



Daughter Scapegoats and Patriarchal Tyranny: The Mazzini Sisters as Sacrificial Victims in Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790)

CHARLIE JORGE

**Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article*

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Since the dawn of time, societies across the world have often used their most vulnerable members as scapegoats to atone for their own ancestral sins or to satisfy their limitless hunger for social and economic ambition. The Gothic, with its emphasis on the darkest shades of humankind, has frequently portrayed these sacrificial scapegoats, alongside their 'sacrificers'. In [Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* \(1790\)](#), the heroines, the Mazzini sisters Julia and Emilia, face a series of horrifying ordeals as they are used as commodities in a social contract, while they defy patriarchal authority and rebel against their cruel destinies.

This paper will analyse the family relationships within the Mazzini circle and the events leading to their collapse, ending with the archetypal departure from the family castle. Departing from [René Girard's](#) theories on scapegoating, we will examine how the Mazzini sisters are turned into sacrificial objects, seen as an opportunity for social and economic advancement. The following paper will first consider the role of daughters as commodities during the late eighteenth century. The second part will present [Girard's](#) scapegoating mechanism, leading to the final analysis of Julia and Emilia as fitting the scapegoating pattern, as they are sacrificed by patriarchal tyranny.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Charlie Jorge

Universitat de les Illes Balears,
Palma, Spain

macseoirse@gmail.com

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Along the late eighteenth century, both English and European societies began to assign new-found relevance to the children of the rising bourgeoisie, the nobility and a unique English social class known as the gentry, as the concept of the nuclear family started to rise (DiPlacidi 159; Thompson 16). With this rise, a new system of family dynamics appeared based on the commercial exchange of women for social and economic positions (DiPlacidi 169-170). As their sole purpose was to fulfil a ritualistic duty, children, and daughters in particular, were viewed as commodities in contractual relationships (DeLucia 103; Mackenzie 686; Wright, “Heroines in Flight” 18), with the heavy load upon their shoulders of securing financial stability for an entire household or family, where their ‘status is that of merchandise or “commodities”’ (Irigaray 84). As Robert Miles poses in a mythical way, ‘To the idol of protecting the survival of the “family estate”, its name and “house”, younger children were readily sacrificed, sentenced to mercenary marriages, “sent into exile, or confined in convents”’ (88). In other words, to ensure the continuity of the family’s status in society, younger children were often subjected to sacrifices beyond their understanding. This included being coerced into strategic marriages with a financial, or social, gain in mind, or even being confined in convents in Catholic countries, all in hopes of forging beneficial alliances with the Church.

It was primarily women who bore the burden of this unwanted—and often unforeseen—pressure, as they increasingly became commodities for marital transactions, as their virtue became ‘an essential underpinning of the credit (in every sense) and fidelity required by the transactional and contractual nature of all social relations under capital’ (Mackenzie 687). To put it differently, they became part of the marital contract, not an equal member of the marriage, which in turn maintained ‘an unequal distribution in power’ (DiPlacidi 163). This bigger emphasis on the newly acquired value of children coincided with the expansion of a prosperous and firmly established upper-middle class, giving as a result greater number of affluent daughters from mercantile backgrounds.

When discussing the irrelevance of women within the legal framework of Britain by the end of the eighteenth century, Anna Shajirat points out that ‘women did not exist in the eyes of the law despite its policing of their bodies and lives in the long eighteenth century’ (405). She portrays a situation where women endure a status resembling that of possessions, as if they were property to be traded with. In this way, their importance and relevance within the scope of the law depended solely on the appraisal of their bodies within the commodification market. In addition to the rise in the number of poor upper-class bachelors, this favoured families to ‘attach cash rewards to their daughters’ (Miles 32), thus making them desirable objects to possess, alongside their fortunes (Perry 377). In this market context, a daughter would become an adult via her marital status, marking a transfer of ‘power over an unmarried girl to a married woman from father to husband’ (Shajirat 387). It is in this exchange of power over a young girl’s life that Thompson’s words become stronger, when he reminds us that at the end of the eighteenth century ‘the “patriarchal” and the “paternal” appear as interchangeable terms, the one carrying a sterner, the other a somewhat softened implication’ (19). Somehow, both fathers and patriarchal tyrants fell close to each other as both the ‘paternal’ and the ‘patriarchal’ ‘may indeed run into each other in fact as well as in theory’ (19).

In the following paper, we shall undertake an analysis of the characters of the Mazzini sisters, Julia and Emilia, in Ann Radcliffe’s 1790 novel, *A Sicilian Romance*. Through this analysis, this paper will cast light on their role as victims of economic, political and social sacrifice. We will see their position in their family and even how, with the goal of advancing the family’s wealth and name, their father orchestrates a marriage arrangement for Julia, all in the service of the Mazzini household. In this context, we will examine specific traits that evoke what René Girard has termed the ‘Scapegoat Archetype’. This archetype embodies an individual whom society identifies as a symbol of its collective failures, ultimately sacrificing them for the greater good of the community.

After disclosing the primary characteristics of this archetype, we will then analyse how they manifest within the personas of both sisters and their familial environment. This analysis will underscore Emilia and Julia’s transformation into commodified entities as they are debased in their own home or intended for marital exchange in the pursuit of prosperity, effectively casting them as the family’s sacrificial offerings, their scapegoats.

Through the tale of the Mazzini sisters' mother, [Radcliffe](#) acquaints the reader with a prominent motif recurrent in her novels, and in particular in *A Sicilian Romance*, the objectification of women's bodies. This thematic exploration positioned her as an influential figure for contemporary women writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft or Fanny Burney ([Wright, "Ann Radcliffe"](#) 307) and laid the blueprint for later literary embodiments of women's experiences, such as Bertha in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) ([Passey](#) 125). This paper will show that the pervasive theme of exploiting children, in particular women, by sacrificing them to the pursuit of wealth and power hangs over the whole novel. This exploitation of children stands out as one of the primary topics within Gothic fiction, which often portrays what [Robert Miles](#) refers to as the 'dysfunctional nuclear family' (4). This genre frequently features protagonists who endure suffering at the hands of authoritative figures—typically tyrannical fathers—seeking to use and manipulate them for the achievement of aristocratic, financial or other forms of dominance ([Hogle](#) 2; [Passey](#) 127; [Wright, "Heroines in Flight"](#) 21; [Yahyapoor](#) 21). These individuals, offered as sacrifices to the insatiable idol of power, family estate, reputation or house maintenance, exemplify what [René Girard](#) terms the Scapegoat Archetype.

Archetypal critics have examined and studied a wide range of archetypes and archetypal figures from different mythological sources, and present in literature across history. Among these archetypes, one that has garnered significant attention is the sacrificial hero, often referred to as the Scapegoat Archetype, which encapsulates a body of figures who share recurrent characteristics. These shared predications are what [René Girard](#), based on his mimetic theory, called stereotypes and serve as guidelines to identify this figure across myth, history and literature, all conforming to a consistent pattern, or 'scapegoating mechanism' ([Kearney](#) 1; [Todorovska](#) 56). Not only does [Girard](#) and the members of his school of criticism provide us with abstract concepts drawn from ancient myths, the Bible and literature, but they also illustrate instances of victimisation and persecution throughout ancient and recent history. In these cases, individuals were selected according to this same scapegoating mechanism. Nevertheless, [Girard's](#) mimetic theory has not escaped controversy. Several scholars have situated his work within broader Eurocentric philosophical traditions, challenging the legitimacy of universalising Western Christian narrative frameworks across diverse cultures ([Dickinson](#) 15). Others have highlighted the 'shortcomings in [[Girard's](#)] mimetic theory's account of mimetic desire and human agency' ([Richardson and Manglos](#) 424), emphasizing areas that need further attention and could be enriched through intersecting perspectives.

3. THE MAZZINI SISTERS AS SCAPEGOATS

[Ann Radcliffe's](#) *A Sicilian Romance* revolves around the decline of feudal power in the house of Mazzini and the rise of a new social order symbolized by the Mazzini sisters' independence. The story begins when the Marquis of Mazzini remarries after his wife's supposed death, leaving his daughters, Emilia and Julia, under Madame de Menon's care. Supernatural events prompt the marquis's return to the castle, where Julia falls in love with Count de Vereza, her brother Ferdinand's friend. The jealous marchioness desires the count herself and conspires with the marquis to marry Julia to the brutal Duke de Luovo. Julia and Vereza's escape fails; Vereza is believed dead, Ferdinand is imprisoned, and Julia flees alone. While pursued by her father and the Duke—whose own son leads a band of banditti—Julia suffers mistaken identities and captivity before finding refuge in a convent with Madame de Menon. Ferdinand discovers her and reveals Vereza's survival. Further Gothic twists follow: Julia, searching for safety, uncovers her long-imprisoned mother—the true source of the castle's ghostly sounds. The marquis's crimes and bigamy are exposed, leading to his and the marchioness's violent deaths. At last, Julia, Vereza, and the reunited family leave the old feudal castle and begin a new life in Naples, symbolizing both personal renewal and the end of the eminently patriarchal past.

3.1 THE MAZZINI INITIAL CRISIS

The first stereotype to address would be the initial crisis identified by [Girard](#), which serves as the catalyst for the eventual sacrifice of the scapegoat ([Kearney](#) 4; [Todorovska](#) 58). This would take place 'in times of crisis, which weaken normal institutions' and that would quickly lead to

‘mob formation’ (Girard 12). These occurrences may not always originate from the same conditions; at times they may result from external factors, such as an epidemic, a drought, or famine brought on by a flood. In other cases, the cause is ‘internal — political disturbances, for example, or religious conflicts’ (Girard 12). Nowhere could we see these more internal causes than in the core of a family circle, and above all when pecuniary gains and profit are concerned. At the beginning of *A Sicilian Romance*, the order of the world is evident and universally understood by its members, with clearly defined boundaries. The patriarchal order of society is well established and there is no ‘interrogation of paternal models of power’ that happen to articulate ‘the dire predicament of alienated, disempowered female subjects’ (Chaplin 142).

Julia and Emilia live in the castle of Mazzini in Sicily, alongside their motherly nurse and educator, Madame de Menon, both sisters embracing their paradisaal surroundings without any sense of fear, danger or inquiry as they have never ‘passed the boundaries of their father’s domains’ (Radcliffe 6), as the narrator allegorically poses. The sisters’ seclusion accords less with Sicilian custom and more with the principles of female education rooted in Rousseau’s theories stated in *Émile, or On Education* (1762) (Milbank xxv). This seclusion and upbringing emphasise the sisters’ position within the hierarchical—and patriarchal—order of the Mazzini family, which marks them as aliens to the core of the family—the head of the family and his inner circle—from the start. As the reader immediately learns, their father, Ferdinand, fifth marquis of Mazzini, lives in Naples with his new wife, and his only son, also called Ferdinand, following the patriarchal line of descent in the family. In contrast to his sisters, young Ferdinand, who appears to have a bright future in the army and ‘who had been educated under his [father’s] immediate care, [and] was the sole object of his pride’ (Radcliffe 10), has been actively involved in the social life and circle of the Mazzini patriarch.¹ Despite this, both sisters enjoy an idyllic and secluded life on the Italian island, akin to an initial sojourn in Paradise, albeit marred by the absence of their father, who visits them sporadically out of duty rather than genuine affection towards them.

It is noticeable that to the marquis, ‘whose heart was dead to paternal tenderness’ (Radcliffe 3), both daughters represent more of a possession to be looked after from time to time than the beloved children who he should nurture with paternal affection. Instead, he fulfils his duty in the utmost manner, offering no more than what is strictly required: ‘[the marquis] paid an annual visit to the castle of Mazzini; [...], and he staid [sic.] only to give such general directions concerning the education of his daughters, as his pride, rather than his affection, seemed to dictate’ (Radcliffe 4–5). As the possessions that they are, the sisters’ education is checked in annual visits, in the same way that the castle itself and his estate are also inspected. Thus, in the same way that the marquis’s estate has a financial value, Julia and Emilia follow what Jenny DiPlacidi remarks as ‘the economics of exchange that designate women as objects’ (175), turning them into marketable articles.

However, this idyllic life, which fostered an individualised education where the sisters’ exceptional talents are nurtured (Radcliffe 4–5), begins to collapse as the entire Mazzini family, under the schemes of the marquis and marchioness, move to their castle in Sicily. Up to this point, the distinction between these two distinct realms was unmistakable: a new enlightened one embodied by the sisters and Madame de Menon as their guide, and the old feudal hierarchy personified by the marquis and his entourage (Miles 88).² Nevertheless, as the marquis and his retinue move to the castle, the merging of the two worlds ensues. It is within this daily cohabitation that we witness the gradual blurring of boundaries within cultural frameworks and hierarchies, marking the onset of the decline of established institutions. According to Girard, the specific circumstances that precipitate collective persecutions are of not great consequence. They all appear to undergo a similar experience, the strongest impression of which is ‘an extreme loss of social order evidenced by the disappearance of the rules and “differences” that define cultural divisions’ (12). When the line that defines these rules and ‘differences’—that is the place where everything belongs within the social and cultural order—starts to blur, institutional collapse occurs obliterating and telescoping hierarchical and functional differences in a way that ‘everything has the same monotonous and monstrous aspect’ (Girard 13). At this point, the community perceives its established order at risk and must take action to ensure its survival (Todorovska 55).

The crisis escalates as the marchioness perceives her status within the established family hierarchy endangered. Her role within their community is clearly delineated from the opening of

the novel, as not only does she live with the marquis in Naples, but she also exerts a notable influence over his decisions, if not total power. The marquis's passions 'were vehement, and she had the address to bend them to her own purpose; and so well to conceal her influence, that he thought himself most independent when he was most enslaved' (Radcliffe 3). Her influence over the marquis, and consequently the entire family, undoubtedly secures her position at the summit of the Mazzini community. She is *de facto* above the marquis, as he is 'most enslaved' to her due to her manipulation of his passions. However, when the marquis's circle moves to the family castle in Sicily and both worlds collide, the marchioness will witness the possibility of her position falter, as she senses some danger from the presence of the marquis's daughters. Both sisters possess incomparable beauty, which makes a person as vain as she is immensely jealous. This is evident when the marchioness, whose vanity is described as being at its peak, becomes rightly alarmed by the talents and beauty of the two sisters, who surpass her in every aspect: 'Vanity often produces unreasonable alarm; but the marchioness had in this instance just grounds for apprehension; the beauty of her lord's daughters has seldom been exceeded' (Radcliffe 6).

Given such a statement on the threats posed by both sisters to the marchioness's vanity and status, it is not surprising that she feels threatened by such 'strangers', and in a way 'outsiders'—as it should be recalled that the marchioness is part of the inner circle of the head of the Mazzini family, whereas the sisters are not: they are the 'others'. In addition to the narrator's praises, a detailed description of the sisters' virtues and beauty follows. The narrator starts by describing Emilia and her accomplishments, her fair complexion and good manners:

The person of Emilia was finely proportioned. Her complexion was fair, her hair flaxen, and her dark blue eyes were full of sweet expression. Her manners were dignified and elegant, and in her air was a feminine softness, a tender timidity which irresistibly attracted the heart of the beholder. (Radcliffe 6)

Following Emilia's description, the narrator proceeds with Julia's, the main character of the novel. Through her portrayal, readers can attain a full description of the qualities of the archetypal romantic heroine, embodied with grace in the person of Julia (Wright, "Heroines in Flight" 15). Additionally, one can discern the reasons behind the marchioness's apprehension regarding such formidable rivals to her position within the Mazzini family circle. Julia is described as 'light and graceful', full of charm and sweetness. All in all, she is a young woman whose emotions manifest in her beautiful features:

The figure of Julia was light and graceful – her step was airy – her mien animated, and her smile enchanting. Her eyes were dark, and full of fire, but tempered with modest sweetness. Her features were finely turned – every laughing grace played round her mouth, and her countenance quickly discovered all the various emotions of her soul. The dark auburn hair, which curled in beautiful profusion in her neck, gave a finishing charm to her appearance. (Radcliffe 6)

After such competitors, it is undeniable that the marchioness perceives her 'institutionalised' high status as significantly threatened. After all, through marriage, she is part of the head of the Mazzini family, emphasised by the fact of her arrival at the Mazzini castle alongside the marquis and the rest of the family unit. The Mazzini sisters do not immediately belong to this inner circle; they are perceived as 'strangers' in their own home—'outsiders'—and are thus regarded by the marchioness and, undoubtedly, by the core members of the marquis's circle.³ Their presence serves only to pose an obstacle in her path.

What is more, the grounds of the marchioness's jealousy extend beyond the sisters' beauty and independent mindset and demeanour; there is another significant aspect to consider. It is noteworthy that the marchioness harbours a deep passion for Hippolitus, Count de Vereza, upon whom 'she centered all her desires' (Radcliffe 11) since before they all arrived at the castle of Mazzini, even if her attempts at seducing him have been unsuccessful. However, Julia effortlessly attracted his attention and affection, by displaying the very skills and virtues that her stepmother envied. This only served to intensify the flames already burning in the heart and soul of a person whose passions leaned naturally towards violence and destruction, now further fuelled by her obsession with the young Count de Vereza.

Another stereotype present in the victimization process is what [Girard](#) refers to as ‘stereotyped accusations’. These are crimes attributed to the potential victims of persecution which, although untrue, the persecutors—and soon-to-be ‘sacrificers’—deem sufficiently justified to proceed with their pursuit. This pattern of the scapegoating mechanism frequently emerges among pursuers: their unwavering conviction in the absolute legitimacy of their persecution ([Kearney 2](#); [Todorovska 56](#)). Following this line of reasoning, this certainly deceptive viewpoint leads persecutors to be ‘convinced that their violence is justified’, as they ‘consider themselves judges; and, therefore, they must have guilty victims’ ([Girard 6](#)). The goal of the persecutors’ accusations extends beyond alienating the victim and making them outcasts. It also aims to dismantle any social connections they may possess within the community, to degrade them ([Cirlot 512](#)). For the persecutors, it is ‘not enough for the social bond to be loosened; it must be totally destroyed’ ([Girard 15](#)).

In *A Sicilian Romance*, Emilia and Julia are the target of such victimization, as the marquis persistently levels accusations at them, portraying them as ungrateful daughters and insinuating that they do not merit their father’s paternal affection. Such an attack on the young girls would understandably instil in them the feeling that they are unworthy of belonging to that family as well. At other times, the marquis inexplicably becomes annoyed with both sisters, leading them to harbour a dreadful apprehension about engaging in any conversation with their father, to the point that, when confronted with the eerie sounds issuing from beneath the floors of their chambers, their ‘apprehension of the marquis’s displeasure was lost in a stronger feeling’ ([Radcliffe 47](#)), the feeling of terror. The only thing that could rival the terror they feel towards talking to their father is the feeling arising from the suspicion of a ghostly presence lurking near their own chambers. Interestingly, when [Radcliffe](#) finally explains the origin of these spectral noises—emerging from their mother, held captive in a cave beneath the castle tower—the sole remaining terror, and a very real one for women at the time, is the total subjugation to their father and the patriarchal order. As [Shajirat](#) points out, by doing so, [Radcliffe](#) unmasks ‘the horrors with which women are left when the supernatural is explained’ and they are faced with a ‘horror in itself far more frightening than any unexplained supernatural phenomenon’ (386). [Radcliffe](#) deceptively employs supernatural trappings to reveal that ‘horror lies not in fantasy, but in the reality that fantasy veils’ ([Shajirat 388](#)).

One of such arbitrary occasions when the marquis expresses his displeasure with the sisters without cause is when, after Vincent’s death, Julia and Emilia decide to have dinner with their father. Vincent had served the Mazzini family faithfully for years and appeared to be privy to the marquis’s closely guarded secret: his former wife’s imprisonment in a cave beneath the southern tower, which is the reason why Vincent ‘requested to have a confessor’ in his dying hours ([Radcliffe 11](#)). Unfamiliar with the causes of Vincent’s distress in his final hours and their father’s worries regarding his servant’s death, both sisters attempt to uplift the marquis’s spirits in an effort to ease his burdened soul. However, despite their many attempts to amuse him and help him forget about his apparent recent loss, the marquis, who had ‘hastily saluted his daughters’ after a long absence, is even gloomier and more displeased as ‘their efforts to amuse him seemed to excite displeasure rather than kindness’ ([Radcliffe 13](#)).

In a subsequent scene, following Julia’s refusal of a marriage proposal from the Duke de Luovo, a union her father deemed highly advantageous for the family—and the catalyst of the novel’s action—, her father summoned her to vent his fury and frustration upon learning of her choice: ‘the marquis sent for his daughter, and poured forth his resentment with all the violence of threats, and all the acrimony of contempt. [...] so dreadfully did he denounce vengeance on disobedience, that she scarcely thought herself safe in his presence’ ([Radcliffe 60](#)). Afterwards, he resolves, despite her pleading, that the wedding would take place on the third day after their meeting, regardless of her wishes. Through the marquis’s reaction to Julia’s potential rebellion, [Radcliffe](#) exposes and attacks the oppression and consequences of the patriarchy prevalent in her novels ([Passey 127](#); [Wright, “Heroines in Flight” 18](#)). In doing so, [Radcliffe](#) presents a threat more formidable than that posed by ghosts or supernatural apparitions, ‘the horrific and seemingly limitless powers of the despot’ ([Punter 14](#)) to which both sisters are inevitably subjected. Therefore, Julia was designed as ‘the joint victim of ambition and illicit love’ ([Radcliffe 65](#)). Her later decision to elope with Hippolitus not only intensifies the marquis’s fury and magnifies the

perceived crime in his eyes, but also aggravates the family's crisis, diminishing their prospects of securing a beneficial marriage that would lead to social and economic advancement.

The consequences of such transgression on Julia's side will be paid by her companion in victimisation, her sister Emilia. It is Julia who foretells her sister's destiny as a potential victim of ambition and a forced marriage. Before her attempt at eloping with Vereza, Julia leaves a letter for Emilia where she confesses her fears and exclaims 'may you never be the partner of my misfortunes!' ([Radcliffe 72](#)) in full knowledge that once their father would not be able to marry Julia to the Duke, he would turn to Emilia as a candidate to realise his plans. Moreover, after Julia's successful escape from the castle, Emilia suffers the marquis's rage under the suspicion that she was part and parcel of the whole plan; she is another suspicious 'evil enemy' the scapegoat embodies ([Kearney 2](#)). First, Emilia is kept prisoner in her own chamber for several days and later, once she is released, she is still treated with mistrust and abuse, as 'her hours moved heavily along' and she was 'condemned to suffer, and to endure without the privilege of complaining' ([Radcliffe 114-115](#)).

At this point, it should be borne in mind that both Julia and Emilia are trapped in an appropriate and demanding family with 'potentially explicit and permanent forms of sexual exploitation within a market economy in which female sexuality was, like everything else, commodifying space' ([Backus 57](#)). By compelling Julia to marry the Duke, the marquis and marchioness are attempting to consolidate their male heir's status within that aristocratic male line [Radcliffe](#) attacked ([Passey 127](#)); that very same male heir the marquis had taught how to behave from an early age and tries to attract and manipulate ([Radcliffe 49](#)). However, his efforts are ultimately fruitless, as Ferdinand sides with his sisters in their ordeal. This is wisely used by [Radcliffe](#) to provide a potential productive discursive space for interrogating the performativity of alternative masculinities and for articulating forms of internal critique that expose the fissures and contradictions inherent within patriarchal hegemonic structures.

Julia's crime appears even bigger as she neglects a supposed familial obligation that should have been internalised in the same way as other "'patriarchal" values' (Miles 92): to ensure the welfare of future generations by sacrificing her own individualism and personal desires. Julia acts against the obligations of both middle-class Protestant English women like [Ann Radcliffe](#) herself, 'to signify the sociopolitical relations of developing capitalism' ([Mackenzie 687](#)), and aristocratic women, 'to uphold patriarchal landholding' (687), at the same time. By shunning her assumed role in the family responsibilities, she severs her ties of duty, teetering on the brink of an actual offense as all through the seventeenth century Europe, and England in particular, saw the 'emergence of new forms of criminality and insanity correlated to the subject's failure to fulfil rigidly defined familial and economic roles' ([Backus 40](#)).

As previously mentioned, these victims become marginalised by these crimes against their communities and are thus prone to be sacrificed. This phenomenon is not uncommon in myth, as neither it in literature and history, where a solitary scapegoat, or group of scapegoats, reluctantly bears the weight and accountability for the community's well-being ([Kearney 1](#); [Todorovska 49](#)). This individual, or minority, is deemed destructive and dangerous to the community. Consequently, to resolve the community's dire circumstances, they must be eliminated ([Todorovska 56](#)). It is preferable for one person to shoulder the burden and responsibility for the survival of the entire family or community than for the whole community to suffer. That way, it is better that Julia and Emilia are sacrificed and given to a not-loved husband, burying them in what Julia calls a destiny 'worse than death' ([Radcliffe 55](#)), than the whole family undergo an economic, social and political standstill.

Hence, when looking at the enthusiastic and meticulous wedding preparations undertaken by the members of the Mazzini community, except for those whose happiness is destined for sacrifice, one cannot help but draw parallels to the jubilation exhibited by a community as they prepare for the ritual of offering a redeeming sacrifice to their deity ([Todorovska 53](#)):

The marriage was to be celebrated with a magnificence which demonstrated the joy it occasioned to the marquis. The castle was fitted up in a state of grandeur superior to any thing [sic.] that had been before seen in it. The neighbouring nobility were invited to an entertainment which was to conclude with a splendid ball and supper, and the gates were to be thrown open to all who chose to partake of the bounty of the marquis. ([Radcliffe 71](#))

Similarly, the Duke makes his entrance into the castle in grandeur with a ‘loud clattering of hoofs in the courtyard’, ‘the rolling of carriage wheels’ and a ‘tumultuous bustle’ (Radcliffe 71). This sacrificial rite becomes more evident when comparing the joy of all the inhabitants of the castle with the anguish felt by Julia, Emilia and their brother Ferdinand, who languishes in a dungeon as punishment for helping Julia escape her cruel destiny.

3.3 THE DISTINCTIVE QUALITIES OF THE MAZZINI SISTERS

That sense of loneliness and isolation highlighted earlier combined with the exceptional skills and distinctive qualities possessed by both sisters and those within their circle, constitute what is referred to as the third stereotype: the ‘universal signs for the selection of victims’ (Girard 18). According to Girard, sacrificial victims are often chosen based on a pattern of ‘difference’. Nonetheless, this distinction does not arise from being ‘different’ within the group, as each individual would perceive themselves as unique in their own right compared to other members of a particular community. The ‘difference’ that would mark a potential scapegoat is ‘not from the difference within the system but from the difference outside the system’ (Girard 21), a system possessing other qualities and attributes. Emilia and Julia possess these qualities and attributes that set them outside the system established by the macrocosm of the Mazzini family and turn them into the ‘others’ that need to be immolated on the altar of the ‘same’ (Kearney 1). Moreover, in addition to these two characteristics—the sense of isolation experienced by sacrificial victims and their exceptional skills—one more aspect originating from them must be included: the degradation endured by scapegoats and their failure to integrate into the community (Girard 18).

As Cooke claims, despite being adored prior to their acts of sacrifice, victims are subsequently shunned by the community that willingly offered them up to suffer in their stead (180). He also emphasises that the ostracism resulting from their immolation is often met with exclusion and rejection, as they are not recognised as part of the sacrificing community; they are viewed as foreign, outsiders (Cooke 182).

As mentioned in a previous point, at the beginning of the novel, Julia and Emilia enjoyed an idyllic existence, living independently from their core family circle with their archetypal guide, Madame de Menon. That *primaeva* state affords both sisters the chance to receive an education that nurtures their virtues and establishes their own secluded community, ‘veiled in obscurity’, detached from worldly passions, needs and mundane ‘enjoyments’ (Radcliffe 7). Yet, when the marquis and the marchioness, accompanied by their social circle, arrive at the castle of Mazzini, Julia and Emilia become marginalised within the walls of their own home. Initially, this could have been attributed to a need for adjustment, as their viewpoints and conduct remain incomprehensible to the marquis and ignored by the marchioness, who regards Julia with ‘mean jealousy’, contemplating her with ‘the dread of rival beauty’ (Radcliffe 6).

Julia and Emilia not only represent a different generation, but they also embody a divergent mentality. Having been raised in a community removed from excessive desires and indulgence, where rationality and restrained emotions dictated their existence, Julia and Emilia embody the emerging enlightened paradigm that challenges the traditional feudal structure—a theme often revisited in Radcliffe’s novels (DeLucia 102; Punter 42)—under the careful tutelage of Madame de Menon. They find themselves out of place within the walls of what has been transformed into an eerie environment, brimming with mysteries, hidden truths and possible supernatural phenomena. Notably, it is not until the arrival of the marquis and his whole party that both sisters truly engage with the enigmatic sounds and secrets shrouding the southern wing of the castle, despite having lived there for years. As marked above, this coincidence marks the community’s moment of crisis, as the collision of these two worlds becomes imminent.

Along this clash of worlds comes a new distribution of spaces in the microcosm of the castle, which is itself, as Anne Williams points out, ‘a potent dream symbol for both patriarchal culture and the (masculine) self’ (94). Following the sisters’ failure to adapt, their quintessential evil stepmother, with the approval of the marquis, begins a campaign aimed at undermining and degrading Julia and Emilia. The marchioness views them as threats to her status within the Mazzini household and her social circle, as seen before, magnified due to her interest in Vereza. This escalates to the extent of seizing their chambers for her own personal use and banishing them to the deserted southern buildings of the castle, a deliberate effort to cast them out.

Eventually, after the persecution endured by the sisters, especially Julia, who is manipulated into signing a beneficial marriage contract, she manages to escape from such a terrible fate as being bound for life to the Duke de Luovo. Nonetheless, the sacrifice is fulfilled, albeit against the victim's will, as in most cases. Through numerous adventures and rambles across valleys, forests and ruins infested with villainous *banditti*—all representative features of gothic literature—Julia enters alone the archetypal deep cave that is forbidden for all, except for the sacralised victim of the sacrifice ([Girard 68, 162](#); [Kearney 1](#); [Todorovska 58](#)). After Hippolitus and Julia are reunited by chance, they run away from persecution, hiding in a cave near the Sicilian coast. As he is not the sacralised victim but her guardian, Hippolitus remains at the cave entrance, facing their pursuers. Despite his efforts, he loses track of Julia, who delves deeper inside 'pursuing the windings of the cavern, fled into its inmost recesses' ([Radcliffe 172](#)). She ventures deeper into the bowels of the earth, into the realm of the underworld, where the dead and ultimate wisdom are said to dwell ([Cirlot 313](#)). There she meets an elderly woman in whose face and features 'she discovered the resemblance of Emilia!' ([Radcliffe 174](#)).

In the deepest recesses of the cave, the archetypal underworld, Julia discovers her 'dead' mother; at all effects, Julia is dead. The sacrificial act is fulfilled; its main victim has died and descended to the nether world, where she has found the mirroring image of her sister, a sort of doppelganger. Not only has Julia been driven to the sacrificial cave, but also, in the image of their mother before the Mazzini sisters, Emilia's effigy is to be found there; looking at it anachronically, Emilia is also dead. The crucial difference lies in the fact that Julia and Emilia—the latter in effigy—have not been offered as a sacrifice to the greed-ridden Golden Calf, the Biblical false idol of the old, fading regime that the marquis and the marchioness wanted to sacrifice them to. Instead, Julia finds herself with her mother, the long-assumed ghost haunting the southern chambers of the castle, who will emerge from the realm of the dead alongside her daughter. Both mother and daughter are thus 'restored to the world' ([Radcliffe 198](#)) in an image akin to the archetypal rebirth of a mythical hero—heroine, in this case—, and reunited with their long-lost family, signalling the dawn of a new era that will signal the end of the marquis's despotic rule and 'a new matriarch replaces the evil marchioness' ([Yahyapoor 28](#)). Julia's discovery of her mother in the underground reveals that the castle's 'haunting' is really the hidden violence of patriarchal imprisonment, and Julia's choice to share her mother's confinement transforms terror into a moment of female solidarity and recovered identity, as she both acknowledges and separates herself from her oppressed, culturally excluded mother ([Rogers 52](#)).

This new order, the scapegoat comes to mark ([Todorovska 51](#)), gains added significance as the denouement accelerates towards its resolution upon their return. In a Radcliffian dramatical conclusion, the evil marchioness is revealed to have been unfaithful to the marquis and stands accused of adultery, leading her to poison her husband in an act of revenge for the discovery. Victim to remorse in his final moments, the marquis confesses that, to marry the voluptuous marchioness, he had imprisoned his former wife—the sisters and Ferdinand's mother—in the cave beneath the castle. The sacrificial victims—Julia in particular—have restored harmony within the Mazzini family circle, heralding the abandonment of the ancestral family castle, which will stay as a memory of the old regime, and even portending departure from Sicily, as they embark on a new start at the Palace of Mazzini in Naples ([Radcliffe 198-199](#)).

4. CONCLUSION

In summary, the juxtaposition of stereotypes within mythological narratives, literary compositions and historical accounts, as elucidated by [Girard](#), compels us to posit that victimisation is not a random occurrence, but rather a deliberate stratagem. Even if revisiting his mimetic theory could offer a fuller comprehension and conceptualisation of the Scapegoat Archetype, [Girard](#) established the layout of a scapegoating mechanism, by which its victims would fit in what he called the 'victimisation stereotypes', or recurrent accusations. Among these he delineated the stereotype of the initial crisis, a catalyst for the eventual scapegoating process, which is followed by the 'stereotyped accusations', the conviction on the side of the accusers that 'their violence is justified' ([Girard 6](#)). The last of the stereotypes presented by [Girard](#) was the pattern of 'difference', which would mark the victims of scapegoating for their exceptional and outstanding qualities. These attributes would eventually lead the victims to failure in their

attempts, if any, to integrate into the community and, therefore, make them eligible for the scapegoating process.

All through the eighteenth century, this victimisation pattern was directed towards children, in particular daughters, as [Backus](#) has pointed out (57). The consistent objective therein is to attribute responsibility for the emerging crises to these victims and subsequently instrumentalise them for its resolution, which would turn them into objects to be commodified to the tyrannical will of the patriarchal order, as Angela Wright and Jenny DiPlacidi, among others, remind us ([DiPlacidi 170](#); [Wright, “Heroines in Flight” 18](#)).

This paper has explored how, in [Ann Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance*](#), the Mazzini sisters, Julia and Emilia, conform to various prototypes of persecution and victimisation. Both sisters witness an initial crisis as their quiet lives are disrupted by the arrival of the marquis and his retinue; a situation that aggravates as the marchioness sees them as potential competitors and a threat to her status within the family. Besides, Julia and Emilia suffer the consequences of the ‘stereotyped accusations’, as they are unjustly accused of being ungrateful daughters, above all as Julia—and, by extension, the suspicions that befall her sister—rejects the Duke’s marriage proposal. This worsens her crime since, by rejecting marrying the Duke, she refuses to fulfil the familial and social obligations the patriarchal despotism of her father imposes upon her, and potentially her sister. This would position both Julia and Emilia as sacrifice victims, serving the economic, social and political interests of the Mazzini family, at least as perceived by the persecutors and those orchestrating the ‘sacrifice’. As an integral part of the sacrifice ritual, scapegoats bring with them a healing, or a reparation of the original crisis. In *A Sicilian Romance*, [Ann Radcliffe](#) also offers her readers such a reparation. When Julia returns to the land of the living, leading her mother—Emilia’s striking doppelgänger—back to ‘light and life’ ([Radcliffe 182](#)), she brings a new order that replaces the old feudal, patriarchal rule embodied in the figures of the marquis and the marchioness ([Yahyapoor 29](#)). As the marquis dies and the marchioness spends her life immured within the walls of a convent, Julia and Emilia abandon the medieval castle and move to their more modern, enlightened palace in Naples with their own close circle: Madame de Menon, Hippolitus, their brother Ferdinand and their newly recovered mother. By such a new order brought along by the Mazzini sisters’ rebirth with their mother, [Ann Radcliffe](#) ends her novel on a positive note and at the same time she unveils a terrible reality for women, and especially daughters, at her time.

NOTES

- 1 It is worth remembering that Ferdinand’s best friend, Hippolitus, Count de Vereza, was the marchioness’s love interest even before they arrive on the island, therefore showing Ferdinand’s involvement within the family. This is also shown when Ferdinand takes on the responsibility to intercede with his father, the marquis, on behalf of his sisters and Madame de Menon, expressing their concerns about the supernatural apparitions taking place in the southern buildings of the castle where they were relocated. At this, his father expresses his disappointment, as he had educated his son to become the heir of Mazzini but, instead, he let himself be led by “the weak mind of a woman” ([Radcliffe 48–49](#)).
- 2 It must be remembered that, despite initially being part of the marquis’s entourage, there are two members of his circle, i.e. Ferdinand and Hippolitus, that take the side of the Mazzini sisters from the beginning, much to the marquis’s and marchioness’s disappointment and, consequently, suffer for it.
- 3 The only exception to this is their brother Ferdinand, who takes his sisters’ side when, in their fright, they tell the marquis about some eerie noises in the southern tower, where they have been compelled to sleep, and helps Julia in her escape when she learns about her impending wedding with the Duke de Luovo. Ferdinand’s betrayal to the core Mazzini family is therefore punished by being scolded by the marquis and later imprisoned.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

Charlie Jorge
Universitat de les Illes Balears, Palma, Spain

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