a parent, and that child subsequently dies, further underscoring the abortiveness of any attempt at producing progeny. He owns Ellena as his daughter only upon the verge of taking her life, which vitiates the act's claim to be legitimating. Finally, we learn that he had nothing to do with her birth at all, and thus that the name he offers her (forces on her might be a more accurate turn of phrase) is a false one.

To readers in the early twenty-first century, all this can obviously be read through feminist critics' arguments against logocentrism as a phallocentric, male-dominant approach to understanding authority and the origins of meaning. Derrida coined the term to describe Western metaphysics as founded on thought systems always sustained by a so-called external truth. Deconstruction argues for the

primacy of writing (*écriture*) over speech precisely because it allows the *logos* (word) to be separated from the originating or "fathering" site. Interestingly enough, Radcliffe's heroine has been taught that the name of the father is "sacred" (236) and unspeakable, a ruse by the women responsible for her that is intended to keep her from being discovered/destroyed by the authority of this unnatural step-parent. Leaving behind the pre-Oedipal stage for the Lacanian realm of the symbolic, where masculine is differentiated from not-masculine, by acknowledging the father and thus entering society through language, is nonetheless an essential rite of passage that Ellena must and does perform. She is able to acquire her true self only by traversing the virtually fatal space controlled by Schedoni and his henchman to find her parentage. Therefore, what I view as a radically feminist episode remains one of the classic Gothic conventions, whereby "the victimized heroine must depend on an essentially evil agency for some relative good" (Murray 144).

Once she has successfully braved the exercise of arbitrary power by patriarchal forces, and is equipped with the necessary knowledge (i.e., that Schedoni is in fact the second Count di Bruno) to prove their illicit appropriation of her subjectivity, Ellena is prepared to move beyond that falsely authoritarian *logos* and assume an authentic identity. Sedgwick (1986) creates a model of the self as a spatialized entity: the space where one can become sovereign to oneself does exist somewhere beyond the here and now and yet is temporarily blocked off. In Ellena's case, she has been denied access to her genuine family history by the early death of her father and, more importantly, by the actions of her mother and mother substitutes. Radcliffe's relating of maternal absence with the heroine's initial status as Other coincides with Simone de Beauvoir's argument in *The Second Sex*, namely that one significant cause behind women's subjugation is that they are alienated from one another by patriarchal culture, and that the estrangement results in an inability to form a jointly empowering collectivity. For Ellena, this alienation is resolved during her stay at Santa della Pieta, where she is finally able to establish supportive connections with her mother and strengthen the nascent bond she has already felt with the abbess. The fact that in *The Italian* the site of genuine female subjectivity is located within an emotionally healthy and mutually respectful women's community supports Mellor's contention that "feminine Romanticism was based on a subjectivity constructed in relation to other subjectivities," where the "self typically located its identity within a larger family nexus, a family or social community" (209). It should be borne in mind that this is not the negative social self governed by duty,

false obligation, and lack of agency that Schedoni offered, but rather one informed by a love and respect that have been earned and reciprocated.

In contrast, Ellena's mother, aunt and house-keeper withhold information and the resultant familial affection from her until she leaves childhood and is ready to become an autonomous subject. So long as she remained in pre-marriageable stasis within the villa Altieri, she had no need of this knowledge. Once her niece has accepted Vivaldi's suit and is thus about to enter the patriarchal hierarchy, however, Signora Bianchi is at long last prepared to reveal the truth. At least one critical analysis sees Ann Radcliffe as a writer who challenges autocratic power by underscoring the importance of knowing: "Too much innocence is hazardous, Radcliffe concludes, to a heroine's health. She needs knowledge, not protection from the truth" (Ellis xiii). Unfortunately, the aunt expires from a sudden and mysterious illness before she can teach Ellena what she needs to know. This lack of empowering information now means that the adult heroine is exposed to malignant forces, although her perilous encounter with them is ironically what accords her the opportunity to construct her own self. Only after a trial by fire is Ellena deemed ready for self-knowledge. I must also underscore the fact that a valid identity is accorded via a matrilineal identification system. Feminist criticism has recently been highlighting the centrality of the mother-daughter relationship in Gothic romance, despite the genre's superficial concern with paternity (see, for example, Greenfield). This daughter who is not a daughter (i.e., to Schedoni) must give up the mother who is not a mother (i.e., Signora Bianchi) if she is eventually to locate the source of female identity for which she has been searching: the authentic mother who holds the key. The patriarchy that has sought to name and claim her via a false knowing is countered by a re-established female network that proclaims the truth, paving the way for Ellena's sovereign subjectivity.

This passage from girlhood to womanhood is accomplished only by successfully negotiating the dangers of patriarchal space, where a woman's value is determined by her marriageability. Heroines of romance are tied to the marriage plot, an aspect of the Gothic's purported conservative tendency; the novel does end with her wedding Vivaldi and acceding to the social rank that she has always merited by becoming his wife. The feminized haven Ellena enjoys inside Santa della Pieta is a temporary refuge—our heroine is not allowed to exist indefinitely outside the patriarchal world for she must eventually take her predestined place as the new Lady Marchesa, wife to Vivaldi. Ironically, it is the discovery of Ellena's identity defined as and through the female that at last renders her possessible by the male. A recent,

historically based analysis of the Gothic by James Watt takes issue with many feminist readings, terming Radcliffe's and other women writers' fictions "unambiguously conservative" (8). It is undeniable that even intelligent, independent, and self-aware Romance heroines must bow to the inevitable and, unlike Vivaldi, do not need anyone to tell them that, "You belong to your family, not your family to you" (30). This statement underscores Ellena's fundamentally limited choices under patriarchy. She (not Vivaldi) is the one who "is not at liberty to dispose of [her]self" (30) and will have to conform to the rules of the patriarchal family.

Regardless, as Miles (*Great Enchantress* 168-69) argues, the Vivaldi-Ellena marriage can be read as an egalitarian one based on respect for each party's essential rights, in opposition to the feudal alliances prevalent among the aristocracy, and thus any overly conservative reading of the conventional ending is subverted. Let us remember that he first attempted marriage ceremony, shortly after the escape from San Stefano, is thwarted when Ellena has still not attained subjectivity and is tempted against her better judgement to enter a socially unequal union. Even at the close of the tale, when she has earned her subjecthood and can accept her suitor on equal terms without any suggestion of a class transgression (all her pride and dignity intact), further safeguards are provided for her happiness 'ever after.' The mother acknowledges the danger of her child's return to the larger world outside the Pieta sanctuary: "Olivia, in thus relinquishing her daughter so soon after she had found her, suffered some pain" (411). Luckily, Ellena's bridegroom is no hostile representative of phallocentric values; he in fact remains implicitly aligned with the female world (many critics comment on the extreme feminization of Gothic romance heroes in general and this one in particular). Moreover, their future marital home is physically near the locus of the Mother: "the vicinity of Vivaldi's residence to La Pieta, would permit a frequent intercourse with the convent" (411). Ellena is not to be left to negotiate her new life as Marchesa without guidance from the sisterhood, and her intimate connection to a site of unassailable femininity is assured.

The importance granted to architecture and setting in Radcliffe has always been recognized, one of her contemporaries going so far as to suggest that she should stick to "furnishing the landscape" and leave depictions of characters to authors such as Fanny Burney (Thomas Green, 1797; qtd. in Rogers 56). The objective of this essay, however, has been to demonstrate how setting and character are effectively brought together in this novel to form a reformist subtext. The gendered spaces discussed here are not at all transparent, but instead provide a

stage for the heroine's passage to selfhood for the reader. Ellena embarks on a quest for the self that challenges the dominant gendered ideologies of identity as Radcliffe plays with heterotopic effects to contest representation of the female as Other and underscore the fundamental falsehoods underlying existing identity paradigms. By linking gendered spatiality to this heroine's subjectivity, I question the legitimacy of normative gender patterns (a privilege that Miles, "Radcliffe and Lewis," would claim for the male Gothic). It has been said that "*The Italian* is not just the most political of Radcliffe's romances, it is also the most sexual-political" (Miles, *Great Enchantress* 173), and this paper has explored the politically and sexually informed use of the crucially important vocabulary of space with a view to highlighting its unambiguous role in the attainment of self.

Works Cited

Botting, Fred. "Through Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture." *A Companion to the Gothic*. Ed. David Punter. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000. 3-14.

Canuel, Mark. "'Holy Hypocrisy' and the Government of Belief: Religion and Nationalism in the Gothic." *Studies in Romanticism* 34.4 (Winter 1995): 507-30.

Delamotte, Eugenia C. *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Ellis, Kate Ferguson. *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

Greenfield, Susan C. "Veiled Desire: Mother-Daughter Love and Sexual Imagery in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*." *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 33.1 (Spring 1992): 73-89.

Holland, Norman N. and Leona F. Sherman. "Gothic Possibilities." *New Literary History* 8.2 (Winter 1977): 279-94.

Keane, Angela. *Woman Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s: Romantic Belongings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Kelly, Gary. "'A Constant Vicissitude of Interesting Passions': Ann Radcliffe's Perplexed Narratives." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 10:2 (1979): 45-64.

Lefebvre, Henri. *La Production de l'espace*. Paris: Anthropos, 2000.

Mellor, Anne K. *Romanticism and Gender*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Miles, Robert. "Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis." In *A Companion to the Gothic*. Ed. David Punter. Oxford and Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000. 41-57.

---. *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995.

Moers, Ellen. *Literary Women*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1976.

Murray, E. B. *Ann Radcliffe*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972.

Radcliffe, Ann. *The Italian*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Rogers, Deborah D. Ed. *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*. Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1994.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. New York: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1986.

Todd, Janet. *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800*. London: Virago, 1989.

Watt, James. *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

---

[1] For a different perspective concerning a male character in a masculine Gothic novel who finds himself trapped in a feminine sphere, see Ellis' chapter nine, entitled "The Self under Siege: Charles Robert Maturin."

[2] Greenfield (80) offers an especially interesting interpretation of Ellena's escape from San Stefano. Olivia envelopes her as-yet-unknown daughter in her own nun's veil, which functions as a secure womb-like enclosure that enables the heroine's safe passage through danger out into the garden and the exterior world.

[3] For further discussion of how the concept of heterotopia can be applied to the Gothic, see Botting.

[4] The infant Ellena previously lived in the Villa di Bruno with her parents, but that space does not enter into the narrative.

[5] Other is *altro* in Italian.

[6] It is of interest to note that San Stefano is named after a male saint (the first Christian martyr), unlike the "good" convent of "pity/piety," which brings to mind the image of a mother grieving for her dead child.

[7] Robert Miles (*Great Enchantress* 159) argues that *The Italian* is entirely "conditioned by the language of rights and entitlements."

[8] There is an earlier transient space in the novel, the "Ursaline convent on the lake of Celano" (179), where Ellena is ensconced for some two weeks by Vivaldi after they have fled San Stefano. The convent is only briefly mentioned, however, and is thus excluded from this discussion.

[9] While Radcliffe's employment of varied spaces to represent the shift from feudalism to capitalism is worthy of extensive treatment, I deal with this aspect only tangentially, as further analysis is unfortunately beyond the scope of this particular article.

[10] Moers, for example, argues that, while other novelists such as Fanny Burney saw marriage as the way to ensure a woman's safety, for Ann Radcliffe, "a woman's main guarantee of her security in the respectable class... was property" (136). My own examination of, *inter alia*, the economic foundation for the various spaces in *The Italian* is indebted to numerous conversations with Dr. Gary Kelly.

[11] For a useful discussion about the sexualization of economics in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, see Todd 262.

[12] Granted, copying was not only an accepted form of art production for women at this time, but even a highly respected one (especially in the training of artists), and thus cannot be dismissed as a marginal activity in all cases. (I am grateful to Dr. Isobel Grundy for bringing this fact to my attention.) Nevertheless, Radcliffe makes it clear that Ellena's role as copyist is bound up with her impoverished and friendless status, not to mention something best kept secret and marketed in an anonymous manner.