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Ann Radcliffean gothic heroine: Negotiating female agency through spatial constraint from eighteenth-century literature to contemporary media

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the portrayal of the Gothic heroine in Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho from 1794 and The Italian from 1797, showing how her characterisation reshaped eighteenth-century Gothic fiction and influenced later narrative models. Radcliffe's heroines, defined by courage, emotional sensitivity, and moral endurance, confront patriarchy, fear, and confinement through rational thought, psychological resilience, and the careful use of domestic or religious space. Using feminist theory and spatial criticism, the study argues that their agency develops not from rebellion but from calm reasoning, emotional control, and subtle resistance within restrictive architectural and social structures. The study also traces Radcliffe's lasting influence in modern texts, including The Handmaid's Tale and the film Ex Machina, where female characters continue to negotiate surveillance, containment, and the search for autonomy. These contemporary works reflect the same pattern of confined yet active agency that Radcliffe first established. Overall, the analysis shows that Radcliffe created a lasting model of female empowerment through spatial negotiation and inner strength. Her Gothic heroines endure because they transform confinement into agency, providing a foundation for later feminist storytelling in literature, film, and wider cultural production.

Contribution/ Originality: The paper's primary contribution is finding the synthesis of feminist literary theory with spatial criticism, to map Radcliffe's spatial heroines onto the latest media and reveal the transformation of architectural confinement into the portable type canonical of agency to illustrate continuity in the eighth-century Gothic spaces and modern visual discourses.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ann Radcliffe is an unquestioned presence in the pantheon of Gothic fiction in the eighteenth century, and this was the designation of Sir Walter Scott, who called her the first poetess of Romantic fiction (Tompkins, 1932). Her literary work is long out of date, but modern feminist criticism acknowledges that she was one of the pioneers in defining the foundations of the female Gothic tradition (Fitzgerald, 2009; Moers, 1976).

Another characteristic of the works of Radcliffe is an advanced use of architectural spaces castles, convents, ancestral mansions, which act as a dramatic setting as well as metaphors of a psychological nature, at the same time exerting some social control. They are places of captivity, arenas where the heroines of Radcliffe can bargain or negotiate with the masculine order of power, frequently on the imminent threat of violence, loss, or even incarceration;

they are therefore reflective spaces, upon which the changing consciousness of the heroine and resistance are projected.

Due to the process of imprisonment and exposure to psychological violence, women, as Pelin Kumbet perceives them, become full of anxieties, suppressed feelings, and fears that accurately reflect the women of the time. (Kümbet, 2018). In this regard, fiction by Radcliffe serves as a compelling text to investigate the suppressed yet resilient interior worlds of women. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the imprisonment of Emily in the titular castle allows the author to subject her personality to trials and tribulations, which ultimately refine her character. Her increasing attention to architectural details, locked doors, secret stairs, and dark corridors, parallels her psychological alertness and provides her with a degree of control over her situation. Similarly, *the Italian* depicts the incarceration of Ellena di Rosalba in the convent of San Stefano as a challenge to institutional authority, particularly that of religious patriarchy. The Gothic milieu, therefore, functions as a heterotopic space (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986) that reflects societal norms while simultaneously offering an intermediary territory where these norms can be opposed or redefined.

Of greater significance than the space dimension, the works of Radcliffe are characterized by a subtle investigation of female identity and the psychological depths of heroines who have to deal with inner struggles and external dangers. Her female characters are strong contradictions: powerful yet fragile, intelligent yet emotionally naïve, subversive in spirit, and bound by social conditions. Notably, the heroines of Radcliffe achieve power not by physical strength but by the power of morality and mental strength.

The blend of moral sensitivity, intellectual alertness, and psychological endurance defines examples of Radcliffean heroines, such as Emily St. Aubert in The Mysteries of Udolpho and Ellena di Rosalba in The Italian. These heroines are normally young, innocent, and socially out of place, and have to face threats of male coercion and confined spaces that challenge their independence. However, instead of passively receiving what happens to them, they take up their space, both physically and emotionally, and devise ways to fight back, which eventually reinstates their agency.

The other typical feature of Radcliffe's artistry is her explanatory treatment of the supernatural, which evokes the spiritual world through unexplained ghostly visions and sounds but ultimately provides an explanation of how all the effects could be due to natural causes (Spooner & McEvoy, 2007). This explained supernatural is finally rationalized, aligning with the idea of female-centered Gothic as proposed by Moers (1976), which suggests that female rationality is superior to superstition. The narrative creates a sense of suspense and demonstrates that her female characters are intelligent, challenging the stereotype of the irrational or hysterical woman prevalent in earlier Gothic texts. Radcliffe contributed to the popularization of Gothic literature within mainstream discourse, which has come to be recognized as a Female Gothic tradition (Norton, 1999).

Thus, according to Miles (1995), she was considered by her peers to be at the forefront of present-day English fiction (Miles,1995), which was a credit to her pioneering method of female characterization and her enduring mark on literature. Continuing this tradition, it is not only the atmosphere created by Radcliffe and her narrative techniques, as well as suspense, but also a deeper reflection of the image of a female protagonist as a psychologically rich, morally independent, and spatially conscious character that remains relevant to Gothic literature. These characterizations enabled Radcliffe to break conventional norms in literature by presenting female characters who can surpass both their intellectually and morally dominant male villains, thereby carving a new niche in the genre that women had not previously held.

The genre is undergoing a certain transformation in the modern research on Gothic in that it is more and more viewed by scholars as a multimodal phenomenon that continues to redefine the notions of the limitations of space and male and female vulnerability. In recent film studies, it is possible to see how the Gothic film does not forget about the architectural limitations of Radcliffe, which constantly prefigure female agency as a negotiable matter in different historical contexts (Aldana, 2020). In addition, recent critical discourse emphasizes the development of postfeminist, neoliberal, and digital versions of the Gothic, in which the autonomy of women has been negotiated within the framework of culturally conditioned boundaries (Aldana & Wester, 2019).

The spatial aspect of Gothic representation is further elaborated in terms of the broader field of media studies. In the national space of television, homes serve as sites of surveillance and psychological confinement, expanding Radcliffean ideas of corridors, rooms, and frames in serial forms that anticipate constrained female inquisitiveness (Johnston, 2021). Simultaneously, digital platforms and post-digital cultural arrangements intensify these processes and redefine agency as a form of individualized self-management, which occurs under unfriendly conditions (Aldana & Wester, 2019; Johnston, 2021).

Based on empirical research in regional settings, it has been found that spatial boundaries are not universal but rather situated within a culture. The interaction between local screen industries and particular geographies co-produces anxieties about reduced mobility of women, thus establishing once again the longstanding nexus of environment, enclosure, and confined agency (Murphy, 2024).

Feminist spatial theory reconceptualizes Gothic settings as gendered architectures of control rather than atmospheric scenery. Kern (2021) demonstrates how domestic and nocturnal spaces are shaped by patriarchal constraints that limit women's mobility, a condition mirrored in Radcliffe's corridors and chambers that combine theatrical peril with opportunities for covert resistance. Brickell and Cuomo's (2019) concept of feminist geolegality positions the home as a site where legal and political power impose bodily vulnerability, reframing Gothic entrapment as a spatialized juridical condition.

Hall's austerity geographies highlight how economic precarity manifests in domestic insecurity (Hall, 2022), producing contemporary Gothic spaces such as unsafe rentals and unstable homes that echo Radcliffean dread within neoliberal contexts. Empirical studies of women's restricted night-time movement further underscore how fear restructures access to urban space, revealing the Gothic city as a lived geography of danger (Zhang, Zhao, & Tong, 2022). Feminist architectural discourse likewise shows how built environments reproduce exclusion while enabling subversive micro-resistances (ARCH, 2022), much like heroines who repurpose oppressive interiors for escape and revelation. Collectively, this scholarship situates the Radcliffean heroine's spatial journey as a sustained negotiation of power within eighteenth-century interiors and their twenty-first-century urban and media descendants.

Thus, in this paper, we are trying to understand how Radcliffe's Gothic heroines established a revolutionary template for female agency based on the strategic navigation of space and the moral assertion of autonomy. At the same time, by integrating feminist literary theory with spatial criticism, this study also explores how Radcliffe's spatial environments both constrain and catalyze female selfhood, situating her fiction within broader cultural concerns about gender, confinement, and resistance. Furthermore, how Radcliffe's Gothic heroines continue to exert influence on contemporary visual and narrative forms will also be discussed.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis adopts an integrated theoretical approach that combines feminist literary theory and spatial criticism. It argues that the agency of the Gothic heroine is specifically formed at the intersection of gendered experience and corporeal locomotion, through which corporeal spaces are known to both constrain and enable demonstrations of feminine resistance, thus producing a space-based conception of female agency.

2.1. Feminist Literary Theory

In her seminal work on the Female Gothic, Moers (1976) established the Female Gothic as a paradigm of reconceptualization of the traditional Gothic novel that anticipates feminine anxieties and desires (Moers, 1976). She argues that it was only this subgenre that explores domestic imprisonment, architectural enclosure, and mental pressures being heaped on women in patriarchal societies (Moers, 1976).

"For Radcliffe, the Gothic novel was a device to send maidens on distant and exciting journeys without offending the proprieties. In the power of villains, her heroines are forced to do what they could never do alone, whatever their ambitions: scurry up the top of pasteboard Alps, spy out exotic vistas, penetrate bandit-infested forests. And indoors, her heroines can scuttle miles

along corridors, descend into dungeons, and explore secret chambers without a chaperone, because the Gothic castle, however much in ruins, is still an indoor and therefore freely female space. In Radcliffe's hands, the Gothic novel became a feminine substitute for the picaresque, where heroines could enjoy all the adventures and alarms that masculine heroes had long experienced, far from home, in fiction" (126).

Gilbert and Gubar (2020) develop this idea with their book, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, published in 1979, which clarifies how the literary norms of patriarchy were defied by the works of eighteenth-century writers of the feminist gender, Sir Walter Scott, and Charlotte Brontë Gilbert and Gubar (2020). Their discussion shows that these writers created characters who were both adherent and defiant of gender norms and that, in most cases, used architectural metaphors to experiment with feminine mental enclosures. The discussion of the so-called madwoman archetype provided by the authors demonstrates that female protagonists, despite being physically limited in their oppressive Gothic spaces, gain a certain sense of agency as a result of their being morally better beings and intellectually strong.

The book, Ellis (1989), further analyzes how Gothic novels challenge the ideology of domesticity in the 18th century through the representation of domestic space, revealing the fate and resistance of female characters in contested castles (Ellis, 1989). In his 2002 book, *Gothic Writing 1750–1820: A Genealogy*, Robert Miles places the Female Gothic within a larger literary-historical context and explains how Radcliffe contributed to the development of these traits (Miles, 2002). Similarly, in Diana's (Wallace, 2004) study, The Woman in Historical Novel, although the temporal range of the narrative is quite broad, it still provides some understanding of how, in the Gothic tradition, female characters gain strength and identity by exploring the past, history, and family secrets (Wallace, 2004). All these negative viewpoints, in turn, offer an analytical instrument with which the negotiating strategies that the heroines of Radcliffe apply to the limited situation can be evaluated to establish autonomy and retain inner lives.

2.2. Spatial Criticism and Gothic Architecture

The Poetics of Space, a 1964 monograph by Bachelard (1964), provides invaluable information about the use of spatial arrangement as a psychological construct (Bachelard, 1964). According to Bachelard, the house hosts daydreaming, the house defends the daydreamer, and the house gives one a chance to dream tranquilly (Bachelard, 1964). He also highlights that "inhabited space surpasses geometrical space" (90), thus indicating that the psychological relation of architecture extends far beyond the corporeal aspect of space, making spaces possess emotional and symbolic meanings.

This domestic utopia is dramatically reversed in Gothic literature, where the threatening spaces that are created, castles, convents, and isolated mansions, do not provide but destroy the architectural sanctuary envisioned by Bachelard. However, the framework presented by Bachelard also suggests that the close knowledge of the relations of space may result in the creation of agency and resistance that cannot be confronted directly. According to (Bachelard, 1964), the house is a leading force of amalgamation of thoughts, recollections, and dreams of humanity. The understanding by the Gothic heroine of secret rooms, staircases, and architectural peculiarities can often be the key to her survival and ultimate victory. This spatial literacy gives her the power to move and eventually surmount the very spaces meant to hold her captive, thus transforming architecture as well as leading to the subversion of patriarchal spatial domination.

The book of Botting (1996), Gothic, provides a brief description of the Gothic space, ruins, and their psycho-affective influence, providing general theoretical background to the spatial criticism part (Botting, 1996). In the book, Punter (1996) details the interaction between space and terror in Gothic literature, particularly how Gothic castles are used as metaphors for mental states and oppression, thus adding depth to the discussion of architectural space used by Radcliffe as a metaphor for the mind (Baldick, 1997).

The analysis of space presented by Foucault and Miskowiec, especially their notion of heterotopias, sheds more light on the functioning of Gothic environments as complex spaces (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). In *Of Other Spaces*,

the authors refer to heterotopias as spaces that are both mythical and real, confronting and challenging the spaces in which we live (23). Unlike utopias, which are entirely fictional entities, heterotopias are real locations that serve as counter-sites, where two or more often contradictory spaces or meanings are juxtaposed. Gothic castles, convents, and lonely mansions can be interpreted as heterotopic spaces: lands of order and confinement that simultaneously embrace chaos, enigmas, and transgression. In these liminal and frequently repressive spaces, heroines are subjected to various forms of control; however, the heterogeneous nature of these spaces creates points of resistance through cracks and ambiguity. The way Gothic heroines navigate these layered spaces, by uncovering secrets, using secret pathways, and developing an internal world even within the physical environment, is a form of agency. This spatial negotiation allows them to attain some degree of freedom and autonomy, even in spaces designed to subordinate them. This demonstrates how heterotopic spaces can function both as means of power and as spaces of subversion.

The recent literature, including Townshend (2019) and Spooner and McEvoy (2007), provides a deeper understanding of the connection between Gothic form, space, power, and gender. These works support the view that Radcliffe's heroines can be seen as spatial agents navigating complex heterotopias, embodying both powerlessness and power in their respective ways.

The paper combines feminist literary theory and spatial criticism in an attempt to assess the role of Gothic stories in the construction and deconstruction of gendered oppression using architectural space. Based on Gilbert and Gubar (2020), feminist approaches also shed light on how women in Gothic literature are put in the subject position of patriarchal control and limitation of their mobility, autonomy, and psychological manifestation. Following Bachelard and Foucault, spatial criticism augments this point of view, understanding the Gothic environments as heterotopic areas in which confinement, secrecy, and transgression meet. Through employing this synthesized methodology, the symbolic and material roles of domestic and institutional spaces are analyzed to show the ways in which heroines in historical and modern Gothic texts are able to acquire spatial agency and turn spaces of limitation into spaces of defiance and self-identification.

2.3. Transmedia Gothic Space and the Persistence of the Radcliffean Heroine

In the latest scholarship of media-Gothic studies, this movement of Radcliffian spatial politics into the contemporary screen ecologies is emphasized. The recent exploration of Gothic television by Johnston argues that the medium is highly Gothic due to its ability to transfer ghostly pasts into the domestic realm and thus the creation of an interior space of surveillance and psychological confinement that equally echoes the architectural constraints peddled by the protagonists of the Radcliffe novels (Johnston, 2021).

This argument is extended by Aldana Reyes, who illustrates the mobilization of haunted architectures and the concept of imagined pasts to support female agency in high-profile Gothic films, especially in the films, namely, Crimson Peak and The Woman in Black (Aldana, 2022). Readings of The Haunting of Hill House also indicate that Gothic enclosure is exaggerated by stream shows that are structured around the episode format, traumatic home design, and repetitive encounters with the family home (Hutchings & Burdge, 2021).

The most recent studies of the television series by Mike Flanagan, in particular, highlight background ghosts creating an invisible force of space, restricting female movements, and modernizing Radcliffean suspense through the hidden danger to the environment (Smith, 2024). Out of the confines of film and television, the Kirkland video game, in its third example of Gothic, demonstrates how interactive mazes and neo-medieval battlefields recreate the restricted mobility of Gothic architectural design, and re-theorize agency as tactical navigation through a rule-bound environment (Kirkland, 2021).

The discursive imperative of the film The Revenant also represents Gothic worlds as being organized into pursuits, spatial obstructions, and even controlled revelation, thereby providing a methodological language of questioning modern-day power relations, which manifest their articulation through limited movement (Williams, 2022). Taken together, these studies confirm the continuity of the Radcliffean Gothic heroine as a transmedia icon

whose agency is continuously being reenacted in terms of spatial confinement, moving in the twenty-first century out of eighteenth-century manorial corridors to serial domestic environments, streaming architectural spaces, and participatory labyrinths.

2.4. Emily St. Aubert and the Castle of Confinement

Emily St. Aubert is the most advanced exposition of Gothic space, communicating feminine identity and allowing limited agency in the works of Radcliffe. Orphaned, economically vulnerable, Emily at first may seem to fit the traditional paradigms of feminine powerlessness; however, her engagement with a series of architectural contexts may manifest an understated understanding of how a sense of spatial awareness can become power-giving when the usual means of identity are lost. Her path, from the pastoral nature of her childhood house to the sublime nature of the Pyrenees, and the dominating architecture of Udolpho, is a geographical and psychological journey that represents the idea (Bachelard, 1964) that inhabited space is more than geometrical space (1964: 90).

The castle of Udolpho is literally a prison as well as a symbolic psychological laboratory where the moral strength of Emily is trained by hardships. More decisively, it is a system of architecture entailing complexities that she has to discover how to maneuver so that she does not lose her sanity and eventually earn her freedom. The detailed descriptions of the maze-like nature of Udolpho, as given by Radcliffe, reflect the world that Emily is in, at the same time supplying her with the geographic information that would see her escape at a later stage. Being trapped in a dark and strictly controlled world, Emily illustrates the theory of feminine subversion by Gilbert and Gubar as she refuses to wait passively, hoping she will be saved, but rather conducts a ruthless assessment of her living circumstances to work out the way to escape (Gilbert & Gubar, 2020). It is a purposeful spatial exploration of the conventional Gothic passivity and a way of showing how spatial literacy can be a practical tool of women's agency.

"When her spirits had overcome the first shock of her situation, she held up the lamp to examine if the chamber afforded a possibility of escape... It was a spacious room, whose walls, wainscoted with rough oak, showed no casement but the grated one which Emily had left, and on another door than that by which she had entered" (17).

Whereas Udolpho is designed in such a way that it confines the characters, Emily finds natural beauty and her ability to experience a higher order of feelings to provide her with an internal sense of freedom that cannot be subdued by material constraints. Her thoughts about the Pyrenees, as an example, confirm her aesthetic and moral superiority to her oppressors. Beyond these, woods, and pastures, and mixed towns and hamlets, and extending to the sea, on whose clear waters shone many a distant sail; and diffusing the whole picture was the purple light of evening, as Radcliffe notes (33). This instance of spiritual elevation foreshadows the mental strength that will get her through the later architectural incarceration. As it is exhibited by the juxtaposition of natural sublime and Gothic architecture, the phenomenon of space functions at several levels. Emily finds transcendence in nature but has to learn to survive masculine domination by learning pragmatically about built environments. This duality is represented in her preferred retreat in the broken tower.

"One evening, having wandered with her lute to this her favorite spot, she entered the ruined tower and ascended a winding staircase that led to a small chamber which was less decayed than the rest of the building, and whence she had often gazed with admiration on the wide prospect of sea and land that extended below" (337).

The tower, being both on the borderline between destruction and salvation, is both a literal and a metaphorical location out of which Emily is able to develop a sense of clarity and inner power. This architectural entrapment and spatial understanding become further elaborated when considered through the prism of the concept of heterotopia outlined by Foucault and Miskowiec, the real spaces that act as a reflection and at the same time countermeasures to the norms of the society within which they exist (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986).

Foucault and Miskowiec (1986) describe the heterotopias in Of Other Spaces (1968) as places where incomparable meanings and times coexist, creating a stratification of spatial experiences that challenge the standard order. The Gothic castle exemplifies such a heterotopic space: physically tangible yet symbolically unstable, it

combines architectural order with psychological disorientation. Udolpho functions as a venue of refuge and incarceration, justice and anarchy, silence and secrecy. Its labyrinthine structure and shifting atmospheres dramatize this, making the space of confinement more complex and difficult to comprehend logically. Within this environment, Emily navigates not only physical paths but also interprets spatial codes, such as those found in concealed chambers, hidden documents, or fragmented memories, demonstrating how a Gothic heroine's subjectivity is shaped by her experiences with space ambiguity.

There is one instance of dislocation in which Emily is roused by a knock: She was, at last, roused out of a sort of sleep, into which she had, at last, fallen, by a sudden pounding at her chamber door. She looked up in horror, and immediately she thought of Montoni and Count Morano, but, after hearing nothing for some time, and hearing Annette's voice, she got up and opened the door (Volume 1, Chapter 5:1552). One of the other passages reflects how she is moving through the castle in fear, and is led astray by shadows and silence: "Emily, who had been deceived by the long shadows of the pillars… feared to look at them, almost expected a figure to start out behind her, now she was going toward where she had last seen Barnardine… she walked with great care to the spot at which she had last met him, where she had once known Barnardine..."

These episodes help to show how psychological uncertainty and architectural complexity, the features of heterotopic space, collide. Udolpho, therefore, can be regarded as an inhabited liminal place, a space of transition in which normative categories are disrupted, and change is possible. Not through a direct flight out of Udolpho but through the multifaceted spatial reasoning that Emily goes through, she expresses the sense of newly acquired agency, memory, and inner clarity. By so doing, heterotopia turns out not only to be a setting but also a prerequisite of radical change.

2.5. Ellena Rosalba and the Convent as Contested Space

The Italian story is set in Naples of the eighteenth century and follows the love story of the noble Vincentio di Vivaldi and the orphan Ellena Rosalba (Radcliffe, 2017). When Vivaldi's mother opposes this union, a scheme is devised with the help of the nefarious monk Schedoni, who assists in the abduction of Ellena. In this novel, she is imprisoned in the convent of San Stefano under the oppressive regime of a corrupt abbess; this setting symbolizes the ongoing struggle between spiritual refuge and repressive authority. Simultaneously, Vivaldi is falsely accused and imprisoned by the Inquisition. Schedoni, who plans to kill Ellena, ultimately saves her when he believes she is his daughter. The narrative reveals Ellena's true background as a noble niece, which by definition qualifies her to marry Vivaldi. The story concludes with their reunion and marriage, while the antagonists meet their demise. The novel prefigures the convent as a critical Gothic site, a space where feminine identity is negotiated and debated through a series of lies, restrictions, and resolutions.

This space is enlightened by the Female Gothic developed by Moers (1976) that defines a specific tradition in which the narratives of women are presented within the precincts of patriarchy and institutions. This structure is reflected in what Ellena undergoes in the San Stefano convent; her confinement promises straightforward feminine fears related to the institutional dominance of women's bodies and decisions. Being a daughter of an artist who must take religious vows imposed on her, she is the embodiment of Gilbert and Gubar (2020) define as women who are both submissive and defiant towards gender norms. The tactical conformity of Ellena to conventional routines, as well as her resistance behind the scenes, is an example of the alleged motif of the madwoman discussed by Gilbert and Gubar (2020), that is, the woman who manages to obtain agency by relying on her moral superiority, but who is physically bound. Her statement that the sanctuary is profaned...it has become a prison (volume 1, chapter 8: 100) depicts the use of architectural metaphors by the heroines of Radcliffe to reveal the dichotomy between feminine ideal spaces (sanctuary) and their real role of detention (prison).

The artistic capabilities of Ellena give another level of spatial agency through painting and music. In her development of alternative spatial environments, she develops a being that is independent of her physical location

and is beyond the boundaries of masculine or institutional power. These imaginative spaces illustrate modes of feminine production that allow economic independence as well as psychological autonomy, demonstrating how artistic practice can be a means to escape architectural confinement even in cases where physical emancipation is not possible.

"She approached the windows and beheld from thence a horizon and a landscape spread below, whose grandeur awakened all her heart. The consciousness of her prison was lost while her eyes ranged over the wide and freely sublime scene outside. She perceived that this chamber was within a small turret, projecting from an angle of the convent walls and suspended, as in air, above the vast precipices of granite that formed part of the mountain. Those precipices were broken into cliffs, which, in some places, impended far above their base, and, in others, rose in nearly perpendicular lines to the walls of the monastery, which they supported. Ellena, with a dreadful pleasure, looked down them, shaggy as they were with larch and frequently darkened by lines of gigantic pine bending along the rocky ledges, till her eye rested on thick chestnut woods that extended over their winding base and, softening to the plains, seemed to form a gradation between" (Volume 1, Chapter 8: 105).

The excerpt creates a graphic image of how Ellena becomes temporarily out of touch with the awareness that she is in her prison when she directs her gaze towards the view that is awe-inspiring on the other side of the window. Her preoccupation with the broad and sublime view shows that her mental forces could go beyond corporeal restrictions placed over her, hence into an auxiliary space that is constructed by her perception and imagination. Although this aesthetic experience is not yet an active act of artistic production, it constitutes an innate aesthetic sensibility and a fine sense of beauty, thus providing an essential means for us to resist subordination and maintain psychological independence. Her awakening heart is an indication of the strong energy of this internal activity, which is able to give her spiritual liberation even at a time when physical escape is impossible.

The conceptual framework of Professor Bachelard can be an important tool in understanding how Ellena takes the convent and turns it into a place of escape (Bachelard, 1964). Although the convent is allegedly meant to instill discipline and control, Ellena turns the convent into a place of rebellion. According to Bachelard, domestic architecture is perfect to protect and foster the dreamer, but since the convent is the opposite, Bachelard views these forms as a device of surveillance and control. However, it is the very fact that Ellena is very familiar with the space layout of the convent, its cells, chapels, gardens, and corridors, that gives her a kind of agency she could not have achieved by confronting it directly. The expertise of her religious practices and understanding of building arrangements allows her to steer institutional scrutiny and preserve her psychological freedom.

By questioning the authority of the abbess, she expresses what Bachelard calls the transformative power of spatial literacy: space that has been taken over by imagination cannot be indifferent (Bachelard, 1964: 48). This sense of space is reflected in the text: when she was so excited she heard some footsteps that lingered somewhere outside her door, and, listening to them, she was convinced that someone was in the passageway (Volume 2, Chapter 8: 252). The convent of San Stefano, therefore, is the most complex architectural space in the novel, acting both as an escape from the violence of the male sex and a possible source of institutional repression that can destroy individual identity through architectural control.

The convent of San Stefano is a paradise of a heterotopic place. It is a physical place but intentionally in seclusion from secular society, ruled by its own unique set of rules, time, and system of morality. This isolation defines it as a zone of otherness, which is not part of the daily rhythm of everyday life. The convent is a sharp contrast of meanings within its own four walls: it is supposed to be a religious sanctuary, a place of spiritual refuge, religious devotion, and peace, but to Ellena, it soon becomes a prison, a place where religious vows are enforced and where she has no control or choice. This paradoxical quality between its idealized role and the reality that Ellena lives in is inherent in its heterotopic nature. At the same time, though, the convent order imposes strict discipline in its daily activities and rules; the inside of the convent is also filled with allusions to intrigue, secrets, unfair use of authority by the Abbess and Schedoni, and even the possibility of violence, which creates chaos and disrupts the facade of tranquility.

2.6. The Paradox of Constrained Agency: Space as Liberation and Imprisonment

Both Emily and Ellena (2023) demonstrate that Gothic heroines are forced to develop an elaborate spatial literacy to survive and eventually triumph over masculine oppression; their success, ironically, is determined by their willingness to live with a kind of temporary confinement and so-called powerlessness as necessary steps in their geographic and psychological growth. This trend reveals the urgency of women to act within the structures of patriarchy and develop strategies to undermine them internally, using the knowledge of space and architectural acquaintance as underground weapons of resistance, which act outside the conventional power frameworks. The heroines in the works of Radcliffe are repeatedly shown as having the power of femininity to develop through practice and trial and error instead of innate ability, and it is crucially dependent on their education in various ways of navigating space, as well as being literate in architecture. Their plight has strategic purposes in the stories, which makes them ultimately realize their moral and intellectual superiority over their oppressors, but that superiority is expressed, first and foremost, in a highly developed command of geographic and architectural relations, which helps them to survive and achieve ultimate victory.

This spatial dynamic is particularly complicated in those scenes when open victimization hides a complex psychological and geographic opposition. As Ellena is kidnapped, it looks like she went without fighting physically, but this is not a sign of weakness. She knows that open opposition would be of little use, and she carefully follows the tracks and the movements of her detainees as this allows her to gather vital data on how to escape in the future. The fact that she managed to remain psychologically composed during transportation demonstrates how spatial awareness can provide some kind of agency even in instances when complete powerlessness is observed. Likewise, the lack of power that Emily experiences in Udolpho develops into an organized architectural project that eventually allows her to survive psychologically and escape physically. Both heroines study their spaces as a textual map to reveal the weaknesses and constraints of the systems of control used by their oppressors.

This ironic interplay of restriction and empowerment indicates how the author of this book, Radcliffe, has a keen understanding of the workings of power through space organization. Even the architectural elements that are meant to confine and overwhelm, such as winding passages, concealed rooms, and covert ways, serve as resistance material when understood and used appropriately. The forced closeness of the heroines with these spaces due to extended imprisonment provides them with an advantage of knowing more than their imprisoners, despite their apparent dominance. Coming across means of exit in Udolpho that Montoni and his companions have not yet thoroughly explored, Ellena can see with her eyes what the convent offers and which conventions her guardians have neglected, and she observes the daily routine of the convent and finds opportunities for escape that are ignored by her guardians.

The spatial mastery of the heroines essentially dismantles the conventional power relations, granting female agency by showing how seemingly submissive other complex resistance tactics. Their architectural expertise functions as an underground layer of authority over the usual authority that enables them to amass intelligence, organize escapes, and organize associates whilst maintaining the appearance of obedience. This preventive spatial literacy is a very feminine agency, which achieves its goals not by force, but by a circumscribed way of doing things, implying that the true power does not reside in the mastery of spaces but in the mastery of knowing how to move around them.

As a result, the manifestation of female agency here can explain how Radcliffe actually rethinks the concept of feminine power as stemming from seeming weakness to create a counter-effect on the moral authority as something that subjugates it but does not nullify it. The final victory of the heroines not only justifies their own strength but also their better understanding of architectural space, which can be deciphered, negotiated, and eventually mastered using patience, observation, and planning. This combination of spatial literacy and moral uprightness develops a prototype of feminine heroism that struggles within the confines of the patriarchal world and eventually surpasses them through a higher understanding of the environment and moral integrity.

2.7. Architectural Apprenticeship: Radcliffean Spatial Literacy in Contemporary Media

The legacy of the spatial-feminine interaction is clearly visible in modern media depictions where female protagonists are placed in complex spatial situations requiring them to be geographically shrewd to survive and prevail. To a large extent, the book The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood can be discussed as a striking continuation of the Gothic canon of Radcliffe because the author considers institutional architecture as a protective and oppressive phenomenon. The survival of Offred depends on her careful mapping of the inner and outer worlds of Gilead, including the precise design of the house of the Commander and the routes of the underground resistance movement. Her homes, such as the Red Center and the Rachel and Leah Centers, distort domestic and pedagogical principles into systemic locations of corporeal and mental subordination, but her insider knowledge of architectural specifics, hidden pathways, and the topography of compression proves useful to her psychological sustenance and her final liberation.

The home of the Commander is like the convents and castles of Radcliffe, a totalizing milieu that is designed to produce obedience by disciplining space. The strictly controlled passage of the kitchen, the sitting room, and the bedroom reflects the spatial control that has been imposed on Emily in Udolpho or Ellena in the cells of San Stefano and shows the power of domestic architecture as a surveillance and restraint technique. Offred ends up with the very form of spatial intelligence that is characteristic of the heroines of Radcliffe, by mapping out the house of the Commander in the most minute detail. Similar to Emily finding out the secret passages of Udolpho or Ellena learning the ins and outs of convent corridors, Offred converts architectural limitations into a way to navigate it. They are illustrated by the secret encounters she shares with the Commander in his study as proof of the ways in which intimate knowledge of space can give rise to the opportunity to exercise agency in the disciplinary space; this study is a negotiable zone where Offred is able to negotiate small freedoms by manipulating space in the same way that Emily used the chambers in Udolpho to her advantage.

The Mayday resistance network commits Offred to expand her spatial literacy and think not just about individual structures but also about the urban geographies of resistance. Safe houses, tunnels, deserted subway facilities, and sympathizer networks create alternative spatial mappings that disrupt the architectural form of control propagated by Gilead, signaling the findings of the Radcliffian heroines of alternative routes to hidden passages, hidden rooms, and other ways around the apparently inaccessible institutional spaces. The meticulous training of the eye of the architect, of which the mastery of Udolpho or the threading of religious establishments like Ellena, is a manifestation, takes place in the same way in the underground geography of Offred as in the other two instances; it is the same progressive architectural apprenticeship, which neither removes nor disturbs the moral authority and emotional sincerity, but only adds to them, the new forms of spatial literacy and strategic thinking, which each place asks.

In Ex Machina (2014), the Gothic environment has been replaced by the role of the decayed castles and dark corridors that Radcliffe used to dwell on, but transferred to a high-tech research center, a venue that is both alluring in the promise of technology and plays the role of psychological and physical confinement. Stuck on the fringe of capitalist society and overwhelmed by surveillance technologies, Nathan's estate is presented as the twenty-first-century reenactment of the Gothic castle: a distant, patriarchal, and claustrophobic world where a strong patriarch oppresses a vulnerable yet intelligent woman. This spatial arrangement is not only ornamental, but this drama enacts the circumstances under which Ava, as well as Radcliffean heroines, are just getting to know, negotiate, and ultimately undermine their imprisonment. This modernist look of the facility, with glass walls, minimalistic interior, and sterile light, at first seems to oppose the Gothic tradition of decay and darkness, but these transparent barriers serve as more diabolical tools of incarceration than stone walls ever did. The glass cell of Ava presents an illusion of being open and yet total control, which Foucault and Miskowiec could define as an idealized panopticon. The periodic power cuts that leave the facility in darkness are moments of temporal reversion to the shaded areas of the Gothic, when Ava can express herself and start describing what she wants to escape (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986).

The awakening of Ava is very similar to the plotting of the narrative of Radcliffean heroines as they gain power not by fighting, but by closely observing, finding inner strength, and being aware of space (Moers, 1976). Similarly, Ava develops some form of spatial literacy as she gradually works out the physical layout of the facility, compromises security, and devises an escape plan. She learns in the classical style of the Gothic heroine, gradually being illuminated: she starts out as a seemingly passive object of observation but then demonstrates the ability to analyze, deduce, and think strategically. The locked doors and closed areas of the facility are puzzles to be solved rather than unavoidable obstacles, reminiscent of Radcliffe heroines exploring secret tunnels and hidden rooms. Ava does not defeat her oppressor, Nathan, through open confrontation but rather through familiarity with the environment he has created to keep her, thus using her own creation against herself, in a Gothic heroine-like approach of exploiting the construction features for escape. The fact that she manages the power grid of the facility indicates her growing control over even the systems designed to enslave her.

In this way, Ava can be characterized by the necessary features of the Gothic heroine introduced by Radcliffe: moral intelligence, psychological richness, and the ability to reverse surveillance into opposition. But so does Yett, Ex Machina, which modifies and reuses this tradition towards a posthuman era. The half-mechanical nature of Ava and the undefined ontological position of being artificial intelligence provide new dimensions of her subjectivity that echo Gothic issues of agency over the body and the delimitations of humans and non-humans alike. However, these aspects do not cut her off from the Gothic descent; instead, they prolong it.

With cyborg theory by (Haraway, 1991), which explains that hybrids destabilize strict binaries and open up space to new ways of agency, (Haraway, 1991), hybrids can create openings that allow new forms of agency. The silence and ambiguity of Ava at the end of the film cannot be fully resolved, yet the endings of Radcliffe tend to leave the readers wondering what might happen in the future when the heroine will have a sense of independence. In contrast to the classic Gothic novels, in which the order of the world is usually restored by the end of the tale after the heroine has gone through hardships, *Ex Machina* does not bring the social order back to its place, proving that the Gothic narrative techniques can be effectively implemented in the context of twenty-first-century fears of artificial intelligence and posthuman subjectivity, but still without the need to lose the main idea of the genre, which is to explore the intricate connection between power, space, and agency.

Radcliffean Gothic heroines have been transformed into various media formats, which emphasize the various aspects of the initial spatial-feminist dynamic and respond to modern-day cultural issues related to architecture, surveillance, and individual privacy. However, in more recent forms, we can see an increased sensitivity to the psychological nuance and social commentary contained in the spatial characterizations that Radcliffe provides, in particular how the modern fears of the panopticon and the power of architecture can be echoed back to the Gothic of the eighteenth century. Television serializations offer a narrative scale sufficient to deal with the gradual development of feminine spatial literacy through protracted architectural training featured in the original novels by Radcliffe, so that viewers can observe the gradual development of feminine heroines as they learn to negotiate threatening spaces without compromising their moral standards.

3. CONCLUSION

The paper has established that the radical portrayal of the Gothic heroine by Ann Radcliffe has become a timeless paradigm of female agency, which still reverberates through the centuries of literary and media productions. Radcliffe essentially re-constructed the Gothic convention by inventively defining Emily St. Aubert and Ellena Rosalba as heroines whose empowerment is achieved not through direct defiance or physical power but through advanced spatial literacy, ethical astuteness, and mental fortitude. In dealing with such a complicated system of patriarchal oppression, these heroines find a way of working around the intricate structures of their worlds, making it their strongest weapon against masculine rule. The theoretical approach used in this paper, which is a combination of feminist literary theory and spatial criticism, shows how the Gothic spaces used by Radcliffe can be seen as heterotopic spaces that not only

limit feminine resistance but also provide avenues of power for feminine resistance when interpreted effectively through a better understanding of architectural relations and space interrelations.

The analysis of modern media adaptations, The Handmaid Tale by Margaret Atwood and Ex Machina by Alex Garland, shows that Radcliffean Gothic conventions have continued to be incredibly adaptable and persistent in their response to the twenty-first-century issues of surveillance, institutional authority, and technological domination. These modern works are not just reproductions of Radcliffean traditions; they also manifest their essence of still challenging the changing variants of gendered suppression. This implies that the underlying forces of spatial constraint and feminine resistance are direly important in an era dominated by digital surveillance and artificial intelligence.

To sum up, the heroines of Gothic novels by Ann Radcliffe have left a literary heritage surpassing all historical barriers because they explain fundamental trends in the interaction of space, power, and feminine agency. Due to modern society struggling with novel forms of surveillance, institutional control, and technological repression, the idea of Radcliffe that spatial knowledge might serve as a source of essential resources to retain individual autonomy in repressive systems is as relevant as it was in the eighteenth century. The path of the Gothic heroine, who seemingly has no power but conquers space, and then is overcome by her moral strength, remains a source of story pleasure as well as practical knowledge of how to be overwhelmed by the intricate systems of spatial power that dominate contemporary experience.

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