Terror, Literature, History
Michel Foucault and Ann Radcliffe

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TERROR, LITERATURE, HISTORY: MICHEL FOUCAULT AND ANN RADCLIFFE
The object of the present study is a particular literary reference that repeatedly appears in Michel Foucault's work — a reference to the work of Ann Radcliffe. We present a close study of the passages where Foucault, in one way or another, deals with Ann Radcliffe's novels (or novels that he believed to be written by Radcliffe), and attempt to show that Foucault's interest in the "literature of terror" is not at all accidental. For Foucault, Gothic fiction is a literary "embodiment" of the historical transition from classicism to modernity.

1. FOUCAULT, RADCLIFFE AND THE QUESTION OF AUTHORSHIP

Michel Foucault's interest in literature represents a constant feature of his multifaceted oeuvre — by stressing this rather obvious fact, we can hardly claim to have made a trailblazing discovery. Schematically speaking, Foucault's interest seems to have had a double function. On the one hand, especially in the early stage of his philosophical career, Foucault was clearly fascinated by literature *as such*, as an object in itself. This fascination led him to develop a kind of writing in which "philosophy" and "literature" often merge to the point of becoming indistinguishable — a kind of writing that Pierre Macherey has aptly called "literary philosophy".[1] This treatment of literature is manifest in many of Foucault's essays from the early 1960s — those on Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot and other authors — and his 1963 monograph on Raymond Roussel might be considered the apogee of this tendency.[2] On the other hand, literary authors often appear in Foucault's work as *exemplifications* of a specific kind: literary works seem to be regularly mentioned when it comes to explaining a particular

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1   Macherey 1995, p. 228.
2   Foucault 1987.

historical phenomenon or — even more frequently — a particular historical change
or transition. Suffice it to mention Denis Diderot's *Neveu de Rameau* in *Madness and
Civilization*[3] or Miguel de Cervantes and Marquis de Sade in *The Order of Things*.[4] These
two approaches to literature cannot, in fact, be clearly separated: Foucault's "literary
philosophy" is undoubtedly concerned with serious philosophical problems (such
as the problem of "being of language", the incarnation of which he sees precisely in
Roussel's work), while his "exemplificative" use of literature often implies remark-
able analyses of literary works *per se*.

     In the following article, my aim is to explore one of Foucault's literary references
that seems to be situated precisely at the crossroads between the two approaches
mentioned above, and that has, perhaps, received less attention than it deserves: his
reference to the work of Ann Radcliffe.[5] By choosing this topic, I certainly do not
pretend to have discovered a "neglected" Foucauldian theme that would shed new
light on Foucault's thought in general. Foucault's references to what he generally calls
the "literature of terror" (*littérature de la terreur*) and to Ann Radcliffe in particular
are, however, numerous enough to represent more than just randomly chosen allu-
sions — indeed, they may be read as so many signs of a genuine interest the reasons
for which are certainly worth investigating further.

     Among Foucault's writings where we encounter the name of Ann Radcliffe, the
1969 lecture "What Is an Author?" represents a good starting point, not because of
the mere mention of her name, but because, by a curious twist of irony, that
mention is linked to a literary puzzle (most likely unbeknownst to Foucault) that
concerns, precisely, the question of authorship. In fact, the name of Ann Radcliffe
appears at a truly crucial moment of Foucault's lecture, where Foucault strives to
define one of the most fundamental notions connected to his view of an author and
authorship: that of a "founder of discursivity". Blaming himself for having "unjus-
tifiably limited" his subject and having identified the author merely with a person
responsible for the production of a book or a text, Foucault proposes to discuss the
notion of the author in a broader sense that he terms "transdiscursive", that is, in
the sense of having founded "a theory, tradition, or discipline in which other books
and authors will, in turn, find a place".[6] As to the historical development of trans-
discursive authorship, which he deems to be "as old as our civilisation", Foucault

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3 Foucault 1988, pp. 199–201.
4 Foucault 1973, pp. 46–50, 208–211. The work of Marquis de Sade, to which we will return
     later on in this paper, is one of Foucault's most frequent literary references. Apart from
     innumerable mentions in Foucault's earlier writings and in the seminars at the Collège de
     France, he plays a key role in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* where his novels
     are treated as exemplifications of the historical transition from "sanguinity" to "sexuali-
     ty" (Foucault 1978, pp. 148–149).
5 Let us mention *en passant* that Radcliffe is not the only Gothic author which attracted Fou-
     cault's attention. For example, "Le langage à l'infini", one of Foucault's „literary/philosoph-
     ical" essays (published in 1963), involves a rather enigmatic passage devoted to François
     Guillaume Ducray-Duminil's *roman noir* entitled *Coelina ou l'enfant du mystère* (Foucault
     2001, pp. 285–288). And more examples would be easy to find…
6 Foucault 1984, p. 113.

stipulates a major historical shift that took place, in his opinion, in the nineteenth century:

> Furthermore, in the course of the nineteenth century, there appeared in Europe another, more uncommon, kind of author, whom one should confuse with neither the "great" literary authors, nor the authors of religious texts, nor the founders of science. In a somewhat arbitrary way we shall call those who belong in this last group "founders of discursivity".[7]

Who, then, is a founder of discursivity? Foucault argues that this founder is somehow "more" than the author of his or her works. This person is instead someone who not only produced the works that he/she wrote but also offered, as Foucault adds, "the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts".[8] Given the time in which Foucault's lecture was given (1969), two canonical examples he gives of the founders of discursivity should not surprise us: Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. Marx's and Freud's oeuvre has, in fact, established "an endless possibility of discourse" (psycho-analysis in the case of Freud, Marxism and post-Marxism in the case of Marx).

Let us leave aside Marx and Freud themselves: what is of interest are the following paragraphs in "What is an Author?" in which Foucault proceeds to make a set of subtler distinctions in order to delimit the notion of a founder of discursivity in a negative way — by saying (as he often does) what the notion in question is *not*. And it is here that he takes, as a reference, the work of Radcliffe. Let us quote the whole passage at length:

> One might say that it is not true that the author of a novel is only the author of his own text;[9] in a sense, he also, provided that he acquires some "importance", governs and commands more than that. To take a very simple example, one could say that Ann Radcliffe not only wrote *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* and several other novels, but also made possible the appearance of the Gothic horror novel at the beginning of the nineteenth century; in that respect, her author function exceeds her own work.[10]

Before examining the passage in some detail, let us simply summarise Foucault's answer to this "qualification". In Foucault's view, Freud and Marx did, after all, something discursively different from Ann Radcliffe. While Radcliffe's texts "opened the way for a certain number of resemblances and analogies which have their model or principle in her work" (and Foucault goes on the mention a number of Radcliffean literary devices and textual paraphernalia taken over by other authors of Gothic fiction: hidden castle, heroine in distress, a cursed, "Byronic" hero, and so on), Freud and

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7   Ibid., pp. 113–114.

8   Ibid., p. 114.

9   A few lines earlier, just before naming directly Freud and Marx, Foucault states that founders of discursivity "are very different, for example, from a novelist, who is, in fact, nothing more than the author of his own text" (Ibid., p. 114).

10   Ibid.

Marx made possible not only analogies, but also "a certain number of differences", creating thus "a possibility for something other than their discourse, yet something belonging to what they founded".[11]

The passages quoted above call for two observations.

First, the notion of a founder of discursivity is not entirely clear. By contrasting the name of Freud and Marx with that of Radcliffe, does Foucault imply that the privilege of being a founder of discursivity belongs to authors of philosophical or *theoretical* texts, as opposed to *literary* texts? Does it mean that a literary author *cannot*, in principle, be a founder of discursivity? Foucault does not seem to say so. All he does is randomly mention "a novelist" or "the author of a novel", who is nothing more than the author of his or her own text — and this rather vague counter-reference is later made more concrete by taking into account the example of Radcliffe, whose "author function" seems to exceed her work *stricto sensu* but, in fact, does not do so. This does not imply — at least not explicitly — an absolute distinction between theory and literature. Be that as it may, the very example of Radcliffe raises some intriguing questions with regard to literary history. Radcliffe's work has certainly made "a certain number of resemblances and analogies" possible. At the same time, however, Radcliffe's work itself is a part of a complicated "genealogical" context of the "Gothic aesthetic",[12] and it may be argued that this aesthetic gave rise not only to analogies but also, and no less importantly, to considerable differences. In this respect, it is quite problematic to say, as Foucault does, that Radcliffe "founded the Gothic horror novel" or "made possible the appearance of the Gothic horror novel at the beginning of the nineteenth century". The Gothic genre, inaugurated by Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and creatively developed by the novels of Clara Reeve, Matthew Gregory Lewis and Ann Radcliffe herself, is subject to remarkable inner differentiation that far exceeds the model of mere "resemblances and analogies"; in other words, it is a true discursivity in its own right.[13] "The Gothic horror novel" that Foucault speaks about, however, is probably something different, as we will show shortly.

The second observation concerns the very title of Ann Radcliffe's novel cited by Foucault: "Ann Radcliffe not only wrote *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* and several other novels". The English translator of Foucault's lecture was clearly at a loss as to the curious reference in Foucault's original text and he chose — quite logically — to replace it with the title of a real Radcliffe novel.[14] The French original, however, says

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11 Ibid. Further on, Foucault makes one more distinction, drawing a dividing line between a "founder of discursivity" and a "founder of a science" (Ibid., pp. 115–116). This, however, would lead us too far from our topic.

12 See Miles 1993, p. 30. It should be noted that Miles' attempt to trace a "genealogy" of Gothic writing is itself largely inspired by the Foucauldian concept of genealogy, coined by Foucault since the early 1970s.

13 It has recently been argued, however, that this "Gothic tradition" with Walpole at its origin was created retroactively due precisely to the popularity of Radcliffe. In this particular sense, Radcliffe may indeed be considered to be a "founder of discursivity". See Townshend, Wright 2014, pp. 3–32.

14 *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* is, indeed, a novel by Ann Radcliffe — it is her first work, published in 1789. In these short juvenilia, which cannot compare to Radcliffe's mature

something different: "Ann Radcliffe n'a pas seulement écrit *Les Visions du château des Pyrénées* et un certain nombre d'autres romans… "[15] What novel is Foucault referring to? The reader might think that *Les visions du château des Pyrénées* might be a rather licentious French translation of *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, but this is easily dispelled: as the title suggests, Radcliffe's story takes place in Scotland, far away from the Pyrenees.

Nowadays, in the age of Google, the mystery can be solved within a few seconds. *Les Visions du château des Pyrénées* is an apocryphal novel, published in French — under the name of Ann Radcliffe — in 1809. Even though it is undoubtedly written in a pronounced Radcliffean vein, it was not written by Radcliffe herself. The original title of the book is *Romance of the Pyrenees*, published (in English) in 1803, and its real author is Catherine Cuthbertson, a writer who has fallen into nearly complete oblivion. When the French translation was published in 1809, it was presented as a Radcliffe novel with no mention of its actual author.

A very simple explanation for this name switch seems to point to a remarkable episode of English literary history that has, in fact, some bearing on the text of Foucault's lecture itself. It forces us, however, to make a brief digression. It is well known that much of Ann Radcliffe's life has always remained a mystery. In his well-researched and erudite biography of Radcliffe, Rictor Norton quotes Frances Burney, who characterises the author of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in the following way: "She kept apart, like a little sweet bird that sings its solitary notes, shrouded and unseen".[16] It is, however, certain that after having risen to literary prominence with *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1796) in the last decade of the eighteenth century, Ann Radcliffe chose — for reasons we can only speculate on — to stop publishing and to remain silent for the rest of her life, that is, for more than twenty years.[17] Given Radcliffe's immense popularity, the impact of the decision was far-reaching. This sudden "silence" led to wild speculations as to the possible cause of this withdrawal, including far-fetched conjectures of her sudden death, as well as unfounded theories concerning her mental health having been damaged by her vivid flights of imagination, leading to her inability to write and to her prolonged residence at a mental asylum. In her *Summer Excursions* (1809), Elisabeth Isabella Spence claims, in a quite straightforward manner, that "the reader will, no doubt, regret with me that a lady whose original genius and wonderful imagination have insured her immortal fame, should have been obliged to retire into a remote part of Derbyshire under the most direct influence of deep-rooted and incurable melancholy".[18] Even more importantly, Radcliffe's retreat from writ-

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works, the author is still looking for proper literary means to express her terrifying visions for which she was to become famous several years later.

15   Foucault 2001, p. 833.

16   Norton 1999, p. 204.

17   *The Italian* was published in 1797; Radcliffe died in 1823. It is true that in the meantime she had attempted to write a historical novel entitled *Gaston de Blondeville* — it was, however, published only posthumously.

18   Cit. in Norton 1999, p. 206. This alleged madness is, in a remarkable way, reflected in a poem by Charles Apthorp Wheelwright, entitled "Ode to Horror": "As the pale spectres

ing led to an unprecedented number — dozens, if not hundreds — of literary works published in France, Germany and Holland claiming to be manuscripts discovered among Ann Radcliffe's "posthumous" papers.[19] These pastiches, imitations and apocryphal texts often bear very extravagant titles: *Manfroné, or the One-Handed Monk, Le tombeau — ouvrage posthume d'Ann Radcliffe, Baron de la Mothe-Langon: L'hermite de la tombe mystérieuse*, etc.

This brings us back to Foucault. The fact that the French translation of Catherine Cuthbertson's *Romance of the Pyrenees* could be published under the name of Ann Radcliffe without its real author even mentioned was a common editorial practice back in the early nineteenth century. And what is perhaps even more important: it is, without any doubt, precisely these pseudo-Radcliffean imitations that Foucault speaks about when he mentions the "resemblances and analogies which have their model or principle in her work".[20]

Foucault's lecture leaves us with one more question. Was Foucault really convinced that *Les Visions du château des Pyrénées* was a Radcliffe novel? Could it be that Foucault, in fact, was well aware that it was not and that he ironically insinuated an apocryphal text into his lecture in order to stress the frail and uncertain character of the notion of authorship? The answer appears to be in the negative, for he mentions the same novel — always referred to as a novel by Ann Radcliffe — on several other occasions where this kind of irony seems quite out of place. In the following paragraphs, I will concentrate on these subsequent mentions, regardless of their chronology. One preliminary "methodological" remark, however, is required.

Among French philosophers, Foucault was not the only one to speak of *Les Visions du château des Pyrénées*. Roughly during the same period, the novel was also referred to in one of the key works of Marxist literary criticism, Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966). It is given a true exemplary value of a "mystery story" par excellence, that is, a story peopled with ghosts, mysterious voices and apparitions whose enigmatic nature is gradually dispelled as the plot progresses; indeed, "the story finishes when the truth of these appearances is revealed, when they are dispersed".[21] What is of concern to us is not Macherey's interpretation itself — however interesting it may be — but the fact that despite being well aware of the likely apocryphal status of the aforementioned novel (even though he obviously did not know its true author)[22], he still chooses it as an exemplary token of Gothic fiction. Macherey states:

> The book in question is, as they say, unpretentious. This is not to our disadvantage; indeed, it is precisely why it has been chosen. Even among minor works

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cross her way / Lo! Radcliffe shudders in dismay / And vainly struggling to be free / Flies to the grasp of Death, from Madness and from thee" (cit. in ibid., pp. 211–212).

19   Norton 1999, p. 205.

20   Foucault 1984, p. 114.

21   Macherey 2006, p. 37.

22   Geoffrey Wall, the English translator of Macherey's work, adds a footnote stating that "this novel, of which no English original has been identified, is generally considered to be incorrectly ascribed to Mrs Radcliffe" (Macherey 2006, p. 30).

it is of the second rank; probably it was not written by Mrs Radcliffe but is a forgery, a pastiche, published under her name after her death. This kind of text, the more or less accurate fake, is often the most characteristic of a genre or style. Here is to be found in a pure if not original state all that defines the type. The skilful imitation can be more revealing than the model.[23]

Macherey's remark is of central importance to the present reading of Foucault. Foucault returns to *Les Visions du château des Pyrénées* (or to Ann Radcliffe — but he always seems to have this particular novel in mind) repeatedly in his later writings and seminars. The blunder concerning its author is far from rendering these loci negligible. It is precisely for the reasons stated by Macherey: Catherine Cuthbertson's novel might be a pastiche, but it renders all the features that Foucault pinpoints in the "novels of terror" all the more relevant. All the motifs that Foucault is interested in are abundantly present in Radcliffe's "genuine" works, and if *Les Visions du château des Pyrénées* were replaced by *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Romance of the Forest* or *The Italian*, Foucault's analyses would still remain perfectly valid. Therefore, in the following analysis, these pseudo-Radcliffean references will be taken seriously, as if their objects were "true" Radcliffe novels.

It seems clear that, generally speaking, Foucault always interprets the work of Ann Radcliffe[24] as a "symptom" of a certain historical — or political — change. This is linked to an interesting feature of Foucault's thought in general: Foucault, as is well known, is rather reticent when it comes to explaining the *causes of or reasons for* historical shifts and transformations. The historical "discontinuity" between epistemic formations, famously present in *The Order of Things*, is the most patent example of this tendency,[25] and it has already been noted that, when speaking about these historical shifts, Foucault often turns to literary works that usually play the role of exemplifications — rather than explanations — of the shifts in question. The case of Radcliffe is no exception. I argue that in Foucault's reading of Radcliffe, three principal sets of interrelated topics might be identified: crime, discipline, and space.

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23 Ibid. p. 32. Let us note in passing that later in the text, as if to support this claim, Macherey quotes, alongside *Les Visions du château des Pyrénées*, also a "true" Radcliffe novel, *The Italian* (see ibid. p. 35), without making any substantial distinction between a "forgery" and the "original".

24 From now on — and for the reasons just stated — I will use Radcliffe's name regardless of the question of authorship.

25 This tendency is undoubtedly prompted by Foucault's particular approach to historiography, theorised in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). In order to avoid certain intellectual "automatisms" that have hampered the traditional historiographical research, Foucault proposes to interpret the notion of history not in terms of linearity and continuity, but rather in terms of "discontinuity, rupture, threshold, limit, series, and transformation"; in order to achieve this, however, "there is a negative work to be carried out first: we must rid ourselves of a whole mass of notions, each of which, in its own way, diversifies the theme of continuity" (Foucault 1993, p. 21). In other words, Foucault reinterprets history in pronouncedly *spatial* (rather than temporal) terms. We will return to the topic of space later in this text.

2. THE NOVELS OF TERROR AS POLITICAL NOVELS

An extensive reference to Radcliffe can be found in Foucault's seminar from 1974–1975, entitled *Les anormaux* (*Abnormal*). In a lecture that was first delivered on January 29th 1975, Foucault speaks about an important historical transformation of what he calls "the economy of punitive power" — a transformation that took place roughly in the time of the French Revolution.[26] Within the framework of the "old" punitive power, a crime, however insignificant, was understood as an attack on the sovereign: as Foucault puts it, "there was a fragment of regicide in the smallest crime" (ibid.). This somewhat blasphemous crime had its counterpart on the side of punishment — the punishment, as far as its form is concerned, was, above all, a spectacular representation or "reactualization" of the crime committed. We clearly recognise the echo of this idea in the frightful *tableau* of Damiens the regicide's torture that opens Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975), published in the same period.[27] Hence the "terrorising character of punishment", its "principle of excessive demonstration", and the "rituals of atrocity" prompted by the fact that crime was understood as an essentially regicidal act.[28] No less importantly, no questions were raised about, as Foucault straightforwardly puts it, "the nature of crime".[29] At the end of the eighteenth century, however, the situation seems to have changed. Foucault links the change in question to the appearance — alongside the invention of new scientific and industrial technologies — of new mechanisms of power that enabled the exercise of power in the permanent form of surveillance and control, rather than in the spectacular form of ritual punishment: again, it is easy to recognise the topics treated in *Discipline and Punish*, as well as in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. At this precise historical moment, a new figure of the criminal appears: the criminal as a monster. According to Foucault, the monstrosity of the criminal may be twofold. First, there is a monstrosity caused by "the abuse of power", monstrosity embodied in the figure of a mighty and powerful, but morally corrupt person. Surprising as it may seem, "the first monster is the king. The king, I believe, is the general model from which, through successive historical shifts and transformations, the countless little monsters who people nineteenth-century psychiatry and legal psychiatry are historically derived".[30] Second, there is what Foucault calls "the monster from below" (*le monstre d'en dessous*), the monster that "breaks the social pact by revolt"[31] — a savage from the forest, an individual governed by primitive, uncontrolled drives and coming not from the top but from the bottom of social scale. As Foucault sums up, "these two figures arise from a precise conjuncture, but they also take up ancient themes: the debauchery of kings, the libertinage of the great, and the violence of the people."[32]

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26 Foucault 2003, p. 82.
27 Foucault 1977, pp. 3–6.
28 Foucault 2003, p. 83.
29 Ibid., p. 86.
30 Ibid., pp. 94–95. This kind of monstrosity is illustrated, in Foucault's seminar, by an extensive analysis of the public image of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette (ibid. pp. 95–98).
31 Ibid., p. 98.
32 Ibid., p. 99.

At the end of the lecture, Foucault once again turns to the "literature of terror" in general and to Ann Radcliffe in particular. The *Château des Pyrénées*, he claims, provides us with an eloquent literary representation of these two monstrous figures. On the one hand, there is monstrosity stemming from the abuse of power and embodied in the figures of wicked princes and deceitful priests. On the other, there is also the monster from below, the "natural man" with "limitless instinct": the brigand, the man of the forest, the brute.[33] What is more, the prevailing spatial setting of the novel corresponds perfectly to this double monstrosity: part of the story takes place in an "inaccessible, hollowed-out mountain carved into a genuinely strong castle",[34] creating thus a conjunction between two milieus proper to the two species of monsters just mentioned: the feudal castle, on the one hand, the forests and the mountains — in short, the savage nature — on the other. Thus, the story told in the *Château des Pyrénées* revolves around two types of monstrosity and two different spatial settings particular to each of them. As Foucault succinctly puts it, adding a pronouncedly political accent to his analysis: "In this figure of the *Château des Pyrénées* we have, I believe, a dense image of these two forms of monstrosity as they appear in the political thematic and imagination of the age. The novels of terror should be read as political novels."[35]

It has already been stated that whatever Foucault says about the *Château des Pyrénées* can easily be found in Ann Radcliffe's "genuine" novels. Indeed, these two types of monstrosity are no exception. Many Radcliffean characters fit perfectly the image of the first type of monster, of the monstrous (quasi)sovereign: the dark yet fascinating figure of Signor Montoni from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is one example, the mysterious character of Father Schedoni from *The Italian* is another. Montoni's portrayal in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for example, is a masterpiece of ambiguity — his handsomeness and stately appearance do not entirely hide the deceitfulness and fearsome nature that will only be revealed later in the novel, and that is expressed, on this first occasion, only in a very allusive manner, as a vague thread transpiring through his features:

> This Signor Montoni had an air of conscious superiority, animated by spirit, and strengthened by talents, to which every person seemed involuntarily to yield. The quickness of his perceptions was strikingly expressed on his countenance, yet that countenance could submit implicitly to occasion; and, more than once in this day, the triumph of art over nature might have been discerned in it. His visage was long, and rather narrow, yet he was called handsome; and it was, perhaps, the spirit and vigour of his soul, sparkling through his features, that triumphed for him. Emily felt admiration, but not the admiration that leads to esteem; for it was mixed with a degree of fear she knew not exactly wherefore.[36]

33 Ibid., p. 100.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid. Foucault then proceeds to present a reflection on Sade's *Juliette*, pinpointing the same duality in the figure of the Sadean *libertin* (ibid. p. 100–101).

36 Radcliffe 1980, p. 122.

The second type of monstrosity is not absent either. For instance, the villain Spalatro, Schedoni's companion, may not live directly in the forest, but he inhabits "a lonely dwelling, which stood so near the margin of the sea, as almost to be washed away by the waves", a place apparently uninhabited, "ruinous and destitute of any furniture"[37] This ruffian, "a man who had 'villain' engraved in every line of his face",[38] is a perfect example of a "monster from below".

It is, however, the last sentence of Foucault's analysis — "The novels of terror should be read as political novels" — that deserves a more extensive comment. What Foucault has in mind here is, as we have seen, a particular political conjunction, one leading to a shift in the economy of punitive power at the end of the eighteenth century. The mention of a political aspect to Gothic fiction may, however, be extended and generalised so as to tell us something both about the nature of the literary genre itself and of the nature of Foucault's interest in it.

In fact, Foucault was not the first to propose a "political" reading of the novels of terror. This privilege belongs to a writer whose importance — as a literary reference — in Foucault's work is far superior to that of Radcliffe: the Marquis de Sade. In his essay *Idée sur les romans* (1800), Sade offers a penetrating interpretation of Gothic fiction as a *transitional genre*, stemming from, and reflecting, historical and political confusion that followed the political tumults at the end of the eighteenth century: the convergence of Sade's and Foucault's reading is plain to see. After having traced a brief history of the novels as such, Sade moves to contemporary fiction, to what he calls "recent novels the magic and fantasmagoria of which constitute nine-tenths of their worth". He praises, above all, Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), "superior on all counts to the bizarre flashes of the brilliant imagination of Radcliffe", and goes on to write:

> Let us agree that this species of writing, whatever one might say about it, is assuredly not without merit. It became the necessary fruit of the revolutionary tremors felt by the whole of Europe. For anyone who was familiar with the extent of the miseries which evil men were able to heap upon mankind, the novel became as difficult to write as it was monotonous to read. In four or five years, there was not an individual left who had not experienced misfortunes and who, in a century famous for its writing, was not able to depict them. In order therefore to confer some interest on their productions, it was necessary to appeal to hell for aid and to find chimeras in the landscape: a thing which one perceived at the time by a mere glance through the history of mankind in this age of iron.[39]

This analysis, brief as it may be, is brilliant, and it seems that Foucault, very much like Sade, was fascinated by the curiously "hybrid" character of Gothic fiction; the character that, for both Foucault and Sade, reflects the social and political situation in which the Gothic novels are produced. Let us only briefly note that in Gothic fiction, this transitional, "hybrid" aspect can be found on at least two levels. First, there is the

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37 Radcliffe 2008, pp. 227–228.

38 Ibid., p. 228.

39 Sade 1800, in Sage 1990, pp. 48–49.

formal level, that is, the level of the literary composition itself. This is something that we might call a literary "impurity" of the Gothic novel. In the preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, Horace Walpole famously presents his short novel as an attempt to reconcile or to merge two literary forms, the ancient *romance* and the modern *novel*.[40] Since the very beginning, Gothic fiction situates itself on a certain border: one between the old and the new.[41] We might argue that the very fact of being a "borderline phenomenon" accounts, at least partly, for the resilience of the Gothic genre, the elements of which have been able to penetrate into what can undoubtedly be classified as "great" literature.[42]

Second, the above-mentioned historical and political confusion is, of course, no less apparent at the level of the content. Sade is right to say that the literature of terror represents a literary reflection of a tumultuous age in which the old certainties, be they social, religious or cultural, are irretrievably lost.[43] Gothic novels, as Robert Kiely has put it, "thrive like parasites on structures whose ruin is the source of their life".[44] Without entering into details, we might mention, among other things, the omnipresent threat of incest and the chaos in family relations (briefly, the disruption of what Lévi-Strauss has called the elementary structures of kinship) that is a constant feature of nearly all "classical" Gothic novels (Radcliffe included) and that has found perhaps the most shocking expression in a lesser known, yet astounding novella *Matilda* by Mary Shelley (1820, published in 1959). We might also mention the decline of religious certainties, as expressed in the blasphemous passages of Lewis's *The Monk* or Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), novels where — despite the final punishment of both anti-heroes, Lewis's Ambrosio and Maturin's Melmoth — the divine instance seems to remain strangely silent vis-à-vis the often unbearable suffering of the mortals below.[45] Let us quote, once again, Robert Kiely: "The Gothic novel was not only *about* confusion, it was written *from* confusion."[46]

Foucault's injunction to read the novels of terror as political novels has, therefore, far-reaching consequences that go well beyond the particular context in which it was formulated. First, it tells us a great deal about the very nature of Gothic fiction itself: political and social tumult gave birth to a strangely "omnivorous" genre, able to encapsulate both the elements of "realism" (novel) and "phantasmagoria" (romance), a genre whose protean character has led, in turn, to the genre's own inner differentiation, as well as its capacity to penetrate other genres. But above all, it tells us why Foucault has manifested such a sustained interest in the Gothic: Gothic fiction as such is a genre of transition par excellence, a historical transition *made visible*.

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40 Walpole 1996, p. 9.
41 On the hybrid character of the Gothic fiction, see, among others, Mishra 1994, p. 10, and Botting 1996, pp. 1–20.
42 Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* or Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* are just two examples among many.
43 Sade's work itself has been interpreted in a similar vein (see Klossowski 1991).
44 Kiely 1972, p. 2.
45 For such a reading, see especially Peter Brooks's essays on Lewis's *The Monk* (Brooks 1973, 1989).
46 Kiely 1972, p. 36.

This transitory nature of Gothic fiction is highly visible in its particular treatment of space — and this is what we will examine in the next section.

3. FOUCAULT, RADCLIFFE AND THE PROBLEM OF SPACE

Foucault's interest in space and spatiality is well known. Many of his works contain spectacular depictions of spaces of various kinds: the asylum in *Madness and Civilisation*, the hospital in *The Birth of The Clinic* or the famous Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*, which will be of particular relevance here. Foucault's lecture "Of Other Spaces: Utopia and Heterotopia" (1967) begins with the following statement: "The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history [...]. The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space."[47] It is no wonder, then, that Foucault returns to Ann Radcliffe when dealing with the question of spatiality.

We have already seen that the topic of space is one of the central issues in the above-quoted passages from *Abnormal*: each of the two types of monstrosity is linked to a particular kind of space. Earlier, in *The Punitive Society*, Foucault's seminar from 1972–1973, this interest in spatiality was even more explicit. Here, Foucault presents a different analysis of the notion of criminality, stressing the fact that at the end of the eighteenth century, criminality, instead of being an intrinsic part of social relations, becomes localized "outside society", in "extra-social places".[48] Whether this stance is compatible with that taken a year later, in *Abnormal*, is not the issue here. The point is that the *Château des Pyrénées* appears, again, as a literary example of this historical alignment. Among these extra-social places, Foucault names convents, castles, cellars, and so on, in short, all the classical gothic loci where criminality thrives and of which the alleged Radcliffe's novel is a perfect illustration. These "other spaces" represent a "geography of crime", places inhabited by an isolated "society entirely closed upon itself"[49] — this time, Sade's name is not mentioned but his shadow certainly looms large: one can only think of the famous *Société des amis du crime* from *Juliette*.

However, the interview with Foucault, conducted by Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot and published in 1977 under the title "The Eye of Power", is the most relevant to our topic. In this "dialogue", Foucault goes on to express himself, as far as spatiality is concerned, in more general terms. The proper subject of the interview is Jeremy Bentham's famous idea of the Panopticon that Foucault deals with in some detail in *Discipline and Punish*, but on this particular occasion, he gives his reflections on space a much wider scope, prolonging his lecture "Of Other Spaces". Criticising what he calls "a devaluation of space" in Western philosophy, he claims that "a whole history remains to be written of spaces [...]. It is surprising how long the problem of space took to emerge as a historical-political problem".[50] Bentham's Panopticon is an important element of such a history, and Bentham's

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47 Foucault 1986, p. 22.
48 Foucault 2013, p. 56.
49 Ibid.
50 Foucault 1980, p. 149.

idea of a transparent space of surveillance makes him, in Foucault's opinion, "the complement to Rousseau".[51] In accordance with Starobinski's interpretation of Rousseau as a thinker of transparency,[52] Foucault proposes to enlarge the notion of transparency to represent a dominant fantasy of the Enlightenment period as such. We might add that, in this fantasy, the external space seems to correspond to the desired mental disposition of the subjects that inhabit it: it is a period governed by a dream of transparent spaces where all shadows are dispelled and all dark recesses become illuminated, while the human mind, guided by reason, gets rid of all irrational prejudices and becomes transparent to itself in the process of universal progress. Foucault says: "A fear haunted the latter half of the eighteenth century: the fear of darkened spaces, of the pall of gloom which prevents the full visibility of things, men and truths."[53] Thus, Enlightenment progressivism sought to demolish (be it literally or metaphorically) all the places that symbolically embodied the darkness of old, irrational ages: the chateaux, lazarets, bastilles and convents… "The new political and moral order could not be established until these places were eradicated".[54] Not surprisingly, Ann Radcliffe's novels (Foucault does not mention any titles but it seems that he is, once again, talking about the *Château des Pyrénées*) represent, once again, a literary exemplification here: this time, in the form of what Foucault calls, in the original French, a *contre-figure*:

> During the Revolutionary period the Gothic novels develop a whole fantasy-world of stone walls, darkness, hideouts and dungeons which harbor, in significant complicity, brigands and aristocrats, monks and traitors. The landscapes of Ann Radcliffe's novels are composed of mountains and forests, caves, ruined castles and terrifyingly dark and silent convents. Now these imaginary spaces are like the negative (*contre-figure*) of the transparency and visibility which it is aimed to establish.[55]

Again, Foucault's observations are remarkably penetrating, yet call for a detailed comment. The French term *contre-figure* (translated as "the negative") is a good starting point here. It would be wrong, I would argue, to interpret Radcliffe's novels in terms of a simple literary conservatism, standing against the Enlightenment progressivism — which Foucault, in the end, does not argue either. What Radcliffe's novels depict is precisely a *conflict* between reason and irrationality, between darkness and visibility, between, as Starobinski would put it, transparency and obstruction. And one of the major literary strategies of depicting this conflict is the spatial setting of the novels, which seems to correspond, in a striking way, to the mental processes of Radcliffean heroines (for Radcliffe's central characters are almost exclusively female).

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51 Ibid., p. 152.
52 Starobinski 1988.
53 Foucault 1980, p. 153.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., pp. 153–154.

In Radcliffe's novels, there is, indeed, a fundamental tension established between two kinds of spaces: sublime, open, majestic sceneries[56] contrasted with the closed, claustrophobic spaces of castles, convents or subterranean labyrinths. Foucault is certainly right to say that these latter spaces are the epitome of opacity and impenetrability. They are not "geometrical" spaces of any kind, but rather labyrinthine, an intricate intertwinement of corridors, hidden chambers, and secret staircases without any rationally penetrable structure. The castle of Udolpho is a supreme example of such a space. Kiely aptly states that the castle is a "random assemblage" rather than a compact and clearly organised space.[57] The following passage from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is an eloquent illustration of this:

> When the chimes had tolled another half hour, she once more opened the door, and perceiving no person was in the corridor, hastily crossed the passage, that led along the south side of the castle towards the stair-case, whence she believed she could easily find her way to the turret. Often pausing on her way, listening apprehensively to the murmurs of the wind, and looking fearfully onward into the gloom of the long passages, she, at length, reached the stair-case; but there her perplexity began. Two passages appeared, of which she knew not how to prefer one, and was compelled, at last, to decide by chance, rather than by circumstances.[58]

Moreover, these intricate space structures correspond to the "inner" psychic life of Radcliffean heroines. Take Emily, the heroine of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for instance. Emily's mental disposition, stemming as it does from her sensitivity and her irrational fears, resembles the space of the castle she is forced to inhabit. She "internalises" the external space, so to speak, but at the same time, she "projects" her fantasies back onto it. By this double mechanism of introjection/projection, she, as Kiely puts it, "half-creates her own Udolpho",[59] living in what we might call a mental chiaroscuro. Radcliffe herself broods over this correspondence between the outer space and the human psyche in a powerful passage that is certainly worth quoting: "[…] but human reason cannot establish her laws on subjects, lost in the obscurity of imagination, any more than the eye can ascertain the form of objects, that only glimmer through the dimness of night."[60]

So far, the "gothic space" truly seems to be a *contre-figure* of Enlightenment transparency and visibility. But this is only half of the story. This dark, labyrinthine space is, in fact, a relic taken over from older fiction (romance). Its literary treatment, however, is considerably more modern. The reason why the convents and ancient castles

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56 Ann Radcliffe is a great landscape artist and her depictions of natural (especially Alpine) sceneries are true monuments of literary mastery.

57 Kiely 1972, p. 66.

58 Radcliffe 1980, pp. 320–321.

59 Kiely 1972, p. 74.

60 Radcliffe 1980, p. 330. One more example of such a correspondence, involving, this time, the faculty of memory: "But a clear moonlight […] gave to the landscape, what time gives to the scenes of past life, when it softens all their harsher features, and throws over the whole the mellowing shade of distant contemplation" (Ibid., pp. 416–417).

represent convenient scenery for the plot is that they are viewed precisely as places of cruelty and hypocrisy that the Enlightenment age so vigorously denounced and that, by the end of the story, must be overcome and rendered ineffective.[61] This is the very principle of Radcliffean terror: at the end of the heroine's dramatic journey, harmony is restored, mysteries are given a rational explanation, and transparency prevails. In this respect, Radcliffe seems to be much indebted to the spirit of (French) Enlightenment and remains, without any doubt, "a child of the century".[62] Moreover, there is at least one passage in Radcliffe's literary works that contains an exalted *éloge* of transparency and rationality and betrays the pronounced influence of Rousseau: the chapters of *The Romance of the Forest* in which Adeline, the heroine of the novel, spends her time "at the foot of the Savoy Alps" (the location seems to be no accident) with the family of Monsieur la Luc. La Luc's portrayal is, indeed, Rousseauism incarnate, including the style in which it is written:

> His was the philosophy of nature, directed by common sense. He despised the jargon of the modern schools and the brilliant absurdities of systems, which dazzled without enlightening, and guided without convincing, their disciples. [...] The people of his parish looked up to him as to a father; for while his precepts directed their minds, his example touched their hearts.[63]

This is why I have proposed in this essay to view Radcliffe's novels as so many depictions of a *conflict* between the old and the new, between the barbarous, "Gothic" irrationality and enlightened reason — a conflict from which reason, in the end, emerges victorious. The merit of Foucault's analysis consists in stressing the role of space in this clash: the dark recesses of ancient castles and convents truly do function as "the negative" of the transparent, geometrical space, corresponding to enlightened reason. In the end, these spaces are left behind: the "*giorno felice*", saluted by Paolo in the closing chapter of *The Italian*,[64] not only signals Elena's and Vivaldi's successful escape from all the dangers and trials they had to endure, but also the happy triumph of rationality.

CONCLUSION

"Foucault links the Gothic to the onset of modernity, be it in terms of modern notions of literature, authorship, or the deployment of modern discipline," says Dale Town-

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61 As Claire Wrobel aptly notes in her article on Foucault and Gothic fiction, there is also an important "geopolitical" aspect at play. Most "classical" Gothic novels take place in Catholic countries: Italy (in the case of Radcliffe) or Spain (in the case of Lewis and Maturin). The perspective adopted in these novels thus corresponds to the "self-satisfied" English perspective in which Catholicism is the synonym for superstition and prejudice (Wrobel 2010, p. 3).

62 The case of Lewis's *The Monk* — not to speak of Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* — is somewhat different. This is at least partly due to the fact that Lewis draws largely on German literary sources, unlike the "French-oriented" Radcliffe.

63 Radcliffe 1999, p. 245.

64 Radcliffe 2008, p. 446.

shend in *The Orders of Gothic*.[65] The present paper is an attempt to give his statement
a more concrete form by examining, one by one, Foucault's references to Ann Rad-
cliffe — or, to be more precise, to what he believed to be a Radcliffean novel. Despite
the error concerning the authorship of *Château des Pyrénées*, Foucault's excursions to
the realm of "the novel of terror" are far from being devoid of interest. They tell us
a lot about both Gothic fiction as such and about Foucault's treatment of literature in
general.

One could, of course, leave behind Foucault's precise references to (pseudo-)Rad-
cliffe and enlarge the scope of the present considerations so as to develop a Foucauld-
ian reading of other works of Gothic fiction, "the dark product of the shift from clas-
sicism to modernity".[66] Dale Townshend goes far in this direction when he presents,
for example, a Foucauldian interpretation of the spectacular depiction of the hideous
prioress's death in *The Monk* (a novel that Foucault, as far as I know, never mentions[67]),
drawing an analogy between this "meticulous, carefully calculated form of punish-
ment" and the death of Damiens, as described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*.[68]
But such an undertaking would lead us too far from our topic. To conclude, let us
come back to Foucault's interpretation of Ann Radcliffe.

The allusions to Radcliffe appear, as we have seen, in different contexts; Foucault
never presents a coherent interpretation of either Gothic fiction in general or of Ann
Radcliffe in particular. These different contexts seem, however, to have one trait in
common: Foucault sees the "novel of terror" as the epitome of a certain ambivalence,
as a kind of "hesitation" between the old and the new. Note that Foucault's interpre-
tative stance often seems to hesitate as well: in the *Abnormal*, he views the novel of
terror as a representation of a "*new* economy of punitive power", while in "The Eye of
Power", he views it as a literary representation of pre-Enlightenment space… Be that
as it may, his reflection on the subject is no doubt inspired by the genre's undeniable
"instability" and "hybridity" (both historical and literary). And as we have seen, his
remarks, scanty as they may seem (there is no need to deny that Radcliffe's impor-

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65 Townshend 2007, pp. 4–5.
66 Ibid. p. 1. We might also note that *Discipline and Punish* includes a brief mention of *The Cas-
    tle of Otranto* that would undoubtedly be worth a detailed discussion: "[…] from the ad-
    venture story to de Quincey, or from *The Castle of Otranto* to Baudelaire, there is a whole
    aesthetic rewriting of crime, which is also the appropriation of criminality in acceptable
    forms" (Foucault 1977, p. 68).
67 He might have known it, however: it was much admired by surrealists and adopted for the-
    atre by Antonin Artaud, one of Foucault's favourite writers.
68 Townshend 2007, pp. 266–267. It is, nonetheless, rather curious to describe this punish-
    ment as "meticulous" and "carefully calculated": the prioress is killed by a raging crowd
    impelled by spontaneous need for what Lewis calls "barbarous vengeance": "They tore
    her from one another, and each new tormentor was more savage that the former. […] They
    beat it [the prioress's lifeless body], trod upon it, and ill-used it, till it became no more than
    a mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting" (Lewis 1995, p. 356). It would be in-
    teresting to read this scene against the background of Foucault's seminar on *Abnormal*:
    here, the punishment is not carried out by the sovereign power (or its surrogate) but pre-
    cisely by "the violence of the people" that Foucault links with "monstrosity from below"
    (see Foucault 2003, p. 99). In this sense, it is the exact opposite of Damiens's execution.

tance as a literary reference is far inferior, in Foucault's work, to that of Sade), often offer remarkable insights. At the beginning of the present paper, it was stated that in Foucault's writings, literary works are often called in evidence whenever the need arises to deal with a historical shift or historical transition. This gives us reasons to believe that the novel of terror (and Ann Radcliffe in particular) is, for Foucault, more than an object of accidental interest. Hopefully, this close examination of Radcliffean references in Foucault's work shows why this is so.

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