Chapter Four

The Resistance to Social Inferiority: Women’s Rights and Independence

This chapter concentrates on Radcliffe’s concern with women’s resistance to social inferiority and her perspective on the meaning of independent women in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Radcliffe shows that women have been deprived of both their happiness and their right to inherit property. Women have to live under the control of men. In addition, women have no opportunity to disengage themselves from the domination of men, because they are used to relying on men’s emotional and spiritual support. In this novel, Radcliffe uses her characters and plots to point out the sufferings and injustices of women. She thinks that women have to fight against oppression, because women’s rejection of social deprivation determines the fundamental change of their life.

I  Marriage

In this novel, Radcliffe discusses two issues of marriage: first, the heroine’s opposition to the profit-oriented marriage; second, the idea of “companionate marriage” (Jump 86). She believes that women have the right to insist on their happiness; therefore, women should not sacrifice themselves to the benefit of their families. She also shows that the ideal relationships between men and women are based on love, faithfulness and mutual respect. Thus, husbands and wives are

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1 In *Mary Wollstonecraft Writer*, Harriet Devine Jump explains that Wollstonecraft “envisages a companionate marriage in which respect tempers, the indulgence of the appetites so that the couple are not united simply in order to gratify their physical desires” (86).
companions. Furthermore, a man’s morality is very important because it counts for the happiness of marriage. A woman cannot injudiciously marry a morally corrupt man.

In the 1790s, most of the women had no right to choose their own spouses. To many upper, middle-class women, marriage was a means of gaining for their families. The cause of women’s inequalities in marriage had much to do with the vanity of the middle class. In the eighteenth-century England, the middle class became increasingly powerful, but the life style of the class was under attack. In her *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft wrote, “All [the middle class] are aiming to procure respect on account of their property . . . The grand concern of three parts out of four is to contrive to live above their equals, and to appear to be richer than they are” (71). In order to reinforce their power, some wealthy, ambitious middle-class families made all efforts to elevate their social status. Thus, their alliance with the aristocrats was the best way to achieve their ambition. Unlike the rising middle class, the power of the aristocratic was not as influential as before. Most of the aristocrats were used to a life of considerable luxury; therefore, some aristocratic families were getting poor. In order to maintain their vast expense, they had no choice but to marry the middle class. Hence, many upper, middle-class women could be exchanged for profits within the form of marriage, and this kind of marriage is the profit-oriented marriage. A daughter had no right to disobey her parents, because a profitable marriage was crucial to her family. Thus, the wretchedness of women showed that “women only lived for the benefit of others”
In the second volume of this novel, Radcliffe uses Emily’s opposition to the profit-oriented marriage to reflect the oppression of women. Like many upper, middle-class women, Emily is persecuted by the Montonis who seek to sell her to an Italian Count. Facing the persecution of the Montonis, Emily rejects the marriage that the Montonis have arranged for her.

Emily’s attitude to marriage is under the influence of her father, St. Aubert. St. Aubert is “a descendant from the younger branch of an illustrious family” (2); however, “the deficiency of his patrimonial wealth should be supplied . . . by a splendid alliance in marriage” (2). St. Aubert does not want to sacrifice his happiness, because he thinks that wealth cannot replace love. Since the death of his father, St. Aubert marries a “very amiable woman, his equal in birth, and not his superior in fortune” (2). St. Aubert’s decision is right, because he is very happy and he always mentions the importance of good marriage to her daughter. Like her father, Emily believes that the happiness of marriage is not based on money. When Madam Montoni forces Emily to accept Count Morano’s proposal for marriage, Emily rejects her aunt. Emily says, “Madam . . . our ideas of happiness may differ. I cannot doubt, that you wish me to be happy, but I must fear you are mistaken in the means of making me so” (204-05). Hearing Emily’s words, Madam Montoni is furious and the conflict between Emily and the Montonis is getting more and more serious. However, the more the Montonis oppress Emily, the fiercer Emily fights against them. One night, Montoni invites Count Morano to his house, and he urges
Emily to promise the Count’s offer of marriage. As a violent and tyrannical man, Montoni dominates everything, and no one dares to challenge him. Nevertheless, Emily opposes Montoni’s idea. She says, “I myself have constantly assured Count Morano, and you also, sir, that I never can accept the honour he offers me, and I now repeat the declaration” (199). Emily’s attitude irritates Montoni. To Montoni the marriage is beneficial, because he not only becomes the uncle of a Countess but also acquires a lot of money.

By describing Emily’s resistance to the Montonis’ plan, Radcliffe explains that marriage should not be based on the exchange of benefits. She also indicates that a woman should not marry a man whom she does not love, because it is wrong to sacrifice a woman’s happiness to her family. Why does Radcliffe attack on the profit-oriented marriage? According to Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, women have no choice but “to settle themselves in a superior rank” (70). For many women, their marriages are “imprudent love matches” (Wollstonecraft 70), because their motivations of marriage are the interest of their families. Some women marry rich, powerful men, but they are very unhappy. Their husbands are men of “lax morals” (Wollstonecraft 70), and these men are addicted to debauchery. To these men women are sexual objects; therefore, they will not love and respect their wives. Radcliffe shows that “women must give their first loyalty to themselves, to their own integrity, and to their own code of values” (Brophy 238). Emily’s deed is courageous because she candidly expresses her unwillingness to Montoin. Through Emily, Radcliffe illustrates that women’s circumstances provide them with few
chances to pursue happiness, but they have to fight for themselves. If women did not actively reject the profit-oriented marriage, they were doomed to be sacrificed.

In addition to criticizing the profit-oriented marriage, Radcliffe elaborates the meanings of companionate marriage. She thinks that marriage is not based on any form of dependency because marriage means “a spiritual union between two individuals” (Genovese 130). Husbands and wives are not only lovers but also friends. Radcliffe’s attitude is a counteraction of women’s inferior status in marriage. According to Jones the “concern of all eighteenth-century ‘conduct’ manuals for women is how women might create themselves as objects of male desire, but in terms which will contain that desire within the publicly sanctioned form of marriage” (14). The degenerating role of the wife is under attack. In her A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft contends that “marriage will never be held sacred till women, by being brought up with men, are prepared to be their companions rather than their mistresses” (165). Meanwhile many of the women intellectuals ask, “If women are denied full individualism, must they not also be considered slaves?” (Genovese 130). Radcliffe believes that men and women are equal individuals. In order to achieve the happiness of both sexes, the relationships between men and women demand a reform.

In the beginning of this novel, Radcliffe uses St. Aubert’s perspective as an example to express her expectation of “an ideal of emotional fulfillment in a sexual relationship” (Grimshaw 24). St. Aubert says, “Virtue and taste are nearly the same, for virtue is little more than active taste, and the most delicate affections of each
combine in real love” (49-50). St. Aubert thinks that true love derives from two people’s capacities for moral improvement and intellectual development. The viewpoint of St. Aubert is an epitome of Emily’s love for Valancourt.

Emily and St. Aubert meet Valancourt on their way to the Mediterranean. When Valancourt sees Emily, he is attracted to her. He not only notices her beauty but also admires her elegance, because Emily’s countenance expresses “so much animation the taste and the energy of her mind” (42). Through their appreciation of the beauty of nature, Valancourt and Emily gradually understand each other. Emily’s grace, intelligence and virtue capture Valancourt day after day. They fall in love and know “no other happiness, than in the union of pure affectionate hearts” (49). However, Valancourt has to go home, he cannot accompany Emily and St. Aubert to their destination. Before he leaves Emily, Valancourt purposely puts a volume of Petrarch’s poems to her trunk. Having discovered the book, Emily thinks that Valancourt loves her, and someday they will meet again. Unfortunately, St. Aubert dies, and Emily stops her journey. She returns to La Vallée and feels very sad. When Valancourt hears the news of St. Aubert’s death, he immediately goes to La Vallée. His love comforts the sorrowful Emily. Not long afterward, they intend to get married, but the greedy Montonis ruins their plan. Emily is forced to go to Italy; therefore, she and Valancourt have to separate for a long time.

During the long separation, Emily never doubts the love of Valancourt, but in the fourth volume of this novel, she decides to break with Valancourt. The cause of her painful decision is the rumor of Valancourt’s degenerating behavior in Paris. Emily
feels very sad about the news of Valancourt’s degeneration, “which must terminate in misery to him, and which robbed her even of solitary image her heart so long had cherished” (510). Emily believes that one’s personality counts for everything, because “love cannot exist in a heart that has lost the meek dignity of innocence” (49). No matter how Valancourt entreats Emily to forgive him, Emily still breaks with him.

Using Emily as an example, Radcliffe indicates that the essence of companionate marriage include three aspects: first, “the calm tenderness of friendship” (Wollstonecraft 37); second, love and mutual respect; third, “the retrieval of ruined circumstances and the reform of corrupted habits” (518). Radcliffe shows that love is not enough to bring the happiness of marriage. Emily loves Valancourt very much, but she cannot marry a morally corrupt man. Once Emily marries Valancourt, her future is no more than “an illusory and destructive fantasy” (Jump 86). Although Valancourt’s degeneration ultimately proves to be untrue, Emily’s attitude to marriage reveals that morality is equally important to love.

II Property

Radcliffe’s concern of women’s right to inherit property will be discussed in this section. In the third volume of this novel, there is a serious conflict between the protagonist and the villain Montoni. The protagonist is the only legal heiress of the late Madam Montoni, and she makes all efforts to protect her right. Due to the lack of the protection of the law, the protagonist has to give up her insistence. Through the protagonist’s dilemma, Radcliffe reveals that the reform of the law is the only means of protecting the right of women.
In the eighteenth-century England, women had no right to inherit property. According to the English law only sons could “inherit estates; daughters, unjustly deprived of estates by customs of male primogeniture” (Kelly 39). Since most of the women at that time were victims of the unjust law, they were “left without a fortune” (Wollstonecraft 110). The only choice for women was marriage. Nevertheless, those who remained single were in distress. Old single women were regarded as disgraceful, and the lack of jobs made it difficult for them to make money. Some educated upper, middle-class women could teach, but their ways of “earning a subsistence” (Wollstonecraft 110) were very humiliating. In her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, Wollstonecraft writes:

A teacher at a school is only a kind of upper servant, who has more work than the menial ones.

A governess to young ladies is equally disagreeable . . . The children treat them with disrespect, and often with insolence. In the mean time, life glides away, and the spirits with it; ‘and when youth and genial years are flown’, they have nothing to subsist on; or perhaps, on some extraordinary occasion, some small allowance may be made for them, which is thought a great charity. (110-11)

The situations of married women were no better than the single women. Some parents gave their daughters dowries, but “the common law of England ruled that whatever property a woman owned before marriage or might receive thereafter became automatically her husband’s” (Wardle 202-03). Women’s plight of survival
resulted from the inequality of the law.

Considering the unequal status of women, Radcliffe reverses the injustice of the law in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. She shows “a determination on the part of Emily and her aunt to preserve inheritance in the female line, behind which lies a conviction that without their consent there is nothing Montoni can do to become the legal owner of their property” (Ellis 123). Radcliffe contends that the threat of violence makes it difficult for women to maintain their right to inherit property. She thinks that the law should protect women’s safety and right.

The third volume of this novel focuses on Emily’s quarrel with Montoni over her right to inherit the late Madam Montoin’s property. The cause of their conflict is Montoni’s debt. Montoni is a rich man, but he indulges himself in gambling. He is ruined by a great deal of debt. In order to pay his debt, Montoni plans to marry Emily to an Italian aristocrat—Count Morano. To fulfill his plan, Montoni takes Emily to Venice. Nevertheless, the plan fails. Count Morano is a bankrupt; therefore, he eagerly seeks for a profitable marriage. He happens to know that Emily is the heiress to La Vallée, and he woos her with great effort. At last, Montoni realizes that the Count is penniless; he thus takes Emily and Madam Montoni to the castle of Udolpho. In Udolpho Montoni becomes very violent for two things: first, his failure to obtain money; second, his debt-ridden circumstances. Montoni thinks that the only means to disengaging himself from his trouble is Madam Montoni’s property. He forces Madam Montoni to renounce her right to the estates in Tholouse. Facing Montoni’s unreasonable demand, Madam Montoni is disobedient and her
attitude irritates Montoni. Montoni punishes his wife with domestic violence, starvation and imprisonment in order to achieve his purpose. At last, Montoni’s cruelty causes the painful death of his wife, but he does not get her consent to inherit the estates in Tholouse.

When Madam Montoni is the prisoner of her husband, nobody knows where she is. She is suffering from loneliness and illness. Contemplating the misfortune of her aunt, Emily ventures to search for Madam Montoni, and she discovers that her aunt is confined to a tower of Udolpho. Although Madam Montoni has treated her cruelly, Emily still forgives her aunt. Hence, she takes care of her aunt every day. Emily’s kindness deeply touches Madam Montoni; therefore, she decides to give Emily her property. She says, “You are not unworthy of these estates, niece . . . I would wish to keep them for your sake—you shew a virtue I did not expect” (308).

Emily has no intention of inheriting her aunt’s property, but she understands that Madam Montoni wants to make peace with her. She comforts her aunt and ceases to talk about the subject. Not long afterward, Madam Montoni dies. Emily thinks that it is her duty to protect Madam Montoni’s property, because she does not want to abuse the trust of her late aunt. In addition, Emily needs the property to support her “future lives” (379). Emily thus determines to fight against Montoni’s oppression.

Since the death of Madam Montoni, Montoni oppresses Emily because she is the only legal heiress of Madam Montoni. Montoni uses the same way to force Emily to renounce her right to the estates in Tholouse. No matter how Montoni threatens her, Emily insists on maintaining her right. In order to procure the property, Montoni
claims that he is the only legal heir of Madam Montoni:

I as the husband of the late Signora Montoni . . . am the heir of all she possessed; the estates, therefore which she refused to me in her life-time can no longer be withheld, and for your own sake, I would undeceive you, respecting a foolish assertion she once made to you in my hearing—that these estates would be yours, if she died without resigning them to me. (380)

By using the assertion of his authority, Montoni thinks that Emily will compromise. Nevertheless, Emily strongly defends herself. She replies, “I am not so ignorant, Signor, of the laws on this subject, as to be misled by the assertion of any person. The law, in the present instance, gives me the estates in question, and my own hand shall never betray my right” (380-81). Facing Emily’s determination, Montoni thinks that he must use a despicable way to threat Emily. He declares that he will not give Emily any protection, and the next day a gangster sexually harasses Emily. Emily is terrified, and she is afraid that she will be raped sooner or later. Emily has “to give up all claims to the estates” (385), and her only hope is to leave Udolpho as soon as possible.

Through Emily’s dilemma, Radcliffe reveals that women are suffering from injustice and humiliation. She shows that women are unable to escape from the domination of men because they cannot find any help from the law. Emily strives to keep her right, but her efforts are in vain. To Montoni, “women are an inferior sort of creation, rightfully controlled by men, who will yield to their fate when violated by male power” (Brophy 238). Emily is not inferior to men, she is intelligent and
persevering, but she is surrounded by a group of gangsters. She thinks that Montoni has no conscience at all. If she continued to fight against Montoni, she would be the victim of murder and rape. Considering the cruelty of reality, Emily must give up her late aunt’s property. Thus, Emily’s failure of maintaining her right to inherit Madam Montoni’s property is an “indictment of its society’s view of women” (Brophy 238).

Although Emily fails, at the end of this novel she restores her right to inherit Madam Montoni’s estates in Tholouse. Through the assistance of the Count De Villefort, Emily recovers her lost fortune. Using Emily as an example, Radcliffe explains that the law demands a reform because it is unfair to deprive women of their right to inherit property. Furthermore, the value of the law is based on the equality of both sexes, and women must be regarded as equal individuals. If the law could not guarantee women the same rights as men, the lives of women would be threatened with violence and insult. Radcliffe concludes that women’s status in society is very powerless and they are living a life of deprivation. Thus, the most useful way to end their wretchedness is through the protection of the law.

III The Independent Women

This section is centered on Radcliffe’s idea of the meaning of the independent women. She indicates that men limit women’s liberty not only materially but also psychologically. Hence, most women cannot free themselves from their spiritual and emotional dependence on men. From the viewpoint of Radcliffe, emotional and spiritual dependence include love, support and advice. Lacking the ability to
overcome their tumult of feelings, women have to depend on men. Thus, the destinies of women are under men’s control. Radcliffe explains that women have to trust their own decision in order to be completely independent from men.

In the eighteenth-century, there were two types of independent women: those who possessed “estate in the form of marriage” (London 45); and those who had a great deal of fortune but remained single. As a successful writer and a married woman, Radcliffe argues that single or married women with a certain degree of “financial independence” (Mackenize 47) are not synonymous with independent women. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Madam Cheron is a widow; Laurentini is a heiress, and they are both very rich. To Radcliffe’s fellow women they are independent. However, they are both deprived of identity, fortune and finally even life. In this novel “Madam Cheron loses her life to her male equivalent in lawlessness, Montoni. Laurentini’s narrative extends the catalogue of vice by linking vengeful murder to licentiousness” (London 45). In other words, the tragedy of Madam Cheron and Laurentini results from their emotional dependence on men. They are independent financially, but they are dependent on men emotionally. Madam Cheron is obsessed with the “uncommonly handsome”(23) Montoni, and her infatuation for this man is fatal to her. Laurentini loves the Marquis De Villeroi so much that she cannot live without his love. In order to stay with the Marquis forever, Laurentini commits murder. Radcliffe contends that women are not independent until they free themselves from their emotional and spiritual dependence on men. Thus, women have to develop their ability to overcome their difficulties, and to form
their own judgment.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Emily counts on two “father figures” (Spacks 156), and she listens to everything they suggest. The first person is St. Aubert, who is Emily’s father and mentor. The second person is the Count De Villefort, who is a kind and decent elder. Emily thinks that the ideas of St. Aubert and the Count De Villefort are very wise; therefore, she respects them very much. Their suggestions influence Emily on her decisions, but both St. Aubert and the Count are not always right.

In the beginning of this novel, St. Aubert dies on the way of his journey. Before he dies, he tells Emily that in his study there is a “pocket of written papers” (78) in a closet. He wants Emily to make a promise, and he says, “my dear . . . Attend to me now, for the promise you have given particularly relates to what I shall direct. These papers you must burn—and, solemnly I command you, *without examining them*” (78). Emily is weeping, and she promises that she will obey her father’s will. In fact, these “papers” describe the miserable story of St. Aubert’s little sister, the Marchioness De Villeroi. In order to prevent Emily from being hurt, St. Aubert never tells Emily that she has two aunts. He thinks that his daughter has an “uncommon delicacy of mind” (5).

Returning to La Vallée, Emily discovers the “papers,” she intends to burn them immediately, but “the writing of some loose sheets” (103) rouses her curiosity. Hence, she cannot “resolve to destroy the papers” (103). Ultimately, she says, “I have given a solemn promise to observe a solemn injunction, and it is not my business
to argue, but to obey. Let me hasten to remove the temptation, that would destroy my innocence, and embitter my life with the consciousness of irremediable guilt, while I have strength to reject it” (103). Emily believes that it is right to follow her father’s will, but the “papers” relate to the stories of Chateau-le-Blanc and the castle of Udolpho. If Emily read the “papers,” she would not have involved herself in “a labyrinth of misfortune” (376).

The Count De Villefort appears in the third volume of this novel, and he appreciates Emily’s virtue and fortitude. He regards Emily as his daughter; therefore, he cares about Emily’s happiness very much. He understands that Emily loves Valancourt very much, but he thinks that Valancourt is not a trustworthy young man. The Count’s son Henri is one of Valancourt’s fellow army officers. Visiting his son in Paris, the Count hears many bad news about Valancourt. Valancourt has “formed an acquaintance with a set of men, a disgrace to their species, who live by plunder and pass their lives in continual debauchery” (505). Not long afterward, Valancourt indulges himself in the “course of dissipation” (506), and he loses a large sum of money at the “gaming-table” (506). He is infatuated with gambling, and nothing can stop his corruption. His conduct “has brought him twice into the prisons of Paris” (507). Through a well-known Parisian Countess, the Count knows Valancourt’s degenerating behavior. The Count thinks that the Countess’s words are very reliable because the Countess lives with Valancourt and has an affair with him. Considering the impending unhappiness of Emily, the Count believes that he must tell Emily everything he knows about Valancourt.
Emily is shocked to hear the Count’s narration of Valancourt’s degeneration in Paris. She cannot believe that her amiable, beloved Valancourt turns out to be a corrupt man. Emily thinks that it is very painful to break with Valancourt, because she and Valancourt have many sweet memories. Her thought lingers on “the late scenes with Valancourt” (518), and her love for Valancourt frustrates her resolution.

The Count advises Emily to break with Valancourt for the sake of her own happiness. The Count tells her that Valancourt may “reform for a while, but he would soon relapse into dissipation” (507). At last, Emily decides to listen to the Count’s advice, because she thinks that she has to be “guided by the superior prudence of the Count” (518). To Emily the Count’s opinion is synonymous with reason, but the Count is completely wrong. The Count misunderstands Valancourt because he unwisely believes the words of Valancourt’s enemy.

The Parisian countess wants to seduce Valancourt, but she fails. Although the Countess is very charming and beautiful, Valancourt is not attracted to her. Hence, the Countess feels much humiliated and she makes all efforts to damage Valancourt’s reputation. Meanwhile Valancourt’s “brother officers” (292) trick him into gambling; therefore, he loses a great deal of money. Discovering the evil of the Countess and his “brother officers,” Valancourt becomes increasingly estranged from this group of vicious people. Unfortunately, he has to be put in jail, because he has no money to pay his debt. Not for long, Valancourt’s brother bails him out; however, he uses his bail to exchange the liberty of Mons. Bonnac. Mons. Bonnac is a very honest man, but his son is involved in a great deal of debt. Mons. Bonnac’s son runs away;
therefore, the poor Mons. Bonnac has to go to prison for his son. As a benevolent and generous man, Valancourt determines to help Mons. Bonnac. Thus, he is in jail again. The news reaches his families, and they are ashamed of Valancourt, because they know nothing about his benevolence. Finally, his brother unwillingly bails him out again. Valancourt thinks that he disgraces his family, and he does not want to go home. He goes to La Vallée; the old servant, Theresa tells him that Emily returns to France and lives in Chateau-le-Blanc. Hence, he goes to Chateau-le-Blanc immediately in order to meet Emily.

Seeing Emily, Valancourt’s happiness mingles with his sorrow. He is glad to know that Emily still loves him very much, but he regrets that he fails to protect her. He blames himself for having been led astray by bad friends in Paris. He says that he is unworthy of Emily’s love. Valancourt’s attitude distresses Emily very much, and she suspects that he has done something wrong. Thus, a series of misunderstandings generate between the lovers. Valancourt is not regarded as honorable until Mons. Bonnac speaks for him. In addition, Theresa also speaks for Valancourt because he has helped her. Since Emily goes to Italy, Valancourt often visits La Vallée and talks to Theresa. However, Emily’s uncle, Mons. Quesnel rents La Vallée to a rich man, and he ordered Theresa to leave. Theresa is very sad because she is penniless and old. When Valancourt knows Theresa’s difficulties, he helps Theresa to find an agreeable place to stay. Theresa appreciates the benevolence of Valancourt because she will be homeless without Valancourt’s generosity.
Hearing the relations of Mons. Bonnac and Theresa about Valancourt’s good deeds, Emily regrets that she has believed the rumors. The Count is also sorry about all of the trouble he has caused. He apologizes to Valancourt for having misunderstood him. Although Emily and Valancourt finally reunite, the Count’s mistakes prolong their separation. In other words, the Count’s authoritative opinion is wrong. If Emily did not accept the Count’s advice, she would not have involved herself in the “ineffectual struggles between affection and reason” (518).

By describing the misjudgment of St. Aubert and the Count De Villefort, Radcliffe shows that a woman cannot depend on the opinion of respectable elders. Emily admires her father and the Count because they are wise and just persons. Due to love and respect, Emily esteems their teaching, but she never dreams that no one is faultless. Radcliffe reveals that a woman must cease her spiritual dependence on men, because she is the only one who understands her mind. In order to avoid making wrong decisions, women have to judge things by themselves. Radcliffe concludes that a woman’s emotional and spiritual dependence on men limits her freedom, because an independent woman is free from any form of dependence on man.

Radcliffe discusses the issues of marriage, property and her definition of independent women in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. She points out that the oppression of women is everywhere. Parents force daughters to marry for their interest and their daughters are not allowed to disobey them. In society, men control property, and their purposes are to reinforce women’s subjection to men. If any woman dared
to quarrel with man over her right to inherit property, she would be threatened with violence. The circumstances of women are very dangerous, but they cannot acquire any assistance from the law. Some widows and heiresses are financially independent from men, but they still cannot be the mistresses of their own. Due to long-term subordination, women are used to rely on the emotional and spiritual support of men. Thus, they have to live under the control of men. Radcliffe indicates that women are very powerless. In order to reverse women’s inequalities in social status, she contends that women’s attention needs to be directed to three aspects: first, their opposition to profit-oriented marriages and their insistence on happy marriages; second, their right to inherit property; third, their disengagement from excessively emotional or spiritual dependence on men. Using the protagonist as an example, she encourages women to reject their meaningless sacrifice for the family, because it is wrong to regard marriage as a way to gaining for their families. In addition, she emphasizes the concept of companionate marriage. Through Emily, she illustrates that the relationships between husbands and wives are companions, and the foundations of happy marriage should be based on love, mutual understanding and moral improvement. As a middle-class intellect, Radcliffe explains that property ensures a person’s dignity and survival; therefore, women are not regarded as equal individuals until they possess property. Through the episode of Emily’s failure to maintain her right to inherit Madam Montonis’s property, Radcliffe shows that women’s right should be guaranteed by the law. In this novel, Radcliffe also describes Emily’s spiritual dependence on St. Aubert and the Count De Villefort.
She reveals that men influence the ways of women’s life and thought. To Radcliff women’s autonomy in the decision of their future is very limited. She thinks that women are not their own mistresses until they disengage themselves from their spiritual and emotional dependence on men. To confront injustice and deprivation, women have to challenge authority bravely.