

## Gothic Terror, Virgilian Bucolic Atmospheres, and Classical Eroticism in *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) by Ann Radcliffe

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### Abstract

*During the long eighteenth century, in a period when enlightened philosophers and writers had intended to spread knowledge universally and illuminate people's minds, a thin red line united poets and artists who were attracted to darkness and showed that the uncanny played an important role in literature and art. Giovanni Battista Piranesi's and Henry Fuseli's nightmares, the attraction to the horrid and the sublime, and Cesare Beccaria's social analysis of the horrors of torture were only some of the influences at the roots of the Gothic mania that exploded during the last decades of the century. Although it is undeniable that Ann Radcliffe was the creator of unparalleled gloomy atmospheres and frightening stories in her Gothic novels, she showed aspects in her prose that did not belong to the Gothic genre. I seek to show that Radcliffe was imbued with classical knowledge despite a lack of systematic education, often mentioned as a problematic flaw by her contemporary and later critics. Classical authors were commonly appreciated through a variety of literary translations by multiple layers of society who did not know Latin or Greek. I intend to demonstrate that Radcliffe's romances, especially *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), included classical imagery and contained ideas and sensibilities moulded, in particular, by the Latin Virgil.*

**Key words:** Gothic Literature, Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Eighteenth-Century Literature, Antiquity, Virgil, Literary Translation, Latin and Greek Literature.

A painting by an anonymous German artist from around 1760 now at the Royal Castle Museum in Warsaw depicts hovering clouds in a dark sky and a person surrounded by antiquities. The gentleman enjoys his position in the middle of the wilderness, protected by classical ruins (see Figure 1). It is a portrait of the influential art historian and archaeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who spent a large part of his life in Italy discovering the secrets of ancient architecture. While his contemporary Giovanni Battista Piranesi exalted the originality of Roman Antiquity, which he often rendered in horrid, awe-inspiring etchings and engravings, Winckelmann was the promoter of Greek models. Both Winckelmann and Piranesi encouraged the renewed love for Antiquity throughout the last decades of the eighteenth century. At the same time they were attracted by mysterious atmospheres. Winckelmann published his influential *History of Ancient Art* in 1764 when Horace Walpole printed *The Castle of Otranto* that was to mark the formal beginning of Gothic literature. Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art* and Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* were not the only significant texts to be published in 1764. *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments* was printed in the same year in Italy. After eighteen months, it had already been reprinted six times and had been translated into French. When it was first 'englished' in 1767, it was attributed to Voltaire.<sup>1</sup> The 1775 English edition still bore Voltaire's name on the frontispiece, and the anonymous English translator claimed in the preface that 'perhaps no book, on any subject, was ever received with more avidity, more generally read, or more universally applauded'.<sup>2</sup> The real author was Marquis Cesare Beccaria. One of the best jurists of the epoch, and a member of Italian Enlightenment, Beccaria's text included several typologies of crimes and punishments. It was especially the second part of the essay that aroused deep interest as it described hideous tortures used to obtain confessions from suspects, whether guilty or not. Beccaria's descriptions were so vivid that they provoked a remarkable impression on readers even though he had not intended to be morbid or indulge in gory scenes. His actual idea was to denounce the inhumanity of torture in a fair legal system. While Winckelmann and Piranesi were promoting the study of the Classics and Walpole was reinventing medieval *romance*, Beccaria provided the collective imagination with real-life tales of horror that were soon to be transposed into the most frightening Gothic imagery. Winckelmann,

Piranesi, and Beccaria together with Walpole were instrumental in providing ideas and iconographies for Gothic literature.<sup>3</sup>

Gothic and Romantic trends at the end of the eighteenth century developed within a general literary current that has been considered antithetical to Classicism and Neoclassicism by many critics.<sup>4</sup> The supernatural, which is deemed to be one of the major characteristics of the early Gothic novels, may be traced back to the works of various authors several decades before the beginning of the Gothic novel. Emma Clery remarks that Joseph Addison's aesthetical meditations in *The Spectator* had praised the introduction of the supernatural to provoke pity and terror in the manner of ancient playwrights.<sup>5</sup> Addison's ideas were modern but also relied on 'the authority of the classical past' (35). Although defining the early Gothic remains a hard task, it is possible to argue that the beginning of its manifestations started decades before its flowering. The eerie descriptions of anguish in *The Nightmare* (1781) by Henry Fuseli and the fascination with gloomy atmospheres in the compositions by the Graveyard Poets showed the attraction to the supernatural that became evident in the 1750s when the Age of Reason was in full swing. Meanwhile, Classicism still had a persistent influence on literary life. An example is provided by Samuel Johnson's scholarly articles in *The Adventurer* (1752—1754) that he wrote for a wider public to comment on classical authors.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1. (Anonymous) *Johann Joachim Winckelmann in a Classical Landscape*

### **Gothic versus Romantic versus the Classics?**

In contrast with the era of Classicism, popular horror stories invaded the market in the last decades of the eighteenth century, and their propagation contributed to the shadow cast on early Gothic literature.

Cheap and low-quality imitations of Gothic novels attracted criticism for the *genre*. As a consequence, it was relegated to an inferior level of literary production in the decades to come. The negative opinions expressed by some Romantic authors resulted in a further blow to Gothic literature. Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall claim that Wordsworth was the one who played a major role in destroying Radcliffe and the Gothic.<sup>7</sup> The liminal state between Gothic and Romantic has intrigued several critics. Michael Gamer observes that ‘the language of influence between writers, whether of direct borrowing or wilful misreading, cannot adequately represent the mediating forces at work, let alone capture the richness of the appropriations that do occur’.<sup>8</sup> Wordsworth and other Romantic authors intended to maintain their high profile, and be acknowledged as the beginners of a new poetic model. Interestingly, they also wrote imitations of Greek and Latin works, but they tended to camouflage these classical influences.<sup>9</sup> Gamer uses the words ‘attraction and repulsion’ to describe the strange relationship between Romantic and Gothic writers. The paradox is that Romanticism may have scattered from a form of literary opportunism. Initially oriented towards legitimising their unsuccessful forms of Gothicism, the Romantics not only distanced themselves from it but also systematically exposed its inferiority. In spite of generalized criticism, the Gothic genre resisted.<sup>10</sup> However, not all Gothic novels are the same. What I intend to highlight is that the distinctive trait that helps to recognise a higher form of Gothic is the use of classical, medieval and Renaissance influences that can be detected in Radcliffe as well as in Horace Walpole, William Beckford, William Godwin, Matthew G. Lewis, and Mary Shelley.<sup>11</sup> Classical imitation was not a casual choice, and the evidence is provided by the pervasiveness of themes from the past in Radcliffe’s novels. Influences from both previous and contemporary poets, novelists and philosophers mark the level of knowledge shown by Radcliffe who had a cultural sense of the enlightened tradition of her time. Although her novels became popular for their mechanisms of suspense that attracted a large public, they provided elegant narratives imbued with cultural implications. The tradition of literary translation played a fundamental role in the development of literature and the adaptation, either conscious or unconscious, of cultural influences, both diachronic and synchronic. That Classicism and other sources from the literary

past were of extreme importance throughout the century can be established by analysing distinct authors. Elements from Antiquity were introduced where they were least expected, and interaction with the ancients appears at various levels in several eighteenth-century works. Dafydd Moore highlighted the profusion of examples from Homer, Virgil and the Classics in James Macpherson's *Ossian* (1765), which was meant to exalt the superiority of Northern European heroic tales in opposition to ancient epics of Greek and Latin traditions.<sup>12</sup>

The image we get from Rictor Norton's biography is that Radcliffe could not possess sufficient cultural knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Despite the prejudices surrounding her, positive opinions in favour of Radcliffe were expressed by a number of critics.<sup>14</sup> Radcliffe's *romances* turn out to be complex and difficult to categorise. She explored various narrative modes making her stories go towards multiple directions before the *finale*, thus opening doors for narratological possibilities.<sup>15</sup> Traces of Greek tragedies and the Classics can be recognised in texts by Radcliffe, an aspect that seems to confirm Claudia Johnson's claim that her writings show a great erudition ranging from philosophy to aesthetics.<sup>16</sup> The task is to discover the source of Radcliffe's erudition, and the answer can be provided by the centrality of literary translations in the propagation of culture and the determinations of canons during the 'long' eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Translations from the Classics were of crucial importance as a consequence of the cultural impact brought about by Dryden's version of *The Aeneid* (1697), and Pope's rendering of *The Iliad* (1715—20) and *The Odyssey* (1725—26). The number of translations of the major classical authors was astonishingly high. Translations of Horace, Ovid, Statius, Lucan, and many others were available for all kinds of readers. In all probability, Radcliffe absorbed the effects of classical Antiquity through literary translations, and her references to ancient authors in her four central novels are not accidental. The remarkable number of translations of classical authors was the basic factor that allowed Radcliffe to acquire wide cultural knowledge.<sup>18</sup> Penelope Wilson explains that the variety of versions of Virgil's works was impressive: 'There had been six complete translations of Virgil's *Eclogues* before 1660, and Virgil's exalted standing ensured that the years 1660—1790 saw many more, both in verse and in prose, often primarily intended for use in schools'.<sup>19</sup> The complete *Georgics* had been rendered by Dryden in 1697 and they 'remained standard until the twentieth century'.<sup>20</sup> Of

all classical authors, Virgil seemed to be the one who played a major role in Radcliffe's works.

### Virgilian Bucolic in Radcliffe

The proliferation of Virgilian examples appealed to a variety of readers, both erudite and less educated. The second book of *The Georgics* provides several examples of botanical descriptions.<sup>21</sup> Inspired by Theophrastus's *Enquiry into Plants* (*Historia Plantarum*), written between the fourth and the third centuries BC, and *Works and Days*, written by the poet Hesiod in 700 BC, Virgil describes trees and dedicates several pages of his masterpiece to their beautiful characteristics. Uniting scientific knowledge and poetic sensibility, Virgil starts from a general vision of the woods. He describes the varieties of trees and their qualities, the 'tall poplar', the 'azure willow', the stately-sized 'chestnut', the sacred 'huge æsculus', the 'oaks', the 'branching elm', the 'clustering cherries', and the 'green bay'.<sup>22</sup> While exalting the divinity in nature, Virgil concentrates on themes that were uncommon for his time. provides useful observations of nature and reveals secrets about agriculture. His text became especially important in the eighteenth century when agriculture and landscape were the results of technical efforts meant to improve the land in Great Britain.<sup>23</sup> The observation of nature in Radcliffe is dictated by the Virgilian example, and it reflects the new interest in agriculture shown by her contemporaries. One entry in Radcliffe's diary written in 1802 is revealing and confirms she is deeply connected to Virgil. She provides descriptions of the garden in Blenheim Castle and mentions the same trees chosen by Virgil in the very same order.<sup>24</sup> What is remarkable is that Radcliffe, like Virgil, starts from a general statement on forests and woods and then proceeds to describe the trees. Even more astonishing is that she starts her list by mentioning the poplar, the very first tree described by Virgil in his lines. The way in which she describes what she calls the 'noblest trees' recalls the exaltation of nature in *The Georgics* by Virgil — a work that Addison had qualified as 'the most complete, elaborate, and finished piece of all Antiquity'.<sup>25</sup> Radcliffe also describes the cypresses mentioned by Virgil who had included 'the cypresses of the Idæan height' (*The Georgics*, Book II: 105, 97). Books I and II of *The Georgics* contain various sections dedicated to descriptions of magnificent trees, which were also an inspiration for

James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730), and anticipated Radcliffe's pastoral passages. Virgil's idyllic images appear to have moulded Radcliffe's descriptions of nature. The love for bucolic scenes and the Virgilian appreciation of nature is reiterated in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) while *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) introduces long passages dedicated to delicate nature.<sup>26</sup> The following excerpt shows the protagonist, Adeline, discovering a majestic landscape for the first time:

They entered upon a land confined by high banks and overarched by trees, on whose branches appeared the first green buds of spring glittering with dews. The fresh breeze of the morning animated the spirit of Adeline, whose mind was delicately sensible to the beauties of nature. As she viewed the flowery luxuriance of the turf, and the tender green of the trees, or caught between the opening banks, a glimpse of the varied landscape, rich with wood, and fading into blue and distant mountains, her heart expanded in momentary joy. With Adeline the charms of external nature were heightened by those of novelty: she had seldom seen the grandeur of an extensive prospect, or the magnificence of a wide horizon —and not often the picturesque beauties of more confined scenery.<sup>27</sup>

It is possible to notice the insistence on the beautiful aspect of trees and nature while the words sound like a Virgilian echo. Trying to get as far away from Paris as possible, Adeline, De La Motte, and his family travel for days until they find a place that seems to emanate a magic quality. The analogy with Virgilian pastoral scenes is amazing, especially considering that the Latin poet exalts the power of spring with remarkable frequency. The entries dedicated to spring in *The Georgics* are the highest in number, compared with autumn and summer. Some examples from *The Georgics* can help to better understand the inner analogy between Virgil and Radcliffe:

While yet the Spring is young, while Earth unbinds  
Her frozen Bosom to the Western Winds;  
While Mountain Snows dissolve against the Sun,  
And Streams, yet new, from Precipices run.  
(...)  
When Winter's rage abates, when chearful Hours  
Awake the Spring, and Spring awakes the Flow'rs,  
On the green Turf thy careless Limbs display,  
And celebrate the mighty Mother's day.  
For then the Hills with pleasing Shades are crown'd

(...)

The Spring adorns the Woods, renews the Leaves;  
The Womb of Earth the genial Seed receives.<sup>28</sup>

It is possible to appreciate the proximity between the Virgilian bucolic descriptions and the Radcliffean exaltation of idyllic settings. Virgil's sensibility and his delicate poetic masterpieces seemed to suit Radcliffe's narrative style.

Radcliffe introduced epigraphs at the beginning of most chapters in her stories to show her erudition and love of literature. However, she completely excluded the fashionable convention of Latin or Greek quotations from the epigraphs introducing the chapters in her most important novels.<sup>29</sup> She made two partial exceptions to this rule: (i) Chapter XIII in Volume III of *Udolpho* (465) features a passage from 'Pope's Homer' concerning a few lines from *The Iliad*, describing a horrible tempest; and (ii) Chapter XVIII in *The Romance of the Forest* (271) introduces a line by Joseph Trapp dedicated to Virgil's tomb that seems to highlight Radcliffe's affinity with the Latin poet.<sup>30</sup> Regarding the motivation for Radcliffe's undisputable choice of Virgil as an ideal mentor, we should consider a number of factors. The Latin poet was universally recognised as one of the greatest geniuses of Antiquity. Moreover, his works were not at risk of moral censorship as Virgil was not considered indecent or offensive on a par with Lucretius, Horace and Ovid. Radcliffe appears to have inherited from Virgil the sense of nature as a form of spirituality and religious sentiment. The Virgilian contrast between the corrupting urban life and the spiritual life in the countryside is mirrored in her novels, and at the very beginning of *The Romance of the Forest* where it becomes the *leitmotiv* of the entire story. If De La Motte has fallen into vice and has become a worse man, it is because he has succumbed to the temptations that were offered to him in the corrupted city. However, when he lets nature penetrate his soul as he enters the forest, he momentarily becomes a different person while admiring the beauty surrounding him:

In the mean time he spent the anxious interval of Peter's absence in examining the ruin, and walking over the environs; they were sweetly romantic, and the luxuriant woods, with which they abounded, seemed to sequester this spot from the rest of the world. Frequently a natural vista would yield a view of the country, terminated by hills, which retiring in distance, faded into the blue



horizon. A stream, various and musical in its course, wound at the foot of the lawn, on which stood the abbey; here it silently glided beneath the shades, feeding the flowers that bloomed on its banks, and diffusing dewy freshness around; there it spread in broad expanse to-day, reflecting the sylvan scene, and the wild deer that tasted its waves.<sup>31</sup>

The enchanting effect of nature is powerful and can alter a person of uncertain morality such as De La Motte. The bucolic surrounding conveys moments of serenity for the anguished character that appears to have forgotten the evils haunting his mind. Radcliffe has borrowed from the Virgilian lines to complete the appeasing description of the landscape. Radcliffe's imitation of *The Georgics* is not simply didascallic, nor is it only an encyclopaedic appreciation of the gifts provided by agriculture through men's hard work. It represents a form of primaeva description of nature with a moral intent. Both Adeline in *The Romance of the Forest* and Emily in *Udolpho* respectively meet farmers and peasants happy with their toil or celebrating the end of labour at sunset. Radcliffe's choice may also have philosophical roots inherited from David Hume, whose words are compatible with Virgil describing the farmer's hard work as a source of constant joy. Life in the city and the apparent progress of mankind are a source of anguish for Virgil, who pessimistically knows that the world is heading towards destruction because of people's desire for power and their blind need for war. The dichotomy between urban decadence and rural life also characterises *Udolpho*: the lavish attractions of a city like Venice hide hypocrisy and crime that are embodied in the figures of the novel's villains. The bucolic atmosphere of the landscape in *Udolpho* near the Pyrenees resembles a Virgilian idyll and is the ideal *locus* of nature's perfection, exalted by the Latin poet and deeply admired by Radcliffe. Nature's quintessence is in its immense variety and breathtaking beauty: 'these tremendous precipices were contrasted by the soft green of the pastures and woods that hung upon their skirts; among whose flocks, and herds, and simple cottages, the eye, after having scaled the cliffs above, delighted to repose'.<sup>32</sup> A very important aspect in *The Georgics* is the mysterious narrator, who is suffering for the loss of his property after the unjust confiscations of his land, a theme that is replicated in Radcliffe, who shows a further strong analogy with Virgil's themes and sensibility.

Coincidentally, the unjustified and undeserved loss of property oppresses all of Radcliffe's main characters. Moreover, the theme of loss and exile in the tenth *Eclogue* is variously reproduced in Radcliffe's novels where the characters, forced to abandon their place of origin, express their chagrin while observing their lost source of joy, rehearsing Virgil's original lament: 'We leave our country's bounds, Our much-lov'd plains; We from our country fly, unhappy swains'.<sup>33</sup> In *The Romance of the Forest*, Madame De La Motte and Adeline express a similar sentiment of nostalgia while leaving the places of their lost happiness; the same feeling is expressed by Emily in *Udolpho* and by Ellena in *The Italian*. The exile of the just protagonist that is unjustly tormented in *the Georgics* resonates with Adeline. The ambiguous De La Motte is desperate as well because he has to abandon everything for the mistakes he has made. Interestingly, the second book of *The Georgics* mentions the escape of a man who is not pure and can never be satisfied.

### **Radcliffe's Gothic and Virgilian Terror**

However, not all descriptions in Virgil are idyllic. The following extract is taken from Book I of *The Georgics*. The pastoral atmosphere is replaced by a deep sense of terror created by a sudden storm:

Oft have I seen a sudden Storm arise,  
From all the warring Winds that sweep the Skies:  
The heavy Harvest from the Root is torn,  
And whirl'd aloft the lighter Stubble born;  
With such a force the flying rack is driv'n;  
And such a Winter wears the face of Heav'n:  
And oft whole sheets descend of sluicy Rain,  
Suck'd by the spongy Clouds from off the Main:  
The lofty Skies at once come pouring down,  
The promis'd Crop and golden Labours drown.  
The Dykes are fill'd, and with a roaring sound  
The rising Rivers float the nether ground;  
And Rocks the bellowing Voice of boiling Seas rebound.  
The Father of the Gods his Glory shrowds,  
Involv'd in Tempests, and a Night of Clouds. —  
And from the middle Darkness flashing out,  
By fits he deals his fiery Bolts about.  
Earth feels the Motions of her angry God,  
Her Entrails tremble, and her Mountains nod;  
And flying Beasts in Forests seek abode:

Deep horrouer seizes ev'ry Humane Breast,  
Their Pride is humbled, and their Fear confess'd:  
While he from high his rowling Thunder throws,  
And fires the Mountains with repeated blows:  
The Rocks are from their old Foundations rent;<sup>34</sup>

The passage belongs to the 1697 version *The Georgics* by Dryden. The highly visual scene is dense with dreadful terror in the face of nature's horrible strength. It may be interesting to notice that Dryden's lexicon was later exploited in Gothic narratives: the 'lofty Skies', the 'roaring sound', and the 'Night of Clouds' are phrases that will be absorbed by Gothic authors. The nightmarish scene, which 'seizes' men's souls with 'Deep horror', increases the sense of terror for the unknown. The image of the 'warring Winds' is particularly important as it is reproduced in *The Romance of the Forest*. The terrible moment when the mysterious Marquis de Montalt enters the abbey of the solitary ruin, where De La Motte, his family, and Adeline have taken refuge, is characterised by the unchaining of a frightening storm — a harbinger of sombre events. Their dialogue is covered by the tempest's disquieting sounds. Here follow some of the most interesting sentences connected with Virgil's previous description:

It happened one stormy night (...). The storm was now loud, and the hollow blasts, which rushed among the trees, prevented his distinguishing any other sound. (...) A loud gust of wind, that burst along the passage (...) overpowered his voice and that of the Marquis (...). The rising tempest again drowned the sound of their voices. (...) Nothing was to be seen through the darkness of the night – nothing heard but the howling of the storm.<sup>35</sup>

In the scene above, De La Motte is shaken following the 'impression of horror' (90) that he suffers during the terrible encounter in the middle of the furious blast. The analogies with Virgil are striking. The world is in turmoil when nature unchains its fury. It is devastating and metaphorical. Although more rarely and in line with the idea of the supernatural expressed by Addison, Virgil offers images of terror when he describes ghosts infesting the earth after unspeakable crimes have been committed. The next passage from the first book of *The Georgics*, translated by Dryden, powerfully demonstrates this mysterious idea:

Pale spectres in the close of night were seen;  
And voices heard, of more than mortal men,  
In silent groves (...)  
The yawning earth disclos'd th' abyss of hell.<sup>36</sup>

The supernatural events threaten and frighten because they represent the testimony of a monstrous crime —the assassination of Caesar. In a parallel manner, *The Romance of the Forest* presents inexplicable phenomena as an omen of crimes that were committed within the ruins of the abbey and are to be revealed. Now hidden inside the ruin among the trees, De La Motte and the other fugitives are exploring the labyrinthine building where they face the uncanny:

[De La Motte] was proceeding when he was interrupted by an uncommon noise which passed along the hall. They were all silent –it was the silence of terror (...). Across the hall, the greater part of which was concealed in shadow, the feeble ray spread a tremulous gleam, exhibiting the chasm in the roof, while many nameless objects were seen imperfectly through the dusk (...). If spirits were ever permitted to revisit the earth, this seemed the hour and the place most suitable for their appearance. [Adeline] was interrupted by a return of the noise.<sup>37</sup>

Virgil's 'voices' are transformed into the mysterious 'noise' pervading the ruins of the abbey. The Virgilian 'spectres in the close of night' become Adeline's murdered father's tormented spirit, coming back as a ghost and a nightmare to reveal a hideous crime, haunting the ruins where the young woman has taken refuge. Radcliffe clearly inserts classical echoes, and various parts of the novel show Virgilian influences profusely. The classical source of *The Georgics* provides ample material for both bucolic descriptions and terrifying events. *The Romance of the Forest* seems to be the only novel where the supernatural is real and the ghost not simply an illusion, an exceptional aspect in Radcliffe's narratives that may deserve deeper critical attention.

### **Classical Eroticism in a Gothic Context**

Radcliffe's sensibility is in unison with Virgil as they both love serene landscapes even though they sometimes unexpectedly introduce distressing scenes of horror. Although Virgil seems to be a powerful source of inspiration for the narration, Radcliffe introduces other

classical authors who become predominant in one of the most problematic episodes at the very heart of the novel. One of Radcliffe's narrative climaxes corresponds to a complex classical moment full of eroticism in *The Romance of the Forest*, when Adeline's story has taken a strange turn. Kidnapped by means of a cruel stratagem, she is led by mysterious figures to a sumptuous palace to be seduced by Montalt. She is brought inside a majestic room, 'splendidly illuminated', with a silver lamp 'diffus[ing] a blaze of light that, reflected from large pier glasses, completely illuminated the saloon'.<sup>38</sup> The excessive luminosity of the scene is in contrast with the dark ruins where she had taken refuge before. The dialectical paradox is between darkness and light. In this context, however, light is not a positive symbol as it is connected to danger. Whereas the obscurity in the forest is protective even though the ruins unveil a past hideous crime, the mansion where she has been taken is disturbingly threatening and dangerous. Surrounded by artificial light, the protagonist has been taken away from her Virgilian idyll in the middle of nature. Now, she is immersed in an atmosphere of exaggerated luxury and sensuality. It is not a coincidence that Virgil is not mentioned in the passage: his absence is intentional compared to the presence of the classical poets populating the scene. The mysterious place that is introduced in one of the central chapters in *The Romance of the Forest* 'seemed the works of enchantment and rather resembled the palace of a fairy than any human conformation' (156). This enchantment is also determined by iconographies that populate the room where Adeline is confined. First, she observes paintings of Armida, the ambiguous seductress in Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*.<sup>39</sup> Still trembling with fear, Adeline can admire 'busts of Horace, Ovid, Anacreon, Tibullus and Petronius Arbiter'.<sup>40</sup> Then other paintings and frescoes on the walls narrate stories that Adeline understands to be taken from Ovid with scenes that convey an idea of latent sensuality as well as of implicit danger. Although the images are not described, they probably represent voluptuous episodes from *The Metamorphoses*, and it is possible to infer their explicit sexual nature. The representations of Ovid's stories are a clear signal that the villa is a place dedicated to erotic encounters. In spite of the deeply sensual nature of the classical paintings and the ambiguous context, Adeline is unperturbed as she cannot be tainted by the strange atmosphere surrounding her. The presence of

Antiquity and classical poets in Montalt's mansion is an exaltation of sensuality and seems a 'staged pastiche of erotic commonplace'<sup>41</sup>, in strident contrast with the idyllic Virgilian atmosphere of the preceding chapters. If a refined aesthete, Montalt is a dangerous predator, whose true nature has not yet been revealed. His love is like a fire that consumes him from the very first moment he meets Adeline. Like Montalt, other characters fall in love with Adeline: De La Motte's son Louis and La Luc's son Theodore are mesmerised by the young protagonist and feel a strong passion for her. It is like the flame that Virgil describes in the third book of *The Georgics*, as the natural process in nature and that Lucretius graphically depicted with all its sensual effects. Montalt's hedonism is, however, under the sign of dishonesty and hypocrisy, whereas Louis's and Theodore's respective love for Adeline is characterised by innocent adoration. Montalt's apparent weak personality is a dangerous mask because his artificial *persona* is soon replaced by a different self when he abandons his sensuality and shows his true ego, revealing an unscrupulous murderer in the subsequent part of the novel. The metamorphosis, which generally involves the victims of the seduction in Ovid, has a different effect in Radcliffe since it does not affect the object of desire. It is the potential seducer and criminal himself that changes, whereas his potential victim is not contaminated or punished, thus reversing the tragic Ovidian tradition. While Montalt succumbs to his own machinations, Adeline escapes the horror and seems to be transfigured into a superior being.

## CONCLUSION

Radcliffe used classical models and mythologies to develop *The Romance of the Forest* and mould the character of Adeline. She courageously broke from tradition by creating a strong independent heroine that could fight against the horrors surrounding her. Adeline seems to acquire the status of a goddess, when Radcliffe compares her to a mythological being on various occasions. The motif of sylvan nymphs is often present in the world of *The Georgics* and *The Eclogues*, where these creatures move in the most beautiful spots of nature living in harmony. Adeline is described as particularly beautiful: 'her figure [was] of the middling size, and turned to the most exquisite proportion; her hair was dark auburn, her eyes blue,

and whether they sparkled with intelligence, or melted with tenderness, they were equally attractive: her form had the airy lightness of a nymph, and, when she smiled, her countenance might have been drawn for the younger sister of Hebe'.<sup>42</sup> Adeline is compared to the nymphs that live in the woods and the goddess Hebe, one of Aphrodite's sisters and the symbol of eternal youth. Radcliffe's insistence on classical details is systematic throughout *The Romance of the Forest*. By using classical comparisons and contexts, she does not only want to be creative but also aims at giving literary *gravitas* to her writing. Such an endeavour seems to be confirmed by Matthew Wickman who claims that the dichotomy between the narrative devices of horror and terror that so much interested Radcliffe was a direct inheritance from Antiquity and, in particular, from Virgil.<sup>43</sup> It is possible to posit that Radcliffe took both categories of horror and terror to perfection, consciously imitating and developing literary canons from the past, and systematically using Antiquity to provide an aura of classical aestheticism that made her Gothic stories unique. Reversing David Durant's claim that 'Mrs. Radcliffe made her heroines discover a nightmare beneath the pastoral', it might be argued that her female characters are helped by the Virgilian pastoral to overcome the Gothic ordeal they face.<sup>44</sup> It is possible to infer from the patterns in Radcliffe's plot and subplots that classical authors and, in particular, Virgil had an important hermeneutic function in *The Romance of the Forest* — a function that could be easily extended to her other works., making them qualitatively superior to popular Gothic fiction. Intriguingly, an iconic image for the early Gothic novel and for Radcliffe's works can be found in a mysterious painting by Andrea Locatelli, one of Salvator Rosa's apprentices. Frequently attributed to Rosa, a painter that was particularly cherished by Radcliffe (Figure 2), the mythological image is the quintessential representation of a bucolic scene where the beauty of the majestic landscape surrounds human figures in *staffage*. However, tragedy is inevitable: Mercury is about to kill the cruel Argo who is keeping the innocent female protagonist, Io, as a prisoner. The enigmatic painting seems to enclose the narrative tropes of the Radcliffean Gothic with all its Virgilian beauty, its idyllic mystery, and its latent horror.



**Figure 2.** Andrea Locatelli (1695-1741): *Mercury and Argo in a bucolic scene*

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The verb ‘to english’, without capitalization, is used by Stuart Gillespie and David Hopkins. It means translating influential works into English. Stuart Gillespie and David Hopkins (eds), *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English. Vol. 3: 1660—1790* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), (henceforth, *History of Literary Translation*).

<sup>2</sup> Cesare Beccaria, *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments*, translated from French and attributed to Voltaire (London, Printed for F. Newbery, 1775), p. iv. Dale Townshend mentions the extreme popularity of Beccaria’s text in his *Orders of Gothic: Foucault, Lacan, and the Subject of Gothic Writing 1764—1820* (New York, AMS Press, 2007), p. 276.

<sup>3</sup> Dante and Boccaccio were another source of inspiration to early Gothic. Diego Saglia, ‘From Gothic Italy to Italy as Gothic Archive: Italian Narratives, and the Late Romantic Metrical Tale’ in *Gothic Studies* 8:1 (2006), pp.73—90.

<sup>4</sup> The idea of Gothic as opposed to classical values and/or antithetical to Enlightenment can be found in Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London and New York, Routledge, 1996), and David Punter, *The Literature of Terror. A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (London and New York, Longman, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Emma Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762—1800* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> Issue 92 dated 22/09/1753 featured a textual analysis of Virgil’s *Eclogues* (42—38 BC). See *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* In Eleven Vols, Vol. IX (London, Printed for J. Buckland, G, Rivington & Sons, 1757), pp. 68—76.

<sup>7</sup> Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall, ‘Gothic Criticism’ in David Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2012), pp. 209—28.



<sup>8</sup> Michael Gamer, 'Gothic Fiction and Romantic Writing in Britain' in Jerrold Hogle (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 85–104, p. 93.

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Gillespie claims that Wordsworth carried out classical translations that he eventually hid and/or eliminated. See *English Translation and Classical Reception. Towards a New Literary History* (Malden, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> For the dichotomy between Gothic and Romantic see Robert D. Hume, 'Gothic versus Romantic. A Reevaluation of the Gothic Novel' in *PMLA*, 84:2 (1969), pp.282–90.

<sup>11</sup> See James Uden, 'Horace Walpole, Gothic Classicism and the Aesthetics of Collection' in *Gothic Studies*, 20:1-2 (2018), pp. 44–58.

<sup>12</sup> Dafydd Moore, 'A Comparison Similar to This: Ossian and the Forms of Antiquity' in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 39:2 (2016), pp. 171–82.

<sup>13</sup> Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho. The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> For critical reception on Radcliffe, see Deborah Rogers (ed.), *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe* (Westport and London, Greenwood Press, 1994); Deborah Rogers (ed.), *Ann Radcliffe, Bio-Bibliography* (Westport CT, Greenwood Press, 1996). Walter Scott recognised that Radcliffe was able to follow classical rules, especially in *The Italian*. See Walter Scott, 'Mrs. Radcliffe' in *Life of the Novelists*. Vol. II (Zwickau: Brothers Schuman, 1826), pp. 38–101.

<sup>15</sup> Concerning narrative methods, Hogle explains that the early Gothic and its derivations are 'an uneasy conflation of genres'. See Jerrold E. Hogle (ed.), *A Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Claudia L Johnson, *Equivocal Beings. Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s. Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.76.

<sup>17</sup> Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century. British Political and Social History 1688–1832* (Bloomsbury, London, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> See Robin Sowerby 'Epic', pp. 149–72; Garth Tissol 'Ovid', pp. 204–16 in *English Translations and Classical Reception*. Both authors carefully document the acquisition of classical knowledge by various layers of society thanks to literary translations.

<sup>19</sup> Penelope Wilson, 'Lyric, Pastoral, and Elegy' in *English Translation and Classical Reception*, pp. 173–90, p. 183.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Davis, 'Didactic Poetry' in *English Translation and Classical Reception*, pp. 191–203, p. 191.

<sup>21</sup> Virgil, *The Eclogues* (translated by Wrangham), *The Georgics* (translated by Sotheby), *The Aeneid* (translated by Dryden), Vol. I (London, Printed by A. J. Valpy M.A., 1830). Unless specified, most subsequent quotations from *The Georgics* and *The Eclogues* are taken from this text.

<sup>22</sup> *The Georgics*, Book II: 11–26, pp.92–93.

<sup>23</sup> Varieties of trees and flowers were being used to change the landscape. See Mavis Batey, 'The Pleasures of the Imagination: Joseph Addison's Influence on Early Landscape Gardens' in *Garden History*, 33:2 (2005) pp. 189–209; Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> Ann Radcliffe. *Gaston de Blondeville, A Romance; St. Alban's Abbey, a Metrical Tale, with Various Poetical Pieces. To which is prefixed a Memoir of the Authoress with Extracts from her Private Journals*, 4 Vols, Vol. I (London, Henry Colburn, R. Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1833), pp. 61–62.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Addison, *The Works of Joseph Addison complete in three Volumes, embracing*

*the whole of the Spectator*. Vol. III (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1837), p. 418.

<sup>26</sup> *The Romance of the Forest*, Edited with Introduction and Notes by Chloe Chard (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009); *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, with Introduction and Notes by Jaqueline Howard (London, Penguin Books, 2001). (henceforth, *Udolpho*).

<sup>27</sup> *The Romance of the Forest*, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *The Georgics*, Book I: 63–66, p. 51, Book II: 462–66, p. 63, 437–38, p. 84.

<sup>29</sup> Quotations in the original Latin were common in authors such as Samuel Johnson, Horace Walpole, and Matthew G. Lewis, among many others. See Uden, 'Horace Walpole, Gothic Classicist', p. 50. For the analysis of Lewis's classical sources, see Maria Teresa Marnieri 'The Early Gothic, the Classics and Ovidian Echoes in Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796)' in *European Academic Research*, V: 10 (2018).

<sup>30</sup> Unlike male writers, Radcliffe never wrote quotations in Latin, Greek or foreign languages in general.

<sup>31</sup> *The Romance of the Forest*, p. 23. The passage reproduces the original spelling in the text.

<sup>32</sup> *Udolpho*, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> *The Eclogues* I: 3–5, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> *The Works of Virgil translated into English by Mr. Dryden*, revised and corrected by John Carey, Vol. I (London, printed by James Swan, 1803). Published online in 2009, <https://archive.org/details/worksvirgil00unkngoog/page/n250>. The lines belong to *The Georgics*, Book I: 430–54, p.114.

<sup>35</sup> *The Romance of the Forest*, pp. 85–90.

<sup>36</sup> *The Georgics* (translated by Dryden), Book I: 642–644, 646, p.122.

<sup>37</sup> *The Romance of the Forest*, pp. 18–19.

<sup>38</sup> *The Romance of the Forest*, p. 156.

<sup>39</sup> Renaissance authors and texts, especially Ludovico Ariosto and Torquato Tasso, are another important literary source for Radcliffe that need to be further investigated.

<sup>40</sup> Horace (65–8 BC) summarized classical measure, stylistic elegance, philosophical attitude, and wide knowledge. His motto '*carpe diem*' was sometimes interpreted as a libertine ideal. See Richard Tarrant, 'Ancient Receptions of Horace' in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, edited by Stephen Harrison (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007). Ovid (43 BC to 17–18 AD) was a great elegist, but his works were considered excessively erotic and scandalous. Ovid's fame rests on his masterpiece *The Metamorphoses* (8 AD), a mythological cosmogony, interspersed with stories of tragic loves and cruel seductions. The Greek poet Anacreon (ca. 582 to ca. 485 BC), was famous for his explicit love poems and bacchanalian lyrics, conveying strong sensuality. Tibullus (ca.60-19 BC) was an elegiac poet. Horace describes his poetic qualities and his beauty in an elegy in his honour. Ovid dedicated an ode to him recalling his passionate adventures and unfortunate loves. The choice of Tibullus denotes sensuality and the exaltation of physical love. A contemporary of Emperor Nero, Petronius (ca. 27–66 AD) was a person of rare elegance that led a profligate life, according to Tacitus's testimony in his *Annals*. Petronius described the decadence of Rome in his celebrated *Satyricon* (ca. 60–64 AD). The fact that Petronius committed suicide is an anticipation of Montalt's destiny. This example may represent an implicit prolepsis that could be understood by cultivated readers.

<sup>41</sup> Olivia Ferguson, 'Venus in Chains. Slavery, Connoisseurship, and Masculinity in *The Monk*' in *Gothic Studies*, 20:1-2 (2018), pp. 29–43, at p. 30

<sup>42</sup> *The Romance of the Forest*, p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> Matthew Wickman, 'Terror's Abduction of Experience: a Gothic History' in *the Yale Journal of Criticism*, 18:1 (2005), pp. 179–206, at p. 187.

<sup>44</sup> David Durant 'Ann Radcliffe and the Conservative Gothic' in *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900, Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, 22:3 (1982), pp. 519–30, p. 523.