In *The Popular Novel in England, 1770–1800*, J. M. S. Tompkins observes that Ann Radcliffe filled up the background with soubrettes, brigands, ecclesiastics and faithful servants; and all these people develop, in her later books, a power of appropriate gesture and resonant phrase that carries them triumphantly through their strong scenes.¹

She argues that to Radcliffe, romance ‘implied dignity and remoteness, and her cult of both qualities was conscious. The homely and the grotesque were alien from her muse’.² This essay aims to revisit Tompkins’s statement that Radcliffe aimed to avoid the ‘homely and grotesque’, contending that she used servant figures such as Annette and Dorothee in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Paulo in *The Italian* (1797) to effect a moderation of excessive sensibility and counter a belief in superstition and the supernatural. Radcliffe’s so-called ‘attack on the cult of sensibility’³ represents her fostering of an enlightened sensibility, a sensibility that is seen as a means to help others rather than as a self-indulgent means of separating oneself from a community that is alienated by excessive egocentrism. In that regard, Emily’s ‘delusions’⁴ are the symptoms of a diseased sensibility which indulges continuously in, and relies for its energetic fuelling on, Coleridge’s ‘willing suspension of disbelief’⁵ rather than the rational questioning of reality.

Radcliffe’s notion of sensibility is class-specific in that the privileged are seen to possess the emotional refinement and sensitivity that enables them to offer sympathy to others and understand suffering. The servant class, on the other hand, is characterised by a loquacious belief in superstition which resists disenchantment and rationalist questioning. Servants, in that regard, are exempt from the process of growth that Emily undergoes. This reading will focus on Annette from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* to establish that she not only serves the purpose of comic relief but that her loquacity, her trust in the unrestrained verbalisation of feelings, fears and anxieties, as well as her melodramatic procrastination of the
narrative, contribute to emphasising the damaging effects of a lack of self-control; Emily’s emotional susceptibility prevents her from interrogating reality disinterestedly – she is incapacitated by her Romantic sensibility which distorts reality and disproportions hopes, fears and romantic dreams so that Emily is guided by her imagination rather than the rationalising assessment of her relationships with others. Annette, despite her servant status, represents a negative role model against which Emily defines herself throughout her narrated development. Annette’s behaviour serves a corrective purpose in that it checks her employer’s sensibility-perverted resistance to reason. In other words, through her unreflective belief in sensationalism and the supernatural, the servant figure aids Radcliffe in formulating an implied critique of her superiors. It leads Emily to modify her behaviour and overcome the implications of insanity inherent in excessive sensibility so that she transforms into a proponent of the explained supernatural at the end of the novel. Then, her sensibility has matured through her love for Valancourt, it has adopted the masculine reasoning powers, but it retains the feminine notions of sympathy that make her a romantic heroine.

Radcliffe pits the two classes of servants and masters (mistresses) against each other by emphasising the unreflective mind of one and the potential for a rationalistic assessment of reality and a sensibility of moral sentiment in the other. The ruling class’s ability to transcend and overcome a lack of self-reflexivity confirms Radcliffe’s conservative stance towards class and acceptable notions of femininity, in particular.

In the Mysteries Emily falls victim to her emotional susceptibility and her excessive trust in romance. Following her father’s dying injunction, she continuously endeavours to explain rationally phenomena that she, in fact, interprets in terms of superstition; it is only through her direct experience of terror and – more importantly – the (unrestrained and unconcealed) surrogate experience of terror manifested by Annette and Dorothée that she learns and will ultimately be able to adopt the character of an enlightened Wollstonecraftian woman of reason and (moral) sentiment. Throughout the Mysteries, therefore, she learns of the necessity to control excesses of both sensibility and her imagination in order to be able to distinguish between epistemologically provable reality and what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms the ‘contagious’ fictions of her mind that Radcliffe defined in her essay ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’.

Radcliffe’s essay serves as a platform for her exposition of the dangers of the imagination that need to be neutralised by reason but which are effective in Gothic fiction, as they heighten suspense. Her ‘illusions of the imagination’ are responsible for a detachment from the reality of an enlightened society, as they avoid ‘every thing familiar and common’; they are beyond ‘all reason and probability’ and – through their obscurity – are able to inspire terror. Terror represents the unpremeditated and unreflected resigning of control over the environment and one’s rational assessment of reality in favour of a state in which (in the Burkean sense) the ‘whole soul is roused and fixed, in the full energy of attention’ and the observer – believing in the actuality of the supernatural – is ‘remote, in the
higher degree, from common apprehension’. Women, irrespective of whether they are servants or mistresses, are prone to the attractions of superstition, unless their perceptions be acute and have been trained to question popular beliefs in mystery and obscurity by unravelling supposed secrets. Radcliffe delineates her type of enlightened mistress in the shape of Emily through her technique of the ‘explained supernatural’, as a result of which the protagonist becomes aware of the hazard she has run by trusting to an excessive sensibility rather than one that is tempered by reason.

Characters such as the lady’s maid Annette neither question the validity of their beliefs, nor the impact their imagination has on the distortion of reality. What James Foster terms the ‘many retardations and unwelcome interruptions’ of interpolated servant narratives are structural devices that give both the reader and Emily time to contemplate Annette’s overexcited mind and femininity. Arguably, Radcliffe’s narrative technique entails ‘always to hold something back [. . .] to create suspense’ and to highlight comically – through this narrative delay – the lack of reason that characterises Annette’s accounts of the supernatural. The comic effect of Annette’s speeches is not only contrasted with the serious disposition of Emily. Rather, it serves Emily as a practical education by confronting her with the dangers of excess directly and, by highlighting the significance of experience, implicitly promotes the meta-educational narrative that her father supplies her with on his death-bed. Therefore, she repeatedly ‘blame[s] herself for suffering her romantic imagination to carry her so far beyond the bounds of probability, and [therefore] determine[s] to endeavour to check its rapid flights, lest they should sometimes extend into madness’. As Barbara M. Benedict has noted, ‘Radcliffe’s explicit ideology lauding reason and order’ reinforces the Wollstonecraftian idea of a proto-rationalist education. ‘This education, Sedgwick suggests, entails the ‘repression’ and control of ‘inner drives’, for the ‘rupture’ that the fear of the Gothic inspires in her mind ‘threatens [the] dissolution [of her self-imposed composure] through an uncontrolled influx of excitation’.

After St Aubert’s death, Annette assumes the function of confidante (and, indirectly, educator) to Emily, assuming also in part the mothering influence that Madame Montoni as Emily’s nearest relative should exert. Moreover, although Emily realises the comic effect of Annette’s fragmented narratives and her complete faith in the supernatural, the fears that she confronts – Signor Montoni’s tyrannical treatment of her aunt, his cold and calculating villainy, his persecution of herself and her anxiety about Valancourt – lead her to escape to the less realistic and tangible (but nevertheless terrifying) figments of her imagination. Thus arguably, Emily’s attempted restraint of her imagination is effected not through conviction but through what she considers the central and indispensable significance of politeness, decorum and propriety. In that regard, Annette’s techniques of maintaining obscurity and narrative procrastination, meandering without coming to the point, reminiscing as well as digressing, temporarily relieves Emily’s anxiety but at the same time heightens the atmospheric suspense and the terror that Emily feels. Annette’s narrative fragmentation
and incoherence testify to the fact that ‘the narrative prefers description to action’, thereby introducing ‘the vacillations of doubt, fear and imagination’ instead.

Annette – as a servant – has the rhetorical license to be an observer and a critic of Emily’s diseased sensibility; she diagnoses Emily’s excessive fears and her lack of reason by using the same category of superstition that characterises herself. She implicitly identifies sameness and similarity rather than the difference that both social status and Emily’s sensibility should define. The ‘instinctualism of vulgar credulity’, as Margaret Russett terms it, represents Annette’s pre-enlightened character, indulging in feeling and ignoring reason. The Gothic is a reality to Annette; and this reality – in order not to be ‘contagious’ to the impressionable Emily – needs to be disenchanted by means of the effect that Radcliffe’s comedy of superstition has on both the protagonist and the reader.

When Emily, on being woken up early in the morning by an unexpected noise, inquires of Annette what has happened, Annette in her usual comical and roundabout way does not attend to Emily’s inquiry directly, but comments on her mistress’ appearance.

‘Dear ma’amselle!’ said Annette, ‘do not look so pale. I am quite frightened to see you. Here is a fine bustle below stairs, all the servants running to and fro, and none of them fast enough! Here is a bustle, indeed, all of a sudden, and nobody knows for what!’

‘Who is below stairs then?’ said Emily, ‘Annette, do not trifle with me’

‘Not for the world, ma’amselle, I would not trifle for the world; but one cannot help making one’s remarks, and there is the Signor in such a bustle, as I never saw him before; and he has sent me to tell you, ma’am, to get ready immediately.’

‘Good God support me!’ cried Emily, almost fainting. ‘Count Morano is below, then’

‘No, ma’am, he is not below that I know of,’ replied Annette, ‘only his Excellenza sent me to desire you would get ready directly to leave Venice, for that the gondolas would be at the steps of the canal in a few minutes: but I must hurry back to my lady, who is just at her wits’ end, and knows not which way to turn for haste.’

‘Explain, Annette, explain the meaning of all this before you go,’ said Emily, so overcome with surprise and timid hope, that she had scarcely breath to speak.

‘Nay, ma’am, that is more than I can do. I only know that the Signor is just come home in a very ill humour, that he has had us all called out of our beds, and tells us we’re all to leave Venice immediately.’

Annette tediously evades telling Emily whether the count has arrived or not, but (anticipating Emily’s indignation) affirms that she is not trifling. Instead, she notes that she ‘cannot help making [her] [..] remarks’, thereby explaining and justifying her digressive technique of narration. Any anxiety that Emily is suffering is immediately transferred to her aunt’s servant who observes that ‘I am quite frightened to see you’, positing herself again as the societal spectator of Emily’s demonstration of excessive sensibility and superstitious terror. At the same time, narrative authority is transferred to Annette who, by means of repetition, interjec-
tions, as well as added tags reflecting her own opinion, slowly works towards the anti-climax of her inability to tell Emily what she desires to know. This inability on Annette’s part to provide actual/factual knowledge is also representative of the futility, counter-productivity and danger of superstition in a society where knowledge is power. Annette’s inability to provide knowledge represents a process of torture to Emily at the end of which she will be able to find rational explanations herself, not rely on Annette any further for the assessment of reality and become a woman of relative independence who confirms her status through her sensibility-informed rationality.21

In the context of Radcliffe’s comedy of superstition and excess, Emily’s dignity is only upheld by means of her social status, as her crediting of the supernatural and the indulgence of feeling make it increasingly difficult for her to be understood, in Barbara Benedict’s words, as the ‘icon’ of an idealized portrait of piety’.22 As Benedict has perceptively noted, ‘the language of sentimental vignette which both approves and reproves excessive feeling’ is used by Radcliffe to show that Emily cannot resist the (imagined) forces of the Gothic.23 Her continual admonitions and censuring of Annette for crediting superstitions are therefore not signs of her sincerity in so far as she feels herself above being affected by the Gothic of Udolpho; rather, she rebukes Annette for her own sake. In doing so, Emily adopts the pseudo-rational stance that characterises Montoni’s diligent observation of the female desire for freedom. In other words, she exerts the controlling function of a male observer, thereby aiming (in vain) to safeguard herself from being affected by the infectious belief in the reality and actuality of the supernatural. Emily does not succeed in the ‘repression’ of her curiosity and on entering the gallery containing the veiled wax figure, she – despite her attempts at self-control – is eager to learn what is concealed by the black veil.

Rather than dissuading her from viewing the picture, Annette, through her insinuations of knowledge, prompts Emily to uncover the wax model; Emily is therefore encouraged in adopting an experimental approach to gaining knowledge, one significant step in the development of her scientific and epistemological curiosity. Yet, it is Annette also who deserts Emily out of fear of a discovery of a supposedly dreadful secret (and her mistress’ independent and rational selfhood). Annette prefers the narratives of, and conjectures about, ghosts and the supernatural, and does not desire any tangible encounter with the supernatural other than observing it in secret, as her intention of viewing the fairies in the great hall testifies. In that respect, Annette lacks the experimental qualities of Dorothée who wants to prove to herself that Emily is the late marchioness’s daughter. Annette’s reluctance to encounter tangible actuality and disenchant mystery is expressive of her unwillingness to use reason and adopt the character of an enlightened woman. In fact, any attempt on the part of Emily to counteract Annette’s credulity and superstition culminates in Annette’s being more eager to defend the irrational belief in phenomena which cannot be explained epistemologically. Annette is immune to the disenchantment of explanations that are offered to demystify and rationalise the supernatural. Arguably, owing to her station as a servant she does
not participate in the discourse of female propriety that Emily was taught by, and
imbibed from, St Aubert.

The conflict between her longing to tell the secrets with which she is trusted and
the promise she has given not to reveal them always culminate in her conceding to
her comically loquacious nature. Radcliffe’s narrator remarks that Annette
dearly loved the marvellous, and had heard of a circumstance, connected with the
castle, that highly gratified this taste. Having been enjoined not to mention it, her
inclination to tell it was so strong, that she was every instant on the point of speaking
what she had heard. Such a strange circumstance, too, and to be obliged to conceal it,
was a severe punishment.24

Annette’s very talkativeness is one of the defining marks of servants in Radcliffe’s
novels.25 And when Annette informs Emily of Signora Laurenti and her portrait,
she draws on a secret that Benedetto has told her:

‘I have heard all about it, ma’amelle’, said Annette, looking round the chamber
and drawing closer to Emily; ‘Benedetto told it me as we travelled together: says he,
“Annette, you don’t know about this castle here, that we are going to?” No, says I, Mr.
Benedetto, pray what do you know? But ma’amelle, you can keep a secret, or I would
tell it you for the world; for I promised never to tell, and they say, that the Signor
does not like to have it talked of.’

‘If you promised to keep this secret,’ said Emily, ‘you do right not to mention it.’

Annette paused a moment, and then said, ‘O, but to you, ma’amelle, to you I may
tell it safely, I know.’

Emily smiled, ‘I certainly shall keep it as faithfully as yourself, Annette.’

Annette replied very gravely, that would do, and proceeded – ‘This castle, you must
know, ma’amelle, is very old, and very strong, and has stood out many sieges, as they
say. Now it was not Signor Montoni’s always, nor his father’s; no; but, by some law or
other, it was to come to the Signor, if the lady died unmarried.

‘What lady?’ said Emily.

‘I am not come to that yet,’ replied Annette, ‘it is the lady I am going to tell you
about, ma’amelle: but, as I was saying, this lady lived in the castle, and had every-
thing very grand about her, as you may suppose, ma’amelle. [. . .]

‘As I was saying – O, where was I? – as I was saying – she was very melancholy
and unhappy a long while, and used to walk about upon the terrace, there, under the
windows, by herself, and cry so! It would have done your heart good to hear her. That
is – I don’t mean good, but it would have made you cry too, as they tell me.’

‘Well, but Annette, do tell me the substance of your tale.’

‘All in good time, ma’am; all this I heard before at Venice, but what is to come I
never heard till to-day. This happened a great many years ago, when Signor Montoni
was quite a young man. The lady – they called her Signora Laurentini, was very hand-
some, but she used to be in great passions, too, sometimes, as well as the Signor.
Finding he could not make her listen to him – what does he do, but leave the castle,
and never comes near it for a long time! But it was all one to her; she was just as
unhappy whether he was here or not, till one evening, Holy St Peter! Ma’amelle,’
cried Annette, ‘look at that lamp, see how blue it burns!’ She looked fearfully round
the chamber. ‘Ridiculous girl!’ said Emily, ‘why will you indulge those fancies? Pray let me hear the end of your story, I am weary.’

Emily, by smiling at Annette’s notion of secrecy, indulges in an unrestrained expression of feeling, suspending her habitual restraint and indicating her spontaneous recognition of the comic character of Annette and her way of convincing herself that divulging the secret to Emily is still within the bounds of her promise to Benedetto. In that regard, Radcliffe’s reproduction of direct rather than reported speech highlights a dramatic quality of the narrative that catapults Annette centrally into the text as an authoritative voice.

Annette’s absolute unpredictability reinforces the critique of uncontrolled femininity that Radcliffe facilitates through the comic Gothic; therefore, despite Emily’s articulated intention to examine the veil and the picture that it is supposed to conceal, we learn that ‘Annette took the light, and immediately walked away with it, disregarding Emily’s calls to stay, who, not choosing to be left alone in the dark chamber, at length followed her.’ Also, to Annette, silence represents a form of isolation in which she cannot cathartically express her fears. By comparison, Emily, at least when in the presence of Annette, tries to conceal her excessive susceptibility to the Gothic environment. This assumed persona of serenity, however, is unmasked through Annette’s penetration of Emily’s own belief in the supernatural. Not only does Annette’s unwavering belief in the supernatural put into focus Radcliffe’s critique of sensibility, but her openly expressed affection for Ludovico contrasts strikingly with Emily’s attempts at concealing her sensations and feelings for Valancourt by following sentimental notions of propriety.

Annette is characterised by an independence of spirit and expression, and it is through this hyperbolic use of her character that Radcliffe can successfully articulate a critique of excessive sensibility.

Another servant figure who demonstrates an active character is Dorothée, the old servant at the Count de Villefort’s chateau. Until Emily’s arrival at the chateau, Dorothée has not indulged in the painful recollections of her late mistress’ death, but – induced by Emily’s curiosity and the resemblance that she identifies between the Marchioness de Villeroi and Emily – decides to open once more the mysteries of the past:

‘Well, Lady!’ replied Dorothée, after a long pause, during which her eyes were fixed upon Emily, ‘you seem so much interested, – and this picture and that face of yours make me think you have some reason to be so, – that I will trust you – and tell some things, that I never told before to any body, but my husband, though there are people, who have suspected as much. I will tell you the particulars of my lady’s death, too, and some of my own suspicions, but you must first promise by all the saints’ –

In parallel with the Annette/Emily stories, a promise of secrecy is exacted from Emily, and Dorothée relates a narrative past that to Emily produces more questions than it provides answers. The servant’s reply to Emily is characteristic, in that the mystery is sustained through the lack of further explanation: Unlike Annette,
however, Dorothée tests out her own theories by throwing the Marchioness’s veil over Emily in order to confirm what she has already identified as a family resemblance. Her active character clearly places the servant figure in a place of authority from which Emily as the victim of her uncurbed sensibility and her untrained detective curiosity can learn.

Like Annette, St Aubert’s old servant, Theresa, is characterised by her loquacity and her ill-judged, but well-meaning harangues. At the end of the narrative Theresa becomes Valancourt’s partisan and defends him against the notions of propriety to which Emily clings and against which her feelings for Valancourt revolt.

‘Alas! my dear young lady!’ said Theresa, ‘why should all this be? I have known you from your infancy, and it may well be supposed I love you, as if you was my own, and wish as much to see you happy. M. Valancourt, to be sure, I have not known so long, but then I have reason to love him, as though he was my own son. I know how well you love one other, or why all this weeping and wailing?’ Emily waved her hand for Theresa to be silent, who, disregarding the signal, continued, ‘And how much you are alike in your tempers and ways, and, that, if you were married, you would be the happiest couple in the whole province – then what is there to prevent your marrying? Dear dear! to see how some people fling away their happiness, and then cry and lament about it, just as if it was not their own doing, and as if there was more pleasure in wailing and weeping, than in being at peace. Learning, to be sure, is a fine thing, but, if it teaches folks no better than that, why I had rather be without it; if it would teach them to be happier, I would say something to it, then it would be learning and wisdom too.’

Age and long service had given Theresa a privilege to talk, but Emily now endeavoured to check her loquacity, and, though she felt the justness of some of her remarks, did not choose to explain the circumstances, that had determined her conduct towards Valancourt. She therefore, only told Theresa, that it would much displease her to hear the subject renewed; that she had reasons for her conduct, which she did not think proper to mention, and that the ring must be returned, with an assurance, that she could not accept it with propriety; and, at the same time, she forbade Theresa to repeat any future message from Valancourt, as she valued her esteem and kindness.30

Ludovico is an equally talkative servant figure, but he is not defined by the passionate outbursts that are demonstrated by Paulo in The Italian. Both Theresa and Ludovico, however, represent traditional servant figures in that they do not demonstrate Annette’s excess, but more mature notions inspired by their experience of life. Smith observes that ‘Radcliffe constantly sets up her ideals as older, experienced people, not youthful heroes and heroines as to imagination as Vivaldi and Emily’.31 Although young himself, Ludovico will become Annette’s husband and thereby regulate her imaginative flights. Valancourt, on the other hand, will marry Emily and channel her imaginative energies in ways that will tend towards the good of the family rather than vacuous mental exhaustion as a result of idle terrors.
By contrast, Montoni wants to inspire rationalism through command rather than education, instructing Emily to ‘endeavour to adopt a more rational conduct, than that of yielding to fancies, and to a sensibility, which, to call it by the gentlest name, is only a weakness’. Similarly, Signora Laurentini’s appeal to Emily to curb the passions and thereby avoid the misery that she has been suffering focuses on Emily’s apparent disposition to indulge in the ‘weakness’ of sensibility. Yet, Emily is unable to ‘reform’ her sensibility through command, preferring instead an escapism that isolates her. Emma Clery notes that Emily’s ‘psyche is presented as a phantasmagoria of memory’, arguing that her past and its associations of happiness inspire a desire to escape from the actuality of evil and to find solace in the realm of sensibility. What Robert Miles terms ‘a surrogate guardian, a developed reason’ is the self-defining faculty that would help Emily to assert her individuality. This definition of the self through reason necessitates, according to David Durant, the (re-)integration of a single woman within a family structure or marriage relationship, for Radcliffe ‘insists that as soon as one fully understands one’s place in the ordered world of the family, all else falls into place’.

It has not been acknowledged by criticism that Emily’s closest confidantes are in fact Annette and the aged Theresa. Each of these – Annette in terms of her belief in the supernatural, and Theresa in terms of her questioning of the validity of the rigidity of notions of propriety – functions as a ‘regulatory mechanism’ which encourages Emily to come of age, adopt principles of reason, find security in a relationship with Valancourt and reconsider the validity of propriety as a static phenomenon that has to be adhered to even if this adherence means unhappiness. For Emily to ‘maintain mental discipline’ it is necessary that she be educated by means of the comic critiques of Annette and Theresa who, from the secure narrative position of servants, discuss not only their own concerns but, implicitly, also how Emily can become an adult by reconsidering her own behaviour and comparing it to the not-always-to-be-rejected ‘sensibility’ of servants. Arguably, the ideal notion of womanhood that Radcliffe wants her heroines to adopt is the type represented by Madame de Menon in *A Sicilian Romance*:

> It was the particular care of Madame de Menon to counteract those traits in the disposition of her young pupils, which appeared inimical to their future happiness; and for this task she had abilities which entitled her to hope for success. A series of early misfortunes had tendered her heart, without weakening the power of her understanding. In retirement she had acquired tranquillity, and had almost lost the consciousness of those sorrows which yet threw a soft and not unpleasing shade over her character.

Madame de Menon is an explicitly acknowledged guide figure who, rather than using comedy, makes use of her sense to unravel the mystery of the Castle of Mazzini. Even she, however, is bound by the rules of propriety, especially in her dealings with the Marquis of Mazzini and his wife. In that regard, the application of reason and the consequent ability to act are counteracted by the notion
of propriety that prescribes passivity to the female character. Madame de Menon occupies a hybrid position in the text as her status is not clearly defined: she is of noble birth, but has no independent fortune of her own and therefore adopts her position as companion-governess to the marquis’s daughters. She embodies a status that mediates between the classes of servants and masters. It is towards the end of the novel that, after Ludovico has explained the mysteries of the Chateau-le-Blanc,

Emily could not forbear smiling at this explanation of the deception, which had given her so much superstitious terror, and was surprised, that she could have suffered herself to be thus alarmed, till she considered, that, when the mind has once begun to yield to the weakness of superstition, trifles impress it with the force of conviction.39

At this point Emily has reached the awareness of what Madame de Menon aims to inculcate in Emilia and Julia in *A Sicilian Romance*. Shortly afterwards, Emily is united in marriage with Valancourt and will reward Annette and Ludovico not only for their loyalty but also for functioning as guides of sorts and acknowledging and confirming conservative Enlightenment values.

Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, writing about parodies of the Gothic novel in the late Romantic period, have noted that

comic Gothic [. . .] has frequently been seen as a reinstatement of Enlightenment values in the face of Romantic idealism: rationality, common sense and the importance of the social fabric were to be valued above the thoughts and feelings, passions and emotions, of the individual. Accordingly, what we might call the comic Gothic novel has often been read as conservative in its recuperation of the individual into the social fabric.40

Their argument is equally valid when applied to comic servant figures like Annette and Theresa, as such characters in various ways lead the heroine to self-realisation, to the questioning and moderating of excessive sensibility and the supernatural and to a reconsideration of her function and place in society. In using servant figures to instruct and disillusion the heroine, Radcliffe legitimises the grotesque and the comic without denying her heroine the dignity which is so central to her sentimental character and disposition. In the *Mysteries* Emily successfully resolves ‘the battle between knowledge and narration’ and ‘the crucial issue’ of ‘inarticulacy’.41 She transforms ‘a narrative of non-revelation’ – one in which excessive emotion and sensibility hamper her from using her reason – into a meaningful narrative of the syntax of life and her gendered role in it.42

Notes

Sensibility, the Servant and Comedy


8 Ibid., p. 166, p. 167.

9 Ibid., p. 164, p. 166.


23 Ibid., p. 370.

27 Ibid., p. 233.
28 This is seen towards the end of the novel when Emily sends Theresa to find out about Valancourt’s fate: ‘Emily’s anxiety, as to the fate of Valancourt, was now scarcely endurable, and since propriety would not suffer her to send to the chateau of his brother, she requested that Theresa would immediately hire some person to go to his steward from herself, and, when he asked for the quarterage due to her, to make enquiries concerning Valancourt’ (Ibid., p. 595).
29 Ibid., p. 499.
37 Miles, Ann Radcliffe, p. 130.
40 Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, Gothic and the Comic Turn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 41.
42 Ibid., p. 179.

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