

## Disrupted Innocence: Dangerous Seductions in two late Eighteenth-Century Novels

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### Abstract:

*Despite their various differences, William Beckford's extravagant story *Vathek* (1786) and Ann Radcliffe's imaginative novel *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) show an unexpected analogy in the cruel threatening of the life cycles of powerless protagonists carried out by ruthless characters. The different fictional universes of the two authors - the former taking place in an imaginary Eastern location, the latter in seventeenth-century France - feature victims that are young and naïve whereas the perpetrators are willing to destroy their lives with all means at their disposal, featuring both indifference and cruelty. Larry Wolff (2005) posited that the exaltation of innocence, especially in childhood, during the Enlightenment had a dramatic negative counterpart in libertines' desire to destroy every form of purity. Exploring the typology of criminal acts in the texts - either potential or concrete, it is possible to identify problematic latent contexts that had an influence on narratives modules. This study intends to explore possible hypotheses behind interrupted lifecycles of innocent protagonists.*

**Key words:** Eighteenth Century, Innocence, William Beckford, Ann Radcliffe, Sensibility, Gothic, Enlightenment

In her article on readers' reactions to Eighteenth-century fiction, based on the philosophical idea of "disinterested sensibility", Fiona Price (3) highlights what she considers "two of the Gothic's most significant features: its insistence on emotional excess and its preoccupation with the visual". Dissertations on the spectators, viewers, and readers' reactions to exterior situations of great emotional impact could be retrieved in various eighteenth-century thinkers and philosophers:

Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftsbury's *Characteristicks of Men, Opinions, and Times* (1713), David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) as well as *An Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), and Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) are some examples of a vast congeries of essays on the theme. Robert Miles (1999, 10) argues that Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism* (1761) introduced the theory of the "ideal presence", which was connected with the primacy of sight and "the visual in the Gothic". We might argue that the discourse on the phenomenology of sensibility and emotional response to particular scenes can include the texts on the sublime by Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), and the meditation on terror by Anna Letitia and John Aikin, "On the Pleasure derived from Objects of Terror" (1773), an essay that was considered the epitome of the theories on the sublime and was to influence writers in the decades to come.

Price develops an idea adapted from Clara Reeve's definition of narrative exaggerations in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole. The axioms from which Price develops her ideas, which are shared by a number of scholars of the Gothic, is that the two features mentioned before (exaltation of the visual and emotional excesses) are mostly Gothic or Romantic, and can generally be found in literary works of the period written by women.<sup>1</sup> However, Clara Reeve had openly criticized *Otranto* in the preface to her novel *The Old English Baron* (1778), a Gothic story that was proposed as a balanced alternative to Walpole's anomalous pastiche. Reeve basically reversed the notion that excesses belonged to female writing. An example of *The Castle of Otranto's* several hyperboles was the shocking death of

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<sup>1</sup> Ever since the distinction of the so-called female Gothic from the male Gothic, Gothic criticism has tended to a separation between the two categories, a separation that is being questioned nowadays. The identification of women's writing as distinguished from male writers that we can trace in Ellen Moers (1976) and Juliann Fleenor (1983) is a consistent part of feminist studies, which is supported also by several male critics. Moers' influential *Literary Women* focused on nineteenth century female writers. Its chapter on "Female Gothic" was a turning point in Radcliffe's critical analysis who was taken as the prototype of distinctive female writing, an idea developed by Fleenor in more extreme terms as she unites feminist ideas with psychoanalytical interpretations: "The Gothic and [...] female experiences have a common schizophrenia" (28) provoked by patriarchal paradigms. Deborah Ross (1991) recognizes the importance of these studies but avoids using the phrase "female gothic" whose rigid definition does not include the variety of works by male and female writers of the last decades of the eighteenth century.

Conrad (the protagonist's son) caused by an improbably huge helmet whose origin is supernatural as most events in the story. Still a teenager, Conrad could be considered as the first young and innocent victim of the Gothic, whose death is described at the beginning of the story in the very first lines while the readers have not had any possibility of visualizing the character yet. The only element to be clear, albeit inexplicable, is the mysterious and surreal cause of his premature violent death. It might be interesting to notice that one peculiar aspect that Walpole and Reeve share is their almost non-existent representation of passions and emotions *vis-à-vis* horrible events. Leaving aside the unusual emotional sterility shown in Walpole and Reeve's works it may be possible to argue that the visual does not solely belong to the Gothic, an aspect that is in contrast with Price and other critics' similar hypotheses. In fact, the visual may be seen as a general feature to be found in both Gothic and non-Gothic narratives during the entire eighteenth century. As far as the excesses of emotional distress are concerned we might equally claim that they are not an exclusive prerogative of female writing. A clear demonstration is provided by Samuel Richardson's novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748) that are characterized by a profusion of sentimentalism representing tender forms of feeling, however less compelling or amorous compared to Gothic or Romantic extremes that were developed a few decades later.

Walpole and Reeve's opposing views and techniques may represent a further confirmation of the risks of generalizations. By choosing a male and a female writer, I intend to show differences as well as analogies behind their specific narrative styles and their different stories, focussing on their descriptions of emotions and passions and their dealing with innocence. In particular, I have chosen two works published between 1786 and 1791, generally identified as Gothic fictions, created by two writers that may be placed at the antipodes of the literary world. The definition of the Gothic genre in William Beckford's *Vathek* may seem problematic. The identification of *Vathek* as a Gothic narrative is rejected by Diego Saglia (2002) and Ross Ballaster (2005), among others. Whereas both critics include the novel in the tradition of the Oriental tales other scholars tend to identify Beckford's story as a peculiar example of the Gothic for certain gloomy atmospheres that dominate the second half of the story. William Beckford and Ann Radcliffe did not have much in common and seemed

to mutually ignore each other despite being contemporaries. Radcliffe did not acknowledge Beckford's works, probably due to a propriety concern for the scandals surrounding her contemporary. On the contrary, Beckford wrote *Azemia* (1797), a parody of the popular novels in vogue during the last decade of the century. He used an improbable pseudonym, as can be read on the cover of his parodic novel: "Miss Jacquetta Agneta Mariana Jenks, of Bellegrave Priory, Wales". Beckford's ludicrous story was probably meant to highlight the nonsense in the literary productions of his time even though he did not directly attack Radcliffe. I would claim that Beckford and Radcliffe also shared some unexpected characteristics in their plots, among which we can find the descriptions of strong emotions, and the disruption (either concrete or potential) of innocence. Although the events that show how innocent creatures' lives come to be dominated by unscrupulous beings are fictional, both Beckford and Radcliffe convey ideas that transcend literary invention as their novels seem to provide clues about the society of the time. They were able to depict particularly strong passions that drive some characters' actions and become the cause of their doom. The adolescent heroine in Radcliffe's third novel, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), is introduced after a few pages from the beginning of the narration when she is going to lose her life by the hands of some criminals. After refusing to take the veil, she has been brought to a mysterious cottage in the countryside. The *banditti* have received the fatal order from her father therefore murder is a clear and present danger. The scene transmits extreme distress for the destiny of an innocent creature, powerless and trembling with fear, submerged by emotions of despair and feelings of horror while the tragic facts are happening directly under the reader's gaze. The same tragic scene is repeated and clarified by Adeline's subsequent narration through a new and emotional perspective. The repetition of the dramatic experience is a confirmation of the importance of the event in the economy of the story. The atmosphere of *The Romance of the Forest* is full of a lingering sense of suspense that often moves towards tragedy. Another major character, Pierre de la Motte, is forced to escape from the capital because of his financial problems. He risks his own life and manages to save the innocent Adeline because he is taken by strong emotions in admiring the girl's perfect beauty that is exalted by her deep distress. However, the relief is only momentary as Adeline's life is suspended in the forest where her saviour and his family take her and where she

remains for more than half of the story. The horrors that she has to face progressively increase. A traumatic interruption of this immobile situation is when Adeline is kidnapped and brought to a beautiful villa. Taken by uncontrollable desire, the kidnapper's intentions are horrible as he has decided to seduce the innocent girl. His actions are dictated by his obscure passion for the young woman, but the crime is not carried out for a series of strange coincidences. It might not be unnecessary to highlight that *The Romance of the Forest* does not actually belong to the category of "seduction stories" that "obsessed British writers and readers alike between the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 and the end of the Eighteenth Century" (Toni Bowers, 140) although strong emotions play a remarkable role in the development of the story. Bowers continues claiming that "plots featuring coercive heterosexual relations, where questions about force and complicity loom large, recurred in virtually all genres, they were a language that everyone spoke, a focusing point for popular fantasy across social divides".<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Radcliffe does not envisage a passive heroine doomed to be conquered. Adeline is an adolescent girl who is fully aware of her moral duties and is not intimidated by violence. Although Adeline experiences strong sentiments she intends to preserve her integrity and is able to dominate her feelings and passions. The young protagonist manages to keep at large other people's deviating passions that may threaten her life. Radcliffe shows a level of originality compared with the literary conventions of seduction stories because her female protagonist abandons her potential role as a victim and becomes a proactive maker of her own destiny, even though a strange form of paralysis has crystallized Adeline's life in the forest. Going back to her previous existence is impossible but proceeding towards a new direction is apparently out of the question. However, Eveline escapes danger on more than one occasion, despite undergoing a series of ordeals while the routine of her thoughtless adolescent years is lost forever: horrid discoveries are going to mar her conscience, whereas rape and murder

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<sup>2</sup> The already mentioned Pamela (1740) and Clarissa (1749) were amongst the most popular seduction stories in Great Britain. During the Enlightenment French literature offered a wide range of seduction stories either frivolous, supernatural or tragic. Remarkable examples are provided by Denis Diderot's *Les Bijoux Indiscrets* (1747) and Cazotte's *Le Diable Amoureux* (1772). Choderlos de Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782), where all possible categories of emotions and passions are described in detail, is probably the best example of libertine seductions with a deeply tragic ending.

are the threats that lurk over her life. What is intriguing is that the young protagonist turns into a courageous being when she decides to escape from the enchanted forest and starts acting as if she were a grown-up. She can master her own emotions, but she is equally able to keep her antagonists' passions under control. She takes economic, social and moral responsibilities upon herself in order to re-start her life-cycle. Her jeopardized innocence is perfectly preserved and her life can change for the better after all menace has been destroyed. She can finally open up to pure sentiments of requited love.

A few years earlier, Beckford had described violent feelings and passions in a strange story of a hedonistic caliph who starts a quest for the ultimate form of power. Beckford's aesthetic introduction of Vathek's majestic court resembles a Garden of Eden in a fabulous Oriental setting where the caliph indulges on all his passions without restraint. The scenes are in sharp contrast with the tragic development of the story, which is also imbued with a chain of bizarre and inexplicable situations. Descriptions of charming landscapes, such as the following one, are common in the text until the final turn of events, when dark atmospheres dramatically replace the dominant beauty:

The evening was serene, the air refreshing, the sky clear, and the flowers exhaled their fragrance. The beams of the declining sun, whose mild splendour reposed on the summit of the mountain, shed a glow of ruddy light over its green declivity, and the white flocks sporting upon it. No sounds were heard...  
(*Vathek*, 25)

The scene offers an example of bucolic calmness: the atmosphere is "serene", the "declining sun" gives "splendour" to the landscape, a peaceful "silence" is dominating the "green declivity". A soothing pastoral peace is represented by the "flocks sporting" on the green hill. However, while the readers' eyes are turned to classical images inherited from Virgil, a horrible danger is looming. It is the "dreadful chasm" nearby, still invisible but alive with the monstrous Giaour, hidden inside it.<sup>3</sup> Exploiting Vathek's passion for the unknown, the

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<sup>3</sup> Introduced as "an abominably hideous man" and as "the stranger" (*Vathek*, 5), the Giaour is described in various ways and his identity remains a mystery throughout the whole novel. He "had the grin of an Ogre" (20), he had "accents more sonorous than thunder" (22). In the end he becomes a demonic intermediary for Vathek's final destination, the infernal Hall of Eblis.

horrible creature has promised the protagonist some magic talismans but he wants innocent lives' blood in exchange. Therefore Vathek has secretly decided to sacrifice young victims for his thirst of power and mystery. All the children he chooses are characterized by a stunning beauty. During a fake pageant to select the most beautiful creature among them, the little ones are stripped naked to show their splendour and slowly led to the "accursed chasm" where they disappear one by one while the naïve subjects believe the scene is part of the celebration. The children's innocence has been duped and destroyed. Later on in the story, Vathek continues his atrocities when he separates the young betrothed Nourinihar and Gulchenrouz. Nourinihar has just entered adolescence. She is seduced by the caliph who is taken by an uncontrollable passion for the beautiful vizier's daughter.<sup>4</sup> The girl, who reciprocates Vathek's feelings, is involved in his fatal quest. Her cousin and young fiancé, a sensitive boy in his puberty, is sacrificed by Carathis, Vathek's cruel mother, who has joined her son in search of magic secrets and the horrid hall of Eblis. She performs demonic liturgies, totally indifferent to the number of victims that she leaves behind and her only passion is unlimited power. Like the giantess Eriphila, who is riding a hideous and enormous creature to chase Rinaldo in the seventh canto of Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1527), Carathis starts her journey with an equally horrible creature to spread terror over her land, but her blind fury leads her to a fatal ending. Vathek and Nourinihar's reciprocal toxic love takes them to a sort of Dante's *Inferno* and to their final doom. Unchained and uncontrollable feelings determine the protagonists' tragic destiny. The systematic destruction of innocence has brought Vathek to a horrid hell.

Albeit both Beckford and Radcliffe are concerned with uncommon circumstances and in spite of the strong passions shown by a number of characters, their novels appear to be diametrically opposed. Whereas Radcliffe is interested in suspense and unexpected

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<sup>4</sup> Vathek's first meeting with Nourinihar resonates with the poetic modes of late medieval love poetry (Vathek, 63). The power of the young woman that unconsciously seduces him, somehow recalls the Italian "Sweet New Style", originally *Dolce Stil Novo*, the poetic manner introduced by Italian Guido Guinizzelli and exalted by Guido Cavalcanti and Dante Alighieri. It highlighted the angelical and purifying function of the beloved woman. Nourinihar seems to represent a pure entity. However, she does not improve Vathek and is corrupted by his greed.

turns of events with latent supernatural episodes, Beckford is interested in magic, extraordinary colourful descriptions, and paradoxical situations that are highly imaginative but implausible. Radcliffe's protagonist, Adeline, is the victim of other people's passions and deviations whereas Beckford's main character, Vathek, is himself the cruel perpetrator of crimes. Clearly, their narratives seem to be different and incompatible. However, some similar elements can be detected. Both stories are based on imagery and invention, they are comparable to fairy tales or strange adventures. The passions shown by powerful characters in the story tend to subjugate others, and their common insistence on cruelty towards innocent and powerless young characters is challenging and provide clues that go beyond fictional invention and might help us connect the texts with eighteenth-century issues. Although appreciative of the hidden biographical interpretations of the two novels that are sometimes provided, I would rather highlight that Beckford and Radcliffe's points of convergence are extreme passions and the constant danger faced by innocence, whether it is preserved (Radcliffe) or destroyed (Beckford).<sup>5</sup> I would claim that the obsessive presence of peril, which dominates multiple pages of both novels, may be connected to real life problematic situations of Beckford and Radcliffe's times. It is a special focus that is linked with social and legal aspects of contemporary society. Even though Beckford and Radcliffe's novels, or romances (as she prefers to call her works)<sup>6</sup>,

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<sup>5</sup> Both André Parreaux (1960) and Boyd Alexander (1962) identified biographical aspects in their pioneering studies on Beckford. Rictor Norton (1999) and Robert Miles (1995), among others, frequently insist on biographical details that they claim to trace in Radcliffe's works. Norton claims that Radcliffe might have been a victim of parental abuse at a very young age.

<sup>6</sup> The insistence of Gothic criticism on the *genre* codification to distinguish the novel from the *romance* denotes the need for a difference in styles as well as in social messages, the former apparently being an expression (generally masculine) of pure realism and the latter usually representing a description of female reaction to rough patriarchy. Similarly to Margaret Doody (1997) who claims that romance and the novel are one in *The True Story of the Novel*, Ross (1991) has rejected the rigid division between the two genres in her study on *romance* and realism in female writing. The definition of *romance* for Radcliffe's works had been posited by Walter Scott (1826) because it justified the strangeness of her stories and at the same did not allow her to be part of the *elite* of novelists of the calibre of Defoe, Richardson, Smollett and Scott himself. Montague Summers (1969) recognized the value of her *romances* because they magically offered three different kinds of Gothic stories: the "historical", the "sentimental" and the "horror Gothic" (30), whose distinction he did not however completely clarify. Maggie Kilgour (1995) is one of the very few critics who maintains that the Gothic is a "hybrid between the novel and *romance*" (6). The difference between *romance* and novel dates back to a period prior to Radcliffe's novels. Ferrante Pallavicino's scandalous work *La Retorica*



cannot be included in the category of erotic novels, which abounded during the course of the century, they are problematic for the dangerous passions and the moral trespassing they often feature. Mixed with ambiguity, the crimes that are perpetrated or are narrowly avoided have strange connotations and are connected with forbidden forms of desire and the will to destroy innocence.

A girl living in seventeenth-century France, Adeline reflects the conditions of an adolescent orphan in England of Radcliffe's epoch. In her text on the supernatural in literature, Emma Clery (125) explains that women's status in society during the eighteenth century was unstable. She argues that according to the British Legislation their position would have been rather precarious. Generally excluded from inheritance or forced to get married for economic reasons, women had the right to inherit a part of the legacy but they could not keep their money and properties long.<sup>7</sup> When young women lost their parents and relatives they could not count on any form of legal or social protection. Equally, in case of marital knot, women lost all their possessions in favour of their husbands when they got married. The Law of England included the definition of *couverture*, explained by William Blackstone on the presentation of the law in 1770. Sue Chaplin (127) underscores that "[i]n the *Commentaries on the Law of England*, Blackstone likens English law to an ancient, venerable Gothic castle that simply requires modernization to render it effective in the eighteenth century". Economic freedom for women was virtually impossible. The difficulties that Adeline experiences are realistic and the dangers she faces are concrete as she has no social status or *couverture* to preserve her. Any protection she might receive from other characters is ephemeral, as she has neither parents nor a spouse. Nevertheless, Radcliffe daringly finds

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*delle Puttane* dated 1642, and translated in English as *The Whores' Rhetorick* in 1683, discouraged "the courtesan from reading high-flown Romances because they promote[d] sexual virtue and constancy, recommending instead the cynical comedy and the aphrodisiac Novel" (James Grantham Turner 221).

<sup>7</sup>The case of poet Anna Seward (1742-1809) is interesting. Her decision not to marry may have been dictated exclusively by a desire for intellectual independence. Seward was her parents' only heir and she could count on a good income, which allowed her to live at great ease in an elegant mansion surrounded by a vast park. She had a circle of friends, intellectuals, philosophers and scientists forming an exclusive coterie. Unlike the great majority of the women of the age, she received a private education from her father, a fact totally disapproved by her mother, who thought that culture for women was improper in an epoch where conventional drawing room accomplishments were considered more than enough without risking of trespassing propriety.

a solution that is more than a compromise. What she envisages is an innocent young woman, the potential victim, who can defend herself. Adeline overcomes all difficulties and acquires a form of conscious independence. On the contrary the hedonistic Vathek is punished because of his crimes. Unfortunately there is no possible redemption for his victims and innocence is forever destroyed. However, the disturbing nonchalance employed to annihilate pure young lives, albeit with grotesque effects, may seriously mirror a concrete situation in real life where the legal system may not have been adequate to prevent abuses towards children and young people.

Some decades before Jean Jacques Rousseau had interestingly envisaged equality between men and women, respectively represented by the two female protagonists, Julie and Sophie in his popular philosophical novel, *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1760). The text was censored and burnt in protest after its publication because of its ambiguity in the protagonists' liaisons. His pedagogical treatise, *Emile, or on Education*, published in 1762, had introduced the idea of respect towards children who traditionally belonged to the weaker layers of society, no matter what their social status might have been, and for its revolutionary ideas about childhood. The text highlighted the intrinsic innocence of young age and the dangers of a corrupted society, based on injustice. In Larry Wolff's words (432), "*Emile* offered a modern conception of childhood's innocence as something that naturally appertained to the child, and of which the child could only wrongly be deprived". In his engaging article on a scandalous case taking place in Venice in 1785, involving a sixty-year-old professed libertine, Wolff interestingly explains how the parameters to judge a sexual crime at the time were completely different from our twentieth- and twenty-first-centuries perspectives. A number of crimes did not have the legal specification they have today. Wolff explains that Franceschini's "thick case file", a rich elderly man employing an eight-year-old and making her sleep in his bed, "offers to the historian of the ancient *regime* one of the most comprehensive explorations of the phenomenon that we today call 'sexual abuse' or 'paedophilia' – for which there were no such clarifying clinical or legal designations in the world of the 1780s" (420). Wolff also explains (418) that "the unusual Venetian tribunal, *Esecutori contro la Bestemmia*, executors against blasphemy (...) had to try to formulate the charges in a way that made sense according to Venetian law. Ultimately, the impossibility of articulating a modern concept of sexual abuse meant

that Franceschini's conduct would be prosecuted under the very general rubric of 'scandal.'" Further Wolff specifies that "the eighteenth century possessed neither the legal framework nor the conceptual vocabulary to recognize (...) sexual abuse" (424). Gayle Rubin's statement can help to understand the level of our contemporary potential misinterpretations that shows how our present visions of the world differ from past epochs and from the Enlightenment era.<sup>8</sup> Different crimes were all judged by the same tribunal notwithstanding their different characteristics. Lorenzo Da Ponte, Mozart's librettist, had risked tragic consequences for having a *liaison* with a married woman, therefore he had escaped to Vienna to avoid conviction by the same tribunal that judged Franceschini. Moreover, Wolff argues that the libertinism exalted by the supposed Venetian paedophile during the trial was not considered different from the libertinism expressed by a paragon of seduction as Giacomo Casanova. As Wolff posits, Casanova's erotic memoirs and even more so De Sade's pornographic stories, which saw the light in the 1780s, highlight the connection between excessive passions, libertinism, and the obsessive will to violate innocence.<sup>9</sup> *Vathek* latently introduces problematic crimes against children and describes different forms of immoral passions that subsequently disrupt innocence. Even Beckford's personal case in real life is probably difficult to determine from the point of view of our cultural and legal universe. Beckford himself was involved in a scandal that had long-lasting repercussions for his private life for a supposed sexual relationship with young William Courtenay. Beckford's situation was never completely clarified. Some historians claim he may have been the victim of a conspiracy to destroy his political career.

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<sup>8</sup> "In spite of many continuities with ancestral forms, modern sexual arrangements have a distinctive character which sets them apart from pre-existing systems". The great social changes brought about by "industrialization" and "urbanization" in Western Europe and the United States in nineteenth Century modified a variety of aspects of human life and "it also gave rise to a new sexual system characterized by distinct types of sexual persons, populations, stratification, and political conflict" (Rubin, 679).

<sup>9</sup> It might be useful to make a distinction: Giacomo Casanova's autobiography, written in French to reach a wider public, features episodes showing a theatrical quality to impress the reader (Grantham Turner 216). De Sade's systematic and serial shattering of innocence in *Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu* (1791) provides a dialectical demonstration of how virtue is completely ineffectual and useless in a world dominated by opportunism and hypocrisy. De Sade's text is more a philosophical manifesto than a real novel.

Beckford and Radcliffe were intent in creating new and original literary forms by transforming and adapting a variety of literary sources. In spite of being sometimes undervalued and excluded from the literary mainstream for their narrative choices and their unusual themes, they contributed to remarkable changes in literary styles and themes. They showed a great degree of originality and introduced romantic atmospheres as well as gloomy contexts that were later absorbed by the Romantics of both the first and the second generation. They originally featured strange and dangerous emotions in some of their characters that in all probability reflected problematic aspects of society that had not been clearly developed before. They introduced ambiguous situations by filtering them in a subliminal way through stories based on adventure and imagination. The disturbing element that transpires from their respective narratives is the constant menace that any form of innocence is subject to. My claim here is that the obsessive threat that is lurking on young and innocent characters is the reflection of a contradictory society that was deeply changing. In spite of the new philosophical supremacy of reason and the outstanding technological innovations of the period obscure and anguishing contexts persisted and re-emerged in a number of works of literature. I would suggest that more in-depth analyses of Beckford and Radcliffe as well as other authors active in the last years of the century could help us discover important clues behind the descriptions of passions and deviations that were the hidden mirrors of the profound contradictions existing in the long eighteenth century.

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