

The Restoration of the Beautiful:

The Parallel Structure of the Explained Sublime in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Caleb Williams**

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1. Introduction: The Parallel Structure of Disclosing the Truth behind the Sublime

In 1794, an innovation erupted in the narrative of the English Gothic fiction. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) experimented with the way the sublime was described. Until her works came into the literary world, almost all of the Gothic novels such as *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) by Horace Walpole (1717-97) or *Vathek* (1786) by William Beckford (1760-1844) had defined the sublime as that which cannot be explained. In *Udolpho* (1794), however, Radcliffe dared to break the Gothic convention to explain the supernatural causing the sublime emotion, which created a great consternation among many critics.¹ Probably, one of the most famous examples of the explained supernatural is the hidden remain of Madame Montoni scene in the castle of Udolpho. After her attempt to assassinate her husband by poison, Madam Montoni is imprisoned separately from the party of Emily. Emily is so anxious about her aunt's long confinement that she tries to find out where her aunt is abused. When she discovers something like a bloody corpse in a separated chamber, she mistakes it for her aunt's remain (348). Although, for a while, Emily suffers from the obsession with the dreadful image of her aunt's corpse, Madam Montoni reappears and explains what happened to her:

The spectacle in the portal-chamber, which afterwards confirmed Emily's horrible suspicion, was the corpse of a man, who had fallen in the affray, and the same which had been borne into the servants' hall, where she took refuge from the tumult. This man had lingered under his wounds for some days; and, soon after his death, his body had been removed on the couch, on which he died, for interment in the vault beneath the chapel, through Emily and Barnardine had passed to the

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¹ Most of the responses were negative towards the explained supernatural because the explanation of the trick dwindled the sublime effect on the readers' mind and made the work unreadable again.

chamber. Emily, after asking Madame Montoni a thousand questions concerning herself, left her, and sought Montoni. (365)

In this part, the explanation of the sublime event is made towards both readers and Emily. While the narrator gives the readers specific information about what the corpse really was, Madame Montoni tells the truth to Emily. In this novel, the structure of the explanation of the sublime consists of the dual narrative formation. The sublime is explained not only to the characters but also to the readers.

This dual explanation of the sublime feelings on the characters and the readers is reflected on William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794). It is well known that *Caleb Williams* was written to spread the author's anarchist principle among more readers than those who Godwin reached through *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). However, it is also remarkable that while he was reading Radcliffe's Gothic novels before finishing writing *Caleb Williams*, he talked with her about how she had created highly popular Gothic fiction (Marshall 27). Among various points they discussed, the method to explain the truth behind the sublime is emphasized here. In *Caleb Williams*, it seems that, as in a realism narrative, no supernatural events or irrational beings are described, but the obscure narrative about Falkland's murderer of Tyrrel arouses sublime feeling in Caleb. After disclosing the miserable truth to Caleb, Falkland persecutes and chases him because he is afraid of Caleb's exposure of murder. Finally, Caleb accuses Falkland of his murder of Tyrrel in the law court and ends up confessing his guilt. After the trial, at first, Caleb feels at ease, recovering his lost position in society, but he gradually feels compassion for Falkland's miserable life. Caleb decides to write down this sequent narrative on his and Falkland's solitude and miserable life as a memoir. This narrative structure that Caleb writes a Gothic story for the readers plays an important role in arousing the sense of pleasure on readers' mind as a simulacrum of Falkland's tragedy, in which readers can re-experience the sublime emotion Caleb had. In *Caleb Williams*, the dual narrative structure of the explanation of the sublime makes the readers capable of feeling sympathy for the delightful terror that Caleb felt.

2. The Vicarious Experience of the Explained Sublime in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

In *Udolpho*, the source of the sublime feeling is the deceptive supernatural. For Emily, taken from her utopian hometown and confined in a haunted castle by her stepfather Montoni, the castle itself is terror. When her party arrives at the castle, Emily is startled at its sublime atmosphere: "Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be

Montoni's; for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the Gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object" (209). In the eerie atmosphere of the castle, her perceptions are controlled by the Gothic associations. However, the seemingly supernatural events and objects she encounters in the castle are only products of her too strong imagination and sensibility and turn out to consist of the natural things. This explained sublime can be divided into two sorts; in the first, the plot explains characters experience of the sublime emotion while the second consists of the meta-narrative structure in which the narrator gives the explanation of the sublime to the readers.

A good example of the former type of the explained sublime is the mystery of vanished Ludovico in the Chateau-de-Blanc, where the party of Emily takes shelter for a while after escaping the castle of Udolpho. This old mansion had been abandoned by its former owner, the Marquis de Villeroi, because of the Marchioness' extraordinary death. Emily and her companions hear rumours from a servant named Dorothee that a deserted room in the mansion is being haunted by the Marchioness of Villeroi. In order to reveal the truth of the rumours, Emily's male servant named Ludovico tries to stay up all night in the room haunted by the late Marchioness. In this room, Ludovico is waiting for the late hour of the night while reading a Gothic novel:

Ludovico, having finished this story, laid aside the book, for he felt drowsy, and after putting more wood on the fire and taking another glass of wine, he reposed himself in the arm-chair on the hearth. In his dream he still beheld the chamber where he really was, and, once or twice, started from imperfect slumbers, imagining he saw a man's face, looking over the high back of his armchair. (557)

The next morning, Emily finds Ludovico vanished from the haunted room. She is scared of the power of the supernatural taking away Ludovico somewhere. The news that Ludovico was spirited away by the mysterious power prevails among those present in the castle and they are controlled by the sublime feeling. Although there is no sign of his coming back, Ludovico suddenly returns to the castle. Curious about what happened to Ludovico, Emily asks him how he disappeared from the haunted room. Ludovico is beaming with triumph to explain as follows:

It does not appear so extraordinary to me, madam,' replied Ludovico, 'that this door should escape notice, because it was formed in a narrow compartment, which appeared to be part of the outward wall, and, if the Count had not passed over it,

he might have thought it useless to search for a door where it seemed as if no passage could communicate with one; but the truth was that the passage was formed within the wall itself. (632)

A wall on which Ludovico happened to lean led to the hidden chamber, where Ludovico stumbled on the hiding place of pirates, who captured Ludovico and took him to the watching tower. While Ludovico was enslaved there, the party of Count de Villefort lost their way into the watching tower, and then they cooperated with Ludovico to escape from the pirates. Once the mystery of vanished Ludovico is explained, Emily realises that her strong imagination, not the supernatural power, is the very cause of her terror, not the supernatural power. Then her sublime emotion fades away.

Whereas this scene features Ludovico explaining to Emily his seemingly supernatural event, the famous veil scene gives the explanation of what was hidden under the veil to the readers directly, not to Emily. The supernatural event takes place in the scene where the party of Emily is confined in the castle of Udolpho. Not persuaded into stopping her reckless inquiry by her servant Annette, Emily veils out something terrible with her too strong curiosity. After looking at the object under the veil, Emily falls on the floor because of the sublime perception:

Emily passed on with faltering steps, and having paused a moment at the door, before she attempted to open it, she then hastily entered the chamber, and went towards the picture, which appeared to be enclosed in a frame of uncommon size, that hung in a dark part of the room. She paused again, and then, with a timid hand, lifted the veil; but instantly let it fall---perceiving that what it had concealed was no picture, and, before she could leave the chamber, she dropped senseless on the floor. (248-49)

Before the explanation of the veil scene at the final volume, it is only the narrator (or Radcliffe) who knows the true character of the sublime object under the veil. This is because Emily had barely opened the veil hung over the large canvas when she fell on the ground due to too excessive terror to keep herself and could not mention what she had seen. The plot proceeds without its explanation till the end of the story as Radcliffe seeks to sustain the readers' curiosity about what Emily had experienced. It is in the last part of the story when the readers finally understand the trick of the veil scene. The narrator states that, if Emily had braved to take a second glance at the unknown object, she would have perceived that it was

just a “formed of wax”, not human body (662). In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the reasonable explanation changes the sublime into the commonplace.

Some contemporary critics say that this explanation deprived the readers of the pleasure of feeling sublime; once the trick of the supernatural is revealed, the sublime object is familiarized.² E. J. Clery, however, evaluates the important role of imagination in this scene. She points out that the explanation of the true nature of the sublime implies the possibilities that the strong sensibility or imagination causes the sublime feeling even if its source is ordinary (114). Moreover, the mete-narrative gives the readers the parallel structure of the sublime experience; the veil scene explanation allows the readers to trace the process by which Emily feels the sublime pleasure in the case of the disappearance of Ludovico, while the parallel explanatory plot of *Udolpho* reminds the readers of the possibility of evoking the sublime feelings in everyday life.

This sense of sympathy for Emily’s sublime emotion is based on Edmund Burke’s aesthetics of the beautiful. In *A Philosophical Enquiry* (1757), Burke contends that, in contrast to the self-preservation, the fundamental principle of the sublime feeling, social relationship with others is that of the beautiful (37). In the section of “Sympathy”, Burke argues that people cannot be indifferent to others’ lives and that feeling sympathy is something like substitution, where the observers are placed into the others’ position and re-experience what others did (41). This experience enables us to feel the pleasure of both the sublime and the beautiful. This fundamental principle is needed to appreciate the general arts such as poetry, painting and so on (41). In this sense, in reading the Gothic novels, the emotion of sympathy makes it possible for readers to feel the sublime emotion.

3. The Sympathy for Tragic Narrative in *Caleb Williams*

In this section, the thesis concerning the explanation of the sublime through the production of sympathy is extended to *Caleb Williams*, which offers two types of the explanation of the sublime. The first comes in the scene where Falkland himself discloses the secret of his sublime past (131). Learning that Falkland committed the murder of Tyrrel

² In *Critical Review*, Coleridge criticized disperse of the sublime emotion by Radcliffe’s narration: “The interest is completely dissolved when once the adventure is finished, and the reader, when he is got to the end of the work, looks about in vain for the spell which had bound him so strongly to it” (361-72).

solely for the sake of his fame, Caleb feels a sense of horror (132).³ The Second is seen in Falkland's admission of the guilt to Caleb's accusation in court. Falkland's true character is revealed to be sinful and vile, and his sublimity is lost as his existence can't be sustained (302). After revealing what his sublime character is truly like, Caleb writes the memoir, which is the very novel that readers of *Caleb Williams* hold (303). The plot enables us to re-experience the delightful terror Caleb felt through the plot.

As Glennis Byron and David Punter propose in *The Gothic* (2009), this novel focuses on the social interaction and injustice (190). While Godwin also discusses these themes in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, *Caleb Williams* connects the fulfilment of Caleb's identification with the society and acquisition of a sense of unity with the aesthetics of the beautiful.⁴ In order to regain the maternal beauty, Caleb and Falkland, who are both isolated from the rest of the world, undergo an oedipal conflict as son and father. After the struggle ends in the explanation of the truth of seemingly sublime Falkland, Caleb writes the memoir in which the readers can feel a sense of pleasure produced by the tragic effect.

In *Caleb Williams*, it is Falkland who causes Caleb to have a sense of sublime. This tragic story begins with Caleb's curiosity to know why his master Falkland often looks melancholic and unease although he is the prominent figure with the wealth and fame. Moreover, his life as hermit, a paroxysm of irritation, lunatic behaviour and the mysterious trunk in the small apartment separated from the library made Caleb suspicious about Falkland's past experience. One day, when Caleb talks with his senior servant Mr. Collins about their master's sorrowful attitude, Mr. Collins relates Falkland's miserable past with his fateful rival Tyrrel (8). According to Mr. Collins, Falkland was once quite different from what he is; he was very cheerful with dignity, which was "the gaiety of the hero and scholar" (9). His appearance, manner and behaviour were filled with chivalric ideals, "models of heroism that his fancy suggested" (10). The conflict with Tyrrel, however, devastated his chivalric ideals. Donald R. Wehrs points out that Falkland's past narrative is mingled with the conventions of realist novels and romance (502-03). Caleb perceives the discrepancy between Falkland's feud with

³ In "On the Supernatural in Poetry" (1826), Ann Radcliffe defines the difference of terror and horror as following: "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (168).

⁴ In his third novel *Imogen* (1784), the lover of Imogen, Edwin encounters two nymphs summoned by the evil musician on the way to rescue Imogen from him. Two nymphs try to attract Edwin in order to forget his purpose to help Imogen. Then they describe the beautiful, saying as follows: "Beauty, the crown of enjoyment, the last perfection of society, in which your reach. Be wise and taste. Partake of the munificence the Gods vouchsafe" (263).

Tyrrel and his too avaricious desire for fame. As a result, after listening to the whole story about Falkland's alteration after death of Tyrrel, Caleb becomes suspicious about the fact that Mr. Hawkins and his son were sentenced to death because of the murder suspect (103-04). Hiding from Falkland's watchful eyes, Caleb starts to search for the truth of Tyrrel's murder.

In his searching, Caleb again comes across the mysterious trunk, which he was once ordered not to be curious about by Falkland. At the beginning of the chapter six of volume two, Caleb sneaks into the small chamber separated from the library when others in the mansion are preoccupied with the sudden fire (129). While Caleb tries every means to open the trunk, Falkland, afraid that something is strange with his secret, rushes into this chamber. The instant he sees Caleb trying to open the trunk, he sticks a gun into Caleb's head, saying he has to come out from the room as soon as possible (129-30).

In this scene, like the veil scene in *Udolpho*, Caleb fails to pierce to the inside of the trunk. What is hidden in it is known only to Falkland; Caleb and the readers cannot know the sublime truth of Falkland's past.⁵ Unlike *Udolpho*, however, after the disturbance, Falkland, as it were, the sublime being itself explains his crime to commit a murder:

“Look at me [Falkland]. Observe me. It is not strange that such a one as I should retain lineaments of a human creature? I am the blackest of villains. I am the murderer of Tyrrel. I am the assassin of the Hawkins.”. . . This is to be a gentleman! a man of honour! I was the fool of fame. My virtue, my honesty, my everlasting peace of mind, were cheap sacrifices to be made at the shrine of this divinity. But, what is worse, there is nothing that has happened that has in any degree contributed to my cure. I am as much the fool of fame ever. I cling to it to my last breath.” (130-31)

Falkland attributes the murder of Tyrrel and a false accusation of Hawkins to the strong desire for fame. Additionally, he explains that he decided to disclose the truth to Caleb because Falkland regards the murder of Caleb as another contribution to his dishonour. For Caleb, this selfish reason to commit a crime makes his sublime emotion into the mere horror:

Such was the story I [Caleb] had been do desirous to know. Though my mind had brooded upon the subject for months, there was not a syllable of it that did not come to my ear with the most perfect sense of novelty. “Mr. Falkland is a

⁵ In the last part of the novel, Caleb remembers the mystery of the trunk and concludes that there are some pieces of document and testimony, which are helpful to regain his reputation in case of emergency (293). However, what is truly hidden in the box is never revealed in the plot.

murderer!” said I, as I retired from the conference. This dreadful appellative “a murderer,” made my very blood run cold with me. (133)

Compared with the explanation of the supernatural by Ludovico to Emily, Falkland’s confession would rather increase a sense of horror on Caleb’s mind than diminish the sublime effect. This is because the observer cannot feel sublime emotion without keeping appropriate distance from it. In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, it is said that it is necessary for the observer to be safe from the direct violence threatening his life (36-37). Contrary to his definition, in this scene, Falkland’s behaviour to stick the gun to Caleb implies the execution of the direct violence. In *Udolpho*, the sublime emotion on Emily’s mind vanishes calmly, but Caleb’s one changes into just a horror.

After escaping from the Falkland’s mansion and breaking out of prison, Caleb spends a long fugitive life in various places including Wales. Under the perfect surveillance by the Falkland’s seemingly omnipotent eyes, Caleb loses his subjectivity and social bond. He is forced to disguise himself as the thief, beggar with Irish accent and Jews. His identity as Caleb Williams is invalidated before the overwhelming authority of Falkland. His supporter’s mind is changed by Falkland’s minions and the adventure story of Caleb Williams circulated by him. At last, his ex-partner Mr. Collins becomes cold to him. When Falkland’s existence again becomes sublime in Caleb’s mind because of his perfect control of Caleb’s life, Caleb determines that he will make Falkland publicly confess his sin in order to regain his own fame and identity lost during his fugitive life and persecution. So, at the end of the story, Caleb decides to make an accusation and the second explanation of the sublime takes place to the assumed readers through his memoir.

The last battle between Caleb and Falkland is for social unity; the loser of the trial is to lose social position and fame completely. To focus on the connotation of gender role in Burke’s aesthetics, the struggle between Caleb and Falkland is the oedipal conflict for the maternal beautiful. Philip Shaw connects the sublime virtue with ‘the authority of the father’ and the beautiful with ‘that of the mother’ and also points out Burke’s penchant for the quotations representing the formation of Freud’s oedipal complex such as the struggle between Death and Satan in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (57). In *Caleb Williams*, Caleb and Falkland, who were seemingly in adversarial relation but strongly connected as father and son, battles for the social fame and identity, some beautiful aspects of Burkean aesthetics.

As a result, Caleb uses Falkland’s guilty conscience to force him to tell the dishonoured truth in public, proving Caleb’s innocence. Once Falkland, confessing his bloody past and

selfish motivation to persecute Caleb, comes to death, what the seemingly sublime Falkland is truly like is disclosed and explained. However, Caleb is full of respect and regret all the more for loss of the sublime Falkland. As a sign of admiration for Falkland, he tries to write his memoir to tell the truth of their long struggle and Falkland's miserable past: "if those errors of thy life be known which thou ardently desiredst to conceal, the world may at least not hear and repeat a half-told and mangled tale" (303).

The memoir of Caleb's enables readers to sympathize with the delightful terror Caleb felt toward Falkland. Considering the description of the beginning part of the novel, this memoir is written to let assumed readers know the coherence of miserable events:

My life has for several years been a theatre of calamity. I have been a mark for the vigilance of tyranny, and I could not escape. My fairest prospects have been blasted. . . . My story will, at least, appear to have that consistency which is seldom attendant but upon the truth. (1)

In this scene, Caleb tells his readers that he writes the memoir with a view to keeping the truth open to the public, but he leaves out an obscure point of the definition of the "truth". The whole story first consists of Mr. Collins' narrative, Caleb's reminiscence and his first person-narrative. All the sublime events or features are written and edited from Caleb's subjective perspective, not from objective one. Like *Udolpho*, in his memoir, there is a possibility that all the sublime events are the product of the imagination.

However, it does not reflect negatively on the early Gothic works; it suggests that there is a large possibility that the readers can feel sympathy with the sublime emotion from Caleb's memoir. It is remarkable that Caleb calls his life as "a theatre of calamity" (1). On the theatre, Caleb and Falkland play the tragedy.⁶ For Burkean aesthetics, the effect of the tragedy is to make the audience sympathize with the difficulties characters are facing with. The tragic story is one of the most suitable forms for the observers to feel the sublime emotion because they can keep accurate distance from the terror (43). In this sense, the tragic *Caleb Williams* enables the readers to feel the same sublime emotion as the tyrannical deeds by Falkland aroused in Caleb's mind.

⁶ In *Caleb Williams*, metaphors of stage-play are often used. In the chapter six of the volume two, when Caleb is interrogated about what he was doing with the mysterious trunk, his strong confidence of Falkland's guilt makes Caleb describe Falkland as Roscious, who played bloody scene in Roman tragedy (131).

4. Conclusion

In *Caleb Williams*, the structure of the dual explanation narrative, where the readers re-experience the character's sublime feeling, is based on the elements of the beautiful in a sense that the imitation of the sublime produces the delightful terror. The social bond and unity, which are not regained after Falkland's death, are alternated as the readers' sympathy for his tragic truth in Caleb's memoir; Caleb desired for the connection with his assumed readers in his fictional world. More importantly, the sense of the unity enables the readers to reach the "truth", which Caleb mentioned at the beginning of the novel. However, the feeling of the sublime is likely to lose its astonishment and terror as its imitations are consumed over and over again. This is because the power of relaxation diminishes that of the tension on the mind. Shaw points out that the infinite variety of changing, one of the characteristics of the beautiful, produces the 'giddiness' in the observer's mind (60). The Gothic fictions that lose the sublime tension cannot give the readers the sense of the delightful terror. Therefore, the Radcliffe School such as Regina Maria Roche, Eliza Persons and Eleanor Sleath, who made use of the technique of the same explained supernatural as Radcliffe and Godwin did, could not keep their popularity no more than a decade by the end of the eighteenth century. It was Charles Maturin's *Melmoth, the Wanderer* (1820) and Radcliffe's *Gaston de Blondville* (1826) that appeared at the end of the Gothic boom; these works are based on the Walpolean supernatural, those unexplainable by the reason. These Gothic fictions cannot allow the readers to emphasize with the same sublime emotion as that of young Melmoth or Gaston and preserve the authority of the sublime in the novel.

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