‘Unimaginable sensations’: father–daughter incest and the economics of exchange

Let a veil be drawn over the unimaginable sensations of a guilty father.
Mary Shelley, *Matilda* (1959)

There are several problems that usually emerge in scholarship examining representations of father–daughter incest in the Gothic, even in works by scholars whose goal is to lay bare the feminist themes that are central to the genre. Principal among these is that representations of father–daughter incest often cause works to be placed in the gendered subgenre of Female Gothic and to be viewed through a lens predicated on this generic division. What frequently stems from this homogenising gesture is a misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the ambition of the Gothic as displaying what E. J. Clery refers to as an ‘intrinsic “femaleness”’. This leads to texts being viewed as part of a Male or Female Gothic form and their representations of father–daughter incest to be understood through these gendered divisions. As I suggested in the *Introduction*, the application of Freudian theory, sociological approaches to incest and structural anthropological discussions of the incest taboo contribute to reading father–daughter incest within a gendered framework that tends to view this incestuous relationship as alternately imagined or abusive. Freudian approaches are often applied in conjunction with anthropological understandings of incest such as those advanced by Claude Lévi-Strauss, who theorised that: ‘the prohibition of incest is … the fundamental step … in which the transition from nature to culture is
accomplished.' The Freudian psychoanalytic preoccupations that underpin much scholarship on the Gothic similarly identify the prohibition of incest as fundamental to the formation of culture, as incest allows adolescents to move from the family into exogamic relationships that complete the transition into culture. Sociological approaches that are informed by the equation of father–daughter incest with abuses of power contribute to readings of these relationships as reflective of the abuses inherent in the emerging nuclear family and domestic spaces. These understandings have focused scholarly readings of father–daughter incest in the Gothic on locating the perceived or real threats against the heroine within the home or castle. I argue that in moving away from these approaches to rely instead upon feminist theories on the traffic in women, representations of father–daughter incest can be understood as engaging with and troubling notions of the exchange of women deemed necessary to culture.

The Freudian mode of viewing incest is, inconveniently for those who use it to lend credence to their arguments regarding incest in the Female Gothic, predicated on the notion of children desiring the opposite-sex parent who raises them and seeing the same-sex parent as a rival. Sigmund Freud argued that ‘the simplest course for the child would be to choose as his sexual objects the same person whom, since his childhood, he has loved with what may be described as a damped-down libido’. Freud believed that incestuous desires rearoused at puberty must be fought against in order for adolescents to distance themselves from their parents and therefore the incest barrier is ‘a cultural demand made by society’. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) Freud’s statement that ‘boys regarded their fathers and girls their mothers as rivals in love, whose elimination could not fail but to be to their advantage’, was founded on his belief that the first sexual desire of children is towards their mothers, an argument explored further in *Totem and Taboo* (1912). This theory, which stipulates that female desire and sexuality are developed in response to the father figure, allows first for a pre-Oedipal stage in which the daughter loves and bonds with the mother before turning to her desire and love for the father, a stage that engenders rivalry with the mother. The incestuous desire is resolved later when the daughter is able to transfer her incestuous desires to another male. The Oedipal phase has two periods, between ages three to five, after which there is a waning consequent upon repression, and then it is reactivated in puberty, when puberty makes possible the transference of incestuous desires.
Freudian theories of incest have become increasingly discredited in the psychological community, in part due to the work of modern psychologists who argue that Freud discounted the actual experiences of his female patients’ sexual abuse and that his theories have limited applicability to female sexuality and desire.\(^9\) Psychologist Anne Cossins describes Freud’s work on incest as ‘discredited due to the circumstances surrounding his initial revelations of incest in patients he was treating and his subsequent repudiations of those claims [as fantasies]’\(^10\). Similarly, psychiatrist Peter D. Kramer calls Freud modern history’s ‘most debunked doctor’, whose work ‘doesn't hold up very well at all … every particular is wrong: the universality of the Oedipus complex, penis envy, infantile sexuality’\(^11\). In an article that describes the displacement of Freud’s incest theories, Bruce Bower states: ‘one current school of psychoanalytic thought rejects Freud’s assertion that the Oedipus complex occurs universally, arguing instead that psychologically disturbed parents sometimes stir up incestuous and intensely competitive feelings in their children’\(^12\). Though this theory fails to account for incestuous feelings and desires exhibited by parents or children not raised by the relations they desire, it is more closely linked to the types of incest uncovered in the Gothic than a purely Freudian interpretation. The sexism underlying Freudian theory is pointed out by feminist scholar Gayle Rubin, who finds it challenging to use Freud and Lévi-Strauss to account for the incest taboo as ‘[they] write within an intellectual tradition produced by a culture in which women are oppressed … the sexism in the tradition of which they are a part tends to be dragged in with each borrowing’\(^13\). In spite of what Rubin describes as the misogynistic tradition underlying these modes of analysis that has led to a feminist re-evaluation of Freudian psychoanalysis and Lévi-Strauss’s structural anthropology, these are still privileged approaches in analyses of female sexuality and incest that find their way into literary scholarship on the Gothic\(^14\).

Even scholars who seek to displace Freudian models of sexual desire sometimes return to the Freudian paradigms that are so entrenched in literary analyses of incest and sexuality more generally\(^15\). Julie Shaffer, for example, argues first that ‘by situating explicit incestuous lust in the father’s desire, such desire need not be projected onto the daughter in the way Freud does’\(^16\). However, Shaffer subsequently gives credence to Freudian theory when she argues: ‘Arraigning patriarchal power in the form of the father figure … situates that power in the home, site of the construction of the female character’s sexuality where it develops'.
ostensibly in response to the father.” In a similar way, Tania Modleski argues that Ann Radcliffe’s plot ‘became popular at a time when the nuclear family was being consolidated. … It spoke powerfully to the young girl struggling to achieve psychological autonomy in a home where the remote, but all-powerful, father ruled over an utterly dependent wife’.

These readings rely on both the psychological and sociological models of incest and although they provide important insights into viewing incestuous threats as linked to the domestic structure they focus exclusively on the father as a threat within the nuclear family. Part of the problem in deploying this Freudian model to explain incest and female sexuality in the Gothic is that it requires father–daughter incest to be read as a product of a familial dynamic seldom present within the texts. Freudian theory that claims girls develop incestuous desires for the fathers who raise them is not applicable to the many Gothic novels in which girls are not raised by their fathers. Its application can thus lead to misreadings that diminish the importance of incest to the narrative and position heroines as victims of fantasies rather than threats. For incest to be a result of children desiring the opposite-sex parent who raises them in infancy and toddler-hood, there clearly needs to be an opposite-sex parent present during these developmental periods, which is not the case in many Gothic works. In addition to the lack of the appropriate family structure, authors did not often depict daughters who desire their fathers, but when/ if they do, it rarely correlates to a synonymous hatred of the mother figure, who in these instances is most often absent. The Freudian paradigm is therefore irrelevant to analyses of novels where the narrative and/or familial structure prohibit conformity to it.

Applying Freudian theory to analyses of heroines can trivialise incestuous threats by framing them as fantasies. Hoeveler, for example, asserts that Gothic heroines seek or fear incest because they have ‘an infantile desire to remain in the paternal and protective domicile of childhood’. Recognising that she must leave home to marry, the heroine attempts to make her father appear evil as she does not want to leave her father and marry another … Therefore, she fancies that her father has attempted to rape her (The Romance of the Forest) or her father is an adulterer (Mysteries of Udolpho) or her father has tried to kill her (The Italian). Only if she can convince herself that she exists in such a super-charged moral universe … can she agree to separate from the paternal abode.
Uniting incest with the Gothic tropes of murder, adultery and hidden secrets seems to corroborate Freudian theory on incest as fantasy or seduction, but when the novels used to support this point are closely examined some disturbing discrepancies emerge. If the heroine of Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797), Ellena di Rosalba, encounters an internal struggle between remaining within the protective paternal home or marrying an interloper, she would necessarily have experienced such a patriarchal home. However, Ellena, raised by her aunt since the age of two in an exclusively female society, has no memory of a patriarchal house. As such, a Freudian analysis of Ellena’s desires and motivations becomes impossible to reconcile with her upbringing. The second point, that because of Ellena’s desire to remain in the paternal abode she imagines an attempted murder by her father, misidentifies both the violent encounter and the familial relationship between Schedoni and his brother’s daughter, Ellena. Schedoni enters his niece’s room, intent on killing her as she sleeps, but is stopped by the sight of a miniature she wears that he believes is his likeness. The attempted murder is real and, therefore, the use of the term ‘fancies’ with its implicit denotation of belief without fact or foundation is inaccurate. Aligning Ellena’s murder fantasy with other Radcliffean heroines’ imagined fears seeks to legitimise the use of Freudian theories yet also conflates the Gothic tropes of terror, incest and hidden secrets. This diminishes the relevance of individual conventions – particularly incest and its various configurations – to the subversive agenda of the Gothic.

Rather than apply a Freudian methodology that is often combined with structural anthropological and feminist sociological approaches, I argue that feminist theory on the exchange of women and recent advances in scientific and anthropological theory better serve analyses of representations of incest in the Gothic. Opponents of Freud’s incest ideas include psychiatrist Mark T. Erickson, anthropologists Arthur P. Wolf and William Durham and feminist theorist Florence Rush, all of whom argue that rather than desiring those by whom one is surrounded in infancy and adolescence, humans tend sexually to reject those by and with whom they are raised. This theory, put forth by sociologist Edward Westermarck and known as the Westermarck effect, can be summarised as ‘an innate aversion to sexual intercourse between persons living very closely together from early youth’. An intriguing aspect of the Westermarck effect is the notion that although brothers and sisters (and indeed, any non-related children) who are raised together will tend to be
sexually averse to one another, if there is a separation at birth and siblings are not raised together they are likely to be highly sexually attracted to one another in adulthood. Foreshadowing recent anthropological and scientific research, there are many instances in Gothic texts of fathers and daughters and other blood relations who sexually desire or who are highly attracted to one another after a period of separation. Such texts deploy contemporary understandings of the pull of blood to trouble available models of female desire and the paternal exchanges of daughters.

In analysing representations of father–daughter incest in the Gothic it is necessary to move away from Freudian approaches and examine more closely the attention paid in these depictions to issues of marriage, the exchange of women and female agency. The legal reality of women’s experience of marriage was famously described by eighteenth-century legal scholar William Blackstone as a civil death. Gothic scholars such as Ruth Bienstock Anolik and Diana Wallace have taken up Blackstone’s description of women after marriage to argue that conventions such as the imprisonment, starvation, haunting and disappearance of wives at the hands of violent husbands or brothers-in-law reflect this legal non-existence. The twin threats of patriarchy and domesticity to women are also manifest, as Ruth Perry and Kate Ferguson Ellis have argued, in the oft-employed Gothic trope of incestuous desires and relationships.

Gothic representations of the constraints and dangers experienced by women after marriage are, I argue, not only literalisations of their legal status and entrapment in domesticity, but are also the consequence of the economics of exchange that positions women as objects transferred and – as Anolik points out – ‘possessed’ by the husband in marriage. In order more fully to explore the implications of these repeated concerns alongside father–daughter incest I look to the works of Luce Irigaray and Gayle Rubin, who question Lévi-Strauss’s widely accepted assumptions about the exchange of women as fundamental to society.

Irigaray and Rubin articulate different understandings of the development of a (patriarchal) culture that demands the incest prohibition in order to facilitate the building of alliances through the exchange of women. Irigaray disrupts traditional thinking that the exchange of women as commodities is necessary to patriarchal society in This Sex Which is Not One (1977), in which she examines Lévi-Strauss’s premise regarding the incest taboo and the construction of culture through such exchanges. Irigaray argues that ‘women are “products” used and exchanged by men. Their status is that of merchandise, “commodities” …
The use, consumption, and circulation of their sexualised bodies underwrite the organisation and the reproductions of the social order, in which they have never taken part as “subjects”.

Gayle Rubin similarly questions Lévi-Strauss’s assertion that culture would not exist without the incest taboo and exchange of women, elaborating that culture is inventive and ‘kinship systems do not merely exchange women. They exchange sexual access, genealogical statuses, lineage, names and ancestors, rights and people – men, women, and children – in concrete systems of social relationships.’ Rubin resists Lévi-Strauss’s structural anthropological understanding of the incest taboo as the basis of culture because ‘there is an economics and a politics to sex/gender systems which is obscured by the concept of “exchange of women”’. I use these approaches to position the exchange of women as a necessary though not natural demand of patriarchy, arguing that in specific incestuous configurations women are removed from their position in the market economy as a method of exchange and wealth accumulation, causing a fracture in society that allows for the development of alternative models of female agency and desire.

In light of these insights, this chapter will set out to examine the incestuous relationships between fathers and daughters in Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and Mary Shelley’s *Matilda* (1959) and the texts’ attendant scholarship. These three works have been selected in order to compare the way that incest is rendered in a representative chronology of Gothic texts beginning with what has been traditionally defined as the original Gothic novel. Incestuous desire is characterised in Walpole’s work as a threatening, male-situated passion; it is also one of the novel’s means of political parody. This contrasts with representations of father–daughter incest in Radcliffe’s novel, in which such relationships are the underlying narrative force spurred by an at times reciprocal, though unrealised, desire. This incestuous relationship is reworked into a mutual desire that is presented as capable of being actualised in Shelley’s text, which, like Radcliffe’s, uses father–daughter desires to structure the novel. These three novels offer fertile ground on which to examine the effect of the depictions of incest in both male- and female-authored novels and over a half-century of changing social values, laws and traditions. The representations of father–daughter incest and female exchange are essential to the social structure in Walpole’s political/Gothic text, while in the Gothic novels of Radcliffe and Shelley these representations allow escapes from and destructions
of culture. Irigaray’s point that ‘the economy of desire – of exchange – is man’s business’ is prefigured by Gothic writers and, through the configuration of father–daughter incest sought by the daughter, Shelley offers a model of female desire that moves beyond the exchange of female bodies.\[^{33}\] By positioning these works in terms of anthropological and feminist insights into sexuality I argue that father–daughter incest in the Gothic reveals the status of women as commodities and through incestuous sexual agency affords women a means to remove themselves from the marriage market. The result of father–daughter incest is often the destruction of the patriarchal family followed by the formation of alternative structures of family, female agency and desire.

**RETURNING TO THE CASTLE: INCEST RESTORES THE RIGHTFUL HEIR IN *THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO***

Literary scholars have long positioned *The Castle of Otranto* as the first Gothic novel and credited Horace Walpole as the genre’s originator. Even feminist scholars who are invested in divulging the female roots of the genre silently assent to the critical myth of Walpole as ‘the father of the Gothic’. Subsequent attempts to re-evaluate Walpole’s role as Gothic progenitor have struggled to work against this long-standing tradition. Ellis, for example, argues that ‘it was women writers in the late eighteenth century who took up [Walpole’s] literary curiosity and transformed it into a vehicle capable of didacticism as well as entertainment.’\[^{34}\] That re-evaluations of the genre’s origins are beginning to take hold is evidenced by Michael Gamer’s criticism that Rictor Norton’s *Gothic Readings: The First Wave, 1764–1840* (2000) is not disruptive enough to the status quo of Gothic paternity and chronology, stating that ‘here, Walpole is still the first Gothicist, and the proliferating categories … are left intact and unquestioned’ and that Norton’s account of the Gothic is ‘old-fashioned in its treatment of genre and literary periods.’\[^{35}\]

The language that informs the scholarly placement of Walpole as the ‘father of the Gothic’ is haunted by the preoccupation with establishing paternity and genealogies that is present in Walpole’s first introduction to *Otranto*. Walpole’s assertion that he is the progenitor of the Gothic is compromised by the location of this self-conscious declaration within the framework of a text comprising true and false fathers. By describing himself as the discoverer of the manuscript and then revising this statement within subsequent introductions, Walpole establishes himself as a
claimant to a title who, much like Manfred himself, is relying on a false – or self-asserted – basis for his declaration. Walpole’s position as a pretender to the throne of the Gothic thus parodies the claims of Manfred and the old and young pretenders to the English throne, James Francis Edward Stuart and his son and Charles Edward Stuart, and potentially also George III, given that Walpole ‘composed the novella during a fit of intense disillusionment with what he perceived to be George III’s excessive use of the royal prerogative’.

His declared role as the originator of the Gothic draws attention to the falsity of such claims and ridicules pretend progenitors rather than being a serious statement of paternity. Benjamin Bird argues that Walpole’s fiction was ‘a safe outlet for … his frustration with the monarchial system of government’ and notes that Walpole used the Gothic to ‘parody the very notion of hereditary succession’ in his later *Hieroglyphic Tales* (1785). Along these lines, James Watt argues that ‘*Otranto*’s position within any larger cultural movement needs to be qualified, since it seems to construct the Gothic as a source of the ridiculous as much as the sublime.” Walpole’s use of parody criticises notions of kingship, inheritance and paternity, deliberately troubling his claim to be the father of the Gothic.

Under the fiction that he translated the text from an ancient manuscript, Walpole wrote about the imagined author: ‘I could wish he had grounded his plan on a more useful moral than this; that the sins of fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation.” That Walpole singled this out as the overriding moral of the piece locates the text’s meaning in the language of paternity, a move that is underscored by the weight scholarship attributes to *Otranto*’s influence on subsequent Gothic generations. In the second introduction, though abandoning the fiction regarding the text’s origins, Walpole lays further claim to his literary fatherhood as the genre’s originator, stating that the novel was ‘an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern’ (p. 9), concluding: ‘I might have pleaded that having created a new species of romance, I was at liberty to lay down what rules I thought fit for the conduct of it’ (p. 14). However, rather than being a wholly new creation, Walpole’s work was shaped by contemporary novels and political allegories of which he would certainly have been aware. Walpole described his writing of *Otranto* as a type of therapy ‘during a particularly bad year in parliament’, which evidences his recognition of the tale’s function as a political parody. Sue Chaplin examines ‘the fictions of origin Walpole himself generated in respect of this aberrant text’, pointing towards it as
‘Unimaginable sensations’

‘a manifestation of … political anxieties’. She argues that ‘the giant hand of Walpole’s dream-text represents the remnants of an aristocratic power that still had sufficient presence in the mid-eighteenth century to challenge the Whig conceptualisation of liberty purportedly embodied in the 1688 settlement’. Accordingly, to read Otranto only as a precursor of later Gothic works can lead to a misunderstanding of Walpole’s text and the literary tradition of the Gothic. Chaplin’s argument that Manfred is an imposter who ‘seeks to establish himself as the founding father of a new order of lineage’, particularly her point that Manfred ‘posits himself as the originating “name of the father” in respect of a political order that has not yet been properly legitimated’, applies readily to Walpole and the Gothic genre. Examining the novella’s heir who ascends a throne ‘only his by virtue of a convoluted, matrilineal genealogy’, Chaplin asserts that ‘the power of the maternal as an originating principle in Otranto is denied within an economy that posits paternal lineage as the only source of legitimate authority’. Such points evoke comparisons to Walpole’s reign as the father of the genre supported by a tradition in viewing him as such that is centuries old. Walpole’s forged and fake paternity is sanctioned as legitimate, while the maternal contribution to the Gothic has been long denied its status as real progenitor. Genres, like people, must have fathers, regardless of women’s formative role in their creation. Thus, Walpole, by way of his parodic self-assertion in Otranto, is perceived as the paterfamilias of the Gothic, a genre in actuality born of many mothers.

Displacing Otranto is a necessary disruption of the traditional genealogy which maintains that Walpole’s work established Gothic tropes – such as incest – and their meanings to be taken up by subsequent writers. In relocating Otranto as a hybrid of political parody and Gothic romance by a creator self-consciously playing with the notion of real progenitors, I argue that later works by Radcliffe can be understood as creating, rather than reacting to, configurations of father–daughter incest that function very differently from Walpole’s representation of violent incest. While Walpole’s novel influenced the works of authors such as Clara Reeve, Radcliffe, Charlotte Smith and the Brontës, so too did the emerging sentimental novel, from which Walpole and the later Gothic writers borrowed images and conventions such as those of the imperilled heroine and threats of incest. In Walpole’s deployment of incest, father–daughter desires are depicted as a consequence of patriarchy – in many ways, similar to the feminist sociological understandings of incest as an abuse of male power – and as a threat to women and the stability
of society, as in Lévi-Strauss’s understanding. Incest functions as one convention of many with which Walpole criticises the political structure in general and the aristocracy in particular as invested in controlling the younger generations. Later Gothic novels use representations of father–daughter incest – which Walpole endowed with political significance to expose Parliamentary and governmental flaws – quite differently: in order to offer alternative social models to a society structured around the exchange of women.

Walpole’s novel is unique in its sheer silliness. The humour of the servants and the confusion over birth, inheritance and identity are taken to extremes, as is the utter implausibility of the circumstances that bring the characters together at the castle. The manner in which the loose ends are tied together by disclosures from the key characters is comedic in its improbability. Furthermore, the initial murder/destruction of Conrad, the son of the household, is never explained, by means wholly supernatural or other. Walpole describes Manfred, Conrad’s father and the head of the castle and family, as: ‘not one of those savage tyrants who wanton in cruelty unprovoked … his virtues were always ready to operate, when his passion did not obscure his reason’ (p. 33). As passion always obscures Manfred’s reason, the ironic description is one of many humorous instances in the text. Although Walpole’s iconic scenes of ghosts and subterranean flights are reproduced in countless Gothic novels that followed, that few of them maintain the parodic humour of his tale supports a repositioning of Walpole’s novel as a political parody veiled within a Gothic framework. In this respect Otranto is more a precursor to George Orwell’s Animal Farm (1945) than the first example of the Gothic genre. While sentimental, Romantic and other Gothic novels use the convention of coincidence that stretches believability to breaking point, Walpole’s integration of humour alongside this convention reveals his text as a work of parody rather than horror. Along these lines, Clery states: ‘[Otranto] seems at first glance to offer the basic stock of Gothic character-types, but closer attention suggests an ambivalence in each of them that verges on irony’; the novel’s imagery, including the giant armoured hand, ‘provides the opportunity for a humorous subversion of authority’. The size of the hand to which Clery refers links the enormity of the title, land and obligations of men to estate and nobility, subverting authority through the use of ironic and parodic hyperbolic metaphor that is not often encountered in Gothic novels.
‘UNIMAGINABLE SENSATIONS’

*Otranto* draws attention to size twice within the opening pages: first in reference to the size of the rightful owner of the castle and lordship of Otranto and then to the helmet that kills the presumed heir of Otranto. The hasty, intended marriage of Manfred’s only son, Conrad, to Isabella introduces the reader to the ancient prophecy 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’ (p. 17). Almost immediately, Conrad dies: ‘dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet’ (p. 19). When Father Jerome asks an unknown herald whence he comes, the herald replies: ‘“from the knight of the gigantic sabre”’ (p. 60). Walpole’s phallic symbol represents the true heir to the castle of Otranto. This size motif is repeated throughout the novel, becoming synonymous with the bloated aristocracy and inheritance structure of the wealthy, property-owning, titled elite.

The sins of the father to which Walpole directs attention in his first preface govern the plot of his novel that focuses on inheritances as a metaphor for the state, and thus provide further evidence for a reading of the text as a contemporary political criticism. Clery points to Walpole’s depiction of ‘the nightmarish collapse of a system of power that contains the seeds of its own destruction.’ In Walpole’s tale order is restored when the rightful male heir is placed in his kingdom, while in later Gothics it is the heroine who reclaims her usurped property, wealth and lineage. The issues with which Walpole’s novel is concerned – unmanageable and dominating government, laws disregarded or distorted for personal gain, inheritance and social order – are similar preoccupations for subsequent Gothic writers who depict these issues as a consequence of heteronormative and gender ideologies rather than a specific political machine. Walpole shows the omnipresence of the political institutions as contrary to human felicity, while later Gothic novels present their underlying ideologies (and most of the arbitrary laws and regulations of the patriarchy) as fundamentally opposed to female agency and desire, suggesting these rights are obtainable only once the old order is broken down.

If Walpole’s novel established the tropes that later became standard to the Gothic, then it is important to look closely at his treatment of female characters who supposedly provide the foundation for the Gothic heroines to follow. That the differences between Walpole’s female characters and those who come after are glaring speaks to just how sharply the genre was defined by its later writers. The central female characters in *Otranto* are kind, dutiful, patient and chaste. Stripped of voices with which to
protest at anything but incestuous threats to their chastity, heroines are frequently silent or deaf even to these threats and fail to voice their own desires. Though Hippolita, as a mother, is not a virgin, her piety and obedience towards her husband lend her a nun-like demeanour. This otherworldly saintliness extends to Matilda, Hippolita's daughter, and Isabella, who would have been her daughter-in-law, both of whom view the convent and life as a nun as an appealing option. The servant Bianca is the only character to protest against the idea of life-long celibacy, saying to Matilda: ‘I do not wish to see you moped in a convent, as you would be if you had your will, and if my lady your mother, who knows that a bad husband is better than no husband at all, did not hinder you’ (p. 40). Bianca’s class enables her to voice the presence of ‘masculine’ passions, freeing her from the silence that Hippolita, Matilda and Isabella must maintain regarding sexual desire. When Hippolita is anxious to see her husband, ‘Matilda made signs to Isabella to prevent Hippolita's rising; and both these lovely young women were using their gentle violence to stop and calm the princess’ (p. 33). Matilda does not speak; she makes ‘signs’ and the beautiful heroines exert a peculiarly feminine ‘gentle violence’. Women are shown to be complicit in keeping other women from taking action; it is no coincidence that Matilda and Isabella prevent Hippolita from the traditionally male act of ‘rising’. Walpole's female characters are entrenched in heteronormative ideologies of maternity and female sexuality. Though they are often viewed as stock figures of the Gothic, Walpole's depictions of women and incest differ from later Gothic novels in which heroines under similar threats effect escapes through their own voice and agency.

The representation of father–daughter incest, a means by which the older generation seeks to extend the lifeline of patriarchal and aristocratic family structures, serves as a further disparagement of the state, but it does so by effectively suppressing women and replacing incestuous exchanges with ones only technically non-incestuous. Irigaray questions the status of women as commodities or merchandise: ‘How can such objects of use and transaction claim the right to speak and to participate in exchange in general? Commodities, as we all know, do not take themselves to market on their own.’ Irigaray’s point is provocatively demonstrated in the effective muting of Isabella when she attempts to control her own exchange by refusing to be Manfred’s commodity. When Manfred proposes to Isabella, his deceased son's intended bride – and his daughter’s contemporary in age and friend – she shrieks, objects and is
pursued by Manfred. Repeatedly imploring Isabella to be quiet when she protests that he is still married to Hippolita, Manfred says: “I desired you once before not to name that woman” (p. 25). Isabella’s ability to part-
cipate in exchange by rejecting Manfred as a marriage choice is denied as Manfred understands her only as an object he has inherited from his son. She is allowed voice only to protest against the proposed incestu-
ous union (incestuous as although Isabella and Manfred are not blood-
related, they were almost affinal kin and now share a ward–guardian bond) and even this speech is stifled.

Hippolita is not only mute, but also metaphorically blind. She refuses to see the incestuous desires Manfred has for Isabella, and her blindness leads her to offer up her own daughter, Matilda, as a bride to Isabella’s father, Frederic. She believes that this will avert the destruction of her family by unifying it with Frederic’s, who will become the lord of Otranto. Hippolita’s blindness, deafness and muteness render her comp-
licit in the incestuous urges of Manfred and Frederic. Isabella cries out that Hippolita will cause their downfall by refusing to listen to the truth regarding Manfred’s incestuous desire, saying: “The purity of your own heart prevents you from seeing the depravity of others. Manfred, your lord, that impious man—’” (p. 89). Hippolita communicates only to defend Manfred and is dutiful beyond comprehension. When Father Jerome speaks pointedly about Isabella remaining in the convent for safety, Hippolita says: “it is my duty to hear nothing that it pleases not my lord I should hear” (p. 50). Her reward is lifelong celibacy in a nearby convent. That she happily exchanges her position as a wife for a non-
sexualised existence and accomplishes this through her silent accession to violent incestuous male desires against other women affords Hippolita an agency through passivity. While I argue that the model of passive feminism fails largely to account for the agency and sexual desires of Gothic heroines, Hippolita in fact fits this model closely. Her actions and their consequences contrast with the punishments suffered by female characters who are silent and complicit with unwanted or violent male incestuous desires in later Gothic works. Walpole’s passive and collusive mother is frequently rejected by subsequent Gothic writers in favour of the missing and reclaimed mother who provides support and assistance to the heroine.

Manfred’s designs on Isabella conform, in part, to a father–daughter configuration of incest, although the violent and undesired nature of his desires share similarities with the model of uncle–niece incest. While
sociological explanations of incest as an abuse of male power located in the nuclear family structure are inadequate to account for most father–daughter incest in the Gothic, this approach is a profitable one in terms of Walpole’s work, in which Manfred’s desires for Isabella exemplify the threat of male familial power. That *Otranto* fits this framework – as Hippolita fits that of passive feminism – furthers my argument that this work should be displaced as the originary Gothic text, in part because subsequent Gothic novels elude strict adherence to either psychological or sociological models of incest. Isabella is positioned as a daughter figure to Manfred as the intended daughter-in-law now under his paternal protection. Manfred’s proposal to Isabella adheres to the incest laws of his and Walpole’s time: no marriage between Isabella and Conrad took place and so if Manfred can obtain a divorce from Hippolita, there is no legal obstacle to their union. Isabella’s disgust at the proposed union between herself and Manfred is thus not based on legal apprehension but on the familial ties by which she understands she is bound to Manfred. Fleeing from Manfred, Isabella decides, ‘if no other means of deliverance offered, to shut herself up for ever among the holy virgins’ (p. 27). Isabella’s iconic flight through the subterranean passage to the neighbouring convent is reproduced repeatedly, with subtle variations, in many Gothic novels. The crucial distinction between Isabella’s flight, initiated by paternal incestuous threats, and those that follow is that her destination – a convent offering lifelong celibacy – is the only alternative model of sexuality available if she refuses a paternal cycle of exchange.

Incest functions as an extension of the male desire that prizes Isabella’s physical beauty and her biological ability to produce another heir for Manfred – to ‘preserve his race’ as Manfred phrases it. Irigaray points to this when she asks: ‘why are men not objects of exchange among women? It is because women’s bodies – through their use, consumptions, and circulation – provide for the condition making social life and culture possible.’ Walpole depicts incestuous desires as the natural consequence of the supposedly legitimate need to produce heirs. In seeming contradiction to Lévi-Strauss’s theories on the incest taboo as the requirement that allowed civilisation to develop, Walpole presents incest as a culturally mandated male desire that is not at all at odds with reproduction and culture. The apparent paradox is resolved when it is understood that Isabella, not Manfred, defines the desires as incestuous – a rejection that is meaningless if the male does not also so locate the desires. That these desires are unfulfilled confirms Walpole’s novel to be deeply
critical of the institutions of government and law that place such power to determine what constitutes incest in the paternal body of the monarch (here: Manfred). Isabella is unable to remain in the convent but is forced back into circulation; the commodity has no say in whether or not it will be exchanged.

Walpole demonstrates the fluidity of conceptions of incest and the arbitrary nature of the law through comic irony. The novel’s dual condemnation of the hypocrisy of the law and definitions of family is manifest in the depiction of Manfred as so blinded by lust and his desire to produce another heir that he pleads incest laws as an excuse to leave his marriage to Hippolita in order to commit incest with Isabella. Incest is first named by Father Jerome, who uses the term to draw attention to Manfred’s proposed marriage with Isabella as the incestuous relationship, saying to Manfred: “by me thou art warned not to pursue the incestuous design on thy contracted daughter”’ (p. 50). Manfred’s desires correspond to Ruth Perry’s understanding of incest as a Gothic convention that depicts ‘a girl singled out, against her will, in her own domestic space, for the sexual attentions of a father, an uncle, or a brother’. Walpole’s deployment of the incest trope, however, seems less to point towards the threats of domesticity and the nuclear family than to demonstrate the potential danger of adhering to archaic laws. In the same conversation Manfred cites the illegality of incest in an effort to free himself from his marriage vows to Hippolita: “It is some time that I have had scruples on the legality of our union: Hippolita is related to me in the fourth degree … Ease my conscience of this burden; dissolve our marriage”’ (p. 50). Father Jerome sees through Manfred’s transparent ploys to end his legally binding union to Hippolita, locating as incestuous the relationship that involves, not distant blood ties, but the abuse of paternal power from a guardian figure over his ward.

The union Manfred contemplates with his son’s fiancée is more appalling to Father Jerome than Manfred’s marriage to Hippolita because the affinal father–daughter bond he almost shared with Isabella is understood as a stronger kinship tie than that of blood four times removed. Thus, the repugnance at the idea of a father–daughter union, in spite of no actual blood tie, is stronger than the revulsion towards an actual – though diluted – blood tie. This understanding parallels Father Jerome’s objection to incest with the understanding of seventeenth-century English theologian and clergyman Jeremy Taylor, who believed that marriages between parents and children or children-in-law overturned ‘the proper order of
Manfred’s proposed marriage to Isabella would violate the authority of the (patriarchal) family and so Walpole’s priest is ironically positioned as objecting to the union with Isabella as incestuous on grounds as irrational as those on which Manfred proposes to divorce his wife. The consanguineal tie is not presented as an obstacle to marriage or an object of disgust as long as the blood is diluted enough the make the transfer of property and wealth (and therefore accumulation) a viable option within the context of a consanguineal union. Adam Kuper discusses this flexible nature of the incest taboo, arguing that the prohibition can be transgressed when so doing benefits members of the dominant group (read: men). The paradoxical and arbitrary nature of the incest taboo is underscored by Manfred, who bases the dissolution of his union with Hippolita on the grounds that they are “related within the forbidden degrees” (p. 69), while simultaneously declaring his wish to marry Isabella, who is as “dear to me as my own blood” (p. 69). Manfred uses the language of consanguineal incest to reject his wife (who is no longer of child-bearing years) as he attempts to unite with Isabella, whom he locates as having an equal, though non-consanguineal, claim of kinship.

The incestuous lust that Manfred feels for Isabella is mirrored in her father, Frederic, who has incestuous father—daughter desires for Matilda, Manfred’s daughter. Manfred, bent on fulfilling his desire to sire a son with Isabella, is happy to sacrifice his own daughter to Frederic: ‘Manfred … proposed the double marriage. That weak prince, who had been struck with the charms of Matilda, listened but too eagerly to the offer’ (p. 96). Frederic readily consents to his daughter’s marriage to her contracted father-in-law because it enables him to realise his desires for Matilda. The fathers agree to trade ownership of their daughters between themselves to have sex with their daughters’ substitutes. Irigaray suggests that ‘the law that orders our society is the exclusive valorisation of men’s needs/desires, of exchanges among men … wives, daughters, and sisters have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men. The use of and traffic in women subtend and uphold the reign of masculine hom(o)-sexuality.’ The fathers embody Irigaray’s claims about the exchanges of women that uphold patriarchal society and sexuality. The mutual lust that Frederic and Manfred feel for each other’s daughters suggests such desires substitute that which they feel for their own daughters. The proposed trade exposes that the girls are commodities and points to the interchangeable, deindividuated nature of female bodies: ‘That prince [Frederic] had discovered so much passion
for Matilda that Manfred hoped to obtain all he wished by holding out or withdrawing his daughter’s charms’ (p. 100). Matilda and Isabella are bargaining chips in the game of their fathers’ lust.

Lévi-Strauss’s description of the structure of marriage as an ‘exchange … between two groups of men’ is borne out in the reciprocal trade in which Manfred and Frederic participate and that elides any remaining distinction between Matilda and Isabella. While the exchange has an incestuous father–daughter configuration, that there is no affinal or consanguineal tie allows for its occurrence without a legal violation of the incest taboo – though it clearly encroaches on the taboo as defined by theologians, sociologists and psychiatrists in that it violates a position of familial authority or power. Manfred has ownership of Matilda’s ‘charms’ – her beauty and virginity – and offers them to Frederic in exchange for Isabella’s beauty, virginity and presumed fertility. Frederic and Manfred exchange the virginity of one daughter for the virginity of the other. Indeed, the interchangeability of the girls that emphasises their fathers’ incestuous desires is brought to a head when Matilda is killed mistakenly by her father. Matilda’s desire for Theodore prompts her to free her lover in an act that she states is unwomanly as it disregards her filial duty to her father. The disruption of paternal authority in favour of female desire does not go long unpunished. Manfred slays his daughter – believing she is Isabella – by plunging his dagger into her bosom in an act symbolic of incestuous rape. The interchangeability of Matilda and Isabella is reinforced further when Theodore later marries Isabella; Matilda’s dead body is replaced with Isabella’s living one. Though the girls have managed to escape the incestuous designs of their fathers, they have done so through no direct action of their own – Matilda escapes through death and Isabella becomes a replacement commodity to fill the gap Matilda has left in the market. Isabella avoided replacing Hippolita only to perform a near identical replacement of a body no longer capable of reproduction when she takes Matilda’s place as Theodore’s wife.

Representations of incest in Otranto operate as hyperbolisations of antiquated social systems and laws that lend themselves to abuses of male power and desire, functioning to reinforce patriarchal dominance through the culturally demanded exchange of women as commodities. The insights of Lévi-Strauss and Irigaray allow Walpole’s representations to be placed within the anthropological understanding of the exchange of women as necessary to culture and feminist challenges to this theory. Such understandings demonstrate that although Walpole’s often
subversive parody plays with disrupting the notion that the incest taboo creates culture, the novel ultimately reinforces the position of women as commodities whose exchange is a social necessity. In recognising these representations of father–daughter incest as aligned with the sociological model of incest as abuses of power encoded within the family and social structures, incest is revealed as a consequence of these structures of power. Walpole’s work presents father–daughter incest as scholarship commonly perceives the function of incest in the Gothic: as an abuse against unwilling young women that is the effect of archaic institutions of power, law, family and marriage. But as we will see, this understanding of father–daughter incest is largely questioned and overturned in later Gothic novels, in which it provides additional models of female desire and agency, affording an escape from the economics of female exchange as necessary to culture.

ESCAPING FROM THE CASTLE: INCEST AND HEROINIC ACTION IN THE ROMANCE OF THE FOREST

The striking similarities between many of the incestuous situations, characters’ personalities and even names in Radcliffe’s The Romance of the Forest and Walpole’s Otranto beg a comparison between the two works that provides an important means of repositioning Radcliffe’s novel – and many that follow – as part of a Gothic tradition distinct from that represented by Walpole’s parodic and satirical work. The contrast between the depictions of incest, sexuality and female agency in The Romance of the Forest and Otranto are marked in that Radcliffe’s representations of father–daughter incest allow the heroine access to desire, voice and action. Radcliffe reworks many of the conventions used in Otranto to model alternatives to the exchange of women that remains, in Walpole’s work, the only means of theorising culture. In reimagining the heroine as having sexual desires presented as naturally occurring, as capable of manipulating the father–daughter incestuous desires encoded within the ward–guardian power relation and as able effectively to flee from incestuous threats and rescue wounded heroes, Radcliffe establishes the heroine, Adeline, as an active agent who removes herself from the traffic in women. In analysing this work, I continue to rely on the theories of Irigaray and Rubin concerning the economy of female bodies and employ insights on representations of consanguineal bonds in eighteenth-century narratives from scholars such as Perry. Scholarship that relies on Freudian
incest theory and approaches Radcliffe’s novel as belonging exclusively to a Female Gothic tradition overlooks female agency and desire by focusing on the heroine as a manipulator of male desires. I argue that Radcliffe explodes the understood – though in her time as yet widely unchallenged – commodification of women by using father–daughter incest as a means of troubling notions of the family, driving female action and depicting female desire as natural.

The novel opens with a description of Pierre de La Motte (one of Adeline’s father figures), who, like Walpole’s Manfred, lacks sufficient self-control to overcome his passions and desires: ‘with strength of mind sufficient to have withstood temptation, he would have been a good man; as it was, he was always a weak, and sometimes a vicious member of society’. La Motte and Manfred are both of good character if not confronted with temptation and passion, which corrupts and dominates them. Radcliffe’s young, virtuous and beautiful heroine is, superficially, similar to Walpole’s Isabella. However, a significant difference in their characters and behaviour emerges when comparing their actions and reactions towards father–daughter incest. This uncanny doubling of characters is repeated by the echoing of names from earlier works – a common occurrence throughout the generations of Gothic texts – as Walpole’s imprisoned young lover, Theodore, is refashioned in Radcliffe’s imprisoned young lover, Theodore. That the very names, experiences and personalities of characters are reused reinforces the closed-in and repetitious nature of the Gothic world. The effect of the duplications not only creates a claustrophobic environment, but also gives a greater sense of freedom when the characters, previously viewed as synonymous with their literary predecessors, are able to break the mould of repetition and with it, the cyclical nature of the patriarchal power structure that previously contained them.

Incest, depicted in Walpole’s novel as a male-desired and male-sought threatening horror to be fled from to the safety of a convent, is portrayed in Radcliffe’s novel as a masculine weakness that allows the heroine the opportunity to save herself and her lover. While in Walpole’s work incestuous desires reinforced the interchangeability of women and their place as marketable goods, the incestuous passions in Radcliffe’s Gothic are manipulated and destroyed by the heroine and allow her to exhibit action, female desire and self-sufficiency. Adeline’s agency is evinced through her ability to feel desire for and attraction to several of the male characters – who are often a blend of good and evil – and in her power
successfully to flee from the danger they present. The effect of this at times perversely presented attraction is described by Perry as mirrored in the reactions of the readers of the Gothic: ‘the confusion of good and evil projected by the attractive male villain produces in its readers a perverse attraction to threatening force, a hankering after unnatural domination.’ I argue that this attraction is found in Adeline, who is initially drawn to the Marquis de Montalt, who becomes the greatest threat to her virtue and freedom. The irrational attraction signifies a consanguineal relationship that is currently unknown to the heroine, exposing a desire that becomes dangerous. Radcliffe reconfigures incest from its representation as a male-wielded weapon of female subjugation to a weakness the heroine exploits to her own advantage. Father–daughter incest thus becomes a transgressive force that enables the heroine to reject patriarchy’s notions of female sexuality, save her lover and fight free of the crumbling castles and convents of archaic domination.

Gothic heroines must frequently rescue themselves from the incestuous designs of an older male relative, guardian or father figure because there is no male hero or protector on whom they can rely, although this agency is often disregarded. The understanding of Gothic feminism as a ‘pretended weakness, a pose of innocent victim, a masquerade of asexual passivity’ overlooks the contrasting depictions of heroines and their male counterparts in situations of imprisonment, threats and violence. I refer to ‘Gothic feminism’ as ‘passive feminism’ so as not to confuse ‘victim feminism’ with the feminist themes found throughout the Gothic that are characterised by action and response rather than pose and passivity. Scholars such as David Durrant corroborate this understanding of passive feminism; Durrant asserts that the Radcliffean heroine ultimately ‘ignore[s] the real world, and live[s] docilely as a child for all of her life. But it is worth it, the outside world is too fraught with perils to be endured.’ These readings tend to minimise the heroine’s triumphs over dangers and obstacles – an oversight necessary to maintain a notion of passive feminism. If the Gothic heroine’s manipulation of the father’s incestuous desires provided the only escape from danger, such a passive reading might be possible, but this is only one aspect of the heroine’s actions that culminate with flights from patriarchal figures and institutions.

The argument for passive feminism rests partly on Hoeveler’s claim that: ‘to the female gothic consciousness, the patriarchy … exists as a huge protection racket … Gothic heroines, if they were to survive, were then forced to seek protection from any surrogate protection agency …
a means of protection that they did not possess in their own right.\footnote{Identifying the Female Gothic heroine as one who sells herself to the 'most controllable' bidder to better manipulate her putative protector, this line of scholarship views the lover’s wounding or imprisonment as a symbolic castration that relegates him to a position of eternal subordination or feminisation.} Thus, the true Gothic heroine chooses the most easily controlled husband (protection system) so that she may reclaim the title, wealth and property usurped from her.\footnote{Gothic heroes are frequently subjected to woundings, but if this does metaphorically castrate them for part of the novel, they generally make full recoveries and thus regain their masculinity by the novels’ endings.} The shift that Perry notes from paternal to spousal patriarchy that positioned first fathers and then husbands as protectors and keepers of women occurred alongside the rise of Gothic fiction that, as she convincingly demonstrates, contended with the change through portrayals of dangerous and incestuous father figures.\footnote{Yet scholarship that understands protection as located exclusively in either the husband or the father overlooks the ways many Gothic heroines triumph with little real male protection.} It is crucial to distinguish between the conclusion that heroines turn to marriages that ‘are quiet acceptances of their new keepers’ to ensure a male guardian and how such engagements and marriages are presented in the Gothic novels themselves.\footnote{The convention of the wounded male lover, rather than creating a malleable protector, forces the heroine into successful self-reliance, reclaiming her name, property and family before marrying. The threat of father–daughter incest works similarly to the wounded hero convention: it does not offer the heroine a permanent protector; rather, it propels the heroine’s escape from the very society that requires such defences. In its father–daughter configuration, incest is a pivotal part of uncovering the Gothic’s rejection of patriarchal culture and passive feminism because it demonstrates that the patriarchal protection system is one that cannot be trusted, no matter how disposed it is to manipulation. In contrast to the notion that Gothic heroines sell themselves to a controllable guardian, these women rather learn that there is no such male defender capable of being influenced permanently; that even fathers and guardians cannot be trusted, that to be safeguarded they must remove themselves from the patriarchal protection system that, in fact, offers them no material security at all.} Patriarchy’s inability to imagine or allow for female desire, a method of controlling female behaviour, is rejected through the representation of
desire that allows Adeline to refuse a celibate life. Radcliffe combines the convention of the convent with the threats of the father to reveal the sexual tyranny over women that fathers attempt to maintain, here using Catholicism and later incestuous threats to enforce female celibacy. Adeline’s repudiation of coercion into celibacy is a drastic revision of Walpole’s female characters’ choices. Adeline describes her removal to a convent at the age of seven and her years of withstanding the efforts of her (believed) father, Louis St Pierre, and the abbess to persuade her to take the veil. Adeline refers to “the wretchedness of my situation, condemned to perpetual imprisonment, and imprisonment of the most dreadful kind, or to the vengeance of a father, from whom I had no appeal” (I, p. 55). In contrast to Walpole’s characters who view the convent as a sanctuary, Adeline – like many Gothic heroines after her who are thrust into cloisters and forced, coerced or threatened into taking vows – identifies celibacy as ‘perpetual imprisonment’. Convent life is viewed as a non-life: ‘the horrors of the monastic life rose fully to my view … excluded from the cheerful intercourse of society … condemned to silence – rigid formality – abstinence and penance – condemned to forego the delights of a world’ (I, p. 67). Radcliffe uses the word ‘abstinence’ rather than ‘celibacy’ to leave the meaning open to being read as abstaining from vices or indulgences, although the sexual connotation was the most common contemporary understanding of the term. That Adeline unites the words ‘horror’ and ‘abstinence’ makes explicit that her dread of the nunnery lies in the prospect of life without sexual (as well as social) intercourse, while offering an alternative meaning for a censorious readership that fears the expression and existence of female sexuality. The convent, the physical manifestation of superstition and repression identified with Catholicism, is loaded with additional terrors through the heroine’s fear of a permanent removal from a sexual existence. Catholicism in the Gothic novel, described as exemplifying ‘tyranny in all its forms: political, intellectual, and sexual’, is tied here to the figure of the father and his demands. In refusing the celibate life of the convent and her father’s demand that she take the veil, Adeline rejects both institutionalised and familial attempts to curtail her sexual choices.

Not only does Adeline reject St Pierre’s demand for her to become a nun, but she also uses it as reason to dissolve their father–daughter relationship: “Since he can forget … the affection of a parent, and condemn his child without remorse to wretchedness and despair – the bond of filial and paternal duty no longer subsists – he has himself dissolved it” (I,
p. 55). Adeline, far from the fearful justifications of Walpole’s Matilda, succinctly justifies irrevocably severing the bond of paternal duty to her father.55 Shortly thereafter, her father retrieves her from the convent, bringing Adeline to the house from which La Motte takes her. That night she dreams of her father:

I thought that I was in a lonely forest with my father; his looks were severe, and his gestures menacing: he upbraided me for leaving the convent, and while he spoke, drew from his pocket a mirror, which he held before my face; I looked in it and saw (my blood now thrills as I repeat it) I saw myself wounded, and bleeding profusely. Then I thought myself in the house again; and suddenly heard … ‘Depart this house, destruction hovers here.’ (I, pp. 61–2)

The sexual imagery in the dream hints at incestuous passions that ‘thrill her blood’ – a far cry from the horror she felt at the prospect of an abstinent life. That she is upbraided and wounded after leaving the convent furthers the conclusion that Adeline eschews chastity in favour of sexual intercourse. Her father’s anger at her for leaving the religious house warns her of a sexual danger. The dreamed encounter and its violent, destructive consequences embody the ‘perverse attraction’ towards danger that Perry describes in relation to readers’ reactions to attractive villains. Adeline’s agency and thrill at the sexual wounding experienced with (if not by) her father is a radical departure from the terror of male desire exhibited by Isabella in Walpole’s novel. Radcliffe turns what was in Walpole’s work female victimisation by the father figure (made not only possible, but also mandatory by the absence of female desire) into a dream of incestuous desires that provokes Adeline’s flight from the father who would control her sexuality.

There is a marked relationship between women, property and exchange in eighteenth-century literature. This connection is assessed by Pollak, who argues that ‘as reproducers women alone made possible the orderly transmission of property and patronym from father to son. As objects of exchange in an exogamous kinship system, they were the conduits through which heirs were produced and fraternal bonds between men were established and strengthened.’56 Such exchanges, which occur in Otranto, are rejected in Radcliffe’s novel. The Gothic convention of the father or father figure who attempts to sell the virginal heroine to a wealthy, older man presents the guardian figure as one who protects the heroine only to maintain her chastity as a valuable commodity.57 An exchange in marriage results in a shift from being the property of
the father or father figure to being the object of another older man. The heroine has a limited number of options by which to remove herself from this economy of exchange. She can elope with her lover and lose the appearance, if not fact, of her chastity and thus her value in the economy. Alternatively, she can join a convent and remove herself from threats to her chastity (a possibility in Walpole’s work, but not an option for Radcliffe’s heroine). Finally, she can manipulate the father figure into serving her needs, which is often presented at some point in the narrative as the most viable option that allows the heroine to act from within her position as a commodity. This is what Adeline accomplishes. Her escape strips her of the protection of one father to deliver her into the arms of a father substitute: La Motte. Adeline controls this ward–guardian relationship and the quasi-incestuous desire it entails before she flees it as well. In relation to the cycle of consumption, Irigaray argues that ‘the economy … that is in place in our societies thus requires that women lend themselves to alienation in consumption, and to exchanges in which they do not participate’.

However, in many of the Gothic representations of father–daughter incest, it is precisely from this place of alienated exchange that heroines first assert their agency, rejecting the dual threats of celibacy or exchange and escaping to an alternative model of economy and sexuality with the lover of their choice.

This renunciation of exchange is exemplified in multiple interactions between La Motte and Adeline in which she demonstrates her value within the endogamic family unit by exploiting her sexual commodification before abandoning the economy that makes such demands. Adeline’s temporary manipulation of the culture of exchange belies the assertion that Gothic heroines assume a mask of femininity to gain a permanent and malleable male protector. Such a ‘gain’ is at odds with Irigaray’s analysis of woman as performing a ‘masquerade of femininity’ on the exchange market for which she goes uncompensated ‘unless her pleasure comes simply from being chosen as an object of consumption or of desire by masculine “subjects”’.

Adeline’s temporary masquerade is not performed for pleasure or to gain a lasting protector, but is a calculated strike at the system that aids her escape from culture. When La Motte, his wife and Adeline enter an abandoned monastery Madame de la Motte voices the most fear, yet it is Adeline who clings to La Motte. In a description charged with sexual undertones, Adeline ‘uttered an exclamation of mingled admiration and fear. A kind of pleasing dread filled her bosom, and filled all her soul. Tears started into her eyes: – she
wished, yet feared, to go on; – she hung upon the arm of La Motte, and looked at him with a sort of hesitating interrogation’ (II, p. 26). Adeline is ostensibly fearful of entering the passageway and the scene functions as a one of sexual transgression or loss of virginity. Adeline, with her new father figure and guardian, is both scared and desirous, fearing and wishing to proceed, and supplants Madame de La Motte’s position by clinging to her husband’s arm in the older woman’s place. Adeline is here a willing usurper of Madame de La Motte, using her youth and beauty to influence La Motte. In unequivocal contrast to the understanding of Gothic heroines as passive and docile, Adeline engages in both physical and emotional agency to gain control and receives the desired response from La Motte. The father–daughter-type relationship, with its incestuous air, grants Adeline power over her new father figure and his wife, whose pleas he ignores to prove his bravery to Adeline. It is important that Adeline is both fearful and desirous – the dread she feels is ‘pleasing’ and though she looks at La Motte with a ‘hesitating interrogation’ she directs this scene; rather than being persuaded to go on against her wishes, she desires La Motte to continue. Radcliffe’s heroine effectively manipulates the father figure into incestuous longings that keep her out of the convent and unexchanged.

In another scene, Adeline pleads with her guardian for protection from the Marquis de Montalt, who has both homicidal and incestuous designs upon her. La Motte, who enters Adeline’s room at the Marquis’s murderous bidding, gazes upon her beautiful form and listens to her sing in her sleep. When Adeline wakes she fears La Motte will hand her over to the Marquis. She throws herself on La Motte’s mercy: ‘“You once saved me from destruction … O save me now! Have pity upon me – I have no protector but you”’ (II, p. 186). Adeline’s plea appears spontaneous but it is unlikely she was singing in her sleep. She exploits her innocence, beauty and youth, successfully locating herself as the object of her guardian’s gaze. La Motte, overcome by her appearance, allows her to flee from the castle and Adeline undertakes a long, dangerous and ultimately triumphant journey to escape from the Marquis. The Gothic heroine uses her sexuality in an incestuous explosion of traditional patriarchal values, figuratively lying down with the father to get to the hero, and thus breaking down the exchange of female bodies by men to gain freedom and choice. Accessing their own sexuality allows heroines to control the desires of men and the course of their futures, disrupting the incest taboo and its simultaneous traffic in women.
Many Gothic novels, following Radcliffe, rework the eighteenth-century literary convention of instinctual kinship recognition and the corresponding disinclination to mate with unknown relatives into an immediate attraction or desire. Perry describes the repugnance characters often display towards members of their families who are hitherto unknown: ‘instinctual disgust warned the sister and brother, although ignorant of their consanguineal connection, that their mating was somehow beyond the pale’. Missing family members are often hinted at by being presented as sexually unpalatable to the hero or heroine by a sort of sixth sense. In the Gothic, rather than the unknown relations feeling disgust, there is often an instant recognition or attraction that helps the long-lost relative to discern his or her missing kin. The heroine feels this attraction towards unknown relatives and to the man (kin or non-kin) she eventually marries. In this sense, the Gothic identifies kin both as those with whom we are related by blood and those we marry. Adeline shows this instant recognition or preference for the Marquis, though the attraction is emphasised on his side. When the Marquis first sees Adeline after she faints, he attempts to lift her:

Upon Adeline, who was yet insensible, he gazed with an eager admiration, which seemed to absorb all the faculties of his mind … Her beauty, touched with the languid delicacy of illness, gained from sentiment what it lost in bloom. The negligence of her dress, loosened for the purposes of freer respiration, discovered those glowing charms, that her auburn tresses, which fell in profusion over her bosom, shaded, but could not conceal. (I, p. 131)

Perry’s arguments about the repugnance that signifies previously unknown family members would imply this older, handsome soldier is certainly not related to Adeline. But the Marquis de Montalt is in fact Adeline’s paternal uncle. The initial mutual attraction that is sexual rather than familial in nature troubles contemporary understandings of attraction and kinship. The existing normative accounts of instinctual recognition/disgust that Perry points to as operating in literature as warnings that a potential mating is incestuous are subverted when female desire is depicted as an instinctive attraction towards the incestuous relationship.

The passivity often attributed to Gothic heroines is challenged by a comparison of their actions to those of the male characters who Radcliffe and other Gothic writers frequently depict as imprisoned, terrified and in search of sanctuary. Adeline’s lover, Theodore, is removed from the
novel’s action after being arrested by the King’s Guard; Radcliffe incarcerates the male who would otherwise be the heroine’s saviour. La Motte is similarly imprisoned at the novel’s opening: ‘Alone, unarmed – beyond the chance of assistance … he endeavoured to await the event with fortitude; but La Motte could boast of no such virtue’ (I, p. 4). La Motte’s confinement, though brief, shows his lack of courage and inability to affect an escape; a lack accentuated by Adeline’s unaided flights from danger. Adeline, whilst held captive by her uncle at his chateau, refuses to be either his mistress or wife, unwilling to sell herself to him honourably or dishonourably and thus re-enter the market of exchange.105 The threat of incest underlies Adeline’s multiple escapes that cause her to develop the self-reliance that later enables her to exonerate Theodore from the false charges levelled against him, rescuing him from an unjust imprisonment. The heroic action breaks down gendered ideologies of masculinility and femininity by requiring that the hero be saved by the heroine.106

When the Marquis leaves Adeline for the night she searches for a means of egress. Seeing a window: ‘she sprang forward and alighted safely in an extensive garden. … Thence she had little doubt of escaping, either by some broke fence, or low part of the wall’ (II, p. 250). It is only after Adeline frees herself from her uncle’s harem-like imprisonment that Theodore ‘rescues’ her in an attempt that goes woefully awry. The Marquis discovers Theodore and Adeline in a small town, where Theodore is dangerously wounded in a fight with the Marquis and arrested. Adeline again relies on herself – this time, not only to save herself, but Theodore as well. The use of incestuous threats to drive action comes full circle when the Marquis is brought up on charges regarding the murder of his brother, Adeline’s father. The judge requires Adeline to give evidence to save La Motte’s and Theodore’s lives (both of whom are awaiting execution) by incriminating the Marquis in the murderous plot against herself. Adeline reflects on the Marquis, who she now (falsely) supposes is her father: ‘her horror of the Marquis, whom she could not bear to consider as her father … redoubled, and she became impatient to give the testimony’ (II, p. 239). Adeline is given voice to make public the incestuous crimes and condemn her pursuer: she ‘gave her little narrative with clearness and precision’ (II, p. 240). Afterwards, Adeline reflects on the circumstances of her birth: ‘From an orphan, subsisting on the bounty of others, without family, with few friends, and pursued by a cruel
and powerful enemy, she saw herself suddenly transformed to the daugh-
ter of an illustrious house, and the heiress of immense wealth’ (II, p. 249).

This transformation has been orchestrated by Adeline; she has refused
a life in a convent, fled from the incestuous and murderous uncle, pre-
pared to testify in a public court, caused Theodore to be freed from prison
and a sentence of execution and learned the truth about her parents and
birthright. When Gothic heroines such as Adeline are described as ‘a pro-
fessional girl-woman, a … creation of the fertile but bored brain of Ann
Radcliffe, bourgeois wife of a man who stayed late at the office almost
every evening … one bored and neglected housewife [who] decided
to translate her personal and social anxieties into words that could be
read by other presumably bored housewives’, both Adeline’s power and
agency and the talent and motivations of Radcliffe are marginalised.107

Adeline is far from the ‘wily little woman [who] would triumph through
her skilful use of femininity as manipulation and guile’ and hardly sup-
ports the notion that ‘Gothic feminism taught women that pretended
weakness was strength, and that the pose, the masquerade of innocent
victim, would lead ultimately to possessing the master’s goods and prop-
erty. Gothic feminists believed … women’s best defenses were a beguiling
demeanor and a sweet smile.’108

The most pressing danger in this understanding of Gothic feminism
is that it become the standard definition, casting the work of Gothic
writers as a female anxiety release that taught women to become pro-
fessional victims. Such a conclusion overlooks the physical threats and
dangers, flights, difficult journeys, recourses to the legal system, use of
voice, reliance on mothers and mother figures, pursuit of truth and the
intelligence that contribute in large part to the ability of the heroines to
destroy the patriarchal system that forced them to perform masquer-
ades. While Otranto parodies the structure of exchange at play in society,
Walpole is unable to reimagine a world in which women do not function
as objects of exchange and thereby foreshadows Lévi-Strauss’s view that
an escape from the exchange is impossible. In contrast, Radcliffe depicts
the destruction of exchange, completing ‘the revolution in kinship’ that
Rubin theorises as taking place ‘if the sexual property system were reor-
ganized in such a way that men did not have overriding rights in women
(if there was no exchange of women) and if there were no gender.’109

Adeline successfully dissolves paternal ties and gender ideologies in her
escape from the castle, driven by the Gothic incest thematic to forever
break from the bonds of patriarchal power.
Shelley’s *Matilda*, written between 1819 and 1820, is an erotic Gothic work that focuses on the incestuous love between the sixteen-year-old heroine Matilda and her unnamed father. Although the incest within the novel is never actualised it is made overt through the father’s verbal declaration and written confession and Matilda’s later revelation of her own incestuous longings. That Matilda and her father’s incestuous relationship is never consummated with sexual intercourse is a crucial point, as, despite the scholarly preoccupation with father–daughter incest, heroines rarely engage in forced or sought sexual intercourse with their fathers. Shelley sent the manuscript to her father, William Godwin, who found the theme of father–daughter incest ‘disgusting’ and the novel subsequently remained unpublished until 1959. Shelley’s biography has thus been used frequently as a basis for critical interpretation of the novel and its incest plot by scholars such as Terence Harpold, who argues *Matilda* depends on the details of Shelley’s life and her relationships with her parents. Hoeveler is just as keen to treat the novel as autobiographical, arguing it ‘reads … as an embarrassingly personal fantasy’. Harpold’s reading, like the majority of psychobiographical analyses of *Matilda*, relies heavily upon the Freudian paradigm that attempts to situate desire and sexuality as responses to a nuclear family structure that does not exist in the novel. Shelley’s *Matilda*, I argue by contrast, deploys father–daughter incest to refute definitions of women as exchangeable goods and dissolve the market economy of women in favour of an endogamic society.

Psychobiographical readings of Shelley’s novel often inappropriately position Matilda as a passive spectator of surrounding events and fail to differentiate between Shelley’s and Matilda’s upbringings. The use of psychobiographical approaches is complicated by applying to Matilda the conclusions drawn (based on the Freudian theory of female psychological and sexual development) regarding Shelley’s development in the absence of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. Although aspects of the novel and Shelley’s life are similar – Matilda’s mother dies in childbirth – they also diverge in important ways: Matilda’s father leaves the infant Matilda to be reared by her aunt, whereas Shelley was raised by her father. Whatever the effects of Wollstonecraft’s death on Shelley’s relationship with Godwin, reading Matilda’s mother’s absence as causing the
perpetual victimisation of the daughter to her father’s desires, given that Matilda does not meet her father until age sixteen, interprets Matilda in a way the structure of the novel does not allow. These analyses tend to identify Matilda as passive; Hoeveler, for example, argues that ‘Matilda’s passivity or rather her ostensible lack of control … suggests the nature of trauma, as well as the posture or pose of gothic feminism. The daughter effectively destroys both her parents simply by being; her very ontology is fatal.”

Harpold asserts that Matilda is a product of Shelley’s psychosexual development: ‘Mary’s capacity for “pre”-oedipal identification with the mother … would have been sharply restricted, in effect, already oedipalized, irreducibly subject to the imperatives of the father’s desire. This is what happens in Mathilda.” Both Freudian-based analyses suggest Shelley is psychologically incapable of the pre-oedipal state of loving her mother and will thus always and only be subject to the father’s desires. Tilottama Rajan notes the limitations of these approaches, arguing that ‘we cannot read incest in biographical terms, and what is at issue here is not so much Mary’s desire for Godwin enacted in the substitutive medium of fiction, as a form of desire whose textual transmission … recognizes is figural structure’.

Readings of Shelley’s work that displace it from the literary realm to the autobiographical by applying Freudian theories of female desire and sexual development to an amalgam of Shelley and her character seem doomed to fail.

Far from being passive or ruled by her father, Matilda’s intense love for him enables her active transgression of the social prohibitions of incest and female desire and her escape from the traffic in women. Matilda’s sexual love for her father is revealed in her self-descriptions as a passionate individual who finds only one release for her love: ‘the idea of my unhappy, wandering father was the idol of my imagination. I bestowed on him all my affections; there was a miniature of him that I gazed on continually … his first words [in my fantasies] were always “My daughter, I love thee”! What ecstatic moments were passed in these dreams!’ (p. 157). Raised from infancy by an affectionless aunt, Matilda fixates on the image of her father. Reminiscences of her early teen years offer no mention of young love or sexual awakening: all her fantasies and hopes of future happiness are settled on the reunion with her father. The language used is essential to understanding the sexual rather than filial nature of Matilda’s love. She passes ‘ecstatic moments’ in dreams with a man she has never met but on whose picture she gazes continually, making her father the object of her female gaze in a fixation of desire that functions in
two important ways. First, it exemplifies what Judith Butler describes as the failure of the incest taboo, the existence of which: ‘appears to suggest that desires, actions, indeed, pervasive social practices of incest are generated precisely in virtue of the eroticization of that taboo’.\(^{117}\) Secondly, it defies the system of exchange that requires woman to be the object and demands ‘that she herself never have access to desire’, a condition that ‘has as its founding operation the appropriation of woman’s body by the father or his substitutes’.\(^{118}\) Matilda challenges the requirements of this system by locating her father as the object of her desire in a reversal of the normative. As Irigaray points out, ‘where pleasure is concerned … to reverse the relation, especially in the economy of sexuality, does not seem a desirable objective’.

Matilda’s objectification of her father via her gaze is a reversal with fatal consequences.

Matilda’s reunion with her father is an eroticised and romanticised moment that establishes the incestuous nature of their attachment: ‘I approached the shore, my father held the boat, and in a moment I was in his arms. And now I began to live. All around me was changed from a dull uniformity to the brightest scene of joy and delight’ (p. 161). This reunion is Matilda’s rebirth; she begins to live only in her father’s embrace, which is equally her awakening and arousal and the description of their reunion has orgasmic qualities. Matilda is jealous of her time with her father and her descriptions of the ‘paradisiacal’ time with him read like the musings of a lover: ‘it was a subject of regret to me whenever we were joined by a third person, yet if I turned with a disturbed look towards my father, his eyes fixed on me and beaming with tenderness instantly restored my joy to my heart. O, hours of intense delight!’ (p. 163). Any outsider is looked upon as an intruder, potentially a usurper of affection and a cause of distress. The father is hardly immune to Matilda as he returns her looks, making her the focus of his masculine gaze. When her father suddenly turns cold without explanation Matilda weeps, worries, is miserable and incapable of eating. Her reaction is not that of a daughter, but a lover abandoned by her beloved; the language Shelley uses to describe Matilda’s emotions is the lexicon of romantic attachment rather than that of filial devotion.

The father’s incestuous desires are exposed partially through a depiction of his anxiety regarding a suitor interested in Matilda, an anxiety that Matilda manipulates to demonstrate to him her value on the market of exchange so he will remove her from it. The suitor’s presence creates tensions between Matilda and her father that reveal his emotions as
too excessively jealous to be purely the product of paternal love. Matilda is aware of her father’s unease, though she claims to be ignorant of its cause: ‘I now remember that my father was restless and uneasy whenever this person visited us, and when we talked together watched us with the greatest apparent anxiety’ (p. 164). Matilda’s claim that she recognises her father’s discomfort only in hindsight is dubious given that she uses the suitor to exhibit her sexuality – her desirability – to elicit a response from her father. Matilda’s value as a commodity is not shown in reference to another woman, which Irigaray argues is requisite: ‘in order to have a relative value, a commodity has to be confronted with another commodity that serves as its equivalent. Its value is never found to lie within itself.’ Matilda establishes her own worth in a way that Irigaray posits she cannot: she manipulates the system of exchange to position herself as valuable in relation to another ‘buyer’ on the market. Elaborating on Lévi-Strauss’s theories, Irigaray acknowledges the position of women as commodities but questions the assumption that society could not exist without such exchanges: ‘the exchanges upon which patriarchal societies are based take place exclusively among men. Women, signs, commodities, currency all pass from one man to another; if it were otherwise, we are told, the social order would fall back upon incestuous and exclusively endogamous ties that would paralyze all commerce.’ Shelley’s representation of Matilda’s value and removal from commerce demonstrates the validity of both Lévi-Strauss’s and Irigaray’s theories. When Matilda is removed from the marriage market there is a paralysis of commerce, as Lévi-Strauss assumed, but the endogamous incestuous ties that are meant to be a consequence of the lack of exchange are instead the cause of it. This paralysis of commerce – resulting from incestuous desires – enables the formation of a wholly new social order rather than the end of culture that Irigaray argues is an insurmountable flaw in Lévi-Strauss’s theory. That Matilda’s father is incapable of offering his daughter as an object of exchange to the suitor begins the breakdown of the traffic in women that is completed when Matilda forces his incestuous declaration.

Matilda receives a letter from her father that expresses his incestuous longings, though its lack of details and fluctuating tone create a sense of hesitancy fully to disclose his desires and accept blame that refuses moral condemnation. The father claims he limits descriptions of his desires to keep vulgarity out of the letter: ‘let a veil be drawn over the unimaginable sensations of a guilty father; the secrets of so agonized a heart may not be made vulgar’ (p. 179). However, by veiling the ‘unimaginable sensations’
one is compelled to imagine them. Shelley thus allows the reader to judge the father’s culpability and leaves open the possibility of a reconciliation between him and Matilda. The metaphoric veil operates here in a more complicated manner than its typical use – concealing sexual activity or violence – becoming a tool of morality that enables the father to be both innocent and guilty and that permits the reader to condemn or to condone his desires. Even the clearest language that the father uses does not explicate the true nature of his love: ‘if I enjoyed from your looks, and words, and most innocent caresses a rapture usually excluded from the feelings of a parent towards his child, yet no uneasiness, no wish, no casual idea awoke me to a sense of guilt’ (p. 179). The confession does not explain if the ‘rapture’ was a purely emotional response or a physical reaction to his daughter’s caresses. While he clarifies that his feelings are excluded from the emotional range of other fathers, he immediately denies they caused him a sense of guilt. The language obfuscates his awareness of his loving Matilda incestuously. The word ‘rapture’ seems to indicate a strictly psychological state – that of ecstasy or bliss – but the fact that it is paired with ‘innocent caresses’ points to sexual ecstasy. Shelley’s blending of the psychological and sexual, paternal and incestuous alongside the use of the veil creates a fluctuating sense of guilt and morality and depicts incestuous desires as an unintentional emotional and physical response the father struggles against acknowledging or indulging.

A refusal to condemn incestuous desires is present from the moment of reunion between Matilda and her father, during which Shelley plays with the Gothic conventions of recognition, genealogy and Orientalism to render the father’s incestuous love possible. Matilda’s resemblance to her mother, Diana, plays a part in his love, as does his belief that Matilda is an angelic soul in a human body and/or the reincarnation of Diana’s soul. This belief makes the idea of incest with his daughter less horrifying as her body is a shell housing his deceased wife’s spirit. That the father’s admission is contextualised within his earlier discussion of his sixteen years in the East lends credence to reading his desires as incestuous without inspiring guilt: ‘The burning sun of India, and the freedom from all restraint had rather encreased the energy of his character … He had seen so many customs and witnessed so great a variety of moral creeds that he had been obliged to form an independent one for himself which had no relation to the peculiar notions of any one country’ (p. 161). Matilda’s father may be more inclined to understand or act on his desires without guilt because of the variety of moral codes he has witnessed. The belief
that incest in India was prevalent is noted by psychohistorian Lloyd DeMause, who describes its occurrence as ‘as far [back] as records exist’.\textsuperscript{123} The Orientalism that often implies exotic sexualities, the setting of India and a variety of ethical creeds position the father as altered in principles by years of exposure to incestuous customs.\textsuperscript{124} The father thus eludes the moral condemnation not permitted to a man with a wholly English experience of life.\textsuperscript{125} This cultural dissonance is pointed to in William D. Brewer’s examination of Shelley’s ‘unnationalizing’ of male characters who ‘find reassimilation into their native cultures difficult if not impossible’.\textsuperscript{126} If Matilda’s father feels guiltless rapture at his daughter’s touch, the ‘independent’ ethical system he has formed suggests that incest is an inherently natural desire restrained by society, rather than morality. In opposition to Lévi-Strauss’s understanding of the prohibition of incest as creating culture, Matilda’s father suggests that it is only the creation of (Western) culture that demands the incest taboo.\textsuperscript{127}

Matilda claims repeatedly that the bliss of her and her father’s reunion is ruined by no fault of her own, yet her part in pressing her father to confess his love is a calculated move that renders her self-absolution false. Her claim of innocence is contradicted both by her actions and Shelley’s biblical allusions: ‘I lament now, I must ever lament, those few short months of Paradisiacal bliss; I disobeyed no command, I ate no apple, and yet I was ruthlessly driven from it. Alas! My companion did, and I was precipitated in his fall’ (p. 162). When Matilda begs her father to speak, he confesses his ‘unnatural passion’ and concludes: ‘my daughter, I love you’’ (p. 173). With these words Matilda sinks to the ground, ‘covering [her] face and almost dead with excess of sickness and fear’ (p. 173). The reaction is seemingly at odds with his revelation; after all, Matilda has not, like her father, had a sixteen-year exposure to the ‘freedom from all restraint’ that would allow her to identify incestuous desires; her sixteen years have been ones of innocence and emotional desolation. Yet Shelley implies that these years of intense longing for her father have similarly prepared Matilda to understand incestuous desires. Matilda’s reaction to her father’s declaration is only appropriate if she reciprocates this passion, otherwise the words ‘I love you’ would surely not have filled her – who has so frequently spoken of her love for him – with fear. Hoeveler regards this scene as ‘a cover for Mary’s own ambivalence towards Godwin … The real passion motivating the relationship between father and daughter is hate.’\textsuperscript{128} This autobiographical reading interprets Matilda’s hatred as a ‘negative Oedipus complex’ that causes her to ‘long to escape with an
idealized and phantom mother.\textsuperscript{129} Nevertheless, it is not her mother to whom Matilda longs to escape, but with the father whom she loves and drives to confess his love to her.

Passive before his arrival, the incestuous desires her father inspires turn Matilda into an active, aggressive agent who incites him to declare his love. Reminiscing about the day she entreats her father to speak, Matilda blames their ruin on herself, in contrast to her earlier self-absolution: ‘had not I, foolish and presumptuous wretch! hurried him on until there was no recall, no hope … I! I alone was the cause of his defeat’ (p. 169). Matilda takes responsibility for her demands that precipitated her father’s admission, reflecting that: ‘it was May, four years ago, that I first saw my beloved father; it was in May, three years ago that my folly destroyed that only thing I was doomed to love’ (p. 209). Her love for her father precludes Matilda from loving any other individual or participating in any of life’s pleasures and the loss of his esteem renders her desolate. After her father’s confession Matilda resolves never to see him again; however, almost immediately she devises ways to reunite with him. She believes that if her father wanders for another sixteen years his passion will fade as he ages, enabling him to love her paternally, desiring that he: ‘go, and return pure to thy child, who will never love aught but thee’ (p. 175). Her resolution to end the relationship with her father is not sincere; it is an attempt to absolve herself from the guilt of sexual desire. It is only by metaphorically castrating her father with age that Matilda can reconcile being with him again – not because she wants him to be rendered impotent but because it is the only way she can conceive of in which they can be together without consummating physically their love. Her father’s inability to so delude himself contributes to his suicide: an act of ultimate self-castration engendered by his fear at the power Matilda’s reciprocal incestuous passion gives her over him.\textsuperscript{130}

Matilda refuses to re-enter the economy of exchange demanded by society. After her father’s suicide relatives force her to move to London and oppress her with demands to seek an appropriate suitor, but the confined and suffocating world of patriarchal control impel Matilda to fake her own suicide and flee. Her apparent inaction in the cottage on the heath is a deliberate rejection of the cultural demands of exchange, a choice to leave civilisation and live in solitude wearing a ‘fanciful nunlike dress’ (p. 187). The purity of the garb is off-putting to men, rather like widow’s weeds but here denoting virginity. Matilda dresses as a bride of Christ who is allowed to remain untouched.\textsuperscript{131} She describes herself in her new life as
‘a selfish solitary creature, ever pondering on my regrets and faded hopes’ (p. 189). As she declares, Matilda does not ever love again. Woodville, a friend who intrudes on her self-imposed solitude, demonstrates how fully she has cut herself off from the possibility of any love other than her father. Woodville is brilliant, beautiful and kind but Matilda views him as a platonic friend. If writers of the Female Gothic wound the hero to render him a safe, feminised mate for the heroine, Woodville seems the perfect choice for Matilda. But this solution is never realised; Matilda does not desire a wounded and feminised hero/lover with whom she can share an asexual relationship any more than she truly desired her father to be rendered impotent with age, except as a psychological absolution of the guilt she feels for her incestuous desires. Matilda is aware that her love for her father is the real reason she cannot accept a suitor or remain with her relations who demand that she marry and this spurs her to dress in the nun-like habit far from the culture that traffics in women.

Matilda describes her emotional state after her father’s suicide: ‘infamy and guilt was mingled with my portion [of misery]; unlawful and detestable passion had poured its poison into my ears and changed all my blood … [to] a cold fountain of bitterness, corrupted in its very source’ (p. 196). The description comingles her wish to return to her father with language that evinces hostility, yet the tones of anger, hate and guilt do not reconcile themselves with her desire to reunite with her father, and it is her expression of faded hopes and sorrow that seem more honest. She uses the language of anger and guilt to justify her indulgent grief and need for solitude, pretending to be tainted by her father’s incestuous desires while consistently revealing that she longs to return to him. Matilda seeks solitude until her eventual reunion in death with her father and only refrains from suicide on religious grounds: ‘With all the energy of desperate grief I told him [Woodville] how I had fallen at once from bliss to misery; how for me there was no joy, no hope; that death however bitter would be the welcome seal to all my pangs; death the skeleton was to be as beautiful as love’ (p. 198). Death will be as beautiful as love because it is in death that she will be reunited with her love.

Matilda employs images of death united with the language of natural and unnatural emotions to trouble the surface narrative of pollution she associates with incestuous desires and reveal her understanding of her equally incestuous desires for her father.

I was doomed while in life to grieve, and to the natural sorrow of my father’s death and its most terrific cause, imagination had added a tenfold weight of
woe. I believed myself to be polluted by the unnatural love I had inspired, and that I was a creature cursed and set apart by nature … I was impressed more strongly with the withering fear that I was in truth a marked creature, a pariah, only fit for death. (pp. 203–4)

The ‘unnatural love’ Matilda inspired in her father is akin to the mark of Cain; she feels set apart from the outside world, separated by her father’s love and the knowledge that she incited it. Matilda later uses the word ‘unnatural’ to describe her childhood pleasures: ‘I enjoyed what I may almost call unnatural pleasures, for they were dreams and not realities’ (p. 208). That the pleasures are ‘unnatural’ and the adjective is linked to her affectionless childhood and dreams that focused on her father’s miniature image unites her father’s incestuous love and the ‘unnatural’ pleasures of her youth.

In so doing Matilda represents her and her father’s desires paradoxically as culturally unnatural yet naturally occurring. Matilda believes it is ‘imagination’ that causes the idea of being ‘polluted’ as opposed to the ‘natural’ sorrow she feels at her father’s death. The use of the word ‘imagines’ in relation to her idea that she has been violated, her purity stolen by her father, is tied to the descriptions of her childhood in which the word ‘imagination’ is so important. It was, after all, her childhood practice to envision her father’s return to her and it was on his idea and image that her imagination dwelled: ‘the idea of my unhappy, wandering father was the idol of my imagination’ (p. 157). In a sense, Matilda blames herself for causing her father’s love and his declaration of it, using the same language that characterised her childhood fixation on her father in her descriptions of the love that she incited him to verbalise. Yet her feelings of guilt and pollution are bound up in her blissful love for her father. Therefore, she emphasises her ‘mark’ as being caused by ‘imagination’; that she ‘believes’ herself polluted, that the idea she is a pariah is ‘impressed’ upon her clarifies that the pollution is not so much physical but emotional, caused by her recognition that her childhood imaginings make her as complicit in incestuous love as her father. What is explicit and ‘natural’ is her grief at being parted from her father through the realisation of the love that she had for so many years fixated on.

The most concrete language Shelley uses in her depiction of incestuous love presents Matilda jeopardising her health in order to bring about her death and reunion with her father. Once aware of her impending death, Matilda states: ‘I shall be with my father … In truth I am in love
with death; no maiden ever took more pleasure in the contemplation of her bridal attire than I in fancying my limbs already enwrapped in their shroud: is it not my marriage dress? Alone it will unite me to my father when in an eternal mental union we shall never part’ (p. 208). Matilda’s death will precede and effect her marriage yet she hastens to add that this will enable an eternal ‘mental’ bond. Her shroud – here doubling as her wedding dress – seems to literalise Blackstone’s understanding of wives as civilly dead after marriage. Shelley presents Matilda’s union with her father as offering the eternal experience of life after death and ‘after marriage’, eliciting a comparison between this marriage and the Gothic wife’s civil death explored by scholars such as Anolik and Wallace. Matilda’s death and union challenge the scholarly understandings of marriage as resulting in the death of the narrative and the wife by requiring the heroine’s death – and thus the death of the narrator and narrative – before the incestuous union can take place. Incestuous love here removes the female body from the marriage market but requires the ultimate erasure of self from culture before the father–daughter union can be consummated.

It is towards the end of her life and her disclosure of her life’s events that she has abandoned bitterness and sorrow in favour of hope and yearning; Hoeveler notes that Matilda shifts from hatred and guilt until it is ‘the dead father who is the love object, the ultimate goal at the end of the daughter’s quest’. Matilda’s parting words reinforce her belief that her future and hopes lie in the grave: ‘Farewell, Woodville, the turf will soon be green on my grave; and the violets will bloom on it. There is my hope and my expectations; yours are in this world; may they be fulfilled’ (p. 210). Matilda’s desires cause her to leave her patrimony, her estates, her name – the very things that Gothic heroines often fight so hard to recover – effectively destroying the patriarchal world of exchange that prohibits incest as a threat to its existence. She does not attempt to escape her female body by denying her desire or sexuality, but embraces it – dressing it with care in the death shroud/wedding dress in which she will meet her father. Matilda’s incestuous desires for her father are the effect of sixteen years of longing for and imagining a reunion that will eventually take place in another world, one beyond the rejected system of exchange that would relegate Matilda to the status of object/commodity.

Incest, whether sought by the father, father figure or the heroine, cannot be dismissed as a mere Gothic convention or as a simple metaphor for the dangers of patriarchy or domesticity. Incest is almost always the subtle means of destroying the patriarchal world that imprisons the
Gothic heroine, acting as a multifaceted construction encompassing the ambivalence of father–daughter relationships, differing configurations of desire, the potential for liberation in transgressive choices and the dangers of unchecked passions. The heroines’ responses to incest – whether they fight, manipulate, flee from, take part in, desire or initiate it – show their ability to act, to choose and to escape. Through the father–daughter incestuous configuration the ideas of Irigaray, Butler and Lévi-Strauss regarding the exchange of women between paternal figures of control are most clearly visible and underscore how dissolutions of paternal ties through incestuous desires break down the exogamic exchanges on which patriarchal society is based. In moving away from Freudian concepts that lead scholars to argue that ‘phobias and persecution fears … are crucially bound up with “normal” feminine psychological development’ it becomes possible to see that the fears and phobias are in fact tangible threats that women face in a culture that deals in the traffic of women. The experiences of Gothic heroines cannot be reduced to an explanation of mere poses of weakness and victimisation without adopting the language of patriarchal power that ignores the abuses perpetrated against women. The Gothic heroine does not pretend to be a victim but overcomes the real dangers endemic to the heteronormative world that demands the objectification and exchange of women. Father–daughter incest has a transgressive power to break apart the familial and kinship ties necessary to the patriarchal society of oppression and exchange, causing a rupture in the efficacy of patriarchy to make available an alternative model of female agency that reconfigures society without the exchange of female bodies.

NOTES

1 Mary Shelley, Matilda, ed. Janet Todd (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 179. Subsequent references will be given in the text.


8 Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 256.


12 Bower, 251.


15 Rita Felski, *Literature after Feminism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 153–5. Felski argues that feminist scholarship has allowed the Gothic to be revisited as a genre and explores how Freudian psychology has become intertwined with scholarly readings of the Gothic.


17 Shaffer, 75.


21 As Shelley’s Matilda meets her father as a teenager after being raised by an aunt, the depiction does not fit Freud’s parameters for the formation of incestuous desires.

22 Hoeveler, p. 56.

23 Hoeveler, p. 57.


of incest and attraction and how GSA (Genetic Sexual Attraction) first came into public discussion.

27 William Blackstone wrote: ‘by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband.’ *Commentaries on the laws of England. Book the first. By William Blackstone, Esq. vinerian professor of law, and solicitor general to her majesty*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1765), I, p. 430.


30 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* [1977], trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 84. Irigaray takes issue with Lévi-Strauss's acceptance of the exchange of women as a natural requirement in the creation of culture, questioning why it is women rather than men who are the objects of exchange (p. 171).

31 Rubin, p. 93.


33 Irigaray, p. 189.

34 Ellis, p. 52.

35 Michael Gamer, ‘Gothic origins: new primary scholarship’, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 14:2 (2002), 217. In his work *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Gamer argues for an earlier Gothic origin than 1764, stating that: ‘with Ian Duncan, Robert Miles, and Edward Jacobs, then, I read the emergence of gothic fiction between 1760 and 1790 as a response to the novel’, pointing to John Home’s *Douglas* (1757) and Thomas LeLand’s *Longsword, Earl of Salisbury* (1762) as, along with *Otranto*, ‘the texts most often involved in literary histories of early gothic fiction and drama’ (p. 57).

36 Benjamin Bird, ‘Treason and imagination: the anxiety of legitimacy in the subject of the 1760s’, *Romanticism*, 12:3 (2006), 192–3. Bird argues that what ‘particularly aroused Walpole’s wrath was a case of seditious libel brought by the crown against forty-nine employees of the dissident journal “North Briton”’ and cites his votes in two parliamentary debates in 1763 in opposition to King George III’s administration that made use of ‘general warrants’ which Walpole considered ‘illegal and an abuse of the royal prerogative’ (193).


Unimaginable sensations


Frederick S. Frank argues that Walpole ‘counterfeited his authorship’ in claiming the book was an Italian manuscript translated by William Marshal and notes that Walpole’s use of the term Gothic in the second preface recalls Bishop Hurd’s ‘earlier use of the phrase “Gothic romance”’ in his ‘Introduction’, Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto and The Mysterious Mother* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2003), p. 16.

Walpole would have been familiar with Henry Fielding’s play *The Welsh Opera* (1731), a political allegory that satirised the government of his father, Robert Walpole, and which is examined in this context in Albert Rivero’s *The Plays of Henry Fielding: A Critical Study of His Dramatic Career* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1989), pp. 91–2.


Chaplin, 182–3.

Chaplin, 185–6.

Watt points to the parodic nature of *Otranto* when he notes its ‘playfulness’ in *Contesting the Gothic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 120–1.

Watt argues that ‘Walpole helped to establish a vocabulary of themes and tropes that was later resorted to across the genres’ (‘Gothic’, p. 121).

In contrast to most critics, Watt displaces *Otranto* as the first Gothic novel (Contesting the Gothic, p. 3).

Modleski notes the conventions that Gothic novels and sentimental and domestic novels share, such as paranoia, persecution and threatened domestic spaces (pp. 10–22). Examples of the sentimental novel include Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771) and Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778).

In ‘Betrayal of trust’ Dominelli argues that ‘like Freud, experts drawing on psychoanalytical approaches ignore the significance of gender in incestuous relationships, the power emanating from the subordination of women to men (McLeod and Saraga, 1988) and the impact of the power relations inherent in adult-child relationships’ (292–3).

Cynthia Wall’s essay on Walpole’s resentment of political authority and use of subterranean images in his correspondence and fiction argues that Walpole deploys the blending of genres found in Shakespeare to construct ‘a nonspecific political satire against typical patriarchal assumptions’ in ‘The
**Gothis Incest**


54 Anolik’s ‘The missing mother’ examines how Gothic writers literalise women’s disempowered status in society through their textual erasure, a technique similar to (though reversed in) Walpole’s exaggeration of the physical symbols of the aristocracy to create political metaphors.


57 Nussbaum points to this association of the domestic female servant with sexuality (pp. 25–6).

58 Irigaray, p. 84.

59 Hoeveler, p. 246.

60 Unlike Hippolita, who is rewarded for her complicity with male-based incestuous desires, female characters who endanger heroines in other Gothic works are punished severely. In Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) Madame Montoni allows the heroine to be offered to the richest suitor and is imprisoned by her husband and dies; in *The Italian* (1797) the Marchesa dies of guilt after plotting the heroine’s murder. In Charlotte Smith’s *Emmeline* (1788) Lady Montreville dies after attempting to coerce the heroine into undesired marriages.

61 See Anolik, 25–43. Examples of this type of mother or mother-substitute include Radcliffe’s characters of Olivia in *The Italian* (1797) and the Marchioness Mazzini in *A Sicilian Romance* (1790); the Countess of Wolfenbach in Eliza Parsons’s *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793); and Correlia in Sarah Sheriff’s *Correlia, or The Mystic Tomb* (1802). An alternative maternal model is the sexually aggressive mother, such as Walpole’s Countess in *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), analysed in Chapter 5.

62 See Chapter 3 for an examination of violent uncle–niece incest as representative of male usurpations of property and female bodies.

63 This trope recurs in novels such as Smith’s *Emmeline*, Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and *The Italian*, Parsons’s *Wolfenbach*, Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), Eleanor Sleath’s *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798) and Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), among others.
This is similarly an implicit criticism of the changes in law regarding marriage under Henry VIII that allowed him to marry Anne Boleyn, who was technically within the forbidden degrees of affinal connection to him, given her consanguineal relationship to his first wife, only to later charge her with incest (among other crimes) in order to have her executed so he could marry Jane Seymour. For an in-depth treatment of the historical and political allusions in Walpole’s novel, see, for example, Carol M. Dole’s article ‘Three tyrants in The Castle of Otranto’, English Language Notes, 26:1 (1988), 26–3.

This is why in Emmeline Smith’s heroine is not considered a viable marriage option for her cousin. Although the blood ties are far enough removed to allow property and wealth movement, because her uncle misappropriated her father’s property, the wealth is already reallocated to her cousin’s family. Emmeline’s aunt and uncle do not object to the union on consanguineal grounds but because their son does not need to marry Emmeline to gain access to her property. An incest taboo is necessary to patriarchy’s maintenance of exogamic exchange; it can only be overcome if the exchange of wealth or power coincides with the incestuous union.


Lévi-Strauss, p. 115. Lévi-Strauss’s theories regarding women as objects of exchange are predicated on understanding the incest taboo as essential to exogamy, and thus culture. Without the ban on incestuous relationships, men would marry within their families and social structures and alliances would not be built.

See previously cited models of incest as an abuse of power or violation of familial authority as analysed by Dominelli, Brickman and Taylor.

This is like the scenes of incestuous stabbings (or near-stabbings) in novels including Radcliffe’s The Italian, Parsons’s Wolfenbach and Anne Ker’s The Mysterious Count; or, Montville Castle (1803).


Modleski points to ‘enforced confinement’ as underlying the paranoia of Gothic heroines (p. 11). Modleski’s treatment of claustrophobic domestic spaces yields important analyses of repeated Gothic conventions.

Perry describes the phenomena of feelings of kinship or attraction to those who turn out to be related as the ‘cri du sang or the call of blood [that]
signified a fictional instinct whose popularity apparently reassured society that consanguinity was still powerful’ (p. 95).

Hoeveler offers this label in the preface to *Gothic Feminism*, stating that it is a tactic found in most Gothic heroines who ‘cannot bare their teeth in anything other than a smile’, taking what had previously been called ‘victim feminism’ in application to the Female Gothic and terming it ‘gothic feminism’ (p. 246).


Hoeveler, pp. 34–5.

Hoeveler, p. 36.

Hoeveler, pp. 36–50.

See Chapter 4’s analysis of Rochester in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), who is an exception to the recovery from wounding, although his injury neither castrates nor feminises him.

Perry argues that consanguineal ties were loosening while the marriage bond and affinal relatives were of increasing importance in society, a shift in the family structure that produced anxiety evidenced through representations of kinship in the eighteenth-century novel, particularly in the Gothic, which hyperbolised the threats implicit in the new nuclear family (pp. 388–90).

See Perry, pp. 86–8.

Hoeveler, p. 36.

See Hoeveler, p. 36.


Female characters are imprisoned in convents and threatened with perpetual celibacy following attempts to compel them into taking the vows of a nun in many Gothic texts, including George Moore’s *Grasville Abbey* (1793), Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, Lewis’s *The Monk*, Sleath’s *The Orphan of the Rhine* and George Barrington’s *Eliza, or The Unhappy Nun* (1803). My argument here contrasts with that of Maria Purves in *The Gothic and Catholicism: Religion, Cultural Exchange and the Popular Novel, 1785–1829* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009). Purves argues that Gothic novels, while generally understood by scholarship as presenting anti-Catholic and anti-monastic views, actually depict the convent as a space of safety to heroines, an alternative to the outside world and its threats, as opposed to being conceived as a threat to female liberty.

Since the mid-fourteenth century ‘abstinence’ has been used to refer particularly to sexual appetites. [http://dictionary.reference.com/etymology/abstinence](http://dictionary.reference.com/etymology/abstinence) [accessed 17 July 2009].

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Leaving available a substitute meaning would have been a real concern for Radcliffe, who needed to maintain an image as a respectable woman writer in a genre frequently condemned for its promotion of individual desires. See Fred Botting, *Gothic: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 1996), in which Botting describes the understanding of the genre as ‘giving free rein to … sexual desires’ (p. 4).

Hoeveler succinctly explains Gothic representations of Catholicism as: ‘a sort of leitmotif throughout the gothic novel, reifying British and Enlightenment dread of medievalism, superstition, and uninformed prejudice’ (p. 52).

Walpole's Matilda is barely able to overcome filial ties to save a man's life while Adeline dissolves them when her sexual freedom is threatened. The contractual nature of her obligation to her father is voided by his refusal to grant her rights – see the analysis in Chapter 4 of obligation and individual rights in relation to incestuous relationships.

Pollak, p. 47.

See, in addition to *Otranto* and *The Romance of the Forest*, Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance*, in which the heroine's father tries to exchange her in marriage to his wealthy and powerful friend, Anna Maria Bennett's *Ellen, Countess of Castle Howel* (1794), in which the heroine is given to a wealthy older man in marriage in exchange for him saving their family estate and Selina Davenport’s *The Sons of the Viscount and the Daughters of the Earl* (1813), wherein the beauty of the heroine's sister renders her a marketable commodity protected by the family patriarch (an uncle).

Irigaray points to this circulation among men thus: ‘the production of women, signs, and commodities is always referred back to men (when a man buys a girl, he “pays” the father or the brother, not the mother …), and they always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to the other. The work force is thus always assumed to be masculine, and “products” are objects to be used, objects of transaction among men alone’ (p. 171).

Joan Riviere argued that ‘womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it’ in ‘Womanliness as masquerade’, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 10 (1929), 306.
the divergent yet coterminous emphases on affinal, consanguineal and conjugal relations.

104 Imprisoned male characters include Vivaldi and Schedoni in The Italian, Valancourt and Du Pont in Udolpho, Hippolitus de Vereza in A Sicilian Romance and Albert in Anne Ker’s The Mysterious Count; or, Montville Castle (1803), amongst others.

105 The figure of the uncle who offers either a role as sex-slave or wife to his niece is similarly presented in Parsons’s Wolfenbach, in which the heroine rejects both options, locating them as objectionable and synonymous.


107 Hoeveler, pp. 54–5.

108 Hoeveler, p. 246.

109 Rubin, p. 199.

110 Gothic heroines, in this sense, complete the disintegration of male/female distinctions and paternal authority suggested by Gallop without necessarily physically completing the incestuous sex act – their refusal to obey the father’s law is almost always enough to cause the destruction of the patriarchal structure.


113 Hoeveler, p. 166.

114 Hoeveler, p. 162.

115 Harpold, 53.

116 Tilottama Rajan, ‘Mary Shelley’s Mathilda: melancholy and the political economy of Romanticism’, Studies in the Novel, 26:2 (Summer 1994), 43–68. This analysis offers fascinating insights into the intertextualities and ambiguities in Shelley’s novel produced by rewritings of her parents’ works and focuses on the themes of trauma, affect and abjection.


118 Irigaray, p. 189.

119 Irigaray concludes that ‘even supposing this to be possible, history would repeat itself in the long run, would revert to sameness’ (pp. 32–3). See

120 Like the earlier analysis of Adeline’s self-sexualising, Gothic heroines develop their sexuality before selecting a spouse.

121 Irigaray, p. 176.

122 Irigaray, p. 192.

123 Lloyd DeMause, ‘The universality of incest’, *Journal of Psychohistory*, 19:2 (1991), 123–64. DeMause cites the observations of scholars such as Catherine Mayo and Verrier Elwin and an old Indian proverb: ‘for a girl to be a virgin at ten years old, she must have neither brother nor cousins nor father’ (125). Such long-standing Western conceptions of Eastern attitudes towards incest support reading Shelley’s representations of the father as having an altered moral code regarding incest based on his time in India.

124 This depiction of the East as having a more lax and passion-centred nexus of morality than that of Western societies echoes a monologue of the Marquis in *The Romance of the Forest* when, attempting to persuade La Motte to murder Adeline, the Marquis insists that it is a sign of superiority to lay aside the prejudices of education and country and embrace one’s nature as those from the East do. The Marquis manipulates a perception of Eastern culture to introduce a more fluid morality to La Motte. See Ros Ballaster’s excellent treatment of eighteenth-century literature and Orientalism in *Fabulous Orients: Fictions of the East in England 1662–1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

125 Hoeveler points to this passage as allowing the father to ‘rationalize incest in the extremely suspect regions of the Orient’, concluding that Shelley does this to reveal ‘another way that the middle-class domestic abode can be seen as a haven for fostering perverse and perverting love’ (p. 167).


127 Lévi-Strauss, p. 25.

128 Hoeveler, p. 172.

129 Hoeveler, pp. 172–3.

130 As Gallop argues throughout *The Daughter’s Seduction*, the daughter’s ‘seduction’ of the father – her refusal to be seduced by him or be submissive to the incest taboo – breaks down male/female hierarchies of law and desire, deconstructing rather than simply reversing them. Matilda’s ‘seduction’ of her father so dismantles the hierarchies that she becomes his pursuer,
driving him to suicide, until the law of father, or patriarchal law, which demands that ‘the daughter submits to the father’s rule, which prohibits the father’s desire’ (p. 70), is not only inverted but destroyed.

131 Hoeveler likewise argues that Matilda rearranges her nun-like garb to become her father’s bride (p. 180).

132 Hoeveler writes that Woodville’s ‘sufferings have effectively castrated him’ but that despite this he is unsuitable for Matilda because she cannot ‘find love or happiness with any living man, particularly one whose philosophical opinions bear such an uncanny resemblance to Percy Shelley’s own ideas’ (p. 179).

133 See Jacques Lacan, Écrits [1977] (London: Routledge, repr. 2001), in which Lacan describes ‘the armature of the Freudian edifice, namely: the equivalence maintained by Freud of the imaginary function of the phallus in both sexes … the castration complex found as a normative phase of the assumption by the subject of his own sex, the myth of the murder of the father rendered necessary by the Oedipus complex’ (p. 144). Matilda’s assumption of the seducer’s role positions her as the male subject, both castrating and killing the Father and his law.


135 Hoeveler argues that Matilda seeks death to ‘escape the corrupted body’ as Shelley viewed ‘all women as diseased, aberrant, and freakish composites of the hopes and dreams of other people … She inhabited a female body; she bled and caused bleeding in others, and those unfortunate facts defined for her and her fiction the gothic feminist nightmare in its starkest terms’ (pp. 182–3).

136 Modleski uses these Freudian insights to locate the Gothic as ‘the paranoid text’ (p. 23).