

EMOTIONS VOCABULARY AND THE RECONCEPTUALISATION OF EMOTIONS IN ANN RADCLIFFE'S "THE ITALIAN, OR THE CONFESSIONAL OF THE BLACK PENITENTS"

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Abstract

The article undertakes the analysis of Ann Radcliffe's novel *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797) from a history of literary emotions perspective which, I argue, yields insights into the attitudes towards emotions embedded in Radcliffe's works. A reading of the novel from such a perspective also complements the critical studies of the artist's engaging with the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility. The novel is read as a text that registered but also participated in the dissemination of an epistemology of emotional experience articulated in the idiom of eighteenth-century moral philosophers – Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and Adam Smith – at the same time as it retained some of the older, theology-based conceptions of passions and affections. The dynamic in which the two frameworks for understanding the emotions exist in the novel is explored through a close reading of the vocabulary in which Radcliffe rendered the emotional experiences of her fictional characters. In this reading it is the passions which are found to have been invested with a variety of meanings and attributed a range of moral valences that most noticeably foreground the movement from a generally negative towards a more complex appreciation of powerful emotions.

Keywords: Ann Radcliffe, passions, affections, emotions history, moral philosophy

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One of the significant perspectives from which the body of critical readings of Ann Radcliffe's novels has been shaped is that of looking into how these texts engaged with the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility. The interpretations produced have ranged significantly - from claiming that her novels fully endorsed the ideal of sensibility and on those grounds conferring upon Radcliffe the title of a "high priestess of sensibility," to contending that they articulated a much more complex attitude to this social and cultural phenomenon, one that combined positive appreciation with an awareness of the dangers entailed in excessive, self-indulgent sensibility. (Howells, 1978; Ross, 1991, p. 155; Smith, 1973, p. 577)

Among other things, such analyses have demonstrated that with her novels Radcliffe reached out beyond the boundaries of the gothic novel convention as established by writers like Mathew Gregory Lewis, to significantly expand its thematic and ideational repertoire. Indeed, the engagement with the widely popular notion of sensibility and the various forms of its socially acceptable and welcome public manifestations allowed Radcliffe to explore and problematise some of the aesthetic and moral issues that were integral to the sensibility discourse. All this has embedded her work in the larger context of the slow-paced, manifold changes occurring in the various ways of understanding and thinking about the emotions and their role in human life in the eighteenth century.

As Thomas Dixon (2003) argued in his *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category*, the eighteenth century witnessed the culmination of a major reconceptualisation of emotional experience. This entailed a shift, a transplanting of concepts from within a framework that had had almost exclusive theological underpinnings to the growingly secular domains of medicine, physiology, philosophy, psychology, etc. The changes in the understanding of the emotions that this shift occasioned surfaced in the changing emotions vocabulary of the time which demonstrated an unprecedented variety (Frevert, 2014, pp. 1–31). Some of the words that had formed the core of this vocabulary, like 'passions' and 'affections', retained their high frequency relative to other words that made up the emotions-lexicon of the times, but did so at the price of the considerable alteration of their meanings. Others, like 'appetites' and 'perturbations', slowly dwindled down to a rather scanty representation in texts theorizing the emotions. The new developments in the fields of

moral philosophy and the cult of sensibility that came to dominate society brought into use the words 'sensibility' and 'sentiment'. The century also saw the more and more pronounced presence of the word that was to become the one all-encompassing term which the newly emergent field of psychology adopted – 'emotion'.

The way in which Radcliffe's work registered this shift, happening as it was in various contemporary discourses, is evident in the integration in her novels of some of the newly emergent ideas about the emotions. The rendering of the experiential aspect of emotions, their role as motivators of action, their moral evaluation in her works reveals an intertwining of the newer with the more stable, older understandings of emotions. The aim of this article will be to assess the integration of the new ways of understanding the emotions, especially those spelled out in the works of some eighteenth-century moral philosophers, in *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* ((1797) 2008b) – the last of Radcliffe's works to be published during her lifetime. This objective will be pursued by an analysis of the ways in which the author employed an emotions vocabulary in which passions were granted particular prominence. It is in the use of the latter word that the destabilizing of older meanings, their volatilisation by the new meanings which came to challenge them is foregrounded.

The motivation for the choice of *The Italian* out of all of Radcliffe's novels derives from the understanding that in writing it the author "went appreciably beyond a schematic psychology that divided characters into the simple categories of the innocent and the corrupted" (Cottom, 1985, p. 51) and that emotional depth and variety are implied in this new psychological complexity. A comparison with *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Radcliffe, (1794) 2008a) - allegedly the artist's most popular novel, offers sufficient evidence of this. For example, the word 'passion(s)' and its derivatives 'passionate', 'passionately' '[un]impassioned', which form one of the focuses of attention in this article, are employed with a relatively high frequency in both novels: eighty-eight occurrences over the 672 pages of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and seventy-seven over the 415 pages of *The Italian*. The latter text, however, demonstrates a variation of meanings that is lacking in the former. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* passions are made the property of the characters which are outright negative, like the arch villain Count Montoni, and of those other characters who unthinkingly inflict suffering upon others. 'Passion' here is used to refer to emotions stemming from excessive egoism and corresponding disregard of

others. They are thus defined in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in exclusively negative terms - as emotions which are detrimental to man and capable of bringing about the complete ruin of one's moral integrity and standing in society. In the words of Sister Agnes - the mentally distracted, dying nun of this novel: "Sister! Beware of the first indulgence of the passions; beware of the first!" Emily, and together with her the novel's readers, receive a stern warning about the passions' powers to lead one "to the commission of crimes. For which whole years of prayer and penitence cannot atone" (Radcliffe, 2008a, p. 646). The attribution of this warning to a character who has given up the world to dedicate the rest of her life to the church, as well as the temporally distant setting of the story, encourage here a reading of the passions within the old theological framework - as stemming from the sensitive/animal soul of man, as part of the punishment inflicted by God on man for his disobedience.¹ *The Italian*, on the other hand, registers a far from univocal understanding of the passions, one that retained some of the older, conservative suspicion towards them but also allowed for the newer, more nuanced understanding of them. This tension in Radcliffe's understanding and appreciation of passions is behind the "double-edged attitude toward extravagant feeling - both indulgent and disciplinarian" that Adela Pinch also remarked upon (1996, p.111).

'Passion' had, in the centuries up to the early seventeenth, been used alternatively as a term denoting what Augustine and Aquinas understood as the unruly appetites of the sensitive soul - pitted against the calm affections of the intellectual soul - or, as a term that encompassed all human emotional experience.² The eighteenth century continued to use the word 'passion' with both meanings, at the same time as it considerably modified the latter. Dixon has mapped these changes, registering, on the one hand, the continuity of the Aquinian conception of the passions and, relative to them, the affections, with the works of theologians like Jonathan Edwards, Isaac Watts whom he provisionally labelled the "Christian revivalists" and, on the other, pointing out the growingly secularised rearticulations of these notions in the works of moral philosophers like Joseph Butler, Francis Hutcheson and Thomas Reid (Dixon, 2003, pp. 62-97). The coexistence of the more conservative theological and the rational

¹ Both Thomas Dixon (2003, p. 29) and Susan James (1997, pp. 13-14) remark on the prominence in the writings of early modern authors of this understanding of the passions and of man's inability to control them as punishment for Adam's sin.

² For a discussion of the continuity between Augustine and Aquinas' views about the passions and affections, see Dixon (2003, pp. 26-61).

frameworks as well as the fact that none of them contained a fully coherent, unified vocabulary of the passions and affections meant that the conceptual field was in a state of flux, distinctions were often fuzzy and rigorous consistency of terminological meanings could be lacking within the scope of a single work. In the midst of this terminological heterogeneity, it is worth exploring how non-theoretical texts, ones belonging to the fields of fictional literature and the popular print culture, employed this vocabulary, thus participating in its consolidation or further diversification. The choices made in these texts can be seen as manifestations of their authors' allegiance to any of the recognizable theoretical frameworks within which human emotional life was being conceptualized in the eighteenth century. A survey of Radcliffe's novels reveals the writer's use of an emotions vocabulary which evokes some of the key ideas articulated in works by the century's moral philosophers – men like Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and Adam Smith. It is possible to speculate, in the light of Radcliffe's upbringing and the milieu of her adolescent years, on the appeal these ideas must have held for her. The novelist's biographers, Norton Rictor and Robert Miles, have both drawn attention to the formative influence exerted on her by two men from her family – her uncles, Thomas Bentley and John Jebb, whose spiritual and intellectual sympathies lay with latitudinarianism and rational dissent (Miles 1995; Rictor, 1999). Both Miles and Rictor write of the sometimes lengthy periods of time during which the young Ann Radcliffe lived in the households of these uncles and of the impact this must have made on the cultivation of her aesthetic tastes, on her intellectual development and the formation of her religious beliefs. The role played by latitudinarian and natural theology ideas in “the presentation of the issues of nature, the supernatural and the providential in her novels” (Mayhew, 2002, p. 274) and in the shaping up of Radcliffe's aesthetic (Chandler, 2006) has already received critical attention. Equipped with a perceptual framework underpinned by the precepts of rational dissent, Radcliffe was preconditioned to be receptive to the kind of ideas about the emotions espoused by moral philosophers whose religious allegiances, Dixon pointed out, were often engaged with “a more rationalistic form of Christianity”, as well (Dixon, 2003, p. 69).

One of the conceptual transformations of emotions vocabulary that *The Italian* registers is that of the words ‘passions’ and ‘affections’ as well as the distinction between them. The shift from a theologically-based to a secular morality framework

effected by moral philosophers had already rearranged the emphases in how these two categories were perceived. Thus, in Francis Hutcheson's *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* (2002) one finds the affections defined as the 'general'³ calm emotions arising from the "rational apprehension of good or evil", either for oneself or others, and the particular passions as "violent confused sensations, connected with bodily motions" (p. 43). Dixon remarked on the similarity of this distinction between general and particular emotions to the classical Christian one between higher rational appetite and lower sense appetite (Dixon, 2003, p. 83). However, Hutcheson, makes another noticeable distinction, this time within the range of emotional experiences he called particular - between calm particular affections and violent particular passions. It is these particular passions and affections that Radcliffe's novel thematises and explores from a close distance. The standard against which they are evaluated is the one with which philosophical morality operated and which attributed positive or negative value to emotions depending on whether they contributed to or prevented both the private and the public good. *The Italian* demonstrates an attitude towards the passions and affections that combines, on the one hand, the more traditional suspicion of the passions and appreciation of calm affections and, on the other - the acknowledgment of a positive potential in passions and a suspicion that calm affections can sometimes appear hypocritical, masking an insensitivity to other human beings.

The probing into the possibility of a positive aspect to passions leads again to Hutcheson who also argued in favour of some of the strong passions. The example he gave offered justification of anger - a particular, selfish passion he classified together with ambition, covetousness, hunger, lust and revenge - in cases when it was motivated by a noble sentiment, or employed as a cautionary emotion against the envy of others:

Anger, which some have thought an useless Passion, is really as necessary as the rest; since Men's Interests often seem to interfere with each other; and they are thereby led from Self-Love to do the worst Injuries to their Fellows. There could not therefore be a wiser Contrivance to restrain Injuries, than to make every mortal some way formidable to an unjust Invader, by such a violent Passion. (Hutcheson, 2002, p. 39)

³ Hutcheson distinguished general passions from particular passions.

Embedded in the economy of the passions that Radcliffe elaborated in *The Italian* is another understanding that points towards moral philosophy's discourse on the passions and affections. The seventeenth and eighteenth century had witnessed the discrediting of the will as the faculty managing the passions and moral philosophers like Hutcheson and Hume denied reason the power to manage and control passions. For Hutcheson, it was possible, through disciplined effort and fostering general benevolent desires, to dissolve bad associations of ideas that provoked violent passions for unworthy objects and so become able to redirect passions towards what was good both for the self and others. Hume was even more straightforward in ousting reason from the position of a controlling agent. In the second book of his *Treatise of Human Nature* he granted passions the power to mutually impact one another: „Nothing can oppose or retard the impulse of passion, but a contrary impulse“ (2007, p. 266). What gave a moral anchor to such a self-regulating system of the passions was the notion, shared by moral philosophers, of man's innate moral sense. The latter was trusted to discriminate between morally good and wrong passions and discourage man from the latter. It is a moral sense of this kind that brings about the most striking passion shifts and moral transformations in the novel.

These several ideas briefly reviewed here were an integral part of the moral philosophical discourse that permeated the fabric of cultural life of the ever-expanding public sphere in the eighteenth century. This fact allows us to assume, even as we remain aware of the reclusive character of Ann Radcliffe's life and of the resulting scarcity of information regarding it, that the author was familiar with these ideas about the passions and the affections, if not firsthand from the original texts in which they were first formulated, then from the variety of rearticulations they were being given in contemporary novels, conduct books and other kinds of writing. These assumptions offer sufficient ground on which to enquire into how the latter have been woven into the emotions vocabulary of her novel.

The narrative of *The Italian* exhibits a noticeable range of emotions-related vocabulary which features both the older terms – ‘passion(s)’, ‘affection(s)’ and ‘perturbation’ – and the newer ones – words ‘emotion(s)’ and ‘feeling(s)’. With the exception of ‘perturbation’ which is used only nine times in the novel, the other words mentioned are used with relatively high and relatively equal frequency. Significantly,

'emotion(s)' and 'feeling(s)' are consistently used as words of neutral moral connotation, while 'passion(s)' and 'affection(s)' bring into the novel connotations that are respectively marked as negative and positive and it is these the text both foregrounds and interrogates.

Radcliffe's use of the word 'passion' in *The Italian* extends to the denotation of both short-term and complex long-term emotions. The novel explores and evaluates the presence and various manifestations of these in the characters and in this process two oppositional pairs are found operating. One is based on the traditional early modern differentiation between bad passions and good affections; the other distinguishes between kinds of passions on the grounds of the moral principles articulated by eighteenth-century moral philosophers. The latter distinction pits the protagonist Vincentio di Vivaldi against the characters of his mother, the Marchesa di Vivaldi and Schedoni, her confessor. The former opposes Vincentio's passionate emotional makeup to the affectionate one of his beloved, Ellena di Rosalba. These two oppositions seem to create a perspective on the young man and his emotions that is contradictory since it implies both a positive and a negative evaluation. However, a close reading of the novel reveals that the opposition of Vincentio's passions to Ellena's affections is anything but clear-cut, for both categories of feeling become subject to interrogation in which the univocal negation of the former and affirmation of the latter is lost. Of the two it is the probing into the notion of the passions that is the more foregrounded - through the character of Vincentio the novel takes tentative steps towards affirming the positive value of some passions at the same time as it retains a sense of unease with regard to passions generally conceived.

As implied in the preceding paragraph, *The Italian* has three characters whose behavior is determined by their passionate natures - the love-struck protagonist Vincentio di Vivaldi, and the two antagonists - Marchesa di Vivaldi and her confessor Schedoni. Of the three, Vincentio is the one who demonstrates the greatest emotional complexity since he is the one male protagonist of a Radcliffe novel in whom passions are so prominent and identified as the motivators of his actions. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho's* Valancourt the author had already created a positive male character incidentally yielding to passional outbursts, but it was in *The Italian* that she engaged with a comprehensive study of the implications of passional excess for a good character.

The more conservative view of powerful passions as wrong is the one that is more immediately felt informing the development of the character and the evaluative stance adopted towards him. The narrative traces Vivaldi's transformation from a man who easily gives in to passions, allowing them to dictate his actions, into one who is capable of consciously exercising control over them. The culmination of this process is reached in the episode in which Vivaldi, a prisoner of the Inquisition, realises that acting upon his passions of "grief, indignation and despair" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p.198) might prove harmful to both him and Ellena. His decision and ability to curb an impulse to burst free and rush in search of his beloved is presented as an act in which his passions – implicitly identified as vice – seem "to become virtues" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p.198). Leading up to this moment are various others in which references to the passional side of Vivaldi's character are accompanied with different excuses, all of them symptomatic of a sense of anxiety embedded in the text and stemming from the attribution of powerful passions to a positive character. This sense surfaces early in the narrative – at the first instance in which Vincentio is described in more detail:

Vincentio inherited much of the character of his father, and very little of that of his mother. His pride was noble and generous as that of the Marchese; but he had somewhat of the fiery passions of the Marchesa, without any of her craft, her duplicity, or vindictive thirst of revenge. Frank in his temper, ingenuous in his sentiments, quickly offended, but easily appeased; irritated by any appearance of disrespect, but melted by a concession, a high sense of honor rendered him no more jealous of offence, than a delicate humanity made him ready for reconciliation, and anxious to spare the feelings of others. (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 8)

The passage introduces the young man's passionate nature as the negative counterpoint to the positive trait of his noble pride. The choice of pride as a positively laden feature that can counterbalance a tendency to passional excess is an early indicator of the novel's complex take on the passions. Listed by the theological tradition as one of the seven deadly sins, pride here appears rearticulated as a passion that can be either morally right or wrong. Thus, in the Marchese the pride of a "principled mind" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 7) is what adds moral substance to his pride of birth. The absence of moral integrity in the Marchesa leaves her with the kind of vain pride that sets going the train of vicious scheming and persecution in the novel. Notably, the narrative points out that it is from his father that Vincentio has inherited his noble pride, attributing to him an integrity which outweighs the negative implications of the passionate

temperament inherited from his mother. This widening of the range of moral valences for the concept of pride in the novel is one that is also found in Hutcheson's *Essay on the passions*. In it he acknowledged an awareness of the traditional way of regarding pride "in a bad Sense" (p. 46) and listed it together with the unambiguously wrong passions and practices of "*Sloth, Luxury, Debauchery, Insolence*" (p. 92), with "*Avarice, Petulancy or Lust*" (p. 65) and contempt of one's fellow-creatures. At the same time, he also found it sometimes denoting the desire of honour and power as well as "Joy upon any apprehended *Right or Claim to Honour*" (p. 46). At other places in the essay he went on to argue that desire of esteem and pride presupposed the presence of a moral sense, if they are to be seen as natural (p. 75). The descriptive sketches of Vivaldi and his parents in the first chapter of the novel show Radcliffe differentiating between the kinds of pride characteristic of them on the grounds of the presence of absence of moral principles in them. In referring to the Marchesa's pride the narrative points out that "her pride was that of birth and distinction, without extending to morals" and later the description introducing Schedoni draws attention to his spirit which showed not "the aspirings of a generous mind, but rather the gloomy pride of a disappointed one" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p.34). The narrative, as it unfolds, continues to add qualifiers to the characters' pride, making the distinction more and more pronounced. Thus, further mentions of Schedoni's pride define it as "haughty" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p.238) and mingled with malignity; in the Marchesa it is "jealous" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p.293) and is coupled with prejudice (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 122); in both it is easily exasperated (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 53, p. 166) – all of this making their pride the antithesis of Vincentio's and his father's pride.

The attributing of positive value to pride where it is grounded in moral integrity is so assertive in the novel that it is the one passion that the reader finds in the character otherwise defined in terms of her complete independence from passions' sway – Ellena di Rosalba. Ellena's pride, the narrative informs the reader, derives from her sense of having inherited a "nobility of soul" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p.26) and from the fact that she has been able to sustain an honest life by means of honest work. At almost every point a reference is made to it, Ellena's pride is qualified by an epithet that reasserts its positive value. It is alternately described as "just pride" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 32, p. 69, p. 11, p. 125), as "pride of conscious worth" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 68), "proper

pride" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p.181), "honourable pride" (Radcliffe, 2008b,, p.70) and "decorous pride" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p.182). And, as if to prevent any possibility of passions and their association with human flaws from attaching to Ellena, the word 'passion' is never used to define the kind of pride found in her. The one time it does appear in a part of the text related to her is when Ellena, going over her encounter with the abbess of the convent where she is kept prisoner, thinks approvingly:

of the frankness, with which she had asserted her rights, and of the firmness, with which she had reproved a woman, who had dared to demand from the very victim of her cruelty and oppression. She was the more satisfied with herself, because she had never, for an instant, forgotten her own dignity so far, as to degenerate into the vehemence of passion (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 85)

The reference to Vivaldi's noble pride is only one of the means by which the narrative deals with the anxiety of leaving its passionate protagonist morally culpable. The same description which opposes pride to his passions offers one more excuse by pointing out the nature of Vivaldi's passions as inherent in his character rather than as consciously cultivated. Indeed, all of the protagonist's passionate outbursts are presented as his impulsive responses to context-specific prompts rather than as carefully performed displays of the kind witnessed in his mother's behavior. The spontaneity of Vivaldi's passions is actually rendered in positive terms, as eloquently indicating his emotional sincerity – a feature that Ellena's aunt, Bianchi, is quick to observe (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 24). A further tempering of the passions' negative implications is achieved by attributing them to Vivaldi's youth. The narrative, thus, reveals a persistent commitment to countering every aspect of the young man's passionate nature with a positive feature in his character.

The justification and even legitimation of some of Vivaldi's displays of powerful passions is the next step the novel takes, and which it accomplishes by tracing the origin of these passions in the character's profound sense of justice and humaneness. The "delicate humanity" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 8) mentioned in the first character description of Vivaldi is nothing less than a version of those sentiments like sympathy, benevolence, compassion which, the eighteenth-century moral philosophers argued, were inherent in man's nature. The use of the word 'delicate', which Barker Benfield has noted was in the eighteenth century often construed a synonym of 'sentimental' is thus also a sign in Vivaldi of the sensibility the eighteenth century valued so highly (1996, p. 299). The

combination of passionate temperament and refined sensibility makes of the character a modified version of the conventional fictional man of sensibility found in Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*. Vivaldi is resistant to the neurotic feebleness and profuse tear-shedding for which the sensitive characters of eighteenth-century fiction were sometimes criticized. His more powerful passions find an explanation in the gender-specific arguments, extensively reviewed by Barker-Benfield, about nervous excitability and proneness to varieties of emotions elaborated in eighteenth-century medical discourses on the nerves. According to these arguments, which became widely adopted and can be found informing works like D-r John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, men were generally regarded as predisposed to the experience of strong passions while women, with their finer nerves and "natural softness", were inclined to the experience of more subdued, calmer affections (2008-2009, p. 14).

The narrative justifies strong passions which overpower Vincentio di Vivaldi at moments of crisis in the novel and dictate a behaviour that breaches established codes of propriety by tracing their origin to the protagonist's deep-seated compassion and love of honour. Lead by his love and determination to protect Ellena, Vivaldi visits the Spirito Santo convent where, believing Schedoni to have been involved in the sudden disappearance of Ellena, he demands to know where she is and his passionate remonstrances disrupt the monk's penance and the peace of the place (Radcliffe, 2008b, pp. 103-105). Later, when he meets the Superior of the convent where Ellena is kept prisoner, Vivaldi, provoked by the Superior's abusive and threatening references to Ellena, feels "indignation and contempt" rise in him and he counters the Superior with the unsparing portrait of her own moral faults (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 120). Vincentio's determination to defend Ellena's honour makes him oppose even his parents. The language in which he articulates his sense of duty towards his beloved, as part of what he considers to be "the first duty of humanity" - "to defend the oppressed" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 30) - is immediately evocative of Hutcheson's way of defining compassion as the public passion that "will engage us to succour the distressed even with our private Loss or Danger" (Hutcheson, 2002, p. 39). This duty, dictated by compassion, Vincentio further identifies as based on a principle of grandeur "which ought to expand all hearts and impel all actions" (Radcliffe, 2008, p. 30). To the observation of this duty and principle he ties up his own sense of honour and virtue becoming in this way an

embodiment of Hutcheson's combination of "Abhorrence of the injurious, and Love toward the injured, with a Sense of Virtue, and Honour" (Hutcheson, 2002, p. 39) as evidence that public passions reveal an amiable side to human nature.

Compassion and desire for honour and virtue which justify most of Vincentio's passionate outbursts are also at the heart of a torturing "conflict of passions" inside him to which the narrative refers more than once (Radcliffe, 2008b, pp. 13, 30, 31). The two irreconcilable passions are the protagonist's filial love for his parents and his amorous love for Ellena. Each passion is paired with a moral principle – a sense of duty that teaches Vincentio to honor his parents and a sense of duty that obliges him to defend the honor of his beloved. What sets them against each other and subjects Vivaldi to emotional suffering is the rigid social prejudice of his parents who refuse to accept Ellena di Rosalba as a match for their son. Adding further cause for emotional turmoil is the young man's jealousy which stems from his uncertainty regarding Ellena's affections.

The experiences through which Vincentio is thus shown going through are rendered as agonizingly painful (Radcliffe, 2008b, pp. 13-14). His state of mind, described by the words "tortured", "fired", "alarmed" – communicate an understanding of strong passions as capable of severely impairing one's capacity for clear sensory and mental perception and as posing a serious threat to one's wellbeing. Vivaldi is thus presented as a victim of the emotions raging within him, but while lack of passional restraint is one thing held responsible for his suffering, another is the selfish pride of birth keeping his parents from accepting Ellena as a match for their son and so leaving him divided between his loyalty to them and love for Ellena. The suffering of her beloved so touches the young woman that she is led to question the moral integrity of her own disciplined adherence to dignity, delicacy and carefully regulated affections:

Her very virtues, now that they were carried to excess, seemed to her to border upon vices; her sense of dignity, appeared to be narrow pride; her delicacy weakness; her moderated affection cold ingratitude; and her circumspection, little less than prudence degenerated into meanness. (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 181)

Compassion here produces a qualitative change in Ellena's perception of what she considers her virtues. The moment they are seen as implicated in the causes of Vincentio's suffering, they acquire the nature of vices. This episode in the novel thus

destabilises the value-laden contrast between bad passions and good affections as the value of each is made dependent on their being conducive, or at least not threatening to other people's wellbeing. This shift of emphasis in the novel is another one of the links connecting Radcliffe's work to moral philosophy in the field of which the contrast between passions and affections was gradually being replaced by that between selfish and public passions and affections generally considered.

The antagonists in the novel – Marchesa di Vivaldi and her confessor, Schedoni – are the characters who illustrate the full measure of the disruptive potential believed to be held by strong private passions. The narrative allows for no ambiguity with regard to the moral valence of the passions associated with them – in several places in the text these passions are defined as evil (Radcliffe, 2008b, pp. 179, 291, 292, 223). Selfish passions and the deliberate and persistent ways in which the Marchesa and Schedoni cultivate and nurture them are unequivocal indicators of the morally compromised nature of these two characters. The care with which they try to prevent the public display of these passions set them in contrast to Vivaldi's emotional spontaneity and sincerity. The introductory descriptions of both the Marchesa and Schedoni emphasise this duplicity in their characters. The Marchesa is defined as a woman of "violent passions, haughty, vindictive, yet crafty and deceitful; patient in stratagem, and indefatigable in pursuit of vengeance" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 7).

The description of Schedoni draws attention to the emotional inscrutability of the front he presents to others. His face is implicitly compared to a solid mask that prevents the communication of emotions: "There was something in his physiognomy extremely singular, and that cannot easily be defined. It bore the traces of many passions, which seemed to have fixed the features they no longer animated." (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 35)

The emancipation from passion that Schedoni's expressionless appearance seems to imply is, however, illusory – the narrative offers ample evidence of the role that passions, particularly those deriving from his pride, play in the confessor's behaviour. There is an element of undermining irony in that, in its fixed form, his face has preserved the signs, if not the life, of his former passions. Later in the story, it becomes clear that in his former life, before he loses his social standing and wealth, the confessor has been completely unrestrained in flaunting his passion in public. The suppression of emotional

display is thus in his case a necessity and safety measure. The traces of passions, frozen on his face, are a constant warning of the possibility of Schedoni manifesting them freely again, should he regain his high social status and wealth.

The Marchesa and Schedoni also serve as illustrations of the conventional notion of the volatility of the passions. Both characters feel certain about their abilities to exercise control over the public displaying of their passions and over the passions of those around them, yet at critical moments both fail to do so. The Marchesa employs her skill to interrogate her son about Ellena without alarming him too much. Schedoni uses his skill in affecting sympathy to manipulate the Marchesa into believing she first came up with the idea of murdering Ellena. Against this background Radcliffe demonstrates the illusory nature of control over passions as she shows both characters failing to suppress a sudden surfacing of anger, malice and fear in moments when they have been shocked out of their equilibrium. When Vivaldi accuses him of having conspired with the Marchesa to frustrate his plans of marrying Ellena, Schedoni cannot cover up the spite that rises in him, allowing Vivaldi to witness a "dark malignity overspread" his features (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 51).

The unpredictability and the difficulty of controlling passions is further complemented by their harmful potential both for those they are directed at as well as for those who are the source of their origin. The young Vincentio di Vivaldi, who is assailed by conflicting emotions of allegiance to his parents and love for Ellena, is unable to reconcile his passions and is tormented by the clash between conflicting principles and between the resulting conflicting passions within him. With the Marchesa and Schedoni the focus falls on the added detrimental effect of passions stemming from excessive selfishness. The accusations Vincentio has directed at Schedoni in the convent subject the confessor to suffering, "terror" and "mortifications of various kinds" and the revenge that he begins contemplating is rendered as a process of "fermenting the direst passions of his nature" (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 109). Fermentation here appears to echo the use of the notion in the field of the medical discourses on human physiology and physiology of the passions in particular - a notion which had been brought into prominence by the work of the seventeenth-century doctor, Thomas Willis, who saw it as essential to life but also as capable of triggering disease (Caron, 2015, par. 7). Fermentation as a property of blood, making it run faster along its course in the body, was connected both to fever and to the

engendering of passions. It thus comes to enhance the overall effect of sickness in Schedoni who, the narrative points out, is also changed in appearance so that he resembles “a spectre rather than a human being” (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 110). The conscious control over the passions-fermenting process Radcliffe has given Schedoni points to the self-inflicted nature of the emotional pain he experiences.

Seen as powerful forces capable of taking control over the body and the mind of man and of inflicting suffering, through the two antagonists of *The Italian* the passions are also shown to have a corrective potential and function. Both the Marchesa and Schedoni find out that the selfish passions that they nurture and in accordance with which they act are forcefully countered by passions that arise within them, taking them by surprise. The first such moment for Vincentio’s mother happens while she is discussing the plan of murdering Ellena with Schedoni at the Spirito Santo monastery. Hearing a requiem sung by the choir upon the death of someone in the monastery she is overcome by the thought of mortality and the enormity of the intended act of the murder. Even though she cannot at this point recognize her own fault in allowing her selfish pride to dictate her perception and actions, the Marchesa is nevertheless terrified by the prospect of becoming the cause of the death of another human being.

The desperate passions, which had resisted every remonstrance of reason and humanity, were vanquished only by other passions; and, her senses touched by the mournful melody of music, and her superstitious fears awakened by the occurrence of a requiem for the dead, at the very moment when she was planning murder, she yielded, for a while, to the united influence of pity and terror. (Radcliffe, 2008, p. 177)

The struggle between passion within her surfaces in visible somatic symptoms of distraction like “short and interrupted” breathings, sighs, change in the colour of her complexion, crying, absent-minded walking (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 177).

The sudden unexpected promptings of compassion are, even more significantly, what prevents Schedoni from acting according to his selfish passions of ambition and pride and so from murdering Ellena himself. Facing Ellena as she is trying to escape the house where she has been kept prisoner by Spalatro, having to meet the look of suffering and fear in her eyes triggers inside him the passion, alternatively called compassion, pity, sympathy, benevolence, which moral philosophers like Hutcheson, Hume and Adam Smith claimed to be inherent in human nature. The effect of shock this

produces on him is rendered in a language that includes as many words denotative of strong emotions as possible – “agitation”, “conflict of passions”, “perturbation”, “violent and contradictory” emotions, disbelief at finding his heart “sensible to some touch of pity” (Radcliffe, 2008b, pp. 223-225). Even though Schedoni calls the touch of compassion for Ellena to which he yields “a weakness” (Radcliffe, 2008b, p. 223), the argument about the power of benevolent passions to disarm selfish passions is assertively conveyed in the novel.

Recent assessments of the trends in critical thinking about Radcliffe (Cooper, 2010; Watt, 2014) have noted the shift from a perception of her works as embedded in conservative social and political views (Durant, 1982; Talyor, 1991) towards recognition of a latent radical component in them (Miles, 1995, Norton, 1999). The dynamic between the conservative and the radical in Radcliffe, articulated by Robert Miles as that between “a surface narrative that seems to go in a conservative direction, and her subtext, which moves in quite other ways” (Miles, 1995, p. 176) offers a pattern that encapsulates the relationship between the conservative and radical meanings with which Radcliffe used emotion words in *The Italian*. The traditional theological opposition between passions and affections which appears to have a dominant presence in the novel is consistently if subtly interrogated, reconceptualised and complemented by infusing it with the meanings articulated in the works of the century’s moral philosophers.

This has several implications for the novel and its place in its contemporary social and literary milieu. One such implication stems from the tentative questioning of the privileged status of affections as the norm for women’s expected emotional experience and behaviour and from the suggestion that such a norm was founded on a socially constructed, gendered stereotype of propriety. In thus suggesting that a wider emotional repertoire be made available to women Radcliffe’s novel can be seen as aligned with the much more passionately outspoken “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” in which Mary Wollstonecraft argued against women’s containment in an intellectually constraining and emotionally enfeebling sentimentality contrasted to men’s allegedly more robust emotionality and intellectual potential.

Published as the novel was in the decade that saw the libertarian enthusiasm of the French revolution get out of hand and become disfigured into the violence of the

Terror - its probing into the righteousness of morally justified passions, anger, in particular, is understandably careful yet prominent enough. At the same time as it singled out and naturalised passions that grew out of concern for the other, the novel also mapped the limits beyond which even such passion can spin out of control and do more harm than good. Perhaps most significantly assertive, however, in the face of the disillusionments following the Revolution is the faith the novel articulated in the presence of an essential compassionate impulse in human nature.

Considering the popularity and the large contemporary readership that Radcliffe's novels enjoyed it can be argued that the novel's thematisation of emotional experience here discussed, must have provoked, disrupted or resonated with the many readers' perceptions of the emotions, thus actively participating in the ongoing shaping and reshaping of the conceptions of the emotions at the end of the eighteenth century.

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