Incest in the Gothic Novel

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cinema will next lead us, but I do believe that perhaps this sort of impressionism is possible as long as one intensely studies the subtle differences between the already established genres and builds upon the development which has occurred over the past seventy years. If a project is consciously undertaken to build upon the past historical development of the avant-garde cinematic art form, perhaps impressionism is a possibility.

**Works Cited**


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**INCEST IN THE GOTHIC NOVEL**

**BY WYATT HOLLIDAY '98**

The human mind has a preoccupation with sex and violence but seems to be unable to reconcile itself with the extension of this preoccupation, namely violent sex such as incest. This preoccupation is nothing new; there has been incest as long as there have been people. If you believe the Judeo-Christian Bible, the entire human race is the product of incest; if God only made Adam and Eve, with whom else could their children "go forth and multiply?" This theme is also widespread and prevalent across the centuries in other literature; and it has usually evoked horror and disgust in those who encounter it. Witness Shakespeare's Hamlet (a possible Gothic hero, himself), and his opinion in 1600-ish of incest:

- O, that this too solid flesh would melt...
- Or that the Everlastling had not fixed

His canon 'gainst self slaughter!

... within a month (of my father's death)

... (my mother) married with my uncle,

My father's brother ...

...O, most wicked speed, to post

With such dexterity to incestuous sheets

(Hamlet Ll.)

Indeed, Anne Williams lists the reasons that Hamlet, both the character and the play, is so important to later Gothic writers such as Walpole: it has a castle; a ghost; a madwoman; a family secret concerning a murder; plenty of violence; and incest [emphasis mine], both actual and implicit [31]. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* was written in the England of the 1760's and contains scads of implied and attempted incest and incestuous images. Incest as a Gothic convention is also, however, as contemporary as Anne Rice's *Interview with a Vampire*, which had a doubly creepy movie version which showed on television the actual act of a vamp, which for the very real implications of the Louis character's kissing the Claudia character. Incest as much a Gothic convention as a locked door. I will attempt herein to explore how the convention of incest in the Gothic novel has played a role in the genre by examining the ways in which it has been used in the first major Gothic, Walpole's *Otranto*, and Matthew Gregory Lewis's also early *The Monk*.

In Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, incest serves several functions, one of which is to further the "dominant power structure," i.e., the patriarchy, in which lies the source of all political and economic power in the novel (Winter 18). The Gothic genre can be seen as a family romance in that it mostly concerns itself with the comings and goings, morals and mores, of one (or several) particular family unit(s). *Otranto* fits easily into this mold; the novel opens to a description of the inhabitants of the Castle, and reads almost like a cast list at the beginning of a play:

Manfred, Prince of Otranto, had one son and one daughter: The latter a most Beautiful virgin, aged eighteen, was called Matilda. Conrad, the son, was three years younger, a homely youth, sickly, and of no promising disposition; yet he was the darling of his father, who never showed any symptoms of affection to Matilda. Manfred had contracted a marriage for his son with the Marquis of Vincenza's daughter. Manfred, Prince of Otranto, had one son and one daughter: The latter a most Beautiful virgin, aged eighteen, was called Matilda. Conrad, the son, was three years younger, a homely youth, sickly, and of no promising disposition; yet he was the darling of his father, who never showed any symptoms of affection to Matilda. Manfred had contracted a marriage for his son with the Marquis of Vincenza's daughter. From this opening, we have a sense of the family politics: the stronger older child, a daughter, is ignored and unloved, while the younger, sickly boy is doted upon and already is engaged to be married. Manfred sees his son as the only acceptable heir to the paternalistic realm of Otranto, even to the point that he seems not even to recognize the Darwinian superiority of his daughter. Manfred seems nearly mad for viable male heirs, because there is a prophesy that which foretells the downfall of "the House of Manfred." When his wife Hipolita attempts to dissuade Manfred from his intention to marry Conrad

Wyatt Holliday is a senior English literature major. When asked about his plans for after graduation, he responded "I don't want to buy, sell or process anything. I don't want to buy anything that is sold or processed; sell anything that is bought or processed; or process anything that is bought, sold or processed; and I don't want to repair anything that is bought, sold or processed." He's thinking about kick-boxing, "the sport of the future."
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of "fact" does not now and never has included the social order, and tradition conflict with the new century viewpoint. Ironic foreshadowing appears proceedings, at least when read from my late-twenti-

The idea of incest is so problematic because the truth of sexual experience are expected to fit within an "already determined range of facts," and this range of "fact" does not now and never has included the idea of the private self should constitute the fundamental basis of private behavior. ... it follows ... that such an arrangement would regard incest, the paradoxical theme of degradation into triviality" (32).

There is a further scene which further the idea that "that strain of irrational truthness" will lead to "Gothic and Camp[D]e[aling] on intense terms" (Duncan 32) (a phenomenon proved by the tremendous success of the movie Scream last year). In trying to explain the depth and intensity of the scene plumbed by Manfred's suggestion of marriage with his former-soon-to-be-daughter-in-law, Walpole (unintentionally) writes one of the most humorous scenes in all of Gothic literature: Manfred (was) advancing to seize the Princess. At that instant the portrait of his grandfather, which hung over the bench where they had been sitting, uttered a deep sigh, and heaved its breast. ... The picture ... began to move ... quite its pannels, and descended(on) the floor with grave and melancholy air (24).

Recalling Hamlet's Father's ghost, the specter motions for his errant descendant to follow; when Manfred tries to follow, thinking the specter is come to impart knowledge upon Manfred, the ghost shuts a door in his face. This scene is interesting because it deals with the implications of incest on two levels: that it is so horrific that the mere suggestion of it causes Manfred's dead ancestors to get up and leave the room, while at the same time inspiring the rather comic image of Manfred's dead ancestors getting up, leaving the room, and slamming the door in his face.

There is, of course, more to the treatment of incest in Otranto than just camp and irony. There is a real commentary upon the grossness of the idea of incest. After all, incest does, in the end, the cause of the downfall of the present principality, leave dead bodies strewn about, and send people into religious vows. The real grossness of the incest is best shown in the scene in which Isabella, Matilda and Hippolita are crying about the, at that point, seemingly inevitable divorce/incestuous marriage which would come about as a result of Manfred's quest for an heir. A careful examination of the diction of the scene reveals a deep-seated abhorrence for the suggestion of the divorce/incestuous marriage. Manfred is reviled as an "impius man," a "murderer, an assassin," "odious," and my personal favorite, "execrable" (Walpole 90-1). Near the beginning of the section, Isabella responds to Hippolita's assertion that she cannot hear ill of her father-in-law! the father of Conrad! the husband of the virtuous and tender Hippolita! (Walpole 23).

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forced "innocence" of the Catholic priest that the urge to kidnap, rape and murder his sister seems to wholly disintegrate Ambrosio's humanity. From this point, we can see that as we delve into the novel, we come to realize the grossness of Ambrosio's duality in the reader's response to Ambrosio in the beginning sections of the novel. However, I would assert that as we delve into the novel, we come realize that Ambrosio's"the power" impetus ultimately manifests himself in his acts of murder, rape, and the eventual "sale" of his soul to Satan.

Lewis's tale lacks the humor which made Otranto a readable read; instead, the plot of The Monk does not depend on comedy or tragedy but rather on suspense, anxiety, and fear (Winter 18). The scenes of degradation are wholly degraded; we know, or at least suspect, early in the novel that any sexual congress between Ambrosio and Antonia would be incestuous, as the novel is loaded with hints of the sexual congress between Ambrosio and Antonia.

Ambrosio, on the other hand, is possibly the most despicable character we have encountered in Gothic literature: he trades his soul to the Devil so that he may have the opportunity to kidnap, rape and murder his sister.

This sense of utter vulgarity is apparent in the passages which contain the actual rape. Ambrosio not only rapes a virgin (and figuratively, the Virgin), but he does it in a setting which suggests necrophilia, which is, by and large, as more foul than incest. The sense of disgust which the rape engenders is furthered by the setting in which it occurs:

By the side of three putrid half-corrupted bodies lay the sleeping beauty... A shroud was wrapped in her shroud She reclined upon the funeral Bier, She seems to smile at the Images of Death around her. While he gazed upon the rotting bones and disgusting figures, who perhaps were once as sweet and lovely...(the images) served to strengthen his resolution to destroy Antonia's honor... (Lewis 379).

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The act of rape is presented in the most sickening light possible. Not only is Ambrosio forcing himself sexually upon the, at this point, helpless Antonia, but he is also so wrapped up in himself that he is physically destroying her. Words like "violence, "wounded, and "bruised" impart a sense of outrageous injustice when applied towards Antonia, of whom we are told in our first glimpse that "the delicacy and elegance of whose figure inspired...the most lively curios... the face to which it belonged..." Her figure... was light and air as that of a Hamadryad" (Lewis 9). The image of a "Barbarian," large and hairy, ignoring the "tears, cries, and entreaties," and overwhelming the defenses of a "light and airy Hamadryad" is very powerful; I doubt that Lewis could have given a rape scene which aroused more disgust and outrage than the one he did. Indeed, "from the moment of its publication, The Monk scandalized readers with its sexual explicitness and its scenes of virtue violated" (Williams 115).

The horror of the incestuous rape is restored a final time at the end of the novel by Satan himself. A good rule of thumb is that if Satan finds you morally reprehensible (much as if the Marquis de Sade feels "apparently unaugured admiration" (Williams 115) for your work, as he was reported to have for The Monk), it is a good indication that you have done, to use a colloquialism, some pretty sick shit. Satan tells Ambrosio that "hell boas much more disgust than yourself" (Lewis 439). Old Scratch then reveals that his own brother and Antonia is his sister; it only takes another quick look at diction to reveal the absolute depths to which Ambrosio has aspired (remember that this is the DEVIL, the Prince of Darkness, talking here, not someone's grandmother). Words like "abandoned Hypocrite," "inhuman Patrick and," "inclement Raviisher" (Lewis 430) are loaded upon Ambrosio. He is accused, in addition to murder, incest and rape, which are taken for granted, of "vanity, "pride, and "blind idolatry," (430), all sins in the eyes of Christian doctrine. As one might have thought, Lewis's painting of Ambrosio's myriad sins could possibly be seen as a revolt, a "transgression," against the "oppressive regime of the Catholic Church" (Brumh 130), making Lewis, himself, at least a "questionable homosexual" (Williams 115), a sort of "Gothic terrorist" (Winter 29) who employed both the terror of power and the power of terrorism (Winter 18) in his attack on Catholicism.

One of the most critically praised elements of The Monk is the frame tale of the Bleeding Nun, an aspect which was suggested in class as possibly the central element of the novel based on its position as the deepest "story within a story" in the novel. The Bleeding Nun can be seen as a double for several characters in The Monk, most importantly Ambrosio, and as such I would assert that, when also examined from its position as the inner-most frame story, it could possibly be seen as Lewis's final comment upon the novel. Beatrice de las Cisternas (a.k.a. the Bleeding Nun) joined a convent early in life at the insistence of her parent. From this point, her story is basically a retelling of Ambrosio's:

She was then too young to regret the pleasures of the profession deprived her. But no sooner did her warm and voluptuous character begin to be developed, than she abandoned herself freely to the impulse of her passions, and seized the first opportunity to procure her gratification. This opportunity was at length presented, after many obstacles which only added force to her desires (Lewis 173). This "gratification" was followed by an elopement and the sightings of a life of "most unbridled debauchery" in which she "displayed the incontinence of a Prostitute" and "professed herself an Atheist" (Lewis 173). Then comes our interest in the story: possessed of a character so depraved, She did not long confine her affections to one object. Soon after her arrival at the Castle, the Baron's younger Brother attracted her notice" (174). The Brother, Otto, persuaded Beatrice to kill her brother, her lover, in exchange for his affection; once again, the action of the Gothic narrative recalls Hamlet. We are told that "the Wretch consented to this horrible agreement" (174); but instead of marrying him as she had promised, Otto used the same knife which she used to kill her lover to kill her.

This story obviously parallels Ambrosio's (He took his vows before he knew better, grew lustful, consummated his lust at first opportunity, became enamored in an incestuous way, was helped and prompted to consummate that lust, killed someone with a knife, and was finally killed himself by the person who prompted him); and it contains several comments upon the nature of incest according to Lewis, and possibly, according to the early Gothic

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genre, which I think bear stating (or repeating, at least). First, whenever a person becomes involved in an incestuous relationship, that person is doomed. I assert that the presence of incest in at least these two Christian (or Catholic) Church. Beatrice cannot "rest" until she has come back to God, in the symphony. She also requires that "thirty masses be said for the repose of my Spirit, and I trouble the world with this final image of horror, it is obvious that the convention of incest within the Gothic genre was used for the most part to invoke disgust and abhorrence, and to signal the downfall of any who become involved in it. While only early Gothic novels were examined herein, this sentiment holds true in later Gothic works as well: Dart ends up in an asylum only after noticing that his sister's "wet dress shapes ... those mammalian ludicrosities which are the horizons and the valleys of the earth" (Faulkner 150), i.e. that Dewey Dell has a nice rack.

Works Cited

"MY LIFE UPON HER FAITH": LOVE RELATIONSHIPS AND CUCKOLDRY IN OTHELLO AND MUCH ADO

by ELIZABETH FALCONE '00

Love relationships and marriage during the Renaissance boasted very specific social roles for both males and females. Ideal Renaissance men and women were required to obey distinct codes of conduct; these codes, once translated into marriage treaties, pervaded marriages of the day (Vaughan 76). Females were expected to be silent, chaste, and obedient figures of society. This image carried over into female marriage roles, as wives were trusted to faithfully obey their husbands. Males were chiefly concerned with their honor and reputation in society; that is, a husband was expected to retain control of his wife. If he could not, and she was unfaithful to him, then he was deemed a cuckold. Renaissance men feared cuckoldry, for it labeled women as whores, men as victims, and was viewed as a mockery of male virility (Kahn 122). Shakespeare commented on this pervasive Renaissance male fear and its impact on marriage in several plays. The relationship between Othello and Desdemona in Othello and that between Claudio and Hero in Much Abo About Nothing each illustrate male vulnerability to such a fear through Renaissance notions of female sexuality, as well as the ironic partnership of cuckoldry and the dependence of women's lives on the faith of their husbands. According to Coppelia Kahn, cuckoldry was thought to be derived from three central attitudes toward Renaissance love relationships (121). Misogyny, the first of the beliefs, presumed that all women were licentious andwayward. The second belief was termed "double standard;" that is, infidelity was acceptable for men, but inexcusable for women. The final belief was called "patriarchal marriage." This basically involved male domination of marriage and female status as property. When a woman was unfaithful to her husband, the value of his property rapidly deteriorated. In such a situation, a role reversal took place, converting the man to victim and the woman to the center of the action. This woman would be the first to be blamed, not her lover. She would suffer condemnation, while her lover would simply endure more disapproval from the community. Strangely enough, cuckoldry, the true victims of the events, were brought more humiliation than were either of the adulterers. This is due in part to Renaissance masculine ideals, which implied that a woman's fidelity is a symbol of her husband's virility (Kahn 121).

Cuckoldry was represented in literature through symbolic horns. These horns were both a phallic symbol and a representation of male virility. A woman leading her husband by the horns was symbolic of the man allowing his virility to be manipulated by his wife. Of course, according to Renaissance masculine identity, this idea was completely unacceptable, for it shifted the dominance from husband to wife. Men had three defenses against cuckoldry. The Renaissance man would either deny the existence of cuckoldry by objectifying women, expect female infidelity due to misogyny, or change the commonly outcast cuckold into a phallic symbol through horn imagery (Neely 141). These defenses allowed men to experience cuckoldry as a male bond, and to view marriage as a community of potential cuckolds.

In Othello, the plot revolves around the marriage of Othello and Desdemona. However, this marriage is one lacking in trust, as well as even personal intimacy, for Othello and Desdemona really know very little about each other. The relationship between the two is based solely on the tales Othello has shared with Desdemona: "She loved me for the dangers I had passed / And I loved her that she did pity them" (1.iii.167-8). The foundation of their marriage is composed totally of Othello's own life, which exhibits the self-centered qualities of Othello's love for Desdemona (Elliot 63). This lack of personal knowledge later manifests itself within the marriage as a lack of trust. According to Gerald Bentley, "romantic-ignorance often paves the way for deception" (1019).

As Renaissance ideals, Othello and Desdemona both accept and reject established codes of conduct.

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