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Social Disruption in the Gothic Novels of Horace Walpole,  
Elizabeth Inchbald, and Jane Austen

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of English  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Masters of Arts in English

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by  
Lia Criselda Lim Pun-Chuen  
May 2005

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Keywords: Austen, Gothic, Inchbald, Sexuality, Walpole

## ABSTRACT

Social Disruption in the Gothic Novels of Horace Walpole,  
Elizabeth Inchbald, and Jane Austen

by

Lia Criselda Lim Pun-Chuen

The Gothic novel plays on the exaggeration of prescribed sex roles and uses various narrative techniques to produce a social commentary on gender politics and to illustrate the consequences of a destroyed social structure. Through the examination of the construct of the Gothic narrative and its fragmentary style, the novels of Horace Walpole, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Jane Austen reveal similar treatments of the sexuality of their characters. The implementation of key Gothic elements—such as the castle, tyrannical father, and distressed damsel—serve to propel the novels' questioning of the patriarchal system, the theme of women as commodities, and the economic value of sexuality. In addition to creating bizarre atmospheres of suspense and mystery, the authors artfully weave the fantastic elements of the Gothic into real responses to the changing culture and sexual anxiety of eighteenth-century England.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Referred to as the “literature of terror” and the “literature of nightmare,” Gothic fiction rouses our unconscious fears and engages our imaginations in fantastic stories of ghosts, villains, heroes, and heroines. Featuring an array of radical characters and intense plots with emotional extremes, the Gothic novels fit well in the category of escape literature. Through this interaction of textual fantasy with the anxious reality of social commentary buried in the novels’ clever response to the time period, Gothic literature exploits the passions of its characters in order to stir the emotions of readers. According to Elizabeth MacAndrew’s The Gothic Tradition in Fiction, “the purpose of Gothic fiction, like that of the Sentimental novel, to which it was closely allied, was to educate the reader’s feelings through his identification with the feelings of the characters” (3). Described as a “symbolic nightmare” by MacAndrew, Coral Ann Howells’ Love, Mystery, and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction adds that Gothic literature “projects a peculiarly fraught fantasy world of neurosis and morbidity” that represents an awareness of our darker passions such as “guilt, fear and madness” (5). Though unusually sinister and barbaric in style, the Gothic novel gained recognition with the literary audience of the eighteenth century, in spite of the order and rationalism that had dominated the earlier part of the time period.

The Gothic genre emerged in the late eighteenth century coinciding with the rise of England’s middle-class. According to David’s Punter’s The Literature of Terror, changes in the socioeconomics of the people and the escalation of capitalism contributed to a transformation in class and gender relations, the rise of urban centers in England, and the emergence of the working order (23). In addition, the former custom of producing literary works under patronage was fading, and “sales of individual works of fiction increased markedly” as literature spread among the middle class (Punter 23). This social

reformation propelled the rise of the novel, and scholars have suggested that the popularity of the Gothic genre was due to its response to the pervading cultural anxiety of the period. According to Dorothy Scarborough's The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction, the Gothic novel "voiced a protest against the excess of rationalism and realism in the early eighteenth century" (6), and reacted against the cultural transformations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Howells states,

As its name suggests with its medieval associations, Gothic is allied with everything which is the opposite of Augustan: instead of notions of order and decorum and rational judgement [sic], it represents the darker side of awareness, the side to which sensibility and imagination belong. . . . (5)

The Gothic novel holds on to an interest in the past and uses the traditions of the past (including literary traditions) to answer the questions of cultural changes of the present and future. By associating itself with less-sophisticated times, the Gothic novel is recognized "as a sign of the resurrection of the need for the sacred and transcendent in a modern enlightened secular world which denies the existence of supernatural forces, or as the rebellion of the imagination against the tyranny of reason" (Kilgour 3).

In its possession of components of Romanticism, Gothic literature has been considered the link between the romance and the novel proper. The Gothic's use of wild characters, passionate language, and outbursts of emotions indicates a movement toward Romanticism, while the elements of realism are retained in the warnings against potential causes of social and psychological disorder in the Gothic model of the family/household. In The Rise of the Gothic Novel, Maggie Kilgour refers to the Gothic as "a transitional and rather puerile form which is superseded by the more mature 'high' art of the superior Romantics . . ." (3). Although the development of Gothic fiction began in the 1760s with Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, and dominated the literary market in the 1790s, the genre lost popularity by the 1820s.

Despite the Gothic's short-lived popularity, much of the attractiveness of the genre is attributed to its blending of literary traditions. According to Kilgour, Gothic fiction "feeds upon and mixes the wide range of literary sources out of which it emerges and from which it never fully disentangles itself" (4). MacAndrew supports Kilgour's claim, stating that

the Gothic was a new type combining techniques of the new novel writing with the fantasy of the "old" romance. It thus put the ordinary world in touch with the mysterious. This linking of the techniques of "new" and "old" romance (or "novel" and "romance") reflects the increasingly inductive study of the human mind. (37-38)

Incorporating two distinct narrative traditions into a single body, Helene Moglen suggests that the Gothic novel uses the modes of the fantastic and the realistic to facilitate the debate of sexual politics and morphing social and psychological systems of the individual (109). Through this interaction between realism and fantasy, Gothic literature both enforces and rebels against social order with its elements of tradition contradicting the imaginative freedom of the plot and characters.

As a product of "combined literary fragments" the Gothic novel is better analyzed through an evaluation of its individual elements. The disjointed nature of the narrative makes it difficult to examine a work of Gothic fiction as a whole. Rather, analysis of separate components provides a more complete perspective of the story as well as its psychological and social commentaries. Although Kilgour mentions that several critics believe the Gothic is "a shallow and superficial form" (5), MacAndrew contributes to the irony in Gothic investigation by stating that Gothic literature "explore[s] the dark aspects of the mind and, through their characters, [it] locate[s] that world within everyday experience" (38).

Essential to the Gothic style of fragmentation, characters are often displaced, either geographically, psychologically, or spiritually. In keeping with the superficiality

of the Gothic, MacAndrew states that “The characters are more nearly representations of the general human state than depictions of individual human beings” (24). By employing these “representations,” readers may easily identify themselves in the characters of the Gothic story, and therefore create connections between their feelings and the emotions of the characters. These characters, who are defined by their emotional extremes, are subordinate to the plot, setting, and heavy didactic tone of the story. According to Robert Keily, “the subordination of person to place enables the gothic to explore ‘the whole concept of individual identity’ and to show ‘human personality as essentially unstable, inconsistent’” (qtd. in Kilgour 5). The individual in the Gothic becomes the reaction to the events occurring in the story, and the characters’ emotional narratives are the responses to the Gothic environment and its elements. Elements that are united in an individual are separated by fantastic episodes, and, according to Helene Moglen’s The Trauma of Gender: A Feminist Theory of the English Novel, there is a severance of “the integrated from the fragmented self, sanity from madness, rationality from irrationality, social sameness from difference . . .” (111). When these components are isolated from each other, the balance that is necessary for an individual to maintain psychological stasis is no more. Thus the characters in the Gothic story represent the consequences of the upheaval of order and institution.

The subversive design of the Gothic novel, which is expressed in the disruption of social conventions by its characters, is heightened by the use of extreme contrasts in the description of characters and setting. According to Linda Bayer-Berenbaum’s The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Gothic Literature and Art, the situation of one radical against another is an attempt to “magnify reality” (22). Amplifying the anomalies of life, the Gothic attempts to challenge the social requirements that command order and normalcy.

To exaggerate the theme of displacement in the Gothic, the setting is often remote, geographically and/or historically. Alienating the characters and their lives from

“civilization,” the Gothic is a “symbolic reenactment of the need to go back from the concealing refinements of civilization to the fundamentals of human nature” (MacAndrew 47). The Gothic story employs the setting of the castle as a central device to represent this movement into past civilizations and isolated communities.

Scarborough finds that “the castle seem[s] to be the leading character” in many Gothic stories and refers to it as a “malignant personality” (10). There is a strong connection between the castle and its owner, and the contrast in power of the owner and the inhabitants of the castle adds another element of subversion to the Gothic. The owner is often the villain who uses his castle and power to imprison his chosen victims (Bayer-Berenbaum 23). The villain (alleged castle owner) is an example of the “modern materialistic individual taken to an extreme” who is an “egotistical and willful threat to social unity and order” (Kilgour 12). In the works of Horace Walpole, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Jane Austen, the villains of their Gothic novels are materialistic men who are tied to their “castles” and use these fortresses as a means of confining their victims, as well as themselves. In MacAndrew’s description of the castle, she refers to it as

[a] dire and threatening place, [which] remains more than a dwelling. It starts out as a stone representation of the dark, tortured windings in the mind of those eminently civilized, and therefore “unnatural” vices, ambition and cruelty; it bears the whole weight of the ages of man’s drift away from an ideal state; and it becomes a lasting representation of the torments of the subconscious pressing upon the conscious mind and making a prison of the self. (48-49)

The castle is a symbol of the patriarchal system in the Gothic novels, and in the treatment of this device, such as the manner in which the “domestic” women are secured within the confines of its cold walls, social commentary is constructed, particularly in remarking on the sexual politics of the time.

The castle and its surrounding environment are enveloped in atmospheres of suspense and mystery. In Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form, George Haggerty says that “space is always threatening and never comfortable in the Gothic novel . . .” (20). Besides the remote location, the castle often contains subterranean passages, a maze of hallways, and shadowy flights of stairs. For prisoners wishing escape from the castle, the labyrinth of corridors makes fleeing from the wicked possessors difficult. Yet if a castle prisoner proves lucky enough to escape the walls, the outside environment is usually more difficult to navigate than underground passages. In several Gothic stories, the unknown of thick forests and caves is dangerous and strange. Terrors lurk in shadows, and although a wooden path may appear clear, the language of the Gothic story incorporates descriptive vocabulary that elevates the suspense by emphasizing the darkness surrounding the path and possibility of peril at any moment.

Scarborough discusses the Gothic scenery as “subjectively represented,” and in this manner “What the writer seeks to do is by descriptions of the outer world to emphasize the mental states of man, to reflect the moods of the characters, and to show a fitting background for their crimes and unearthly experiences” (11). The suspenseful and mysterious atmosphere enveloping the castle and the surrounding environment are major elements of the Gothic, and often “There is ever an artistic harmony between man’s moods and the atmospheric conditions” (Scarborough 11). Much like the castle and the owner share characteristics, the weather in the Gothic reflects the conditions of the characters. For example, heavy rainfalls may occur when households grieve over dying relations.

In addition to paralleling weather conditions with characters’ moods, the physical world is depicted as decaying and subject to natural disasters, such as raging storms and deadly lightning. There is a tremendous power of nature over human creation. In Walpole’s tale, a thunderous clap causes the castle of Otranto to crumble. Although the castle is restored to its fair owner by the end of the story, it remains a material possession

that is defenseless against the power of nature. The quickness with which nature is able to destroy a fortress, such as the castle of Otranto, demonstrates the command that nature has over the physical world. It also has a more didactic parallel, signifying the supremacy of divine rule over humanity.

This idea of decay in the Gothic directly relates to the eventual decay of human life. The element of death is crucial in the Gothic subversion of life, particularly in the mystery and chaos that is inherent in the act of dying. The catastrophe of death is usually accompanied by terror and the psychological and physiological consequences that ensue. The feeling of terror may be attributed to the dying individual or those persons associated with the dying. In the stories of Walpole, Inchbald, and Austen, the central characters experience the deaths of close relations. The Castle of Otranto begins with the death of Conrad, the son of Manfred, the Prince of Otranto; A Simple Story opens with the death of Miss Milner's father; and the mysterious death of General Tilney's wife in Northanger Abbey churns the Gothic imagination of Catherine Morland and becomes the catalyst for the "decay" of her innocence and naiveté as she grows more aware of the horrors of reality.

Terror in the Gothic may be brought about by human actions, but more often the sense of fright is conjured by supernatural forces that are alarming because of their very real manifestation. According to Moglen, the presence of the supernatural "in late-eighteenth-century texts reflect the remystifying urge of a demystified world" (111). During this time, there seemed to be a great desire to seek identity in a higher force in the secular world. The transformation of the spiritual into material is a way that the Gothic accepts the mystical and rejects physical restrictions. Through its use of the supernatural, the Gothic novel attempts to suggest that the extreme consciousness can function separately "from an individual mind" (Bayer-Berenbaum 32). This proposes that the supernatural is omnipotent and has the capability to change the physical world. As reality is expanded through supernatural agents, the consciousness is also expanded. For

example, many Gothic stories contain scenes with magically moving/speaking objects; and through portraits and statues, the spirit invades the real world. The materialization of the spirit (through such sighing portraits and walking statues) is a way that the Gothic discards physical limitations. According to Bayer-Berenbaum, the appearance of ghosts in the novel is an element used to challenge sexual definition. The asexuality of ghosts further subverts social order by incorporating a sexless and virtually lifeless dimension into the story (33).

As MacAndrew states in her introduction, there is “a peculiar form of symbolism found in Gothic tales. In this literature, the entire tale is symbolic” (8). The Gothic genre first emerged in the literary world in the midst of a debate concerning the dangers of reading that led to social subversion. Kilgour refers to Gothic fiction as a “socially subversive force” because it seduces readers into escaping from reality to enter a disruptive, exciting world (7). The hazard of reading Gothic literature was that it promoted qualities of both the romance and the novel that were considered objectionable: Gothic fiction both “idealized life” and “unidealized reality” (Kilgour 6). Although it offered an escape, the danger of reading Gothic literature was in the reader’s return to reality.

The subversion of sexuality emerges as the central theme in Gothic fiction. The Gothic novel can be considered a literary confrontation between the “economic man” and the “domestic woman” (Thompson 186). Through the exaggeration of gender and gender roles, the Gothic intensifies the conflict of the sex-gender system. The power of the patriarchal system is questioned through the representation of “fathers as absent or impotent and the inheritance of power as corrupt . . .” (Moglen 117); and the women in the Gothic symbolize the imprisonment of domestic life. The individual in the story is not only separated by his or her sexuality, but social alienation and isolation occur when the person explores his or her ego.

According to Bayer-Berenbaum, “Sexual perversions are important in Gothic literature for their intensity born of repression and for the expansion they provide in the range of sexual practice” (40). The threat of rape and incest occur in the Gothic; therefore, often the dread of sex looms over the female characters. Because the Gothic focuses on familial relationships and household order as a representation of the larger world, incest would be considered the ultimate subversion of the household. Bayer-Berenbaum explains that “A person who is incestuously fixated ultimately seeks a return to the darkness of the womb or, reaching further back, to earlier forms of animal life and inorganic compounds” (136). The incestuous individual is typically the father (or father-figure) in the Gothic story. In Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto, the death of Conrad, Manfred’s only son, leaves Manfred to be his own heir. The household is confused and Manfred’s incestuous desire to marry Isabella mimics the wish to return to the womb—the father must become the son in order to continue the family line.

The Gothic emphasizes sexuality by exaggerating it; through amplifying traditional gender roles, the Gothic writer makes an obvious distinction between male and female. For example, the men in Gothic novels are portrayed as oppressive and tyrannical. The male is usually the villain and the one who seeks incestuous relationships. The females of the Gothic are virginal and naïve—they are unaware of the dangerous desires of their male counterparts and are too passive to put up a defense. In Howells’ discussion of female sexuality in the Gothic, she explains:

Just as the Gothic heroine was the idealised image of beauty, so was she the image of sublimated sexual fantasy. She innocently arouses the admiration of practically every man she meets, but usually escapes the penalties of commitment until the end, when she is happily married and promised a future of unalterable bliss.

Clearly, idealisation and repression go together in the heroine; to be angelic and robed in white is only the romantic side of eighteenth-century

convention, the other side of which is the condemnation of woman to a passive role in which she can be sacrificed by society for sexual and economic interests. (11)

The Gothic idealization of femininity and distortion of masculinity supports what Kilgour refers to as the “plot of feminine subversion” (9). In this plot, the female gothic is established, which explores

domesticity and the family, through the technique of estrangement or romantic defamiliarisation: by cloaking familiar images of domesticity in gothic forms, it enables us to see that home *is* a prison, in which the helpless female is at the mercy of ominous patriarchal authorities.

(Kilgour 9)

The depiction of women as repressed is a technique of the Gothic novel that questions the patriarchal system. The portrayal of men as materialistic in Gothic fiction is an example of the extreme effects of capitalism on the individual. The vice of greed is illustrated, and not only does the novel show the effect of greed in economics, but it presents the consequences of greed on human relationships.

Horace Walpole, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Jane Austen use the Gothic tradition as a technique to make creative statements about the sexual politics of the time. By incorporating the individual elements of the Gothic, such as the castle, remote setting, inflated personalities, and highly emotional narratives, these authors react to the anxiety of society’s expectations of gender. Walpole, who is credited with establishing the genre, manipulates Gothic elements to question the effectiveness of a patriarchal structure during this time of rising materialism and capitalism. He also shows how women are viewed as commodities with values placed on their sexual functions in The Castle of Otranto. In Inchbald’s A Simple Story, the conflict between vanity and virtue is presented through the idealized femininity of Miss Milner. In addition, Inchbald further subverts sexuality by allowing her main female character, Miss Milner, to possess faults

and to act manipulatively over the male characters. Inchbald also explores the relationship between sexuality and religion. Austen's parody of the Gothic novel, Northanger Abbey, presents the tension of gender and economics in a modern fashion. Through her character of Catherine Morland, Austen examines imagination as a means of fostering femininity and shows how the horrors of reality are more frightening than Gothic horrors.

CHAPTER 2  
THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM AND THE GOTHIC THREAT OF INCEST IN  
WALPOLE'S THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO

In the introduction to her discussion of The Castle of Otranto, Dorothy Scarborough says, “There had been some use of the weird in English fiction before Horace Walpole, but the terror novel proper is generally conceded to begin with his Romantic curiosity, The Castle of Otranto” (6). Appearing December 24, 1764, Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto established the conventions of the Gothic genre, epitomizing the novel’s subversive designs through its disruption of social conventions. The work, considered to be “the source and fountainhead of the entire Gothic tradition” (MacAndrew 9), manipulates the emotions of the reader through bizarre treatments of the characters involved in the story and strange descriptions of the mysterious settings. The reality of sexual relationships is magnified to a frightening degree—the men possess more than just dominant personalities; their behavior is violent, and they are abusive toward the women in the Gothic.

These elements that have been combined to form a bizarre and sinister literary genre were born from a most unexpected source, but it is almost unsurprising that such strange fiction would come from an eccentric, perplexing, and versatile writer. Born into a family of politicians, the youngest son of England’s longest-ruling Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, the socially-diverse Horace Walpole served as the Earl of Orford in 1791 (Honour 9) and was “considered important as a prose stylist and as the social historian of his time—the chief course of knowledge of life in eighteenth-century England” (Kallich 6). According to Martin Kallich’s Horace Walpole:

At present, there are about six thousand known letters in the Walpole correspondence, extending over sixty years, and about four thousand by Walpole himself. As a result of this enormous amount of writing, we have

a vivid, authentic record by a responsive spectator of eighteenth-century culture. (6)

The letters along with his political memoirs, which span over forty years, paint pictures of eighteenth-century England that truly establish the culture and society of the time. Although several of the stereotypes surrounding Walpole describe him as being an effeminate socialite, his portfolio of writing—including “verse, satiric and political pamphlets, periodical essays, *catalogues raisonnees*, political history, literary history, art history, biography, memoirs, the novel, the tale, and the drama”—is a sign of his intellectual power (Kallich 7).

Walpole had a deep interest in art and fashion. He had a “fad for medievalism, and he expressed his enthusiasm in that extraordinary building at Strawberry Hill, courteously called a Gothic castle” (Scarborough 8). As a product of his enterprises in antique collection and Gothic architecture, Strawberry Hill served as Walpole’s stylish residence and private printing office. Influenced by the architecture of the King’s College Chapel at Cambridge, Strawberry Hill was instrumental in developing Walpole’s Gothic imagination (Kallich 12). The Neo-Gothic design of Strawberry Hill inspired the author to write The Castle of Otranto: “In the revival of Gothic architecture originated the Gothic novel” (Kallich 80).

Walpole feared that his Gothic story would not be well received by his contemporaries, and, therefore, he published the work under a pseudonym:

Though he himself felt the importance of this slight work, which, to the end of his life remained his favorite among his writings, he expected his fellow literati would scorn it as a “romance.” Instead, his anonymous tale received high praise from literati and reading public alike. He had given fictional treatment to some of the major preoccupations of his time that were also his own concerns, and after an interval, others began to copy his

work—many a castle, many a tyrant, many a hero and heroine of perfect virtue and courage appeared. (MacAndrew 6)

Although the fear of rejection by the literary audience loomed over Walpole's story, the unexpected acceptance of his creative work led to The Castle of Otranto promoting a new genre of literature.

In his establishment of the genre, Walpole initiated the use of “[t]he device of the discovered manuscript . . . to achieve a sense of remoteness” (MacAndrew 35). The first edition of The Castle of Otranto includes a Preface which describes the text as having been discovered and “Translated by William Marshal, Gent.” from “the Original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto” (title page of the first edition). In the Preface, “William Marshal” claims to have discovered the text “in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England” (Walpole 3). This method of introducing the story as a “discovered manuscript” is a technique used by Walpole to create the atmosphere of displacement in the novel, which also “produces an indirect, mediated narration that imparts an air of strangeness to the exotic setting” (MacAndrew 10). Walpole was inspired by his travels to Italy during his Grand Tour from 1739 to 1741 (Smith 126), and Hugh Honour's biographical study of Walpole stated that the castle in the novel “was in some respects similar to the medieval castle at Otranto in Apulia” located in the boot heel of Italy (18). Walpole claimed that the manuscript was “printed at Naples, in the black letter” (a form of Gothic type font), and was written in “the purest Italian” (Walpole 3). The translator claims that the story was written between 1095 and 1243 and that “the groundwork of the story is founded on truth,” which is evident in the minute details of the castle's passageways and architecture (Walpole 5). In his “Preface to the First Edition,” Walpole uses his experiences of foreign travel to “[put] us on notice that the mysterious world is about to be revealed” (MacAndrew 11).

Although the Preface to the First Edition is merely another fictional piece designed to enhance the reception of Otranto, Walpole emphasizes the questions of

eighteenth-century morality, denying the romantic aspects of the story when his “translator” mentions that “The piety that reigns throughout, the lessons of virtue that are inculcated, and the rigid purity of the sentiments, exempt this work from the censure to which romances are but too liable” (Walpole 5). In The Literature of Terror, David Punter claims that despite Walpole’s attempts at

conjuring a general sense of [“]past-ness[”] by the occasional insertion of costume detail or its equivalent . . . [Otranto] does give evidence of an eighteenth-century view of feudalism and the aristocracy, and in doing so originates what was to become perhaps the most prevalent theme in Gothic fiction: the revisiting of the sins of the fathers upon their children. (Punter 52)

Walpole’s use of a past civilization worked to emphasize the present culture, and in the “Preface to the Second Edition” he admits that Otranto was “an impulse toward formal innovation” (Haggerty, Gothic 1):

It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former, all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. But if, in the latter species, Nature has cramped imagination, she did but take her revenge, having been totally excluded from old romances. The actions, sentiments, and conversations, of the heroes and heroines of ancient days, were as unnatural as the machines employed to put them in motion. (Walpole 7)

In addition to establishing the genre, a letter from Walpole claims that The Castle of Otranto was inspired by dreams, thus supporting the concept that dreams stimulate creative fiction. In this letter Walpole writes,

Shall I even confess to you what was the origin of this romance? I waked one morning from a dream, of which all that I could recall was that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head filled like mine with Gothic story) and that at the uppermost banister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armor. In the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew on my hands. (qtd. in Scarborough 14)

Dreams are of a supernatural nature, and the dream as a prophetic sign is an element that drives Gothic fiction. According to Scarborough, “Dreams played an important role in the inspiration of tales of terror” (13-14). Also, as MacAndrew states, “Otranto is just the first of many a fictional plunge into the subconscious mind” (22). As part of this psychological examination into the background of The Castle of Otranto, there is evidence in the descriptions of the characters that suggest the work to be psychobiographical and based on his own familial relationships. Despite the radical characterization, descriptions of Walpole’s family and self are evident in the breakdown of the characters. The effeminate stereotype of Walpole is seen in the character of Conrad, who is described as being “a homely youth” and “sickly” (Walpole 15). It is also rumored that the relationship between Manfred and Hippolita parallels the relationship of Walpole’s parents. This focus on family and subversions of order in the household illustrates Walpole’s concern for the need of stability and harmony within the family.

Walpole begins his first chapter with an introduction to the Gothic family. Manfred is presented as being the Prince of Otranto and having two children: a daughter named Matilda who was “a most beautiful virgin, aged eighteen,” and a son named Conrad, who was a “homely youth, sickly, and of no promising disposition” (Walpole 15). The relationships between the father and his children are established within the first paragraph, and the audience finds that Manfred feels strongly for Conrad yet appears to despise his daughter, who is a portrait of beauty and virtue. The tension between father

and daughter is recognized immediately, and Manfred's compulsiveness is depicted in his involvement with the preparations for Conrad's wedding to Lady Isabella, the daughter of the marquis of Vincenza. Hippolita, Manfred's wife, is the last family member who is mentioned. Hippolita is described as "an amiable lady" (Walpole 15), but a greater emphasis is placed on her sterility because she has only "given [Manfred] one heir" (15). Thus according to MacAndrew, "The problem of evil is already presented as a psychological problem created in the ambience of the family" (12).

As exaggerations of stereotypes, Walpole's "highly simplified figures [are] useful for the embodiment of ideas" (MacAndrew 12), and even the physical characteristics of the individuals are direct manifestations of their spiritual states. Manfred is introduced to readers as a possessive and abusive man, "haunted by the guilt of a secret crime committed long ago by his grandfather . . ." (Kallich 95). Hippolita and Matilda are passive women, simple and suffering victims of Manfred's tyranny. Lady Isabella, whom "much of the sexual symbolism revolves around," is the beautiful and innocent target of Manfred's incestuous longings (MacAndrew 15). Theodore, the hero, is first presented as a mysterious peasant, who is later revealed to be of noble birth and the rightful heir to Otranto. Kallich argues that Walpole's manipulation of the characters in such a radical fashion is part of his obedience to

the Classical rules of art which Walpole adopted, and each of which he discusses in the preface, the Aristotelian catharsis is used to justify this romance: terror and pity, the tragic passions, are evoked and purged, thereby sustaining the somber tone and effecting the full purpose of tragedy. (Kallich 95)

After establishing the Gothic family, and the extreme Gothic characters of the virginal daughters, the sickly son, and the naïve, submissive wife, Walpole introduces the prophecy that drives the events of the story: "*That the castle and lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large*

*to inhabit it*" (16). The narrator of the novel agrees that "It was difficult to make any sense of this prophecy; and still less easy to conceive that it had to do with the marriage in question" (Walpole 16). But as the story progresses, the prophecy is tied to the "sins of the father" and to the retribution that must occur for order and stability to be restored.

The novel begins with the simultaneous occurrence of birth, marriage, and death. Conrad, the son of Manfred, Prince of Otranto, is crushed to death by a large helmet that falls from the sky on the day of his wedding to the Lady Isabella, which is also his birthday. Critics claim that this beginning to Walpole's novel introduces the genre's "problem of constructing continuous narrative sequence, a problem that has haunted the static and disjointed gothic form" (Kilgour 18). As a result, Conrad's death forces Manfred "to be in effect his own heir, realising a somewhat inverted or perverted oedipal fantasy of self-perpetuation" that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the manifestation of a prophecy that threatens Manfred's title and ownership of the castle of Otranto (Kilgour 19).

These first descriptions of the compulsive and frenzied Manfred, Prince of Otranto, reveal his relationship with his family. The elements of the Gothic household are established as Walpole presents his male protagonist as showing favor towards his son, disaffection towards his wife and daughter, and aggressive sexual desire towards his daughter-in-law. Manfred's characteristics also set the standard for all Gothic villains. According to MacAndrew, "The first characteristic of such a villain is isolation. He who cuts himself off from virtue divides himself from his fellow man" (84-85). Manfred physically isolates himself from his family following Conrad's death: "he dismissed his friends and attendants, and retired to his own chamber," commanding that "nobody should have admittance to him" (Walpole 20). Eventually, Manfred will only allow Isabella to see him after he decides that she is the only one who will be able to help him maintain his reign of Otranto.

In Otranto, Manfred is the “materialistic individual” whose unbounded ego provokes his madness. He is portrayed as an inconsistent narcissist who turns his beloved son’s death into an opportunity to seize his son’s fiancée for procreation. In addition to Manfred’s sexual pursuit of the Lady Isabella, he both despises and feels concerned for his wife. In his first encounter with Isabella in the gallery, Manfred says, “Curse on Hippolita!” and tells Isabella to “Forget her from this moment, as I do” (Walpole 22). But later, Manfred confesses to Friar Jerome, “I adore [Hippolita] like a mistress, and cherish her as a friend—But man was not born for perfect happiness!” (66), and even continues to say that “Hippolita’s virtues will ever be dear to me” (67). Every one of Manfred’s actions is contradictory, and it is clear that his behavior is impulsive and selfish. According to Moglen’s The Trauma of Gender, the character of Manfred is feminized in his hysteria, inferior humanity, and motivation by passion (118). His inability to remain constant in his actions and words undermines his masculinity, and his outbursts further diminish his stability. Manfred’s unpredictable passions are

aroused by his obsession with the prophecy that his line will not retain its unlawful rule over the principdom. . . . Like a medieval Oedipus, he tries to prevent the prophecy from coming true and his own evil deeds and his downfall are the result of his desperate effort to maintain the position he holds through his grandfather’s crimes. (MacAndrew 12)

Manfred’s compulsive actions are performed in an effort to maintain possession of the castle, the central device in Gothic novels. In Walpole’s story, the castle of Otranto represents Manfred, and by retaining his ownership, he preserves his identity. The castle assists Manfred in controlling the women of his household: “The wife and daughter [Manfred] dominates so completely are confined to it almost entirely, as if they lived and breathed and had their being within his personality” (MacAndrew 13). Both the castle and Manfred are radical representations of the patriarchal structure of society. Throughout the story, the physical conditions and descriptions of the castle mimic

Manfred's physical and psychological states. The two are both isolated features—the castle is located in a remote area surrounded by unknown forests, and Manfred is displaced. Also, at the end of the story when Manfred realizes the wrong of his actions and the sins he has committed, he breaks down as “A clap of thunder at that instant shook the castle to its foundations” (Walpole 108).

The power of possession and the value of economics are illustrated in the conflict of the ownership of the castle of Otranto. As the product of capitalism, Manfred represents the economic man who focuses on safeguarding his “investments.” The work of Ricardo, his grandfather, was an attempt at securing Otranto for his family; but with the supernatural events that have culminated in the death of Conrad, Manfred feels his property is threatened—such as the castle and the women in his possession. Without a son, the only way to continue the line of Otranto is for Manfred to become his own heir. Social identity becomes shifted as “Manfred seeks to consolidate the present, past, and future in himself” (Moglen 119). In the midst of his efforts to be economic, Walpole's anti-hero bases his snap decisions on whichever results are more beneficial for himself. Manfred must decide which of his possessions are the most valuable, and in his process of being economical, the women are categorized as commodities to Manfred. In The Castle of Otranto, as in other Gothic novels, the sexual function of the women determines their worth (Moglen 120). For example, because Hippolita (his wife) has been unable to conceive heirs and his daughter Matilda is practically worthless as an heir (she is unable to extend the bloodline), Manfred quickly abandons them. Hippolita is of no value to Manfred because she is past child-bearing age. As Manfred says to Isabella in Chapter One, “Hippolita is no longer my wife; I divorce her from this hour. Too long has she cursed me by her unfruitfulness: my fate depends on having sons” (Walpole 23). Also in Chapter Four, Manfred is able to trade Matilda to Frederic for Isabella because they are both virgins. The women who are materially useless are insignificant to Manfred, whose only aim is self-perpetuation. These three women are victims of Manfred's fury, and

although they are so idealized in their femininity (they are passive), they are essential in continuing family lines and are principal properties in the department of “patriarchal capitalism” (Moglen 123). A concern of the patriarchal capitalist is the reproductive power of the female. This interest in women’s ability to conceive parallels the eighteenth-century cultural notion of maternity as the only true function of females. In the Gothic novel, female sexuality is dominated by the male, and the males are, therefore, labeled as villains, although in the reality of eighteenth-century society, the “villainy” and power of men is accepted as natural to their gender.

Throughout the novel, Hippolita’s passivity seems to encourage Manfred’s tyranny and support his villainy. In Chapter One, Hippolita claims that Manfred is “dearer to me even than my children” (Walpole 21). According to Moglen, Hippolita “not only submits to male power but aligns herself with it . . .” (120). In Chapter Four, when Isabella weeps to Hippolita about the impiety of Manfred and his desire to divorce her, Hippolita refuses to believe Isabella and says, “Remember, he is thy father still” (Walpole 87). Also, when Hippolita informs Matilda that she must wed Frederic, Hippolita’s reasoning is that “Thy fate depends on thy father” (Walpole 89). These particular episodes illustrate Hippolita’s passivity and obedience to Manfred. As Moglen suggests, Hippolita is the “female counterpart of Manfred’s moral evil; she turns it back upon herself as guilt and doesn’t draw upon it as a catalyst for action” (120). In *Otranto*, Hippolita emphasizes the need for Matilda and Isabella to follow the commands of Manfred, and “tries to socialize her daughter [and Isabella] so that [they] will accept her own economic and sexual oppression” (Moglen 120).

Matilda exhibits the same characteristics of passivity as Hippolita does. Although she begs Hippolita for an escape from marriage to Frederic, Matilda does not take any complaints to her father, Manfred. Bianca calls Matilda the “dutiful daughter,” mocking her constant submission to Manfred’s demands, particularly his matrimonial objectives for her (Walpole 38). Rather than go to her father to discuss her feelings about potential

husbands, and because Hippolita will not offer any advice, Matilda prays at the statue of Alfonso. According to MacAndrew, Matilda's "repressed sexual feelings are sublimated into adoration . . ." (90). This scene of prayer before the statue also conflates sex and religion, emphasizing the Gothic perversion of sexuality. Matilda finds comfort in the image of Alfonso, which is the type of security that should be offered by her father. In the end, Matilda's murder is her ultimate acceptance of Manfred's wickedness and hostility.

The only woman in the novel who exhibits any sign of strength and opposition against the patriarch is the Lady Isabella. After Conrad's death, the narrator reveals that Isabella "conceived little affection" (Walpole 16) for her groom and that

She felt no concern for the death of young Conrad, except commiseration; and she was not sorry to be delivered from a marriage which had promised her little felicity, either from her destined bridegroom, or from the severe temper of Manfred, who, though he had distinguished her by great indulgence, had imprinted her mind with terror.... (18)

When Manfred decides to pursue Isabella as a wife and a mother of his heir, Isabella does not submit and instead shows her opposition to him by fleeing from the castle. The escape from the castle of Otranto illustrates Isabella's challenging the patriarchal system. By running away to the convent, Isabella moves to more than just stable household, but female community "which mirrors the family's institutional structure but would exempt her from the exigencies of her body" (Moglen 120). At the convent, Isabella's sexuality would no longer be a commodity—she will be free of Manfred's aggression.

The view of female sexuality as a commodity is a significant aspect of the idealization of femininity. According to MacAndrew, "Characters must not be too perfect, however. To hold the reader's sympathy, 'virtue must be mixed with something of helplessness or imperfection, with an excessive sensibility, or a simplicity bordering on weakness'" (40). Again, despite Hippolita's extreme virtue, her inability to bear

children is an imperfection that devalues her womanhood. Matilda's neglect from Manfred gives her the sense of helplessness that exaggerates her sexuality. Also, Isabella's beauty and Manfred's threats against her purity magnify her femininity.

The idealization of femininity in the Gothic story intensifies the immense wickedness of the male-dominated actions occurring in the plot. The sentimentality of the virtuous "damsel in distress" is set beside the brutality of the villain to highlight one another. Through the exaggeration of the female's oppression, as expressed by the threats of the tyrannical male toward the endangered woman, the Gothic becomes a "vehicle for female anger [because] the gothic provides a 'plot of feminine subversion'" (Kilgour 9). The image of the domestic prison is represented by the castle of Otranto, and the control which the powerless females are unable to rise against is represented by Manfred, one of the "ominous patriarchal authorities" (Kilgour 9).

As a product of the idealization of women, the Gothic novel confronts the problems of sexual perversion through its representation of vulnerable female characters and authoritative, violent male figures. By exposing sexual taboos, Gothic literature challenges forbidden sexual practices, such as rape and incest. Rape in the Gothic un.masks "the socially repressed association of sexuality and aggression on the part of the male . . ." (Bayer-Berenbaum 40). The strengthening of the villain's power is expressed through the wickedness of the rapist and the defenselessness of the victim. In The Castle of Otranto, a father pursues his daughter-in-law, desiring her to produce his male heir. Manfred's pursuit of Lady Isabella in Otranto is incestuous. Throughout the story, he refers to himself as Isabella's guardian and her father because she has been taken into the family. Although they are not related by blood, the contract of marriage between Isabella and Conrad allows for "perversion to creep into sexual relations that initially appear innocent" (Bayer-Berenbaum 40). According to MacAndrew, "the psychological aberration of incest—also a staple item in Gothic tales—is Walpole's central theme and he is using the editor's words to attract our attention to it" (11). MacAndrew is referring

to Walpole's statement in his Preface "that *the sins of fathers are visited on their children*" (5).

In Otranto, the alienation of fathers from their children, and the need for Manfred to "control the female sexuality that can both legitimate and invalidate him" (Moglen 123), exacerbates the issue of incest. Following the death of Conrad, Manfred is immediately fixed with an aggressive sexual desire. His sexual fantasy is sublimated into his virtuous daughter-in-law, Isabella, who tries to escape his perverse assaults. Isabella cries out to Manfred, "You, my lord! You! My father in law! the father of Conrad! the husband of the virtuous and tender Hippolita!" (Walpole 23). It is the terror of being sexually assaulted "by the man who, in the repetitions of Walpole's narrative, is the double or dark surrogate of her own absent father" that frightens and panics Isabella (Morris 305). Also, Manfred's present marriage to Hippolita is considered an incestuous union because the two are related "within the forbidden degrees" (Walpole 66). Manfred tells Friar Jerome,

It is some time that I have had scruples on the legality of our union: Hippolita is related to me in the fourth degree—It is true, we had a dispensation; but I have been informed that she had also been contracted to another. This it is that sits heavy at my heart: this state of unlawful wedlock I impute the visitation that has fallen on me in the death of Conrad! (Walpole 49)

Almost humorously, Manfred tries to use this argument to get Friar Jerome to allow him to divorce Hippolita in order to enter into another "incestuous" union with Isabella. As MacAndrew explains, "In The Castle of Otranto the relationships, as we have seen, are all of parents and children—the dire effect on the children when parents are evil and the beneficial effects when they are good. The threat of real incest is the precipitating force for the action" (69).

Several scenes in the novel present incestuous tensions between Manfred, Isabella, and even Matilda. In Chapter Five, Manfred believes he has interrupted an intimate moment between Theodore and Isabella behind the tomb of Alfonso. In his jealous rage, he plunges a dagger into the chest of the woman behind the tomb, only to find that the voice he heard was Matilda's. Manfred's murder of his own daughter shows his psychological instability. MacAndrew states that Manfred "symbolically commits the incest he has planned" because by murdering "Isabella" he is finally able to possess her (86). David B. Morris's essay on "Gothic Sublimity" adds that the murder is an act of "Gothic repetition" supporting the significance of Walpole's Preface concerning the sins of the father as perpetuating through generations: "Matilda and Isabella—despite their opposite temperaments—are doubles or mirror images, and Manfred's pursuit of Isabella is not simply an expression of unrequited desire but the reenactment of an ancient pattern" (305). It is also suggested that Manfred's rejection of Matilda's sympathy at the beginning of the novel following Conrad's death, is a way of ignoring incestuous temptations presented by Matilda (MacAndrew 86). By pouring out his "fatherly" affections on Isabella rather than Matilda, Manfred feels that his incestuous desires are justified.

Manfred's desire to replace his son and have a sexual relationship with Isabella also introduces a theme of alienation of fathers from their sons and shows the need for the two to resolve their separation. Even in the incestuous desire to marry Isabella, Manfred is narrowing the gap between himself and the deceased Conrad, becoming Conrad in the sense that he will inhabit the role of husband to Isabella. The disconnection in the father-son relationship is also evident in the characters of Friar Jerome and Theodore and in the interrupted lineage of Alfonso the Good, the true lordship of Otranto. For example, when the peasant Theodore is asked to remove his shirt for execution, the Friar Jerome notices the birthmark on his back and realizes that the peasant is his son—Friar Jerome and Theodore are reconnected. Further, when it is revealed that Theodore is the descendent

of Alfonso and the rightful owner of Otranto, his title emerges from his mother's line. The notion of the patriarch, which makes Manfred and Frederic the leaders of their households, is sabotaged when it is discovered that Theodore's rights to Otranto were passed to him through his maternal bloodline. Although The Castle of Otranto ends with Theodore's engagement to Isabella, the threat of incest still has not vanished. According to Morris, "reconciling marriage between Theodore and Isabella cannot entirely free the novel from the shadow of repeated incest. (They are each the closest surviving blood relatives of Alfonso the Good.)" (306). The looming danger of incest continues to threaten the order of the Gothic household.

The focus on the disruption of the family is a representation of the potential corruption of society. If sexuality can be subverted at the basic level of the family, then there exists a high possibility for entire cultures and societies to be disordered with shifts in sexual power. When traditional gender roles are questioned, when the man of the house is realized as a tyrant and the women are victims of his abuse, the Gothic experience occurs and is uncontrollable. The Castle of Otranto is a radical example of the destabilization of the household, illustrating the emotional and mental anxiety of a culture that is experiencing changes in the economy and movements in gender politics. As MacAndrew states,

Otranto is peopled with two-dimensional characters embodying virtue and vice; its setting constitutes a representation of the villain's character; it is an indirect narration, a story mediated through two voices before it reaches the reader; and its imagery and supernatural events lead to an interpretation of its meaning as an eighteenth-century psychological tale. Thus, an examination of Otranto tells a great deal about the convention to which it gave rise. (9-10)

Throughout The Castle of Otranto, eighteenth-century standards such as the authority of the patriarch are contested in the characters and their situations. In

Walpole's story, the character of Manfred serves a didactic purpose because he represents the negative consequences of upsetting tradition and corrupting morality. As stated in the Preface to the First Edition, "the sins of the father are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation" (Walpole 5). According to MacAndrew, "The theme of children suffering for their fathers' sins is played out in Manfred. He himself carries the burden of crime and guilt. And his sins are [']visited upon['] Conrad and Matilda in that they suffer death through him" (85). The story of Otranto purposely disrupts social order and gender roles to illustrate the significance and consequences of upsetting tradition. The Gothic narrative tries to provide an answer to the transformation of the eighteenth-century civilization by placing its exaggerated characters into altering states of reality, and showing how interruptions in order can negatively influence life.

## CHAPTER 3

### A SIMPLE STORY BECOMES COMPLICATED:

#### THE VICIOUS SIDE OF VIRTUE

Elizabeth Inchbald's A Simple Story is a novel saturated with elements of Gothic fiction. Published in 1791, less than three decades following Walpole's establishment of the genre, the influence of the Gothic tradition is most evident in volumes three and four of the novel when Inchbald's setting begins to evoke an atmosphere of doom, and the emotions of the characters have grown more intense and extreme. According to Candace Ward's "Inordinate Desire: Schooling the Senses in Elizabeth Inchbald's A Simple Story," Inchbald's work

[features] characters both exalted and plagued by their passions and sympathies, [and] the novel demonstrates the dangers sensibility posed for both female and male characters; at the same time sensibility provides the occasion for Inchbald's examination of the culture it both reflected and produced.

The social commentary woven within the Gothic reflects Inchbald's concerns with sensibility and the "contradictory cultural expectations facing women and women writers in the late eighteenth century" (Parker 257). In the first part of the novel, Inchbald inverts the Gothic structure by destabilizing the patriarchal system through a rebellious Miss Milner; and in the second half of the novel, Inchbald returns to the traditional Gothic in her restoration of the patriarchy with the death of Miss Milner and the rise of Lord Elmwood.

Referring to the novel as a "trimodal collaboration," Moglen states that A Simple Story is a "romance [coexisting] with realism... [and] accompanied by incipient strains of the fantastic" (150). In line with the formula of Gothic literature instituted by Walpole, Inchbald combines the realistic with the fantastic to create the background for the novel's

response to social and sexual conventions. Through the character of Miss Milner, Inchbald addresses the question of a woman's power over her relationships. By portraying Miss Milner as possessing faults and manipulating her guardian/lover/husband Dorriforth, Inchbald pushes the Gothic's central theme of subversion. According to Anna Lott's "Sexual Politics in Elizabeth Inchbald," the novel "celebrate[s] women who exist outside of familial constraints, refusing, despite strong pressure, to confess to misdeeds" (638). The rebellious Miss Milner epitomizes this description, particularly through her actions in the first half of the story and in her death in the second part of the novel. Her escape from Elmwood Castle proves her ultimate denial of the patriarchal structure, and her death occurs without regret of her past actions—Lady Elmwood cautions her daughter against wickedness but accepts her own wrongdoings at the end and does not submit to guilt or forgiveness.

Through the plot and characters, Inchbald's personal connection with Gothic literature is apparent in A Simple Story. According to Annibel Jenkins, author of I'll Tell You What: The Life of Elizabeth Inchbald, although the novel was published in 1791, the first draft was written in 1777 and was revised numerous times, during which Inchbald received many suggestions from friends regarding possible improvements to her work (274). At one point, A Simple Story was in an epistolary form until a friend suggested that Inchbald change the style to a "simple narrative" (Jenkins 274). During the fourteen years that it took to perfect the novel, Gothic literature became extremely popular with literary audiences. Therefore, considering the literary period and Inchbald's years of working on A Simple Story, it can be safely assumed that Inchbald "set[s] her work in the context of her own time" and is influenced by the Gothic work of her contemporaries (Jenkins 280).

Inchbald's work in the theatre had been her first link to Gothic literature. In the 1780s, Inchbald performed in The Count of Narbonne, a stage adaptation of Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (Jenkins 259). Inchbald also wrote a criticism of The

Count of Narbonne in her Remarks, a “series [of] critiques of the 125 plays in The British Theatre” (Jenkins 11). Although there is no confirmation of a direct correspondence between Inchbald and Walpole, A Simple Story reflects the influence of Walpole’s Gothic elements. Also, Inchbald’s description of Miss Milner appearing “beautiful as angel” (12) may refer to a mutual friend of Inchbald and Walpole. According to Jenkins, Inchbald may have based Miss Milner’s beauty and the idea of beauty on the “celebrated beauties” of the theatre, particularly Sarah Siddons, an actress-friend of Inchbald, who was also acquainted with Horace Walpole (280). Walpole “wrote that Lady Sarah ‘was more beautiful than you can conceive,’” and despite the absence of letters between Walpole and Inchbald, it is possible that Inchbald may have been personally influenced by Walpole and his writing as she worked on A Simple Story (Jenkins 280).

Even if Inchbald was not directly influenced by Walpole, the Gothic elements of A Simple Story are so prominent that they cannot be ignored. Despite the claim of many scholars that the Gothic components are found primarily in the second half of the novel, the Gothic objective of subversion is revealed within the first pages, as well. Following the Gothic tradition, A Simple Story opens with a death in the family—the father of the young Miss Milner has passed away leaving his daughter in the charge of his priest friend, Dorriforth. Much like Otranto’s presentation of the simultaneous events of birth, death, and marriage at the beginning of the novel, Inchbald’s story begins with the disruption of one household as a result of the death of the patriarch and the creation of a new family, with Dorriforth becoming a “father” to the orphaned Miss Milner. As the new guardian, Dorriforth restores the genealogical line and becomes the new patriarch in this Gothic household. Within this new “household,” Inchbald employs the use of exaggerated character types to serve as representations of the cultural expectations of the men and women. A Simple Story uses the “family” as a background to the Gothic power struggles fought between the sexes and between humans and nature. Miss Milner’s coquettish character is in conflict with the stubborn and rigid personality of Dorriforth,

and in addition, the transformation of their familial roles (from “father”/“daughter” to “lovers”) is the ultimate subversion of order.

Inchbald’s radical characters also follow another rule of Gothic fiction—they are subordinate to the plot and setting in order to explore the entire consciousness of the individual. The device of subordination is used by Inchbald when she moves her characters to various geographical locations and when she separates them from each other. For example, when Miss Milner is isolated from everyone else, she seems to experience the height of her emotions. At the beginning of the second volume when Miss Milner is alone in Bath, the degree of her melancholy is so heightened that upon the receipt of a letter stating the death of Lord Elmwood, Miss Milner becomes preoccupied with thoughts of death and grows delirious: “...her health became impaired from the indisposition of her mind; she languished, and was once in imminent danger” (Inchbald 96). The same intensity of emotion occurs at the end of the second volume, when Miss Milner becomes isolated from Dorriforth following his refusal of their intended union. Although they are not geographically separated, the division between Miss Milner and Dorriforth causes Miss Milner to become physically distressed: “Not only her colour, but her features became changed; her eyes lost their brilliancy, her lips seemed to hang without the power of motion, her head drooped, and her dress was wholly neglected” (Inchbald 179). Also, in volume three, Dorriforth has a “severe and dangerous illness” when he is in the West Indies by himself. Thus the individual Gothic becomes the reaction to the events occurring in the story, and the emotional narratives are the responses to the Gothic environment and its elements.

Inchbald adheres to the Gothic conventions in the settings of A Simple Story. Although it is not emphasized as greatly as in The Castle of Otranto, Inchbald incorporates the Gothic castle into her novel. The death of Lord Elmwood in the second volume, Dorriforth must become the new Lord Elmwood and take over the ownership of Elmwood Castle. In Chapter Ten, Inchbald clearly establishes that the residence is a

castle—the narrator says, “Elmwood house, or rather Castle” (46). When Dorriforth breaks his religious vows in order to create an heir to preserve ownership of the castle, the transformation of the priestly Dorriforth into a hardened businessman mimics the character of Manfred in Otranto. Dorriforth becomes a castle owner and, consequently, a villain. Like Manfred, the new Lord Elmwood is a “threat to social unity and order” (Kilgour 12) as he grows materialistic, and his new greed causes him to devote much of his time to tending his estates, which he uses to gain power over those around him. When Miss Milner is living at Elmwood Castle, all her actions are under surveillance by Dorriforth. The castle becomes a prison to Miss Milner, and it is only after her escape from the castle that she and Matilda can be free from Dorriforth’s tyranny. But following Miss Milner’s death, Matilda returns to Dorriforth’s estate and is confined to particular rooms so that she may remain unseen. Even Miss Woodley is in the possession of Dorriforth when she returns with Matilda to the castle.

While the castle represents the power of the male castle-owner over his inhabitants, death is the only power that is greater, and keeps with the Gothic concept that nature has power over the physical world. Death occurs several times in Inchbald’s novel and serves as the introduction to the two parts of A Simple Story. The deaths of Mr. Milner and Lord Elmwood show how the chaos of death spirals outward with distressing effects on those associated with the dying. Although it is Mr. Milner’s death that results in the union (both familial and marital) between Miss Milner and Dorriforth, the death of Lord Elmwood is the most significant in the novel because of his relationship with Dorriforth. The intimate connection between these cousins is evident in Dorriforth’s desire to be with Lord Elmwood as he is dying: “for the extreme illness of Lord Elmwood, in whose chamber he passed chief of the day, and slept in Elmwood House every night” (Inchbald 92). Also, the business that is involved with Lord Elmwood passing his title and estates to Dorriforth completely disrupts Dorriforth’s position, behavior, and thinking. Lord Elmwood’s death causes Dorriforth to break his religious

vows and marry Miss Milner, thereby exposing his evil nature which has been repressed by “his religion and some opposite virtues” (Inchbald 34).

The act of Dorriforth’s breaking his religious vows is similar to the Gothic element of prophecies and omens. In Otranto the prophecy that haunts and threatens Manfred’s ownership of the castle is stated at the start of the novel, and the curse brought upon Manfred’s family by his dishonest ancestors manifests with the death of Conrad and the consequent loss of Manfred’s family, castle, and self. When Dorriforth leaves the priesthood, Inchbald refers to his dispensation from his vows as a crime, which was “generally followed by such examples of divine vengeance” and “miraculous punishments” (78). Like the Gothic novels, Inchald’s A Simple Story shows how a broken promise can have harmful and dangerous outcomes. The “foreboding of disaster” that Dorriforth senses at the beginning of the novel occurs after he breaks his pledge to God and commits the incestuous act of marrying his ward, Miss Milner (Inchbald 13). In the first paragraph of Chapter Sixteen, the narrator describes Miss Woodley’s thoughts on the dangers of breaking religious vows:

[T]here was no guilt, except that of murder, which she though equal to the crime in question, provided it was ever perpetrated.—Adultery, her reason would perhaps have informed her, was a more pernicious evil to society; but to a religious mind, what sounds so horrible as sacrilege? Of vows made to God or to man, the former must weigh the heavier.—Moreover, the dreadful sin of infidelity in the marriage state, is much softened to a common understanding, by the frequency of the crime; whereas, of vows broken by a devotee she had scarce heard of any; or if any, they were generally followed by such example of divine vengeance, such miraculous punishments in this world, (as well as eternal punishment in the other) that served to exaggerate their wickedness. (Inchbald 78)

Although Dorriforth is a priest and is meant to be a spiritual leader and compassionate guide to others, his attitude towards his own family shows his callousness, and his quickness to break his vows to become Lord Elmwood shows his lack of dedication to religion and his growing materialism. In contrast, Miss Milner staggers from coquette to predator to victim. In the beginning of the novel, Miss Milner's flirtations are a result of her young age and beauty, but following her marriage to Dorriforth, she learns to manipulate him as a lover. Unfortunately, Miss Milner becomes a victim of her own "jests," and her fear of Dorriforth forces her to flee from his house to live alone and unprotected. Matilda, the daughter of Lord and Lady Elmwood (Dorriforth and Miss Milner), possesses a virtuous character throughout and is the most consistent character in the novel and, thus, the most victimized individual in A Simple Story. In fact, Matilda's femininity is idealized because of her portrayal as a submissive, passive victim of the patriarchal system. Unlike the other characters, Matilda must suffer and experience the extreme emotions and passions of her parents and those around her.

Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood, on the other hand, represents the opposite of an idealized woman—in many aspects she is very masculine in her actions. Although her beauty is described as divine, the "virtue" possessed by Miss Milner serves as an attractive, pleasing quality, as well as a weapon that fires against the male authority surrounding her. The "female sensibility" of Miss Milner is "identified with dangerous sensuality," and according to Ward:

because women's nervous systems were believed more pervious than men's, it followed that women were more easily aroused and less capable of controlling their sexual desires. Such arousal not only discomposed the female body, but threatened the social order as well.

As Ward further suggests, "The sensibility Miss Milner exhibits is clearly identified with her sexuality, and her reformation is contingent upon its curtailment."

Miss Milner is a revolutionary Gothic female in that she possesses several faults and accepts her wrongdoings without confession or feelings of remorse. Miss Milner is masculinized through her actions, and according to James Boaden, Inchbald's first biographer, "There is something unfeminine . . . in a lady's placing herself in the seat of judgment" (qtd. in Lott 635). Although Boaden's quote refers to Inchbald, the character of Miss Milner reflects this aspect of her author. Throughout A Simple Story, Miss Milner's actions place her "in the seat of judgment"—for example, in the second volume she attends a masquerade although Dorriforth/Lord Elmwood forbids her to go, particularly because of the masquerade's morally suspect nature; and while Lord Elmwood is away in the West Indies, Lady Elmwood rekindles a relationship between herself and Frederick Lawnly, a rival lover from the past. In Lott's essay, Inchbald is said "to view her femininity, and the beauty and charm inherent in it, as a prerogative that allowed her to speak more directly and incisively than men" (636-37). Likewise, Miss Milner uses her femininity, and the idea of femininity, to her advantage, manipulating Dorriforth and rival lovers with her coquetry.

Miss Milner presents the struggle against the "exclusive paradigms of proper and improper female behavior" by the women of the late eighteenth-century (Ward). In the first half of the novel, Miss Milner's introduction to and disruption of Dorriforth's household, works to subvert order and sexuality in A Simple Story. In the second chapter of the novel, Dorriforth's flattering description feminizes him:

His figure was tall and elegant, but his face, except a pair of dark bright eyes, a set of white teeth, and a graceful fall in his clerical curls of dark brown hair, had not one feature to excite admiration—he possessed notwithstanding such a gleam of sensibility diffused over each, that many people mistook his face for handsome, and all were more or less attracted by it—in a word, the charm that is here meant to be described is a countenance—on his countenance you beheld the feelings of his heart—

saw all its inmost workings—the quick pulses that beat with hope and fear, or the placid ones that were stationary with patient resignation. On this countenance his thoughts were pictured, and as his mind was enriched with every virtue that could make it valuable, so was his honest face adorned with every emblem of those virtues. (Inchbald 8-9).

According to Ward, this description of Dorriforth is longer than any physical description of the heroine, Miss Milner. Although it is meant to justify Miss Milner's attraction to Dorriforth, the details of Dorriforth's physical appearance and the emphasis on his virtue echo the cultural expectations of feminine virtue and sensibility and parallels the feminizing of Manfred in Otranto. The first part of the novel emphasizes a subversion of gender roles—Dorriforth is presented “like the domestic heroines . . . identified by inner virtue rather than outer strength,” and Miss Milner is “characterized by activity rather than passivity and acquiescence” through her flirtations and stubbornness (Ward, par. 5). As Ward explains:

In Inchbald's novel, male sensibility does not so much preclude sexual desire as change its agency, as demonstrated by Miss Milner's sexual response to her guardian. Miss Milner—rather than Dorriforth—assumes the active subject position, while Dorriforth becomes the object of her desire. Such a reversal of male and female roles dramatizes the late-century concern that sensibility undermined masculine authority. (par. 4)

Inchbald takes the Gothic element of sexual subversion to another extreme and attempts to show a more bizarre concept of sexuality through A Simple Story. Rather than feature the power of the patriarchal system, Inchbald uses Part One of the novel to show the possibilities of power within a matriarchal system. Towards the end of the second volume, after admitting to “counterfeiting indifference” to Dorriforth in an effort to make him desire her, Miss Milner says, “let my Elmwood act just as his love shall dictate; and

now I have no longer a doubt of its excess, instead of stooping to him, I wait in the certain expectation, of his submission to me” (Inchbald 173).

The danger is not in Miss Milner’s femininity but in her ability to use her female qualities to control the others in her life. Both Dorriforth and Sandford realize the threat of Miss Milner’s sexuality—Dorriforth is both attracted and repulsed by it—and they feel the only way to tame “the dangerous energy of Miss Milner’s nonconformity [would be] through marriage” (Ward). According to Patricia Meyer Spacks’s “Oscillation of Sensibility,”

To make Miss Milner good, in other words, is Dorriforth’s assigned function. The narrative founds itself on the situation of a flawed female cared for by a flawless male—a reversal of familiar fictional arrangements. . . . Once he realizes that Miss Milner loves, he falls from feminized priesthood into manhood. (517)

At the end of the second volume, Dorriforth and Miss Milner marry to become the new Lord and Lady Elmwood. The union symbolizes a return to the traditional Gothic atmosphere, where patriarchal order is restored—Lord Elmwood is now the husband and the possessor of Lady Elmwood. The final paragraph of the first half of the novel summarizes the ominous feel of the Gothic that threatens the marriage between Dorriforth/Lord Elmwood and Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood and illustrates Miss Milner’s fear when she realizes that she will lose power as the wife of Lord Elmwood:

Nevertheless, on that first wedding-day, that joyful day, which restored her lost lover to her hopes again; even on that very day, after the sacred ceremony was over, Miss Milner—(with all the fears, the tremors, the superstition of her sex)—felt an excruciating shock; when, looking on the ring Lord Elmwood had put upon her finger, in haste, when he married her, she perceived it was a—MOURNING RING. (Inchbald 193)

The marriage between Dorriforth and Miss Milner, formerly “father” (guardian and priest) and “daughter,” presents the element of incest which is central to the Gothic subversion of social order and sexuality. The second half of A Simple Story follows a more traditional Gothic style, starting *in medias res*—seventeen years into the incestuous marriage between Lord and Lady Elmwood and the birth of their daughter, Matilda. The moral consequences of incest have taken effect on the Elmwood household, and the readers are told that Lady Elmwood is “no longer beautiful—no longer beloved—no longer—tremble while you read it!—no longer—virtuous” (Inchbald 194). Lord Elmwood, “[t]he compassionate, the feeling, the just Lord Elmwood,” is now described as “an example of implacable rigour and injustice” (Inchbald 195).

Lady Elmwood seems to understand the command that Lord Elmwood has over her when she is trapped within his castle. Because Lady Elmwood knows that she has done wrong in flirting with Frederick Lawfully and in other misdeeds, following Lord Elmwood’s return from the West Indies she flees the castle with Matilda: “She fled the place at his approach; fled his house, never again to return to a habitation where he was the master” (Inchbald 97). Once she is out of Dorriforth’s control and in her own “lonely [house] on the borders of Scotland,” Miss Milner is able to live free—but at a price (Inchbald 198). The fantasy of fleeing a domestic prison is shaken by the realistic outcome of Miss Milner’s escape. In the second chapter of volume three, the Gothic terror of reality is with Miss Milner at her deathbed in her “solitary habitation” (Inchbald 198). George Haggerty argues in “Female Abjection in Inchbald’s A Simple Story” that Miss Milner’s “defiance only reinforces Dorriforth’s arbitrary power. Inchbald allows Miss Milner to exercise her female prerogative in order to demonstrate just how profound the limits to that power really are” (Haggerty, Female 658-59). Haggerty also states that “female fortune depends on paternal will in more ways than one in this novel” (Female 659). Matilda shows this dependency on her father when she returns to Lord Elmwood’s estate after Miss Milner’s death. His rejection of her forces Matilda to desire to be loved

by her father. Matilda follows her father throughout the castle like a shadow and faints when she encounters him.

The death of Lady Elmwood occurs after she leaves Elmwood Castle and, subsequently, the possession of Lord Elmwood. Escape from the patriarchal system (first by her infidelity, then by her fleeing to the country) disrupts the life of Lady Elmwood, and her separation from her husband has caused her to weaken and lose self-control. Before she dies, Lady Elmwood “was just understood to utter the word ‘Father’” (Inchbald 201). Her utterance is an indication of her acceptance of the patriarchal structure, and, ultimately, her death reunites Matilda with the Gothic patriarch, Lord Elmwood.

In Otranto, the Preface warns that “the sins of the fathers are visited upon their children,” but in A Simple Story, the sins of both the mother and the father are visited upon Matilda. According to Spacks, A Simple Story has a “two-generation plot, duplicating a mother’s dilemma in a daughter’s, [which] implies the necessary repetitions of female experience” (516). Following the death of her mother, Matilda becomes the new Gothic heroine, and like Matilda in The Castle of Otranto, Inchbald’s Matilda is shunned by her father. According to Ward, “the tyranny [Lord Elmwood] exercises over Matilda is based on complete denial of her physical presence.” Abandoning his daughter shows rejection of her sexuality as well as rejection of Lady Elmwood’s image.

Another similarity between this Matilda and the Matilda of Otranto is in their adoration of material representations of patriarchal figures. In Otranto, Matilda prays and adores the statue of Alfonso the good; in A Simple Story, Matilda admires a painting of Lord Elmwood:

There was one object, however, among all she saw, which attracted her attention above the rest, and she would stand for hours to look at it—This was a full length portrait of Lord Elmwood, esteemed a very capital picture, and a great likeness—to this picture she would sigh and weep;

though when it was first pointed out to her, she shrunk back with fear, and it was some time before she dared venture to cast her eyes completely upon it. In the features of her father she was proud to discern the exact moulds in which her own appeared to have been modeled; yet Matilda's person, shape, and complexion [sic] were so extremely like what her mother's once were, that at the first glance she appeared to have a still greater resemblance of her, than of her father—but her mind and manners were all Lord Elmwood's; softened by the delicacy of her sex, the extreme tenderness of her heart, and the melancholy of her situation. (Inchbald 220)

Matilda has an incestuous reaction to the painting, making the portrait of her father an object of desire. Because Matilda has returned to Elmwood Castle and is under the authority of her father, the threat of incest is acute. Adhering to traditional Gothic fiction, Inchbald resituates her characters to parallel the Gothic relationship of the tyrannical father-figure and the virtuous daughter. Several instances of incestuous desire are manifest throughout the second half of the novel. According to Parker, "The Elmwood household functions as a perverse version of the family unit, for it relies upon substitutes to maintain an intercourse among the various members" (263), and because Matilda is prohibited from seeing her father, she must rely on the substitutes to replace parts of him. After Miss Woodley tells Matilda about her meeting with Lord Elmwood, "Matilda laid hold of that hand she said Lord Elmwood had held, and pressed it to her lips with love and reverence" (Inchbald 228). Later in the third volume, after Lord Elmwood leaves the castle for a moment, Matilda wanders "into that part of the house from whence her father had just departed—and visited every spot where he had so long resided, with a pleasing curiosity that for a while diverted her grief" (Inchbald 245). The narrator describes Matilda's responses to Lord Elmwood's belongings in sensual and sexual terms:

In the breakfast and dining rooms she leaned over those seats with a kind of filial piety, on which she was told he had been accustomed to sit. And in the library she took up with filial delight, the pen with which he had been writing; and looked with the most curious attention into those books that were laid upon his reading desk.—But a hat, lying on one of the tables, gave her a sensation beyond any other she experienced on this occasion—in that trifling article of his dress, she thought she saw himself and held it in her hand with pious reverence. (Inchbald 245-46).

Parker refers to the “blatant Oedipal implications” of A Simple Story as a product of the “unhealthy obsession engendered precisely because of the barriers that Lord Elmwood has set up between himself and his daughter” (263). Also, according to Howells, “even Mrs Radcliffe, that most discreet of writers, once makes the suggestions in Udolpho that the heroine is secretly in love with the villain” (12). In the scenes portraying Matilda’s obsession with her father, the language and sensations described by Matilda mimic the feelings of a very passionate love. Despite Lord Elmwood’s menacing behavior towards Matilda, her fixation on his image represents a desire to have an intimate and strong relationship with her villainous father.

The problem of sexual perversion, particularly the threat of incest within the family, propels the plot of A Simple Story. In the first half of the novel, although Miss Milner prompts the marriage to her guardian and Dorriforth uses the marriage to secure Elmwood estates and create an heir, the relationship between the two is obviously incestuous. Throughout the novel, Dorriforth refers to himself as Miss Milner’s guardian, even when they are married, and acts like her guardian rather than her lover. Although they are not related by blood, the contract of marriage between Miss Milner and Dorriforth allows for the perversion of their father-daughter relationship. According to Howells:

The mainspring of her [the heroine's] adventures is persecution by the villain, whose sinful desires are underlined by the unnaturalness of the situation. He is often a father figure . . . either in a priestly role . . . or an elderly mentor . . . ; in order to satisfy ["impious passions"] he would have to transgress his religious vows or ties of blood (in some cases both).  
(11-12)

In Part Two of A Simple Story, the threat of incest resurfaces between Matilda and her father—and also with Rushbrook. The actions of the parental generation are continued through their children, illustrating the repetition of the Gothic tradition. Rushbrook, like Dorriforth, is presented as a “feminized hero” and, as explained by Spacks, “Rushbrook exhibits comparable repression, figuring his own developing erotic feeling for Matilda as sympathy. . . . Like Matilda, he weeps at moments of crisis” (518). The feminization of Rushbrook parallels that of Conrad in Otranto, who is portrayed as being weak and passive; and, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, Henry Tilney in Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey, who is also submissive to his father and fond of romantic novels.

In the second half of the novel, readers discover that Mr. Sandford also experiences a reversal of the patriarchal system. In the beginning of A Simple Story, Sandford has the influence of a father over Dorriforth and is continually advising him on how to act. As the novel passes through seventeen years, Sandford loses the authority he once held over Dorriforth. Sandford has grown old and Dorriforth's power has grown so corrupt by the end of the novel that Sandford cannot compete with him. Sandford also loses his ability to control Miss Milner's feelings and, instead, becomes sympathetic to her plight. The sympathy expressed by Sandford feminizes him and resembles the cultural concept of female sensibility.

Following in the Gothic tradition, the characters of Inchbald's novel bring about their own successes and failures through their actions. For example, Miss Milner's

manipulation of Dorriforth and her flirtations with rival lovers contribute to her decline. Similarly, Dorriforth's greed as the new owner of Elmwood Castle is a destructive characteristic. The Gothic confrontation between the "economic man" and the "domestic woman" is epitomized in the relationship between Dorriforth and Miss Milner.

In addition, Dorriforth is the prime example of the Gothic father. In one way he is "impotent" as a religious Father because he fails to be a spiritual guide to those who depend on him. Also, he is the absent father to his "children"—Miss Milner, Rushbrook, and Matilda. Although he is the designated "father" to Miss Milner, Dorriforth rarely acts like her guardian, primarily because they become lovers so quickly. In addition, Dorriforth simply chooses to ignore Rushbrook and Matilda. Because he has inherited the power of guardian to these three individuals, Dorriforth can easily misuse his authority. Particularly with Miss Milner and Matilda, Dorriforth must be in control of the women who surround him (Moglen 123) and feels compelled to exercise his patriarchal rule over his bloodline and Elmwood estates.

Like Manfred, Dorriforth also puts the "present, past, and future in himself" (Moglen 119) when he becomes the guardian to Miss Milner, marries her, and has a daughter with her. As evidence of Dorriforth's greediness, he makes decisions based solely on which results will prove to benefit him the most. For example, because Miss Milner has committed so many offenses, he banishes her and their daughter Matilda. Matilda, like Walpole's Matilda in *Otranto*, is worthless as an heir to Dorriforth because as a woman, she is unable to continue the Elmwood bloodline. Therefore, Dorriforth quickly abandons her because she is of no value. Instead, Dorriforth creates a relationship with Harry Rushbrook, treating Rushbrook like a son in order to replace the materially useless women in his life. At the end of the novel, even Rushbrook's passion for Matilda is portrayed as incestuous and based on greed. By marrying Matilda, who is almost a sister to him, Rushbrook can preserve Elmwood Castle within their genealogical line. The ending of *A Simple Story* parallels the warning given in the Preface to the

Second Edition of The Castle of Otranto: “the sins of the fathers are visited on their children.” The ending of Inchbald’s novel suggests doom through the repetition of the incestuous element in the Gothic tradition.

CHAPTER 4  
THE TOMBOY AND THE TYRANT: THE FEMINIZATION OF  
CATHERINE MORLAND IN NORTHANGER ABBEY

The significance of social and sexual order is found in Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey, which is her literary response to the Gothic novel. The premise of Northanger Abbey is to show the importance of imagination and the power of imagination in life through a subversive plot design. Austen's novel argues with Samuel Coleridge who warns that reading novels is "especially injurious to the growth of the imagination, the judgment, and the morals, especially to the latter, because it excites mere feelings without at the same time ministering to an impulse to action . . ." (qtd. in Kilgour 7). Catherine Morland, the heroine of Austen's story, proves Coleridge wrong in her amusing escapes from reality and her honest reactions to imagined situations. In Catherine's attempts to apply Gothic elements to real-life situations, Austen explores "the imaginative propensities of the ordinary human mind, showing the extent to which imagination colors daily experience and judgment" (Howells 115). Although critics argue that Northanger Abbey is strictly a parody of the Gothic tradition, the novel ridicules high-society's condemnation of the novel as poor literature while using the same "poor" elements of the Gothic novel to drive the story. Rather than placing her characters in an ancient setting, she uses modern scenery and plays on the relations and attitudes between economic classes to propel the narrative.

Before appearing on the literary scene, Northanger Abbey experienced an incubation period similar to Inchbald's A Simple Story. Originally titled Susan, the novel was written in 1798, but it was published in 1818, twenty years later and after Austen's death, fashioned with a new title and minor revisions. According to Scarborough, Northanger Abbey was written "to ridicule the Romanticists and the book in itself would justify the terroristic school, but she was ahead of her times, so the editor

feared to publish it” (47). In The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance, Edith Birkhead speculates that the success of such a “mock romance” would threaten and “endanger the popularity of the prevailing mode of fiction,” and “[hence] for many years it was concealed as effectively as if it had lain in the haunted apartment of one of Mrs. Radcliffe’s Gothic abbeys” (128).

Within the parody of the Gothic, Austen shows an odd reverence for the genre through her depiction of the power that fantastic fiction has over the imagination. George Levine discusses Austen’s authorial position in his essay “Translating the Monstrous: Northanger Abbey” and emphasizes that “Austen includes explicit and unequivocal praise of the very fiction she seems to be mocking. She does not pretend to be writing a true history, but to be a novelist writing a novel” (336). Northanger Abbey both mocks and respects simultaneously, presenting readers with comic adventures of the heroine who is carried away by Gothic literature and the overwhelming real world. According to John Lauber’s Jane Austen, “If there is to be a novel, Catherine must enter the world, and if she is to become truly adult, she must suffer” (17). The Gothicism of Northanger Abbey occurs in the suffering of Catherine Morland:

In the course of the novel, she will commit highly embarrassing (but not fatal) blunders, suffer painful embarrassment frequently, be courted by a suitor whom she comes to dislike intensely, learn to discriminate between book-inspired fantasies and reality, experience the difference between false and true friendship, meet and fall in love with a man who is older and more mature than herself, and eventually marry him in spite of the superior wealth and connections of his family and the opposition of his domineering father. (Lauber 17)

While the traditional Gothic elements are present in the novel through the descriptions of Catherine’s imagination, and the abbey serves as the device of the castle, Northanger Abbey employs the Gothic character types, themes of sexual and social hierarchy, and

creates feelings of danger and fear throughout the story. Following in the steps of Otranto and A Simple Story, Northanger Abbey removes the heroine to the unfamiliar setting of Bath, leading her to a series of Gothic experiences and relationships.

Catherine Morland's Gothic adventures begin upon her discovery of Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho and her voyage away from her home to vacation in Bath with family friends, Mr. and Mrs. Allen. At the start of the novel, Catherine is described as "in training for a heroine" (Austen 41), and in her early childhood Catherine is portrayed as a tomboy of sorts, playing rough with the boys. From the beginning, Austen takes the traditional gender roles of the eighteenth century and subverts sexuality by refusing to allow Catherine to possess an idealized femininity. The Gothic formula is manipulated in a similar fashion as Inchbald's A Simple Story: Catherine, like Miss Milner, is introduced as lacking in femininity. Whereas Miss Milner's unfeminine traits lie in her extremely coquettish and aggressive behavior, Catherine Morland is depicted as "fond of all boy's plays," disliking gardens ("and if she gathered flowers at all, it was chiefly for the pleasure of mischief"), "inattentive, and occasionally stupid" (Austen 39-40). Even Catherine's physical appearance is described as "a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour, dark lank hair, and strong features" (Austen 39). With such an unconventional beginning to the novel, in order for the Gothic adventures to begin, Catherine needs a more feminine presence—thus she is removed from the Morland house and placed with the strange Mr. and Mrs. Allen in a most unfamiliar setting.

Taking Catherine out of the comfortable scenery of her home and rural family life mimics the Gothic technique of displacement and isolation. In Northanger Abbey, the first equivalent to the remote and mysterious setting of the Gothic is the town of Bath, "the most popular and fashionable resort in England" but completely mysterious and unknown to Catherine (Lauber 18). Bath is overwhelming to the young heroine, and according to Lauber:

Bath is sophisticated; it offers a variety of human types (including of course young men) that a girl from a village rectory could never have encountered at home. In Bath, Catherine will learn to discriminate between true and false friendship and to trust her own responses. . . . Bath offers not only social variety but a freedom that Catherine has never experienced before. (18)

Without the protection of her family, Catherine finds herself lost in Bath and clinging to rather unreliable guardians, who seem only to occupy themselves with appearing in vogue with the other vacationers at Bath.

Like Hippolita in Otranto, Catherine's guardian Mrs. Allen is passive and foolish. The narrator describes Mrs. Allen as "one of that numerous class of females, whose society can raise no other emotion than surprise at there being any men in the world who could like them well enough to marry them. She had neither beauty, genius, accomplishment, nor manner" (Austen 45). Both Mrs. Allen and Hippolita are simple women; both are married to materialist husbands, and the two women show very little care towards their "daughters." Hippolita only interacts with Matilda when it is necessary or when Manfred needs her to; Mrs. Allen cares only to make Catherine fashionable and acceptable in high society. The materialism of Mrs. Allen in Northanger Abbey, and the manner in which she pushes Catherine to find a potential male partner in Bath, also likens her to Otranto's Manfred. Despite the presence of Mr. Allen, Catherine's "father-figure" in Bath, Austen uses Mrs. Allen's animated and egotistic personality to carry the role of the materialistic guardian. Like Manfred's fear of losing possession of Otranto and Dorriforth's obsession with the Elmwood estates, Mrs. Allen is extremely preoccupied with appearances and economics—the fabrics she purchases must be of high quality and the potential suitors for Catherine must also meet high social standards.

Among the men that Catherine meets while in Bath is John Thorpe, whose sister, Isabella, has become friends with Catherine through their love of novel-reading. In Lauber's discussion of the Thorpe children, John Thorpe is an "anti-hero," and like the males of the Gothic novels, John "is a fool, a bore, and a braggart, in short, a crude stereotype of masculinity" (19). He is assertive and uncompromising in his attempts to persuade Catherine to be with him. In Chapter Nine, John surprises Catherine and forces her take a carriage ride to Clifton with him, James, and Isabella. Although Catherine tries extremely hard to back out of the ride, and despite her mention of a previous engagement that has been made with Eleanor Tilney, John's behavior upsets Catherine. According to Shinobu Minma's "General Tilney and Tyranny: Northanger Abbey," John Thorpe, as well as Isabella and James, show that they are "capable of unwarrantable coercion" in the manner in which they push Catherine to join their carriage ride (516). Minma says their selfishness "[forces] Catherine to bend to their will in spite of her previous engagement" and they exhibit a tyranny that shadows the violence of General Tilney (516). In addition, there is a dangerous flame in John's aggressive behavior, which is presented after he realizes the mutual attraction between Catherine and Henry Tilney. As part of his Gothic masculinity, John Thorpe feels the need to sabotage any prospects of happiness for Catherine, and tells General Tilney that Catherine is not of a respectable social class and unworthy of Henry's time. John's actions and jealousy parallel the suspicious and resentful behavior of Manfred and Dorriforth.

In keeping with the controlling nature of her brother, Isabella flirts aggressively and manipulates those around her. Her coquettishness mirrors Miss Milner's in A Simple Story, and her exaggerated beauty and faux innocence makes her a crude stereotype of femininity. As Lauber states:

To the naïve Catherine, her new friend is glamorous and sophisticated, while her friendship, of course, seems genuine. With Isabella's desertion of James Morland, Catherine is forced to admit that her friend has been

false. It's more difficult for her to recognize that for all of Isabella's lavish professions, her "friendship" was as empty as her "love." (20)

Realizing that Isabella is a fake, Catherine experiences one of the horrors of reality that proves to be more devastating than the Gothic. Yet what makes this reality painful to Catherine is, aside from Isabella's separation from James, that it was Isabella who introduced Catherine to the Gothic novels (even providing a reading list), stirring her imagination.

When Catherine arrives at Northanger Abbey following her escapades in Bath, there is a distinct change in her demeanor, which follows in the Gothic formula of subordinating person to place. In the move from her home village to Bath, Catherine learns about "polite society" and remains apprehensive of fashion and flirtation; then with her arrival at the abbey from Bath, the structure and location heighten Catherine's femininity, and she grows more sensitive in her emotions. According to Mark Loveridge's "Northanger Abbey; or Nature and Probability," there is an "implausible change between Catherine at Bath—matter-of-fact, docile, appealing, and relatively unimaginative—and at Northanger, where she is suddenly overimaginative and absurd" (1).

At Northanger Abbey, Catherine is able to spend time with Henry and Eleanor Tilney. According to Lauber, "the influence of Henry and his sister, Eleanor, on Catherine is beneficial. She finds not only a lover and eventually a husband in him, but a true friend in his sister—in sharp contrast to the pretended friendship of Isabella" (21). Her first meeting with Henry Tilney in Bath, Henry presents himself as a sensitive gentleman, whose kindness toward Catherine almost feminized him. The sex-gender relationship is evenly balanced in the relationship between Catherine and Henry Tilney. The feminine qualities in Henry match the more masculine aspects of Catherine's personality. According to Jaqueline Pearson's Women's Reading in Britain, their "relationship grows through discussions of gender, language and textuality: even their

first encounter in the Assembly Rooms centres round a discussion of the gendering of private textual modes like letters and journals” (Pearson 210). The couple learns from each other as the novel progresses, and through Henry, Catherine is able to understand the differences between fictional and realistic terrors.

The end of the first part of the novel defines the relationship between Henry and Catherine as one of love and mutual respect; by Chapter Twenty, the novel turns more toward the Gothic when Catherine arrives at Northanger Abbey. Although it is not the exact image of the Gothic castle, the abbey is still inhabited by a tyrannical male—General Tilney. Catherine notices General Tilney’s abrasiveness towards his children, particularly Eleanor, and from these observations of the General, Catherine determines to address the mystery surrounding him and the untimely death of his wife.

Austen’s General Tilney is analogous to Walpole’s Manfred and Inchbald’s Dorriforth. Like Manfred and Dorriforth, the General’s villainous traits are evident in his extreme materialism, greediness, and control over his virtuous daughter, Eleanor, who is similar to the Matildas in Otranto and in A Simple Story. General Tilney’s materialism is responsible for turning Catherine away from the abbey when he believes that she is a lower-class individual and comes from a poor family. Because of his resentment of Catherine towards the end of the novel, General Tilney, like Manfred, also becomes alienated from his son. Henry is ashamed of his father and separates himself from the General because of the way he treats Catherine. Yet Henry also exhibits “villainous” traits (similar to his father’s) when he “condemns Catherine, wrongly, for condemning Frederick, and condemns Catherine for condemning the General, whom she (wrongly) suspects of having murdered his spouse” (Neill 4-5). Henry’s words towards Catherine displays his masculinity to show authority over her, but his exploitation of his own sexuality functions to stabilize social order momentarily.

Catherine feels threatened by General Tilney, and her fear of him is heightened when she imagines that he has murdered his wife or has her locked up in a secret room.

Catherine's search to find out the mystery of the missing Mrs. Tilney is described in a very Gothic terms, using exaggerated movements and descriptions when setting the scene. In Chapter Twenty-One, Catherine is flipping through the mysterious manuscripts (that turn out to be laundry lists) and her lamplight is strangely extinguished. Austen writes:

Darkness impenetrable and immovable filled the room. A violent gust of wind, rising with sudden fury, added fresh horror to the moment.

Catherine trembled from head to foot. In the pause which succeeded, a sound like receding footsteps and the closing of a distant door struck on her affrighted ear. Human nature could support no more. (172)

Through the language of the Gothic—"violent gust" and "fresh horror"—Austen saturates her text with powerful Gothic imagery.

Although the tone of Austen's novel is more humorous than that of Walpole's Otranto and Inchbald's A Simple Story, Northanger Abbey maintains the same elements of the Gothic in its story. The Tilneys represent the Gothic household, and Catherine's stay at the abbey disrupts the order that General Tilney seems to have established within his family. Because Catherine is responsible for the disturbance in the patriarchal system headed by the General, the solution to stabilizing the household is to allow Henry to marry Catherine. According to Levine, "General Tilney is morally obliged to accept her as his daughter-in-law, even if he has been wrong in thinking her a social equal" (340). Although the marriage is based on love, as Henry's wife, Catherine will be under the control of General Tilney's patriarchy.

Throughout Northanger Abbey, Austen "violates gendered behaviour codes" by purposely exploiting "the chasm between proper female behaviour and that endorsed in the novels" (Pearson 207). Even at the beginning of the novel, Austen deliberately says that "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine" (39), and she continues to describe Catherine as a tomboy

lacking in several feminine qualities. Austen makes her heroine more masculine at the beginning of the novel, but as Catherine experiences life through novels and learns the difference between fiction and reality, she is feminized and more powerful at the end. Catherine's vulnerability to Gothic novels and to her imagination fosters her femininity, and through her subsequent interaction with Eleanor and Henry, she adopts tender female qualities.

Austen challenges the notion of the novel as a "dumbing" text and lacking in intellectual reaction by the reader through Catherine's fanciful application of Gothic traditions to her experiences. John Mathison examines Catherine's "addiction to Gothic horror" in his essay "Northanger Abbey and Jane Austen's Conception of the Value of Fiction" and discusses how her Gothic cravings aid in awareness of reality and prompt her maturity. Because of her naïveté and lack of experience in handling fiction, Catherine is easily taken in by the fantasy worlds offered by the Gothic. Although her imagination runs out of control, the Gothic novels awaken Catherine and add excitement to her days at Bath and Northanger. In addition, the Gothic novels force Catherine to examine and question her surroundings and relationships. Catherine discovers the existence of illusions in relationships, as well as in fiction, and "most important, the Gothic novels make Catherine aware of her own ignorance and follies" (Mathison 147).

At the end of Northanger Abbey, Catherine discovers her sexuality through the development of her imagination. The Gothic novels enrich her life and allow her to "[arrive] at a peak of cultural self-consciousness" (Fleishman 667). Despite Catherine's mistaken assumptions about Isabella, General Tilney, and others, Austen uses these errors to show a "female much in need of male correction" (Neill 9). Catherine is "deluded by too much novel reading and not enough experience" (Levine 335), and when she first arrives at Northanger, her disappointed reaction to the modernity of the abbey "expose[s] the naivety of a girl addicted to novels" (Minma 503). Despite the fact that Catherine's imagined the guilt of General Tilney, he represents "the essential characteristics of

tyranny” that frightens Catherine. General Tilney’s cruelty, seen through his demands on his children, is most strongly expressed in his removal of Catherine from Northanger. According to Minna, “The General is not a murderer, nor does he confine his wife, as Catherine imagines; but her comparison [to a Gothic villain] is amply justified by his final ‘violence’—her abrupt dismissal from Northanger” (507).

Scarborough claims that “Perhaps the most valuable contribution that the Gothic school made to English literature is Jane Austen’s inimitable satire of it, Northanger Abbey” (47). The novel goes beyond the definition of a mock-romance in that it “respond[s] to modernism” by using more “formulaic and gothic modes” (Mussell 51). Austen’s heroine demonstrates the strength of imagination and the influences of reading fiction, and contrary to the late eighteenth-century conception of novel-reading as disruptive to the rational mind, Catherine shows how the Gothic novel actually emphasizes reality. In addition, Austen does not introduce Catherine as possessing such an idealized femininity but rather uses the novel to show how Catherine learns and grows confident in her sexuality. The creation of a less masculine hero, Henry Tilney, and the added quality of his novel-reading, provides an excellent balance to Catherine. In creating Northanger Abbey, Austen is “a novelist writing a novel” (Levine 336). Her character General Tilney, who possesses the “vanity of a wealthy, worldly-minded landowner,” echoes the materialism of both Manfred and Dorriforth in his greedy actions that emphasize his Gothic villainy.

Though A Simple Story shares more similarities with The Castle of Otranto, Northanger Abbey shows that “Gothicism itself is not restricted to a single time and culture or even to a single style of writing” (Bayer-Berenbaum 20). The responsiveness of the Gothic is apparent in Austen’s more modern work; and in the employment of the Gothic tradition, Austen is able to transform specific aspects of cultural anxiety, such as questions of marriage and economics, and reduce them to a household. Within the family unit established by Austen, and in her manipulation of the Tilney family, Northanger

Abbey attempts to answer questions posed by society regarding the changes occurring within their culture and the revolution of sexuality during this time.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE GOTHIC: A FATAL ATTRACTION

In the fiction of Walpole, Inchbald, and Austen, the obsession of the virtuous and victimized female and her wicked male oppressor parallels the literary audience's fascination with the Gothic novel. Like the distressed damsels of the Gothic, the readers are tightly engaged in the swooping motions of the plot—anxiously following the demise of the tyrant and the success of the heroine and finding themselves strangely interested in the dangers befalling the Gothic family. According to Birkhead, “human nature often looks to fiction for a refuge from the world[;] there is always room for the illusion of romance side by side with the picture of actual life” (223). The characters and sexual tensions in relationships are treated similarly in all Gothic stories, as well as the manipulation of physical scenery and the emphasis on highly emotional narratives. As proven in Austen's parody, the Gothic tradition is not restricted to a specific time or style, in fact, the “origins of the Gothic sensibility predate the eighteenth century, and works that are essentially Gothic are being produced today” (Bayer-Berenbaum 20).

There is a hint of Catherine Morland in all of us, and as Stephen King discusses in his essay “Why We Crave Horror Movies,” the acceptance of horror into our lives is welcomed and enjoyed—as long as it is fictional. When Isabella Thorpe provides Catherine with a list of “horrid novels” that should absolutely be read, Catherine responds with excitement because she is eager to fill her imagination with bizarre terrors. In opposition to the unacceptable nature of the eighteenth-century novel (let alone the Gothic novel) because of its “corruptive” features, King claims that experiencing terror is necessary in maintaining emotional and mental balance. Reading Gothic fiction helps readers “re-establish [our] feelings of normality” and satisfies the need to “let loose and scream” (King 340).

The Castle of Otranto, A Simple Story, and Northanger Abbey play on the “anticivilized emotions” of the characters and use perverse sexual themes to draw reactions from the readers. Gothic literature may be viewed as a social service because it allows readers to act on their primitive emotion of fear. King’s assessment of horror movies applies equally to the Gothic novel: “It deliberately appeals to all that is worst in us. It is morbidity unchained, our most base instincts let free, our nastiest fantasies realized...” (341). Because the Gothic is a combination of fantasy and realism, readers are readily aware of the Gothic dangers presented in these works. When the tyrannical father-figures threaten the virtue of their daughters, the literary audience understands that the author’s exploitation of the father as a sexual menace represents society’s conflict with patriarchal power.

The use of Gothic elements in the literary exploration of society and sexuality is the most creative method of involving readers in social commentary. Individuals are undeniably attracted to these “horrid” novels, and the authors demonstrate a command and understanding of the psychology of terror in their works. Taking advantage of the conventions established by Walpole, Inchbald, Austen, and other authors illustrate how such a reactionary literary genre best emphasizes and responds to questions of cultural change and transforming sexual politics of the time through the clever construction of exaggerated character types and bizarre plot designs.

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