



The Castle of Otranto: The First Gothic Novel

Charlotte Loiseau

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The Castle of Otranto: The First Gothic Novel.

Nom: **LOISEAU**
Prénom: **Charlotte**

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RÉSUMÉ

Ce mémoire part de l'affirmation, "le roman de Horace Walpole, Le chateau d'Otrante est le premier roman 'gothique'". Le but est d'étudier le roman en tant que tel. Dans la première partie, nous traitons des thèmes du gothique : la place centrale du château, le thème du labyrinthe, de la fuite, du sexe, le *doppelgänger* et le "fantastique" et le "merveilleux". Dans la deuxième partie, on étudie la dimension onirique du roman : d'abord en partant de son origine, puis en traitant les hyperboles, la "dramatization" du roman, le détachement du monde extérieur et l'acceptation d'une réalité créée par le rêve. Enfin, dans la troisième partie, la question traitée est celle de l'horreur et de la terreur en comparant le roman avec *l'inquiétante étrangeté* de Freud : le recours aux peurs enfantines, l'effet de la narration, les vérités cachées qui resurgissent et l'animisme et la relation avec la mort.

KEYWORDS: Gothic, Walpole, The Castle of Otranto, Dream

ABSTRACT

This study stems from the statement "Horace Walpole's novel, The Castle of Otranto is the first Gothic novel". We aimed to study the novel as such. In the first part, we discuss the themes of the Gothic novel: the central importance of the castle, the maze, the escape, sex, the *doppelgänger* and "the *fantastique* and the *merveilleux*". In the second part we study the oneiric dimension of the novel: the origin of the latter, the importance of hyperboles, the "dramatization" of the novel, the detachment from the external world, the acceptance of the dream-created reality. And finally in the third part the question of terror and horror in the novel is discussed by making a parallel with Freud's *Uncanny*: wakening of childish fears, the effect of narration, reappearance of hidden truth, Animism and relation to death .

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Introduction

Walpole's novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, is the tale of the family of Manfred, prince of Otranto (for a short summary see annexe 1).

It is the only novel written by Horace Walpole, who on the other hand wrote several books on Gothic architecture, which fascinated him. He had a project of renovating his villa (Strawberry hill) in the Gothic fashion. This obsession for Gothic architecture was probably one of the reasons why he wrote *The Castle of Otranto*.

Possibly doubting his ability to excel in a writing exercise he lacked experience in (fiction), Walpole had wanted to protect himself from a possible fiasco. When the novel was first published in 1764, it was presented as the translation of an ancient Italian manuscript.

“Walpole n'était pas sûr de l'accueil qui serait fait à cette œuvre de haute imagination : sans doute y attachait-il par ailleurs assez d'importance, pour ne pas s'exposer inutilement au ridicule”¹.

The novel turned out to be a success and he published it a second time under his real name, asking for the reader's pardon in the preface to the second edition.

All the same, the success of the book far exceeds mere critical or commercial acclaim in that *The Castle of Otranto* is said to be “the first Gothic novel”²:

“En écrivant son ‘histoire gothique’, cette ‘chose frénétique’ où le surnaturel des légendes médiévales est amplifié par le rêve, Walpole a pleinement conscience de faire une œuvre originale.”³. The fact that this work is considered as the first Gothic novel infers that the novel is a turning point. All the more so as the Gothic genre itself can be considered as a turning point:

“Dans l'histoire du roman anglais, la phase ‘gothique’ correspond à ce qu'on pourrait appeler une crise de croissance, le passage du réalisme à l'imaginaire”

This interest for the imagination can be seen as a reaction against the rationality of artists in the

¹ Maurice Lévy, *Le roman “gothique” anglais 1764-1824*, (Paris : Albin Michel, 1995), 96

² see also Françoise Grellet, *Literature in English: Anthologie des littératures du monde Anglophone*, (Paris : Hachette, 2002), 99 and Ann Daphné Grieve, “Roman noir ou roman gothique”, *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, accessed on may 24, 2011.

<http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/roman-noir-roman-gothique/>

³ Lévy, *Le Roman Gothique*, 124

previous age.

“The end of the 17th century and the first part of the 18th century, until about 1745, were marked by a respect for convention, moderation and balance”⁴

In the second half of the 18th century, we might note a recrudescence of the interest towards medieval and Gothic architectures which obviously can be related to the appearance of this Gothic tale.

The fact that *The Castle of Otranto* is considered as the first Gothic novel can lead as well to a series of difficulties. The first piece of a genre may not present all the features that later critics gives to the genre in general. One has to be careful, for characteristics that do not seem to be fitting the definition of the Gothic might be the beginnings of one of the features of Gothic genre. A literary genre is a delicate entity to define and *a fortiori* when one discusses a genre of novel. Novel is in itself an hybrid genre and therefore one could find in a particular novel features of more than one sub-genre. Moreover a sub-genre evolves. Even if it tends to be delimited in time, as soon as a new novel bearing its features appears, it makes the genre itself evolve.

“Toute œuvre modifie l’ensemble des possibles, chaque nouvel exemple change l’espèce”⁵

It is nevertheless possible to define the main features that a novel should bear to be considered as belonging to a given genre.

The Gothic genre corresponds to a novel with certain features like: recurrent themes (such as the importance of the setting, supernatural events, the escape, the image of the maze etc.)⁶, dream-like characteristics present in the novel⁷ or the importance of terror and horror (“en effet, les thèmes de peur, d’agression sadique, de mystère et de mort parcourent ces récits, où une ‘inquiétante étrangeté’ révèle au plus près les désirs de l’homme.”⁸). We might also consider the evolution of the tools available to study such a novel, the development of narratology⁹ in the 20th century and the Freudian study of dreams might come in handy in the

⁴ Grellet, *Litterature in English*, 56

⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: éditions du seuil, 1970), 10

⁶ Todorov, *littérature fantastique* “les thèmes du fantastique” Grellet, *Litterature in English*, 99

⁷ Lévy, *Le Roman Gothique*, 7, 108, 114

⁸ Grieve, “Roman noire”

⁹ “narratology, in literary theory, the study of narrative structure”. Encyclopaedia Britannica, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/403648/narratology>, accesed on may, 24, 2011

study of *The Castle of Otranto*. We will therefore consider the statement “*The Castle of Otranto* is the first Gothic novel” and try to study the novel in the light of the aforementioned tools developed recently. The first part will discuss the themes (or *topos*) of Gothic literature, in the second we will study the oneiric dimension of the novel and last, horror and terror will be compared with Sigmund Freud’s *The Uncanny*.

PART I: THEMES OF THE GOTHIC NOVEL

The concise definition given by Françoise Grellet displays some of the main features of Gothic literature, in this part we will try to analyse those features (and a few more added by Tzvetan Todorov) in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*:

“Most [Gothic] plots followed the same line: the heroin is kidnapped by a wicked relative taken to a far away castle or abbey [...] which with its tunnels, dungeons and strange noises becomes a scene of terror, and strange supernatural happenings (not always accounted for at the end of the novel)”¹⁰

1. THE CENTRAL IMPORTANCE OF THE CASTLE

As Maurice Levy explains¹¹, Horace Walpole was fascinated by Gothic architecture and spent a great part of his life trying to transform his mansion (Strawberry Hill) into a truly Gothic palace. He wrote *The Castle of Otranto* during the renovation of his mansion and confesses his attraction to Strawberry Hill in the first edition of the book. *The Castle of Otranto* was first published in 1764 as the translation of a manuscript dating from the 16th century, thus allowing Walpole to comment on his own work, underlining features of his writing, such as the detailed descriptions of the castle, in the first preface to his novel:

“The author seems frequently, without design, to describe particular parts. ‘The chamber’, says he, ‘on the right hand;’ ‘the door on the left hand;’ ‘the distance from the chapel to Conrad's apartment:’ these and other passages are strong presumptions that the author had some certain building in his eye ”¹².

It is a bit disturbing that the author should comment on his own work but it underlines even more the fact that he did have “a certain building in his eye” (probably Strawberry Hill) and

¹⁰ Françoise Grellet, *Literature in English: Anthologie des littératures du monde Anglophone*, (Paris : Hachette, 2002), 99

¹¹ Lévy, *Le Roman Gothique*, chapitre II, 77-143

¹² Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, accessed on November 28, 2010 <http://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?oldid=1720570>, 3

that the castle had a central place in the novel. Indeed, Maurice Levy explains¹³ (chapitre II: le rêve gothique d'Horace Walpole) that *The Castle of Otranto* was carefully “built” in Walpole’s head and that the book was a direct consequence of his obsession with Gothic architecture (possibly the fact that he could not completely transform Strawberry Hill into a Gothic castle):

“Le vrai-faux de Strawberry Hill en même temps qu’il fait son orgueil ne cesse de le tourmenter [...] cette insatisfaction profonde n’est pas étrangère à la rédaction du *Château d’Otrante*”.¹⁴

One can therefore think that the castle is the central subject of the novel, and this statement can surely be underlined by the title of the book. It gives to the castle another dimension, the reader might almost feel it is the eponymous character of the story. It can also be added that the castle is almost a hyperbole in itself: despite the fact that Walpole uses rather usual terms to describe the castle, the minute details provided by the author and certain comparisons (the castle is able to contain the limbs of a giant) stress the importance of the castle and its gigantic size. This disproportionate size gives to the castle the role of a cornerstone in the novel. Maybe this can begin to explain why, in this novel, the castle has such a central and important role. Indeed the castle is the very cause of the whole story: we could think that Manfred is cursed by the castle because he is an usurper. The castle does not really belong to his family, this is why he wanted to marry Conrad to Isabella. It would seem that the castle rejects Manfred, because it is the symbol of the rightful owner’s family. The castle becomes some kind of a character of its own (even if it is more passive than active in the story we cannot stop ourselves from thinking the building itself has something to do with the supernatural events).

We can find a similar phenomenon in a later work by Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (which could be seen as inspired by the Gothic genre). The first similarity one can notice is that the titles of both the novel and the short story are the name of the edifice. In the short story the house is the symbol of the family of Usher, the cracks in its façade represent the terrible state of the last two remaining members of the family. At the end of the story, Roderick and Madeline Usher both die and the house falls into pieces with them. In *The Castle of Otranto*, the role of the castle as a symbol of the family of its rightful owner – the heir of

¹³ Lévy, *Le Roman Gothique*, 77-143 .

¹⁴ Lévy, *Le Roman Gothique*, 86

Alfonso, Theodore – is not as obvious as in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. There are not any clear personifications of the building, whereas, in Poe's short story the house is clearly compared to a human being: "the vacant eye-like Windows".¹⁵

Before the apparition of the entire giant, the reader cannot help wondering if the enormous hand and leg that are seen (without the rest of the body) are not the limbs of the castle itself. The impression given by those observations is that the castle is a symbol standing for the family and rightful heirs of Alfonso. The castle takes a great part in the horrific and gloomy atmosphere of the book, it is a source of fear, Diego even says to Manfred that he should "send for the chaplain, and have the castle exorcised, for, for certain, it is enchanted"¹⁶ and Bianca says it is "certainly haunted"¹⁷. The castle is also associated with death (e.g.: "fatal castle"¹⁸)

Even if one cannot say that the place where the scene is set always has such a central position in every Gothic novel, it is still one of the major tricks used to create the horror and the gloomy atmosphere of the genre. The building where Gothic stories take place is always inspired Gothic architecture (often a castle, but sometimes a monastery or some similar building) with small windows and therefore dark corners and places which intensify the fears of the characters. There are also secret passages like in *The Castle of Otranto*¹⁹ when Isabella and Theodore find a trap door. We can also compare it to the Castle of Dr Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) or to the castle of count Dracula in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897): both have secret passages and dark corners which deepen the fear of the characters during the night. It is typical of Gothic architecture to have small windows and, thus, very little light. and darkness exacerbate the fears of the heroes. Moreover the secret passages allow the villains who know their way in the castle to encounter the hero/heroine at any moment. It is one of the processes that create suspense of the story, the reader is aware that anything can happen and that the hero can encounter the "villain" at any moment.

¹⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, accessed April 14 2011, <http://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Poe/Usher.pdf>, 3

¹⁶ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 13

¹⁷ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 18

¹⁸ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 11

¹⁹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 12-13

2. THE THEME OF THE MAZE

The several secret passageways also create a feeling of insecurity because they transform the castle into a labyrinth. This theme exists in other Gothic novels, *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* for example. Here, in *The Castle of Otranto*, the characters who are familiar with the castle (Matilda, Hyppolita and Manfred) do not seem to have trouble finding their way through its endless rooms and vaults. On the contrary, Theodore is, like the reader, “unacquainted with the castle”²⁰. When Isabella is fleeing, even though she ought to know her way around, she seems to be frightened and lost in the castle. Their feelings seem to underline the dreadful sentiment the castle can inspire. The characters need to be able to situate themselves in the castle and even Isabella who seems to have lived in the castle for a long time – and should consider it like her home – does not feel safe or confident in one the secret passages. The feeling of fear is omnipresent and created mostly by the fact that Isabella is alone in the dark and lost. It arouses a feeling of claustrophobia, the reader can feel Isabella’s urge to escape from the castle:

“The lower part of the castle was hollowed into several intricate cloisters; and it was not easy for one under so much anxiety to find the door that opened into the cavern. An awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which, grating on the rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness. Every murmur struck her with new terror; yet more she dreaded to hear the wrathful voice of Manfred urging his domestics to pursue her.”²¹

It can also be added that the detailed description of the castle and the immensity (mentioned previously²²) help the reader to picture the castle as an enormous maze of stairs, unused rooms, corridors, vaults and secret passages. As we can see in the extract above the author himself compares the castle to a labyrinth.

There is also a cavern near the castle which indeed is a labyrinth. The description Matilda draws of that cavern incites us to believe that it is also a place of fear and anxiety: “Yonder

²⁰ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 9

²¹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 8

²² Both points are discussed in 1.

behind that forest to the east is a chain of rocks, hollowed into a labyrinth of caverns that reach to the sea coast”²³. Here too, the author compares the caverns to a maze. But the feelings of Theodore are described thanks to the use of internal focalisation, and he reminds us of medieval literature’s heroes: he does not fear to die if it is to save that of a gentle lady. Moreover, the labyrinth might be for him a way of escaping the dreaded castle and its insane prince. The point of view of Isabella (given thanks to internal focalisation) adds to the stress of the reader because the heroine is terror stricken (even though it is not as striking as it could be in other Gothic stories because the narrator in *The Castle of Otranto* is heterodiegetic): “The trembling Princess relapsed into her former agony of fear. Theodore endeavoured to encourage her, but in vain.”²⁴. At this moment of the story, Isabella seems to be panicking but not only because she is lost. Theodore says they are “too near the mouth of the cavern” so they must not be too deep into the cavern. The reason why Isabella is so frightened is because she is pursued by Manfred. This leads us to another theme of the Gothic novel : the escape.

3. THE ESCAPE

The escape of a pure, virginal, young woman is often present in Gothic novels. In *The Castle of Otranto*, Isabella (like Matilda) embodies the image of the pure virgin (a virtuous female who symbolises innocence) while Manfred represents another typical character of the Gothic novel: the “beast” (a perfidious being who longs after the innocent young woman). After the death of Conrad, Manfred decides that, since Isabella cannot be united to his son, she should be married to the only male member of the family left: himself. Manfred is the typical Gothic villain, even though he is not a supernatural creature nor does he have supernatural capacities or powers (contrary to the creature in *Frankenstein*, Count Dracula in *Dracula*, Dorian in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or Edward Hyde in *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*). He is selfish and does not have a sense of morals (he wants to divorce his wife and marry his daughter-in-law). Nowadays this may not be systematically considered as a lack of moral values but when Walpole writes the story (in the 18th century) and *a fortiori* when the story takes place (between the first crusade in 1095 and the last in 1243) marriage is a sacred bond and those who want to break it are severely judged. He is violent and quick tempered,

²³ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 31

²⁴ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 33

throughout the story his name is associated with the lexical field of wrath and violence. He is said to be “enraged”²⁵ ; “impatient”²⁶ ; “impetu[ous]”²⁷ ; “execrable”²⁸. He is a frightening character and Isabella is scared of him even before he starts to chase her: “Then shutting the door impetuously, he flung himself upon a bench against the wall, and bade Isabella sit by him. She obeyed trembling”²⁹.

Isabella flees during most of the story and the threatening figure of Manfred is always used as a means to create fear. The reader sympathizes with Isabella who is literally terrified by the “tyrant”³⁰. He is never very far from his goal. Isabella is not the only character who tries to escape from Manfred’s dubious plans. Matilda does too, but not in the same way. She disobeys her father and helps Theodore in his plans to break free. The suspense linked to Isabella’s escape is building up and plays great part in arousing horror in the reader:

“Words cannot paint the horror of the Princess's situation. Alone in so dismal a place, her mind imprinted with all the terrible events of the day, hopeless of escaping, expecting every moment the arrival of Manfred, and far from tranquil on knowing she was within reach of somebody, she knew not whom, who for some cause seemed concealed thereabouts; all these thoughts crowded on her distracted mind, and she was ready to sink under her apprehensions. She addressed herself to every saint in heaven, and inwardly implored their assistance. For a considerable time she remained in an agony of despair.”³¹

In this excerpt, the rhythm is very halting (as if imitating Isabella’s trouble to catch her breath), due to the apposition of short clauses. It creates a climax, the reader expects Manfred to catch her any minute. Moreover this kind of construction helps build the suspense and thus the reader sympathizes with Isabella.

²⁵ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 5

²⁶ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 4

²⁷ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 21

²⁸ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 39

²⁹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 7

³⁰ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 23, 24, 31, 41, 43, 48

³¹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 9

The fact that Manfred pursues Isabella during almost the whole story is one of the processes that Walpole uses to create fear and horror but it is also related to the odd nature of the relationship between Manfred and Isabella. Manfred desires Isabella, not only because she is the solution to his legitimacy problems but also because she is young and beautiful. Isabella is his daughter in law and his desire for her seems almost incestuous to the reader. His eagerness to possess Isabella, his obsession with her make the reader feel uneasy. This can lead one to think about another theme of Gothic novels: Sexuality.

4. THE SEXUAL DIMENSION OF THE NOVEL

Even though it is not as clear in *The Castle of Otranto* as it may be in *Frankenstein* or in *Dracula*³², sex is one of the main topics of the novel. Sex is a topic which brings uneasiness, not only because it is a taboo but also because (as in most Gothic novels) it is depicted as nasty. The reader feels that Manfred should not be attracted to his daughter in law, there is almost something devilish about his passion for Isabella.

It creates uneasiness because of the drastic difference between the two characters. Isabella is a virtuous, innocent young girl whereas Manfred is a brutal, sly, rude middle-aged man. It feels like both characters are the antithesis of one another. Besides they are both described with antithetical terms. Isabella is the image of a virtuous young woman, with high moral values and respect for the principles of religion. She is described by Matilda in the highest terms “Isabella is of a cheerful disposition, but her soul is pure as virtue itself”³³. And Matilda goes on (p. 18) “Isabella is no hypocrite; she has a due sense of devotion”. It seems that the terms used to describe Isabella all belong to the lexical field of piety and are also most of the time religious terms (e.g.: soul, virtue, devotion). She is also a symbol of virginity. Her innocence is omnipresent in the descriptions of this character: “dear Isabella! This brave Knight—I know not who he is—will protect thy innocence”³⁴; “Isabella, whose heart was too honest to resist a

³² Dracula does not correspond the period defined for Gothic genre, though as underline in the online encyclopaedia Britannica (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/239776/Gothic-novel> accessed on 24/05/11): “Dracula (1897), by Bram Stoker, [is] in the Gothic tradition but introduce the existential nature of humankind as its definitive mystery and terror.”

³³ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 16

³⁴ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 34

kind expression”³⁵ ; “the natural sincerity and candour of their souls”³⁶. On the contrary, Manfred is a symbol of impurity. As opposed to the pure and religious Matilda, he is shown as a sinful man. As it was said earlier, Manfred is a violent man and he is very quick-tempered, a parallel can be made between the candour of Isabella and the impiety of Manfred who is subject to at least two of the seven deadly sins: wrath and envy. Those sins lead him to an even greater sin at the end of the novel: infanticide, he kills his own daughter. This last sin makes him a “murderous monster”³⁷ and it is qualified as “sacrilegious”³⁸. Manfred is the antithesis of Isabella, he is described as an insensitive person: “The undaunted youth received the bitter sentence with a resignation that touched every heart but Manfred’s”³⁹, “the inflexibility of Manfred’s temper”⁴⁰. He is also described as a tyrant as and a “savage”⁴¹ and a “Profane Prince”⁴². “Profane” underlines the fact that Manfred is, contrary to Isabella, not pious. Indeed the friar qualifies his plans as “impious”⁴³ and “cursed”⁴⁴. The character of Manfred is also associated with fire: “Manfred, whose spirits were inflamed”⁴⁵ ; “ questions that might tend to inflame Manfred’s wrath against his son”⁴⁶. It might be taken as a clue to Manfred’s almost devilish nature. This relationship seems to be cursed by god and Manfred seems to be drifting towards sin.

What makes Isabella and Manfred’s possible union even more disturbing for the reader is the nature of their relationships. Indeed, Isabella seems to have lived for a while with Manfred and Hippolita, “whom she shall always respect as Parents”⁴⁷. Isabella herself refers to Hippolita as her mother: “No, madam, no; force should not drag me to Manfred’s hated bed. I loathe him, I abhor him: divine and human laws forbid—and my friend, my dearest Matilda! would I wound

³⁵ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 38

³⁶ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 38

³⁷ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 48

³⁸ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 49

³⁹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 23

⁴⁰ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 24

⁴¹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 41

⁴² Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 42

⁴³ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 42

⁴⁴ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 42

⁴⁵ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 48

⁴⁶ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 36

⁴⁷ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 19

her tender soul by injuring her adored mother? my own mother—I never have known another”⁴⁸. But we can also see in this extract how twisted Manfred’s desire for Isabella seems to be (“divine and human laws forbid”⁴⁹). It is clear that incest is discussed here (“by me thou art warned not to pursue the incestuous design on thy contracted daughter”⁵⁰). Incest is omnipresent in the book, Manfred and Hippolita’s marriage is already incestuous: “Hippolita is related to [Manfred] in the fourth degree”⁵¹. The perspective of his marriage with Isabella seems much more dubious than his marriage with his distant cousin though there is no blood bond between them, it can be related with the extreme resemblance that exists between Isabella and Matilda.

5. THE *DOPPELGÄNGER*

Matilda and Isabella’s resemblance is striking. Not only do they share beauty and charm (“Manfred, Prince of Otranto, had one son and one daughter: the latter, a most beautiful virgin, aged eighteen, was called Matilda.”⁵² ; “beauteous and all perfect as [Isabella’s] form is”⁵³) but they also share the same status of pious and virgin young girls. They also act in a very similar way, when they are together they usually do the exact same thing and are referred to as a group: “The princesses were all attention and anxiety”⁵⁴ ; “the young ladies were silent and melancholy”⁵⁵ ; “The princesses then revealed to Hippolita their mutual inclination for Theodore”⁵⁶. Even towards each other they have the very same reactions. When one is jealous, the other is, and when one stops to be jealous the other does to:

“ [...] and jealousy that for a moment had raised a coolness between these amiable maidens soon gave way to the natural sincerity and candour of their souls. Each confessed to the other the impression that Theodore had made on her; and this confidence was followed by a struggle of generosity, each insisting on

⁴⁸ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 39

⁴⁹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 40

⁵⁰ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 20

⁵¹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 21

⁵² Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 4

⁵³ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 32

⁵⁴ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 39

⁵⁵ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 46

⁵⁶ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 40

yielding her claim to her friend. At length the dignity of Isabella's virtue reminding her of the preference which Theodore had almost declared for her rival, made her determine to conquer her passion, and cede the beloved object to her friend.”⁵⁷

Here the repetition of the construction “each... the other” underlines how similar their reactions are, it creates a mirror effect. The mirror effect can be seen in works which can rather safely be called as “heirs” of the Gothic novels like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in which Dorian can see the evolution (or more accurately the fall) of his soul through the painting. The novel is built around a sort of symmetry. The *doppelgänger* (double) is a theme linked to that of the mirror and can be seen as well in *The Castle of Otranto* and later works influenced by this genre. The most obvious example of that figure is, of course *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In the story Dr. Jekyll actually manages to separate two aspects of his personality, thus creating two different persons sharing the same body. Here, in *The Castle of Otranto*, Matilda and Isabella do have two separate bodies (separate but nevertheless very similar) but they share the same soul and personality. The resemblance is so close that, in the end, Manfred kills his own daughter because he mistakes her for Isabella:

“Manfred, whose spirits were inflamed, and whom Isabella had driven from her on his urging his passion with too little reserve, did not doubt but the inquietude she had expressed had been occasioned by her impatience to meet Theodore. Provoked by this conjecture, and enraged at her father, he hastened secretly to the great church. Gliding softly between the aisles, and guided by an imperfect gleam of moonshine that shone faintly through the illuminated windows, he stole towards the tomb of Alfonso, to which he was directed by indistinct whispers of the persons he sought. The first sounds he could distinguish were – ‘Does it, alas! depend on me? Manfred will never permit our union.’

‘No, this shall prevent it!’ cried the tyrant, drawing his dagger, and plunging it over her shoulder into the bosom of the person that spoke.

⁵⁷ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 40

‘Ah, me, I am slain!’ cried Matilda, sinking. ‘Good heaven, receive my soul!’”⁵⁸

The death of Matilda creates a mirror effect in the structure of the novel. The story begins with the death of Conrad and ends with the death of Matilda and with the realisation of the prophecy : “an ancient prophecy, which was said to have pronounced 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.’”⁵⁹.

6. THE “*FANTASTIQUE*” AND THE “*MERVEILLEUX*”.

This Prophecy introduces another characteristic of the Gothic novel: the supernatural phenomenon. This kind of supernatural event is typical of fantasy and of medieval literature. The image of the giant can make us think of chivalric novels, although the gloomy atmosphere linked to the Gothic architecture of the castle gives a different atmosphere to the novel. At the beginning of the story, one can wonder if what happens is real or if it is Manfred who is on the verge of insanity. He is almost paranoid because of his status of usurper and he seems to be obsessed with the prophecy. The reader might think that it is a product of Manfred’s imagination due to his fragile state of mind. For example when Manfred sees the picture of Alfonso coming to life, even though Isabella hears something he is the only one to see it:

“At that instant the portrait of his grandfather, which hung over the bench where they had been sitting, uttered a deep sigh, and heaved its breast.

[...] still looking backwards on the portrait, when he saw it quit its panel, and descend on the floor with a grave and melancholy air.

‘Do I dream?’ cried Manfred, returning; ‘or are the devils themselves in league against me? Speak, internal spectre! Or, if thou art my grandsire, why dost thou too conspire against thy wretched descendant, who too dearly pays for—’”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 48

⁵⁹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 4

⁶⁰ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 8

Manfred himself is not sure of what he has seen. To analyse this, we shall invoke Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the *fantastique*:

“D’abord il faut que le texte oblige le lecteur à considérer le monde comme un monde de personnes vivantes et à hésiter entre une explication naturelle et surnaturelle des événements évoqués. [...] Enfin il importe que le lecteur ait une certaine attitude à l’égard du texte: il refusera aussi bien l’interprétation ‘allégorique’ que l’interprétation ‘poétique’”⁶¹

It would correspond to what we have seen with Manfred in the beginning of the novel but the supernatural events seem to get clearer and clearer as the story evolves and soon the reader has to accept that there are supernatural events taking place in the castle that cannot be explained rationally. This is a feature of Gothic tales. In *Frankenstein* the creature exists. In *Dracula* (even though this work has been written after the period that delimits the Gothic novel one cannot fail to notice that this novel is very close to the genre) the reader has no doubt that the vampire is real. And in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the reader “witnesses” that Dorian does not age. In *The Castle of Otranto* the reader is forced to admit that natural laws cannot explain the events which take place in the castle. This is what Todorov calls “*le merveilleux*”:

“si au contraire [le lecteur] décide que l’on doit admettre de nouvelles lois de la nature, par lesquelles le phénomène peut être expliqué, nous entrons dans le genre du merveilleux.”⁶²

He adds⁶³ that the *merveilleux* is “hyperbolic” and we cannot deny that *The Castle of Otranto* is hyperbolic; the Giant in itself is a hyperbole, the characters often speak with exaggerations, Theodore in particular: “‘I fear no man's displeasure,’ said Theodore, ‘when a woman in distress puts herself under my protection.’”⁶⁴ ; “‘For me!’ cried Theodore. ‘Let me die a thousand deaths, rather than stain thy conscience.’”⁶⁵ .

In the end of the novel the reader does not have a choice but to accept the supernatural events as supernatural. This is a feature of Gothic novel, supernatural events – or creatures– are accepted and are an integral part of the novel.

⁶¹ Todorov, *littérature fantastique*, 37-38

⁶² Todorov, *littérature fantastique*, 46

⁶³ Todorov, *littérature fantastique*, 48

⁶⁴ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 22

⁶⁵ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 24

PART II: THE ONEIRIC DIMENSION OF THE NOVEL

We have already demonstrated a number of processes used by the author to create the gloom and horror of the novel. Yet, the particular atmosphere of the novel also encompasses the dream-like (or nightmarish ?) components of the story and of the Gothic novel as a genre. To quote Maurice Lévy :

“Le ‘gothique’ porte naturellement au rêve et cela pour plus d’une raison : son origine lointaine, la quête spirituelle dont sa verticalité est le signe de pierre, l’insolite, mystérieux ou menaçant de ses voûtes sombres et de ses tours sont pour la conscience une interrogation qui déclenche les forces imaginatives”.⁶⁶

In this part it will be shown that not only *The Castle of Otranto* finds its origin in the dream of its author but is also similar to a “dream-life” (as described by Sigmund Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*).

1. THE ONEIRIC ORIGIN OF THE NOVEL

In Maurice Levy’s *Le roman “gothique” anglais 1764-1824*, we learn that the novel was entirely built from a dream Horace Walpole had:

“l’origine onirique du conte semble bien confirmer qu’il fut dicté à Walpole, tout au moins initialement, parce qu’il y avait de plus spontané en lui. Il devait raconter, quelques mois plus tard, à son ami William Cole, comment était né le Château d’Otrante. Il avait rêvé, une nuit de début de juin 1764, qu’il se trouvait dans un très vieux château [...] où il avait aperçu, posé sur la rampe d’un grand escalier, à l’étage supérieur, une main de géant recouverte d’un gantelet de fer”⁶⁷

The author even directly tells his own dream through Bianca’s encounter with the giant, which she comments as follow:

“I looked up, and, if your Greatness will believe me, I saw upon the uppermost banister of the great stairs a hand in armour as big as big.

⁶⁶ Lévy, *Le Roman Gothique*, 114

⁶⁷ Lévy, *Le Roman Gothique*, 93-94

I thought I should have swooned. I never stopped until I came hither—would I were well out of this castle.”⁶⁸

Bianca’s point of view when she sees the hand is identical to the one depicted by M. Levy when he relates Walpole’s dream.

As we saw in the previous part Walpole’s dream of having a Gothic castle of his own was one of the things that influenced him to write his book. His obsession with Gothic buildings was therefore one of the sources of inspiration for *The Castle of Otranto*. And as S. Freud analyses in *The Interpretation of Dreams*⁶⁹.

“When we were dealing with the relations of dreams to waking life and with the material of dreams, we found that the most ancient and the most recent students of dreams were united in believing that men dream of what they do during the daytime and of what interests them while they are awake.”

2. IMPORTANCE OF HYPERBOLES

One can make the parallel between Walpole’s obsession of changing Strawberry hill into a Gothic castle and his story, it would almost seem that the process of writing *The Castle of Otranto* was similar to the process of dreaming. Dreams take place in a familiar setting which is altered in different ways, *The Castle of Otranto* can be seen as a dreamlike alteration of Strawberry Hill:

“There lies in dreams a marvellous poetry, an apt allegory, an incomparable humour, a rare irony. A dream looks upon the world in a light of strange idealism and often enhances the effects of what it sees by its deep understanding of their essential nature. It pictures earthly beauty to our eyes in a truly heavenly splendour and clothes dignity with the highest majesty, it shows us our everyday fears in the ghastliest shape and turns our amusement into jokes of indescribable pungency.”⁷⁰

In other words, in dreams everything is exacerbated, everything is more than it could ever be in

⁶⁸ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 46

⁶⁹ James Strachey, trans., *Sigmund Freud: The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 70

⁷⁰ Strachey, *Interpretation of dreams*, 91

real life. This aspect is also very present in *The Castle of Otranto*, everything in the tale seems to be exaggerated, and there are many hyperboles in the novel. An obvious example would be the giant – and everything related to him – which is a hyperbole in itself and anytime the reader comes across this character, his belongings or his limbs, he might notice an overstated description:

“[...] he beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black feathers”⁷¹

“‘it is a giant, I believe; he is all clad in armour, for I saw his foot and part of his leg, and they are as large as the helmet below in the court.’ As he said these words, my Lord, we heard a violent motion and the rattling of armour, as if the giant was rising [...]”⁷²

“‘Oh! the hand! the Giant! the hand!—support me! I am terrified out of my senses,’ cried Bianca.”⁷³

In the second quotation we can see that even when the size of the giant is not detailed – though the violence of the motion could be considered as a testimony of it – the reactions of the characters are exacerbated. The feelings of Bianca are depicted in an equally hyperbolic way. We might add that the verb chosen by the author, “cry” reinforces the feeling of fear of Bianca. This last excerpt pictures the hyperbolic dimension of the book. Everything in the story seems to be an exaggeration of real life.

The sword, most likely belonging to the giant, is worth mentioning as well: “A hundred gentlemen bearing an enormous sword, and seeming to faint under the weight of it.”⁷⁴; “the gigantic sword burst from the supporters, and falling to the ground opposite to the helmet, remained immovable [...]”⁷⁵; compared to small body parts (hand, foot) the sword provides a better representation of how enormous the giant actually is: the fact that the sword needs to be

⁷¹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 5-6

⁷² Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 13

⁷³ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 45

⁷⁴ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 27

⁷⁵ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 29

carried by a hundred men gives some kind of scale for the object.

The size of the giant (and his belongings or limbs) leads directly to the exaggeration of the size of the castle. How could the giant wander in the corridors without breaking the castle if the latter is not gigantic itself:

“ [...] la forteresse d'Otrante est construite autour d'une cour centrale tellement vaste, que cent hommes, portant sur leurs épaules l'épée gigantesque, peuvent, non seulement y entrer, mais encore en faire le tour. Notons au passage ce remarquable exemple de contamination onirique: les dimensions démesurées du glaive imposées par celle du gantelet vu en rêve, l'un étant fait pour l'autre, font à leur tour que le cadre est indéfiniment élargit.”⁷⁶

But the castle is not the only thing that is exaggerated: the reactions and the consequences of the actions of the characters also seem to be overdrawn, as we have seen with Bianca earlier. The characters of the novel always seem to be reacting in enormous proportion. Manfred's wrath is likewise often described or depicted in hyperbolic way:

“‘This bravado,’ said he, ‘surpasses all thy former insolence. Thou shalt experience the wrath with which thou darest to trifle. Seize him,’ continued Manfred, ‘and bind him—the first news the Princess hears of her champion shall be, that he has lost his head for her sake.’”⁷⁷

Theodore in particular could be considered as an hyperbolic medieval hero:

“‘Alas!’ said the stranger, ‘what can I do to assist you? I will die in your defence [...]’”⁷⁸ ; “‘I fear no man's displeasure,’ said Theodore, ‘when a woman in distress puts herself under my protection.’”⁷⁹ ; “‘For me!’ cried Theodore. ‘Let me die a thousand deaths, rather than stain thy conscience. What is it the tyrant would exact of thee? Is the Princess still safe from his power? Protect her, thou venerable old man; and let all the weight of his wrath fall on me.’”⁸⁰ Theodore is the image of a valiant knight but seems too flawless to be realistic.

⁷⁶ Lévy, *Le Roman Gothique*, 119

⁷⁷ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 22

⁷⁸ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 9

⁷⁹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 22

⁸⁰ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 24

3. THE “DRAMATIZATION” OF THE NOVEL

Another feature of dreams as S. Freud describes it in *The Interpretation of Dreams* is that when one dreams, he experiences action:

“Dreams construct a situation out of these images; they represent an event which is actually happening as Spitta (1882, 145)⁸¹ puts it, they ‘drama-tize’ an idea. But this feature of dream-life can only be fully understood if we further recognize that in dreams—as a rule, for there are exceptions which require special examination—we appear not to think but to experience.”⁸²

We can use the word used by K. Spitta for *The Castle of Otranto*, the book seems to be “dramatiz[ed]”. Indeed, one can notice the great number of (frequently long) dialogues present in the novel. They take an important part of the novel. Not only are they omnipresent but they also give a vivid experience of the story. The reader might feel he is witnessing the action. Moreover the dialogues most of the time occur when there is an important addition to the plot, they create a vivid vision of the action, which might allow the reader to be caught in the action. The scene where Theodore, convinced he is saving the princess, harms the Marquis of Vicenza, her father, is an illustration of climactic events depicted through dialogue:

“Then thou—then thou’—said the Knight, struggling for utterance- -
‘seest—thy father. Give me one—’

‘Oh! amazement! horror! what do I hear! what do I see!’ cried Isabella. ‘My father! You my father! How came you here, Sir? For heaven's sake, speak! Oh! run for help, or he will expire!’

“Tis most true,” said the wounded Knight, exerting all his force; “I am Frederic thy father. Yes, I came to deliver thee. It will not be. Give me a parting kiss, and take—”

‘Sir,’ said Theodore, ‘do not exhaust yourself; suffer us to convey you to the castle.’

⁸¹ Spitta, K. (1882) *Die Schlaf-und Traumzustände der mensch-lichen Seele*, Tübingen. (1st ed., 1878.)
quoted in Strachey, *Interpretation of dreams*, 91

⁸² Strachey, *Interpretation of dreams*, 79

‘To the castle!’ said Isabella. ‘Is there no help nearer than the castle? Would you expose my father to the tyrant? If he goes thither, I dare not accompany him; and yet, can I leave him!’”⁸³

This extract is quite representative of the dramatisation of the novel, one can notice how little narration there is. The rhythm of the dialogue – the injured Lord Frederic of Vicenza stutters and pauses whereas Isabella’s utterances accelerate the rhythm – makes the extract all the more vivid. Isabella makes an accumulation of exclamations which conveys the state of amazement and panic she is in. There are a lot of repetitions as well, which underline the surprise and the dramatic dimension of the scene.

One can also notice in this passage the use of the theme of the *quiproquo* which is often used in the theatre to create a comic or a tragic effect, for example, in William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* the tragic ending relies on the fact that Romeo does not have the letter and believes that Juliet is really dead when she is not.

One can also notice that in this dialogue, the narration is very limited. It is limited to the indication of who speaks and how the character speaks. It is very similar to stage directions. There are other examples in the text of this phenomenon:

“‘Ha! what art thou? thou dreadful spectre! is my hour come?’

‘My dearest, gracious Lord,’ cried Hippolita, clasping him in her arms, ‘what is it you see! Why do you fix your eye-balls thus?’

‘What!’ cried Manfred breathless; ‘dost thou see nothing, Hippolita? Is this ghastly phantom sent to me alone—to rue, who did not—’

‘For mercy’s sweetest self, my Lord,’ said Hippolita, ‘resume your soul, command your reason. There is none here, but us, your friends.’

‘What, is not that Alfonso?’ cried Manfred. ‘Dost thou not see him? can it be my brain’s delirium?’”⁸⁴

The brief underlined passages in this extract depict only aspects that a spectator could see, the gestures and “physical” reaction of the character which are very similar to stage directions and underline the fact that the reader is like a spectator.

⁸³ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 34

⁸⁴ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 35

4. DETACHMENT FROM THE EXTERNAL WORLD

Another feature of dream life is a severance from the real world: “Detachment from the external world seems thus to be regarded as the factor determining the most marked features of dream-life”⁸⁵. This feature is present in *The Castle of Otranto*.

First, the action takes place in the castle and the characters do not seem to have a link with the external world. It would almost seem that the story relies on the microcosm of a in the castle of Otranto. Even though Frederic is technically coming from the external world – external to the microcosm of the castle that is – he is soon to be seen as a protagonist of the story, taken from the real world to be better incorporated into the microcosm of the castle. This phenomenon is underlined by the very small number of secondary characters present in the story: apart from Bianca, Diego and Jaquez, all the characters take an almost equal part in the story and are all part of the “upper class”. This narrows even more the world depicted in the story for there is only one step of the social ladder represented. Therefore, the characters seem to be isolated in an elitist kind of microcosm: not only are they physically separated from the world they also seem to be sociologically separated from it. Theodore is the only main character thought to be a peasant, in the beginning, but he turns out to be the legitimate owner of the castle. Even among the main characters it would seem that most of them belong to the same family: Manfred, his wife and Matilda are of the same family, the friar and Theodore are relative and Frederic and Isabella are relatives. The three families seem to be closely linked to one another by the castle. Manfred, actual owner of the castle is considered as an usurper by Frederic:

“and he requires [Manfred] to resign the principality of Otranto,
which [he] hast usurped from the said Lord Frederic, the nearest of blood
to the last rightful Lord, Alfonso the Good”⁸⁶.

In this extract we also learn that Frederic is related to Alfonso and Theodore is the direct heir to the latter: “Behold in Theodore the true heir of Alfonso!” said the vision”⁸⁷, it is revealed by the long story told by both Theodore and Jerome⁸⁸. Those close relationships emphasize the importance of the castle and therefore reinforce the impression of microcosm and almost of a

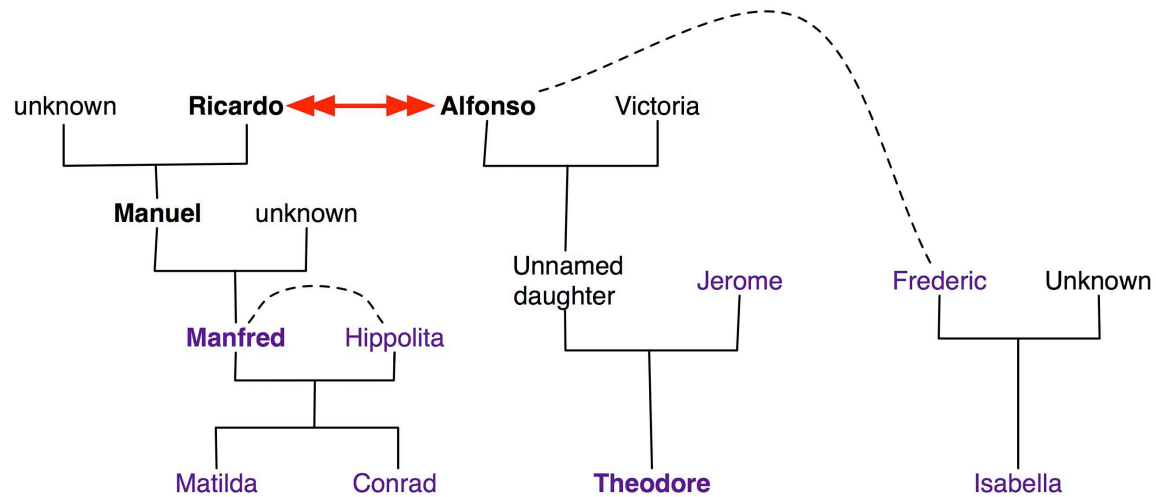
⁸⁵ Strachey, *Interpretation of dreams*, 82

⁸⁶ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 26

⁸⁷ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 50

⁸⁸ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 36, 50-51

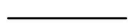
huis-clos. Even though we hear about external things (the crusades for example) they all serve the same purpose: to describe the origins of the characters and mostly Theodore's. Both the relationships of the main characters and the history of the ownership of the castle are very confusing for the reader (see figure 1).



Key :



Ricardo Poisonned Alfonso and usurped his title of Lord of Otranto
(and stole his castle)



Direct familial link : parent / children or siblings



Indirect familial link

Who bore the title "Lord of Otranto"

Main character of the novel

Figure 1: links between the various protagonnists of the novel

Figure 1 sums up the different relationships between the characters and the different owners of the Castle. With this, one might realize how restricted the microcosm is for not only do they all belong to the same social class but the genealogy is limited to two main families, even Manfred and Hippolita come from the same family.

Most of the action takes place in the castle or at least the fortress of Otranto, and the subject of

the story is centered around the castle and to whom it belongs. It creates a claustrophobic effect of being locked in – as a parallel to Isabella’s situation – and separated from the outside world which is one of the feature of the dream-life according to S. Freud and some of his fellow psychiatrists :

“Delboeuf (1885, 84)⁸⁹ arrives at the same conclusion after somewhat different psychological arguments. We believe in the reality of dream-images, he says, because in our sleep we have no other impressions with which to compare them, because we are detached from the external world”⁹⁰.

Like in a dream, the action almost seems to be “context-less” and separated from the outside but it also sheds light on a new aspect of dreams which is relevant to the novel: the fact that in dreams, we easily believe everything that happens.

5. THE ACCEPTANCE OF A DREAM-GENERATED REALITY

The dreamer does not at all question the reality of his dream even though he might have good reasons to.

“Dreams are disconnected, they accept the most violent contradictions without the least objection, they admit impossibilities, they disregard knowledge which carries great weight with us in the day-time, they reveal us as ethical and moral imbeciles”⁹¹.

One can easily agree that, in dreams, everything is not logical and maybe the reader can have the same feeling about the novel in which there are super-natural events, as we said in part I. The reader (with Manfred) has to accept them because no natural phenomenon can explain them. In the first part, we quickly studied the reaction of the characters (other than Manfred) to the confrontation with the supernatural. It would seem that (though they are terrified) neither Bianca, nor Diego or Jaquez ever question the reality of the giant limbs they see in the castle:

⁸⁹ Delboeuf, Joseph. (1885) *Le sommeil et les rêves*, Paris. Quoted in Strachey, *Interpretation of dreams*,

⁹⁰ Strachey, *Interpretation of dreams*, 80-81

⁹¹ Strachey, *Interpretation of dreams*, 83

“‘I only heard the noise. Diego had no sooner opened the door, than he cried out, and ran back. I ran back too, and said, 'Is it the ghost?' 'The ghost! no, no,' said Diego, and his hair stood on end—'it is a giant, I believe; he is all clad in armour, for I saw his foot and part of his leg, and they are as large as the helmet below in the court.'”⁹²

In Diego’s mind there are absolutely no doubts about the supernatural events, it seems as if the problem is not whether it is supernatural or not but what kind of supernatural creature it is. As for Bianca:

“‘So Jaquez thinks, may it please your Greatness,’ said Bianca. ‘He says this moon will not be out without our seeing some strange revolution. For my part, I should not be surprised if it was to happen tomorrow; for, as I was saying, when I heard the clattering of armour, I was all in a cold sweat. I looked up, and, if your Greatness will believe me, I saw upon the uppermost banister of the great stairs a hand in armour as big as big.[...]’”⁹³

She does not question the event either, she even interprets it as a manifestation of the prophecy threatening the Lordship of Manfred, which is at the heart of the story. The prophecy is the starting point of the story and explains the presence of Isabella in the castle, and we are told about it very early in the novel :

“‘They attributed this hasty wedding to the Prince's dread of seeing accomplished an ancient prophecy, which was said to have pronounced 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.’ It was difficult to make any sense of this prophecy; and still less easy to conceive what it had to do with the marriage in question. Yet these mysteries, or contradictions, did not make the populace adhere the less to their opinion.’”⁹⁴

In the beginning, the prophecy does not seem to make any sense but the reader is quickly

⁹² Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 13

⁹³ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 46

⁹⁴ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 4

convinced that the story revolves around it, and this becomes very clear after the first appearance of the giant, the reader completely accepts the prophecy as a real foreboding of what is going to happen to Manfred.

One cannot discuss the topic of the prophecy without discussing the importance of metaphors, symbols and images in the novel. In that subject as well the novel is very similar to dream life as S. Freud depicts it: “dreams think essentially in images”⁹⁵

“Most of the artificial dreams constructed by imaginative writers are designed for a symbolic interpretation of this sort. They reproduce the writer’s thoughts under a disguise which is regarded as harmonizing with the recognized characteristics of dreams.”⁹⁶

The prophecy in itself is some kind of a symbol, a prediction of the tragic events that are going to take place in the castle, due to the fact that Manfred could be seen as an “ethical and moral [imbecile]”⁹⁷. The Lord’s fear that the prophecy might come true leads him to disregard ethics and moral values: he wants to divorce from his wife and marry Isabella – this, as we already discussed, feels like a incestuous marriage to the reader and Isabella. Moreover, his fear of the prophecy is somehow the starting point of the whole story. Maybe, one could compare the story of Manfred with the myth of Oedipus to the extent that both Manfred and Oedipus’ father by fear of the prophecy create the situation which leads to its realisation. In the prophecy, there is a metaphor: “the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it”⁹⁸. One may think that both this part of the prophecy and the giant are a metaphor for the guilt of Manfred’s ancestor Ricardo, who, as we learn at the end of the story, killed Alfonso and stole his Castle:

“Alfonso, ye all know, died in the Holy Land—ye would interrupt me; ye would say he came not fairly to his end—it is most true— why else this bitter cup which Manfred must drink to the dregs. Ricardo, my grandfather, was his chamberlain—I would draw a veil over my ancestor’s

⁹⁵ Strachey, *Interpretation of dreams*, 78

⁹⁶ Strachey, *Interpretation of dreams*, 122

⁹⁷ quoted from Freud: “Dreams are disconnected, they accept the most violent contradictions without the least objection, they admit impossibilities, they disregard knowledge which carries great weight with us in the day-time, they reveal us as ethical and moral imbeciles.”

⁹⁸ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 4

crimes—but it is in vain! Alfonso died by poison. A fictitious will declared Ricardo his heir.”⁹⁹

Manfred feels he is being punished for his ancestor's crimes and one could analyse that this is precisely at that moment that the real owner has grown too big for the castle. Manfred's (or rather Ricardo's) guilt was too much of a burden to be kept a secret any longer and Manfred has nothing left to lose.

The prophecy is not the only image in the novel, another prediction, or symbol Manfred's tragic destiny is the sword. One could see the sword as being the symbol of Manfred's punishment. We could make the parallel between Manfred's sword and Damocles' sword¹⁰⁰, as they both represent a menace. The difference is that Manfred's punishment is the death of his daughter, killed by his own hands and not his own death.

“As they made the circuit of the court to return towards the gate, the gigantic sword burst from the supporters, and falling to the ground opposite to the helmet, remained immovable.”¹⁰¹

The fact that the sword remains immovable could be seen as a symbol of the unavoidability of the punishment of Manfred: the infanticide of his daughter and the loss of everything he owns.

⁹⁹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 50

¹⁰⁰ This legend tells the story of Damocles, suitor of the tyrant of Syracuse. Damocles was very admiring of the tyrant and said to him that with such power and respect he should be rejoiced. The tyrant offered to switch place with him for one day. He puts a sword held by only one horse's hair above the head of his courtier to show him that with great power comes great insecurity.

¹⁰¹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 28

PART III: TERROR, HORROR: A PARALLEL WITH FREUD'S *THE UNCANNY*

Terror is omnipresent in the novel, and, of course it is one of the main features of the Gothic genre:

“Most [Gothic] plots followed the same line: the heroin is kidnapped by a wicked relative taken to a far away castle or abbey [...] which with its tunnels, dungeons and strange noises becomes a scene of terror, and strange supernatural happenings (not always accounted for at the end of the novel)”¹⁰²

Lévy seconds this definition by describing the Gothic genre as the “genre terrifiant”¹⁰³. *The Castle of Otranto*, being considered as the first Gothic novel, should bear this seminal characteristic as well. To demonstrate how this is accomplished in the novel, we will be relying on Freud's concept of the uncanny:

“The subject of the ‘uncanny’ [...] is undoubtedly related to what is frightening — to what arouses dread and horror; equally certainly, too, the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general. Yet we may expect that a special core of feeling is present which justifies the use of a special conceptual term. One is curious to know what this common core is which allows us to distinguish as ‘uncanny’; certain things which lie within the field of what is frightening.”¹⁰⁴

It seems to be quite an useful concept in the description of Gothic novels when we put our interest on how a Gothic novel like *The Castle of Otranto* arouses fear in the reader, for what is frightening is not only the supernatural phenomenon but the general atmosphere. We will rely on the work of Freud in which he gradually completes and specifies the definition of the concept of the uncanny to try to describe the different processes that frighten the reader.

¹⁰² Grellet, *Litterature in English*, 99

¹⁰³ Lévy, *Le Roman Gothique*, 646

¹⁰⁴ Alix Strachey, trans. *Sigmund Freud The Uncanny*, accessed January 3, 2011
<http://www.mediafire.com/?vz51vgqdzqo>, 2

1. THE WAKENING OF CHILDISH FEARS

Freud associates the feeling of fear, of uncanniness, with repressed childish fears:

“an uncanny experience occurs [...] when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression”.¹⁰⁵

Different “infantile complexes” are at stake, one of the more obvious is the fear of the dark, of loneliness:

“Concerning the factors of silence, solitude and darkness [...], we can only say that they are actually elements in the production of the infantile anxiety from which the majority of human beings have never become quite free.”¹⁰⁶

There is a blatant example of the effect of silence, solitude and darkness when Isabella tries to escape from Manfred. The three factors are a way to create uneasiness and a sort of claustrophobic feeling:

“ An awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions, except now and then some blast of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which, grating on the rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness.”¹⁰⁷

Those childish fears being commonplaces, they allow the reader to sympathize with Isabella as they arouse repressed feelings in the reader as well as in the character. In the first part we discussed how Gothic architecture particularly fits that kind of fear. The passageways and the dungeons are a perfect environment to raise that kind of fears and this allows darkness to be omnipresent in the story.

In *The Castle of Otranto* the reader can feel the reappearance of the most basic childish fears. In his *Uncanny* S. Freud gives the example of Hoffman’s *Sandman* to illustrate his concept. The sandman is a character from European folklore, usually found in children tales. Though Freud specifies that fairy tales “produce no uncanny effect whatsoever”, one can think that the memory of a character from those tales was meant to scare children – like Hoffman does with

¹⁰⁵ Strachey, *Uncanny*, 28

¹⁰⁶ Strachey, *Uncanny*, 31

¹⁰⁷ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 8

The Sandman – can also be a source of fear. In *The Castle of Otranto*, the reader is faced with a similar process. The giant is also a creature generally associated with fairy tales. It is usually a threatening character, like in *Jack and the Beanstalk* or in *Puss in Boots*. The image of the giant given by those tales is a fierce creature ready to do anything to eat a fresh little child. For example in *Jack and the Beanstalk* the giant says:

“Fee, fi, fo fum,
I smell the blood of an Englishman.
Be he alive or be he dead,
I’ll grind his bones to make my bread!”¹⁰⁸

The giant is the image of a disproportionate human being, its size represents a menace to the child. Although it would probably not seem very scary to an adult, the giant in *The Castle of Otranto* is too a threatening image but not in the same way. For a start we might look at the link between this giant and death. For starts, the helmet of the giant is the object that kills Conrad:

“Shocked with these lamentable sounds, and dreading he knew not what, he advanced hastily,—but what a sight for a father’s eyes!— he beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet”¹⁰⁹.

The description of Conrad “dashed to piece” can remind the reader of the image of the fairy-tale giant “grinding” human bones, but what really creates the uneasiness here is the symbol that the giant represent. And as we already discussed one can see in the gigantic sword the foreboding of Matilda’s death too.

In Freud’s example of the sandman, he compares the fear of losing one’s eye to the fear of castration:

“A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one’s eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ This version of the tale was found on http://www.phonemus.fr/histoires/Jack_and_the_beanstalk%5B1%5D.pdf (accessed on may the 19th 2011) p1. The author was not specified, but a fairytale is originally an oral tradition so it is possible to find the text without a specified author.

¹⁰⁹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 4

¹¹⁰ Strachey, *Uncanny*, 13

And later he supports this theory with the fact that the sandman seems to keep the hero of the story from finding love¹¹¹.

We might compare this with Manfred's situation: he is only preoccupied by the fact that he will have no heir when Conrad dies and Hippolita's inability to give him a healthy son is redundant in the novel. In the end, he has no child left for he has assassinated his daughter and Conrad has been killed by the helmet. After those dramatic events Manfred is to join the church and, therefore, will never have children (again). This can easily be linked to the complex of castration discussed by Freud. Although this has a strong effect on the reader, it is less harrowing than the other, Freud has an explanation for that, we need to be told the story from a certain point of view to get the feeling of uncanniness.

Another theme present in *The Castle of Otranto* is linked to child development and is likely to create a feeling of uncanniness: the double. We already discussed the theme of the doppelganger in Part I but we must quickly mention it here. Indeed the strange resemblance between Matilda and Isabella creates a sense of uneasiness and is part of the reason why Manfred's feeling for Isabella seem so out of place. Let us not forget that Matilda dies "instead" of Isabella. Manfred's anger was directed towards Isabella, but he mistook Matilda for Isabella. It almost feels as if Isabella took Matilda's place when the latter died (in the end Isabella marries Theodore): in a way the former represents the soul of the latter.

As for mirrors, the plot itself could be seen as a mirror for the death of Conrad begins the story and his sister's death ends it.

2. THE EFFECT OF NARRATION

Dislocated members, especially if there is the idea that they have a will of their own and that they are able to move¹¹², are another source of uncanniness described by Freud and found in the novel. We can relate to this phenomenon the feeling felt by the reader when the limbs of the giant appear in the story. Those limbs, described as they are, do not seem to belong to an entire body. Though later Freud explains that in Herodotus' story of the treasure of Phampsinitus, when the thief plays a trick to the princess and has her take his brother's amputated hand

¹¹¹ Strachey, *Uncanny*, 14

¹¹² Strachey, *Uncanny*, 23

instead of his own, the reader does not have a feeling of uncanniness¹¹³ he explains it as follow:

“The answer is easy. In the Herodotus story our thoughts are concentrated much more on the superior cunning of the master-thief than on the feelings of the princess. The princess may very well have had an uncanny feeling, indeed she very probably fell into a swoon; but we have no such sensations, for we put ourselves in the thief’s place, not in hers.”¹¹⁴

This leads to the study of the narrative technique in Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto*. The narrator in *The Castle of Otranto* is heterodiegetic¹¹⁵, he takes no part in the story whatsoever. In *The Castle of Otranto* the reader cannot question the narrator precisely because he is not part of the story, he is just the voice that tells it. In Walpole’s novel, the internal focalisation¹¹⁶ amplifies the sense of terror because the reader sees through the eyes of a character. For example the fear, the panic felt by Isabella when she tries to escape from Manfred is transmitted the reader who knows her inner thoughts and feelings:

“Yet where conceal herself? How avoid the pursuit he would infallibly make throughout the castle?

As these thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, she recollected a subterraneous passage which led from the vaults of the castle to the church of St. Nicholas. Could she reach the altar before she was overtaken, she knew even Manfred's violence would not dare to profane the sacredness of the place; and she determined, if no other means of deliverance offered, to

¹¹³ Strachey, *Uncanny*, 25

¹¹⁴ Strachey, *Uncanny*, 25

¹¹⁵ “We will therefore distinguish here two types of narrative: one with the narrator absent from the story he tells [...] the other with the narrator present as a character in the story he tells [...] I call the first type, for obvious reasons, *heterodiegetic*, and the second type *homodiegetic*”. Jane Lewin, trans., *Gerard Genette Narrative Discourse, an essay in method* (New York: Cornell university press, 1980), 244 245

¹¹⁶ “To avoid the too specifically visual connotations of the terms *vision*, *field*, and *point of view*, I will take up here the slightly more abstract term *focalization*, The second type [*Narrator = Character* (the narrator says only what a given character knows)] will be narrative with *internal focalization*” Lewin, *Narrative discourse*, 189.

shut herself up for ever among the holy virgins whose convent was contiguous to the cathedral.”¹¹⁷

The interrogations reinforce the feeling of helplessness and fear in the young woman and give to the reader a vivid impression of her sense of panic. As Freud states it, the fact of sharing a character’s point of view – here Isabella’s – emphasizes the feeling of uncanniness in the reader, which would not have been the case if he was to share Manfred’s feelings, for example. It becomes clearer further on in the novel. Throughout the novel there are shifts in focalisation. It is not always internal focalisation (although it is much used to exacerbate the fear of the reader) and there are also shifts between different points of view: we do not always share the viewpoint of frightened Isabella. That underlines the fact that, depending on whose vision he shares, the reader is not as keen to feel the uncanny. For example when Theodore and Isabella meet in the cavern the internal focalisation is from Theodore’s point of view. He is, as we said in the second part, a medieval hero, he is not scared by the events and the events therefore seem less scary.

“The armour he wore was like an indication to the person who avoided him. Theodore, now convinced that he was not mistaken, redoubled his pace, and evidently gained on the person that fled, whose haste increasing, Theodore came up just as a woman fell breathless before him. He hastened to raise her, but her terror was so great that he apprehended she would faint in his arms. He used every gentle word to dispel her alarms, and assured her that far from injuring, he would defend her at the peril of his life.”¹¹⁸

Since Theodore is the one pursuing Isabella, the fact that the reader sees the action through Theodore’s eyes diminishes the uncanniness of the scene, but Theodore’s point of view builds up to the mistake he makes when he harms Frederic of Vicenza. This time the altercation between the two men gives a stronger impression to the reader when he shares Theodore’s point of view. Though sympathizing with the fear of the character is not the only source of uncanniness, the internal focalisation on the feelings of Manfred, is also a part of the frightful atmosphere of the story for the reader can feel he is drifting towards madness.

¹¹⁷ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 8

¹¹⁸ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 32

“Manfred, whose spirits were inflamed, and whom Isabella had driven from her on his urging his passion with too little reserve, did not doubt but the inquietude she had expressed had been occasioned by her impatience to meet Theodore. Provoked by this conjecture, and enraged at her father, he hastened secretly to the great church. Gliding softly between the aisles, and guided by an imperfect gleam of moonshine that shone faintly through the illuminated windows, he stole towards the tomb of Alfonso, to which he was directed by indistinct whispers of the persons he sought.”¹¹⁹

In this passage the reader can feel that Manfred’s wrath has blinded him, and pushed him towards a fit of hysteria. The last sentence of the extract is particularly “uncanny”, the verbs “gliding” and “steal” evokes some kind of supernatural, devilish, creature. Those verbs underline the inhuman part of the character, the image of a menace. The fact that he is “guided by an imperfect gleam of moonshine” can symbolize the fact that he is blinded by his anger, his sight is not clear. Manfred seems to be eaten by the secret he keeps: “We can also speak of a living person as uncanny, and we do so when we ascribe evil intentions to him”¹²⁰.

As discussed in the first part, the feeling of uneasiness felt by the reader is partly due to the evil intention of Manfred’s towards Isabella, in the light of the last passage, one could consider those intentions as more and more evil. Freud continues later on by explaining that :

“The uncanny effect of epilepsy and of madness has the same origin. The layman sees in them the working of forces hitherto unsuspected in his fellow-men, but at the same time he is dimly aware of them in remote corners of his own being.”¹²¹

Madness can clearly be discussed in Manfred’s case as we have said before, and the influence of this process of using internal focalisation to exacerbate the reader’s fear can be seen in later works like Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in which there are different narrators and all homodiegetic¹²² (Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein and the creature). In even later works inspired by *The Castle of Otranto* like in Poe’s *Black Cat*, this homodiegetic narrator becomes

¹¹⁹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 48

¹²⁰ Strachey, *Uncanny*, 20

¹²¹ Strachey, *Uncanny*, 23

¹²² Please refer to the note 115 on heterodiegetic narrator.

a source of the uncanniness in the short-story because the narrator is unreliable and it creates in the reader a feeling of doubt and uneasiness. From the very first line of the tale the reader begins to doubt his sanity for the narrator himself seem to doubt it:

“For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence.”¹²³

It allows the reader to see the dark side of the narrator. In *The Black Cat*, and most of Poe's short stories, the gruesomeness comes from the fact that the reader experiences the drifting of a man towards madness. Even though Poe was critical of the Gothic novels¹²⁴, one cannot deny the similarity in the depiction of Manfred drifting towards madness and the condition of Poe's narrators. *The Castle of Otranto* can probably be considered as the embryo of those latter works. Madness is a particularly strong source of uncanniness because as Freud explains, human beings are frightened by madness “but at the same time [they are] dimly aware of [such things] in remote corners of his own being.”¹²⁵

3. REAPPEARANCE OF HIDDEN TRUTHS

Madness can be seen as a repressed part of one's personality coming back to the surface, one could compare it to the secret that eats Manfred from the inside and probably has a link with his insanity. Freud depicts it as source of the uncanny :

“something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.”¹²⁶

Hidden truths, “skeletons in the closet” are an important theme of the novel. Manfred acts madly because of the weight of his ancestors' crimes. This can remind us of the myth of the Atreidai, the descendant of Atreus who were cursed because he fed his brother with the latter's dead children. Atreus' children (the Atreidai) inherit the curse and suffer infanticides,

¹²³ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Black Cat*, accessed may 23, 2011.
<http://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?oldid=2152494>, 1

¹²⁴ His novel *Metzengerstein*, is said to be a parody of german fantastic literature and Gothic literature (<http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/edgar-poe/>)

¹²⁵ Strachey, *Uncanny*, 23

¹²⁶ Strachey, *Uncanny*, 21

matricides, incest, madness until the last remaining child, Orestes is forgiven by Athena after he killed his mother (who had herself killed his father). Manfred has to carry the burden of the crimes of his ancestor, he tries to marry Isabella because he is an usurper and think she is the daughter of the rightful owner, this would allow him to stay Lord of the castle. It leads him towards madness until he kills (by accident) his daughter Matilda and confesses the crime of Ricardo. This secret is the basis of the story and the first sign of it is the prophecy. But Manfred's secret is not the only "hidden truth" of the story, Jerome, the priest is also the father of Theodore who is, in fact, the legitimate heir of Alfonso.

All those secret lead to metanarratives ("narrative within the narrative"¹²⁷). Indeed, one after the other, Theodore, Jerome and Manfred become the narrator of new stories. Those stories can also be considered as analepsises (or flashbacks) which little by little give the reader the knowledge he is missing. This is part of the process that create a form of suspense to the story. The rhythm in the novel is helps build up the suspense, the dialogues can give information (like when Jerome tells that Theodore is actually his son) or sometimes they can delay it. It builds up the action, the very theme of this novel is hidden truth, and the author is careful to reveal only one bit at a time. And with each revelation the reader can notice an acceleration in the story, not only in the plot but in the rhythm of the writing:

“‘What may this mean?’ said he. ‘How can he be thy son? Is it consistent with thy profession or reputed sanctity to avow a peasant's offspring for the fruit of thy irregular amours!’

‘Oh, God!’ said the holy man, ‘dost thou question his being mine? Could I feel the anguish I do if I were not his father? Spare him! good Prince! spare him! and revile me as thou pleasest.’

‘Spare him! spare him!’ cried the attendants; “for this good man's sake!’

‘Peace!’ said Manfred, sternly. ‘I must know more ere I am disposed to pardon. A Saint's bastard may be no saint himself.’”¹²⁸

In this extract there are a lot of interrogative and exclamatory forms, and short sentences that

¹²⁷ Lewin, *Narrative discourse*, 228

¹²⁸ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 24

give the impression of an acceleration of the action, and a sense of panic. The very short exclamatory lines particularly emphasize the feeling of suspense. There is an acceleration of the action but also a delay of the outcome. As the reader and the character present learn more about Theodore's origin, they are holding their breaths: is Manfred going to have Theodore executed or is he going to spare him?

This process is used throughout the story, it helps build up the suspense concerning Manfred's hidden secret. At the end of the novel, the apparition of Alfonso declares that Theodore is his heir. This has an uncanny effect. The apparition can be considered as a *deus ex machina*. It seemed like Frederic would not believe that Theodore was the legitimate heir of Alfonso and this "ghost" makes it indubitable. This also contributes to the uncanny feeling of the reader. The apparition has a godlike figure:

"The moment Theodore appeared, the walls of the castle behind Manfred were thrown down with a mighty force, and the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude, appeared in the centre of the ruins.

'Behold in Theodore the true heir of Alfonso!' said the vision: And having pronounced those words, accompanied by a clap of thunder, it ascended solemnly towards heaven, where the clouds parting asunder, the form of St. Nicholas was seen, and receiving Alfonso's shade, they were soon wrapt from mortal eyes in a blaze of glory."¹²⁹

In this excerpt one can easily see the lexical field of divinity, also associated with action relating to god ("mighty force" ; "clap of thunder"). One could make the parallel between this apparition and the Greek god Zeus, who is the master of lightning and thunder and the "god of gods". The apparition is like a (pagan) god-like avenger ghost. This can bring a feeling of uncanniness because at the time religion was very important and the confrontation to such "savage beliefs" like animism was to give a particular feeling of uneasiness. Nowadays the confrontation between the two religions is not as important as before but with the development of science and scepticism, the feeling is still present.

¹²⁹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 50

4. ANISMISM AND THE RELATION TO DEATH

According to Freud, animism is an ancient belief that left traces in every human being and manifestation of such things are a source of uncanniness:

“It seems as if each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to this animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has passed through it without preserving certain residues and traces of it which are still capable of manifesting themselves, and that everything which now strikes us as ‘uncanny’ fulfils the condition of touching those residues of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression.”¹³⁰

In *the Castle of Otranto*, however, as we said before, even though the final apparition of Alfonso is a god-like figure, it still is described as a ghost. Moreover, the final apparition is not the only animistic phenomenon the reader will come across during his reading of the story. The shadow of the murdered prince is present throughout the novel. Even Theodore is like a double of his ancestor. Manfred mistakes him for the ghost of Alfonso, at the end of the novel:

“‘What!’ cried Manfred breathless; ‘dost thou see nothing, Hippolita?
Is this ghastly phantom sent to me alone—to rue, who did not—’”¹³¹

Theodore is not the only ghost that Manfred sees, the prince also witnesses a picture coming to life when he tries to convince Isabella she should marry him.

“Manfred, distracted between the flight of Isabella, who had now reached the stairs, and yet unable to keep his eyes from the picture, which began to move, had, however, advanced some steps after her, still looking backwards on the portrait, when he saw it quit its panel, and descend on the floor with a grave and melancholy air.”¹³²

The living portrait can remind us of a ghost, first because he is the representation of a dead character coming back to life, then also because it is described with features reminding of ghosts (cf. underlined passages). But we can also compare it to an unanimated object that has a

¹³⁰ Strachey, *Uncanny*, 25

¹³¹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 35

¹³² Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 8

mind of its own and comes to life : what Freud describes as an uncanny event as well¹³³ .

The secondary characters like the servants seem to represent people with animistic beliefs since they are the ones usually referring to ghosts or spells: Jaquez refers to the castle as “enchanted”¹³⁴ ; Bianca takes Theodore for the ghost of the astrologer¹³⁵ and also refers to him as a “sorcerer”¹³⁶. One can consider the servants as a representation of the fear linked to ancient animistic beliefs. Their appearances in the story is a source of fear and uncanniness for they almost always appear to relate a supernatural event. They also seem very concerned about the dead prince Conrad:

““Diego and I [Jaquez], according to your Highness's orders, went to search for the young Lady; but being comprehensive that we might meet the ghost of my young Lord, your Highness's son, God rest his soul, as he has not received Christian burial—””¹³⁷

One can hardly discuss the theme of animism without looking into another source of uncanniness deeply linked to the belief that souls linger on earth: man’s relation to death.

“There is scarcely any other matter, however, upon which our thoughts and feelings have changed so little since the very earliest times, [...] as our relation to death. Two things account for our conservatism: the strength of our original emotional reaction to death and the insufficiency of our scientific knowledge about it. Biology has not yet been able to decide whether death is the inevitable fate of every living being or whether it is only a regular but yet perhaps avoidable event in life.”¹³⁸

Death is omnipresent in the novel. The narrative begins with the death of Conrad, ends with the death of Matilda and revolves around the mysterious death of Alfonso and the mystery of who his legitimate heir is. The reaction of the characters towards the death of Matilda is the kind of reaction anyone would expect. The characters are desperate, they grieve and they cry. On the other hand, the reaction of the characters to the death of Conrad may seem strange to the

¹³³ Strachey, *Uncanny*, 14-15

¹³⁴ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 18

¹³⁵ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 20

¹³⁶ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 18

¹³⁷ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 12

¹³⁸ Strachey, *Uncanny*, 21

reader, for even his father of whom he is said to be the “darling”¹³⁹ does not seem to be concerned by his death, he even says to Isabella that he hopes she will “rejoice”¹⁴⁰ in the death of his son. The mystery of death is one of the main sources of fear in Gothic novels. It will later lead to another theme in Gothic novels, the victory of man over death which leads the main character to his loss. For example, in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, man finding a way to defeat death is one of the main subject of the story. That is also why the full title of the work is *Frankenstein or the modern Prometheus*. Prometheus is a character in Greek mythology who stole the fire from the gods to give it to man, he was punished by being attached to a rock, an eagle would come every day eat his liver which would grow back every night. Victor Frankenstein is also punished because he defied god’s laws by creating life. We can find the same kind of theme in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, Dorian does not age but ends up committing suicide because of his sins. Death and the possibility of avoiding it is one of the main source of uncanniness in Gothic novels. Although, in *The Castle of Otranto* no character really “survives” death, Theodore might be seen as the living version of his ancestor who comes back from beyond the grave to put the rightful owner in place. His resemblance with Alfonso is stated many times throughout the story. Though the theme of a human coming back from the dead is not treated in the same way as in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or *Frankenstein*, death has the same central importance in the *Castle of Otranto*. Death is something mysterious, it is a question without an answer and therefore this subject is frightening for the reader.

¹³⁹ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 4

¹⁴⁰ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 7

CONCLUSION

The Castle of Otranto was an original work, new in its form and its contents. Is it enough to make it “the first Gothic novel” as we suggested in our opening statement? With the tools used to study the novel, it seems possible to say that, as the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* bears a wide range of the features considered to be typical of this genre. The main themes of the Gothic can be found in the novel, like the central importance of the place created by the interest for Gothic architecture or the theme of the maze, the escape, sexual ambiguity, the theme of the double and the supernatural events. In the light of more recent tools provided by the development of new sciences such as narratology and psychology – new considering the date of publication of novel – it has been seen that dream is part and parcel of this Gothic novel, not only in its conception but also in its structure (dramatisation of the novel, hyperboles) and in its inner contents (the characters are detached from the external world). The reader of the novel is confronted with The uncanny, which is likely to generate terror and horror by allowing repressed feelings to resurface. But let us not forget that, as a first example of one particular genre, the features are bound to evolve in later works inspired by it. This is the study of one novel as part of a genre and not the study of the genre in itself. The Castle of Otranto can be seen as an inspiration for later novels strictly part of the Gothic genre such as *Vathek*, by William Beckford, *The Mysteries of Udolfo*, by Ann Radcliff or Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Its influence might be considered even further with fantastic literature, particularly in the work of writers such as Edgar Allan Poe or Abraham Stoker. The literary phenomenon initiated by works such as *The Castle of Otranto* is bigger than the Gothic genre which in its definition is limited in time –Maurice Lévy, for example, situates it between 1764 and 1824 – its influence might be found in different works belonging to different literary genre.

“Il semble malaisé de définir cet ensemble d'œuvres romanesques, dont la vogue en Angleterre, à la fin du xviii^e siècle et au début du xix^e siècle, coïncide avec le romantisme, et qui ne se laissent pas enfermer dans un genre clos, encore moins définir par une épithète.”¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Ann Daphné Grieve, “Roman noir ou roman gothique ”, *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, accessed on may 24, 2011.

This study is therefore limited to defining this particular novel as part of the Gothic genre but the range could be enlarged beyond this limit by trying to establish its influence upon later works through features or an author's biographical notes for instance. It would be interesting to compare the narratological study of *The Castle of Otranto* and some other Gothic novels especially these and where there is a homodiegetic narrator. The difference between *The Castle of Otranto* and such novels would surely enrich that kind of study.

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ANNEXE :

Short summary of the novel :

The story begins on the birthday of Manfred's son, Conrad. Conrad is to be married this very day to the beautiful Isabella but he is discovered dead, squashed by an enormous helmet. This death seems to go unnoticed, except for the fact that the helmet reminded Manfred, who sets his mind on marrying Isabella, of an ancient prophecy – “the castle and lordship of Otranto ‘should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it.’ ” –. She does not want to and flees: Manfred pursues her through the corridors of the castle. She manages to escape from him thanks to the help of a mysterious gentleman and takes refuge in the church near the castle. Manfred, in rage decides to execute Theodore but the reader discovers he is in fact the son of the friar, Jerome. Jerome tries to convince Manfred to let Theodore live but they are interrupted in the midst of the dispute by the arrival of knights. They explain they represent Isabella's father, the Marquis of Vicenza and that they are here to take Isabella back to him, they understand that Isabella has fled and decide to find her before Manfred. In the meantime, Theodore is led to be locked in a chamber, he meets Manfred's daughter Matilda, who helps him escape, they fall in love. Theodore escapes using a secret passage, he encounters Isabella and decides to help her. They come across a knight, thinking it is one of Manfred's men, Theodore fights and harms him. The knight turns out to be Frederic of Vicenza, Isabella's father. They have no choice but to go back to the castle to have him taken care of. He recovers quickly and is invited to Manfred's table. At the sight of Manfred's daughter, Matilda, Frederic is spellbound by her beauty accepts. Manfred notices it and decides to make a proposition to Frederic : the marquis can marry Matilda if he accepts that Manfred marries Isabella . Later on Manfred hears from a servant that Isabella is to meet Theodore (with whom she is in love.) in the church. He goes to the church and sees Theodore with a woman, outraged he kills her but discovers that it was not Isabella but Matilda. While everyone weeps the death of the princess the ghost of the former owner of the castle appears and declares that Theodore is the rightful owner of the castle. Manfred and Hippolita join the convent and Theodore, new lord of the castle, after grieving Matilda, marries Isabella.