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Sexual Harassment from Gothic Villains: Manfred in *The
Castle of Otranto*

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To all the survivors of sexual assault.

I believe you.

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Introduction

The moral ambiguity of the gothic hero is subject of discussion within the formula of the gothic literature. While their morality breaks off from the archetypical hero, it does not seem like there is a standard on how to delimit the morality of the gothic hero. On the contrary, the gothic villain is always stereotypical, and their motifs and actions obey a formula which facilitates the atmosphere of horror in the gothic novel.

This study consists of an analysis of the first gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by the English writer Horace Walpole (1717 – 1797), in order to examine the character of Manfred, the prince of Otranto. As the forerunner of many leading characters in gothic literature, I argue first that Manfred set the archetype for gothic villains, propagating unwarranted misogynistic attitudes, and consequently with his redemption, empowers further villains to imitate him. The perpetuation of patriarchal narratives within gothic literature has deep roots in what we know of patriarchy to this days.

While some critics have argued that Manfred can be classified as a gothic hero, or a gothic hero-villain (that in practical terms, has the same ambiguous morality as the gothic hero), this thesis draws attention to Manfred's figure as a villain, considering his personality, as well as his harassment towards Isabella, and his redemption. By establishing a distinguishing framework between the gothic hero and the gothic villain, I

aim to present Manfred as the mold of the stereotype of the gothic villain, whose actions inspired and were replicated by the following villains in gothic literature.

In Chapter One, I will discuss the context in which Horace Walpole wrote *The Castle of Otranto* and the parameters in which Manfred operates as a character. These parameters encompass his nature as a villain considering the most prominent characteristics of his personality, his attitudes towards his servants and his family and the prophecy that condemned him, and how he tries to fight against it. With the review of these concepts, I aim to exhibit how Manfred's harassment to Isabella is completely unjustified, and that he could still be presented as a villain without the harassment.

Chapter Two revisits the entire scene in which Manfred harasses Isabella, intending to display how his act of gender violence is a demonstration of power, that projects his will to subdue women in order to remain as the prince. Isabella will also be briefly introduced as the first gothic heroine, and how her fighting against a patriarchal villain results in a silent failure.

Lastly, Chapter Three will focus on Manfred's redemption arc and how his crimes are forgiven by all. The nature of his forgiveness is questioned considering his sudden change of personality after murdering his daughter, and how he never approached Isabella in order for her to forgive him. This point is important both in terms of the plot, and also for

the subsequent gothic novels that displayed a gothic villain with similar motifs as Manfred.

With the connection of these three main arguments, I claim that Manfred is not only a gothic villain, but also a sexual harasser. The fact that that this issue is not addressed as such in the closure of the novel, and that his redemption is only focused on the murdering of Matilda, indicates that the medieval, patriarchal values of the novel are replicated and persist in gothic literature.

For the purpose of my study, I will refer to the definition of hero-villain as proposed by Clarence Boyer in his book *The Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy*:

We may say, then, that a villain is a man who, for a selfish end, wilfully deliberately violates standards of morality sanctioned by the audience or ordinary reader. When such a character is given the leading role, and when his deeds form the centre of dramatic interest, the villain has become protagonist, and we have the type play with the villain as hero. (qtd. in McIntyre 874).

From a broad perspective, Manfred would fit this description, as he is a villain that violates morality, but he is also given the leading role. However, —and here, I agree with McIntyre— Manfred had “little individuality” (874) to be considered as a hero, meaning that his deeds (as I shall point out in Chapter One) came from a selfish motif, and were not particularly the center of the interest within the gothic form.

Chapter I: Context, Prophecy and Family: Manfred's Traits.

I might have pleaded that, having created a new species of romance, I was at liberty to lay down what rules I thought fit for the conduct of it: but I should be more proud of having imitated, however faintly, weakly, and at a distance, so masterly a pattern, than to enjoy the entire merit of invention, unless I could have marked my work with genius, as well as with originality. Such as it is, the public have honoured it sufficiently, whatever rank their suffrages allot to it. (Walpole 10)

The Castle of Otranto introduced elements, and specifically, a character whose ambiguity as both hero and villain remain to this day. This passage written by Horace Walpole on the preface of the second edition, pretends to illustrate his own thoughts about his fatherhood of the genre, precisely emphasizing the ambivalence of the new species. Manfred, who seems to be a political parody, a tragic character and the villain of the novel at the same time represents exactly what Walpole meant with the imitation of a pattern rather than a brand-new invention. This chapter will investigate the elements of a gothic novel that gave Manfred the power of acting on his whims as the tyrant villain, but also to understand his underhand portrayal of a morally ambiguous character.

According to a nineteenth century academic analysis of gothic fiction, Horace Walpole named the novel *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (for the preface of the second edition) and used the word "Gothic" as nothing else than Medieval (Longueil 457). Longueil mentions that this definition existed side by side with the meaning of "barbarous", and proved the novel to have a mediaeval atmosphere added to a

supernatural background: “lonely castles, haunted towers, subterranean passages, knights in armor, magic” (458). Taking this coinage of the term (and with elements mentioned by Longueil) as the gothic formula for writing gothic literature, however, in no way defines the need for a character like Manfred. We have the lonely castle of Otranto, a tower haunted by Manfred's grandfather portrait, the subterranean passage that Isabella uses to escape and the giant helmet of Alfonso's armor, that by means of magic falls upon Conrad. None of the factors so far include a tyrant character.

In the aforementioned preface, Walpole states that he was aiming to combine the elements of medieval romance and the modern novel (8). Was Manfred then just conceived as a medieval character? He indeed was a prince who wanted to avoid a prophecy in order to keep ruling his castle. Sue Chaplin in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic* says that the novel has been called a political allegory, set in a Catholic past that “interrogates contemporary problems of inheritance, lineage, and the legitimacy of aristocratic rule” (389). Hence, Manfred could be as well a representation of the illegitimacy of the aristocratic rule. However on the same book, L. Andrew Cooper notes that the novel could be either reinforcing the “divine placement of the nobility” or “suggesting that the very idea of dynastic purity having divine supernatural countenance is a giant joke” (725). The ambiguity of Otranto’s politics, he says, forecasts the ambiguity of the literary heirs, and this, in my opinion is exactly what Manfred as a character does as well.

Let us consider, how a medieval character became the first main character of the gothic fiction? Scholars Marie Mulvey-Roberts and Leslie Fiedler have agreed that the term hero-villain comes precisely from the gothic form, but to determine this definition, it is necessary to analyze the context in which *The Castle of Otranto* was written. I will now examine some pieces of scholarly literature that, although they do not necessarily examine the figure of Manfred specifically, they discuss how *The Castle of Otranto* was the forerunner of gothic literature.

The elements that are considered in the gothic novel vary from author to author, specifically in regard of what it means to write a male character. Authors like Nabi (75) and Heiland (183) put forth that that the term ‘male gothic’ (as a subgenre) is coined differently from ‘female gothic’, and this influences how the gothic form is set, which differs in the narrative technique of both subgenres, their plot and assumptions about the supernatural. Additionally, Nabi mentions that the male Gothic is often regarded as ‘the true Gothic’, quoting a number of authors¹. I will not examine the binary distinction between female and male gothic as two different gendered subgenres, because such an

¹ Clery, E. J. *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley*. Liverpool University Press, 2004.
Durrant, David, 'Ann Radcliffe and the Conservative Gothic.' *Studies in English Literature*, 22.1 (1982): 519-30.
Gamer, Michael. *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

enterprise would go beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, I believe in the relevance of Manfred as written by Walpole considering how female authors like Ann Radcliffe (in late 18th century) build up their own gothic male antagonists upon his figure.

There does not seem to be a clear consensus on how to define Manfred. In 1985, David Morris divided what he called the “Gothic Sublime” into two branches: repetition and exaggeration. The latter being represented in *The Castle of Otranto* by Manfred, whose “actions are pure excess reified in plot” (302). Botting and Townshend also agree that the novel relies on his “ludicrous excesses” (5). In his book *Contesting the Gothic*, however, James Watt noted: “If Manfred is sometimes presented as a potentially sublime or tragic figure, however, Otranto also accentuates – for the knowing reader – the absurdity of his role” (Watt 35). Considering Manfred to be as tragic as he is absurd turns him into a one-dimensional, exaggerated character, in my point of view.

If Walpole's goal was to build a satirical character who would answer the tyrannic-aristocratic figures who were in the parliament at that time, then the satire encompasses deeply more than that. Manfred seems like a criticism to an entire medieval system that would collapse just as the castle of Otranto does in the end of the book. But does this criticism manage to be effective without becoming unnecessary in terms of Manfred's horrible acts?

Manfred's attitudes are reflected in how he treats other characters. Only at the beginning of the novel and after the death of his son Conrad, he unjustly decides to accuse a servant of having killed the heir in a very odd way:

he gravely pronounced that the young man was certainly a necromancer, and that till the Church could take cognisance of the affair, he would have the Magician, whom they had thus detected, kept prisoner under the helmet itself, which he ordered his attendants to raise, and place the young man under it; declaring he should be kept there without food, with which his own infernal art might furnish him (Walpole 14)

These outbursts and delusions of grandeur set the conditions of Manfred's character throughout the novel. This can be related to the definition of what it means to be a gothic hero. According to Mario Praz, the gothic hero contributed to the figure of the romantic Byronic hero (59), who is full of perverse charm (77). This definition centers on the way complex male characters are written. Though it is difficult to categorize Manfred as someone with perverse charm, for at least most of the novel. When Manfred decides to stab Isabella to prevent her union with Theodore, he stabs his daughter instead: "Oh, Matilda! - I cannot utter it - canst thou forgive the blindness of my rage?" (Walpole 71). This is the very first glimpse of remorse we see in him, only after he accidentally, but not unintentionally, stabs his daughter. He just regrets that he missed the target. We cannot define Manfred as a gothic hero.

Manfred's behavior as a feudal patron according towards his servants, is also printed with exaggeration, as it was mentioned by Morris. The way in which Jacquez, one of Manfred's servants, talks to him is crucial to understanding Manfred as a more powerful figure to everyone in Otranto:

'Why, my Lord' replied Jaquez, trembling, 'I was going to tell your Highness, that since the calamitous misfortune of my young Lord, God rest his precious soul! not one of us your Highness's faithful servants – indeed we are, my Lord, though poor men – I say, not one of us has dared to set a foot about the castle, but two together: so Diego and I, thinking that my young Lady might be in the great gallery, went up there to look for her, and tell her your Highness wanted something to impart to her.' (Walpole 23)

In just one dialogue and not counting the other interjections, Jacquez socially distances himself from Manfred, mentioning his titles of nobility five times. Also, the way in which he trembles, hesitates, and rambles, shows us that these interactions between patron and servants are marked by fear. Observing the dialogue in depth in its context, Jacquez was trying to explain himself to Manfred for not being able to enter the chamber and, therefore, for not preventing Isabella's escape. He also fails to see the supernatural figure that Manfred saw: "Satan himself I believe is in the chamber next to the gallery" said Jacques, and he could not see it" (23).

The last statement relies in Manfred's figure as a villain regarding Theodore. Theodore embodies a medieval-romantic hero, and the concepts of honor and virtue from the 18th century. He is the ideal of the moral values of his society, rescuing Isabella without

expecting anything but her eternal love in return, and becoming the Prince of Otranto after Manfred's downfall. Manfred stands out from a romantic villain because he is also the main character of the novel, and similarly to Greek mythology, he owed his downfall by trying to change the prophecy that fell upon him. This is what sets him apart from being a gothic hero and makes him a gothic villain.

It is the prophecy what adds the supernatural factor at the beginning of the novel, and the one that causes the obsession and insanity in Manfred: "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.'" (Walpole 12). Not only do we find this in *The Castle of Otranto*, but also in *Vathek*, as the homonymous protagonist also experiences the supernatural, ending in his disgrace. A farthest approach would be *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, that although it does not have the supernatural element, it does test Victor Frankenstein by giving him the power to create a creature through an exaggeration of technology and the power to bring back the dead. These characters also belonged to the upper social class or had royal titles, like Manfred did.

Manfred's desperation to remain the prince of Otranto, and probably the same weight of having the title, led him to a tyranny. Therefore, Manfred's personality contrast with

Theodore's chivalry, and he also torments the women around him, being these his own family: his wife, Hippolita, his daughter, Matilda, and his daughter-in-law, Isabella. According to Rebecca Munford, in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, family has to be present within the gothic formula, as many of the narratives deal with dynasty linked with ambition and ancestral guilt. Family, she says, is "a microcosm for broader social structures of patriarchal government" (225). This family image is evident in *The Castle of Otranto*, but remains blurred considering that all of the characters but Friar Jerome and the servants are somehow part of the family, including Frederic, Theodore and his ancestor, the spirit of Alfonso.

Little is found in academic texts, however, about the direct family consolidated by Manfred and Hippolita. I argue that Hippolita's submissiveness, outside the limitations of the prophecy, contributes to Manfred's state of dominance just as much she contributes to his remorse and forgiveness at the end of the story. At the beginning of the narration, Hippolita is introduced shortly after Manfred, and even before the prophecy:

Hippolita, his wife, an amiable lady, did sometimes venture to represent the danger of marrying their only son so early, considering his great youth, and greater infirmities; but she never received any other answer than reflections on her own sterility, who had given him but one heir (Walpole 12).

Manfred's relationship with Hippolita is always deteriorated because of him. Defined as kind and pleasant, Hippolita is always blamed by Manfred, because she could not give

him more sons that could keep the family lineage in Otranto. Also, she could not make her own decisions, and she seemed to accept this as an absolute truth: “‘It is not ours to make election for ourselves: heaven, our fathers, and our husbands must decide for us’” (Walpole 60). Indirectly, Hippolita's submission gives Manfred another tool to build his patriarchal tyranny. If Isabella is the tragic heroine escaping from the villain, Hippolita works indirectly as an agent that completes Manfred's entity as a gothic-hero-villain. She helps Manfred in his redemption, offering him a solution in the cells of the asylum and, moreover, including herself in his deeds:

‘My Lord,’ said she to the desponding Manfred, ‘behold the vanity of human greatness! Conrad is gone! Matilda is no more! In Theodore we view the true Prince of Otranto. By what miracle he is so I know not – suffice it to us, our doom is pronounced! shall we not, can we but dedicate the few deplorable hours we have to live, in deprecating the further wrath of heaven? heaven ejects us – whither can we fly, but to yon holy cells that yet offer us a retreat (Walpole 74).

Left both without more children who can take care of the family lineage, Manfred and Hippolita have no other option to dedicate their lives to religion and seek in their faith redemption before God (although of course, the only culprit here is Manfred).

To delineate a character like Manfred and to recognize his status as both a protagonist and a villain remains ambiguous in the duality. His figure intentionally sought to represent a feudal society and a critique of its authoritarian behavior, but also represents that it was

somehow unthinkable to judge the behavior of a man in authoritarian power. In the case he had malicious intentions, he could always be redeemed. In both *Vathek* and *Frankenstein*, death seemed to be the only valid solution to redeem these acts, but in the case of characters who respond to the archetype of Manfred there is a solution connected to religious faith.

But understanding Manfred only as a character is failing to care about the perception of the gothic novel as a form or social criticism, or as a sublime entertainment. I have named Manfred's defining / most salient characteristics (the context in which he was written, the prophecy that he is trying to avoid, his family context), and overall, he fits within the nature of the gothic villain. In brief, his attitudes define him as a tyrant, but up to this point, he is not expected to act as a sexual harasser.

Chapter II. Psychological Behavior: Manfred as a Sexual Predator.

If the figure of Manfred is studied as a hero-villain, this would mean that at certain point of the novel his personality traits were subverted, as he is the wicked villain but also has the leading role of the plot. However, as it was discussed in the previous chapter, Manfred's deeds were not exactly heroic until the last five pages of the narration. Nevertheless, I have intentionally left out Manfred's relationship with Isabella to comprehend the striking cruelty of his acts as a villain, and to reflect on the forgiveness he receives at the end of the novel.

David Morris, Jenny DiPlacidi and Jill Campbell have all considered the harassment of Isabella by Manfred as an incestuous design that obeys a patriarchal structure, typical of the gothic genre. Morris relates incest relationship to the uncanny of the gothic form, praising Sigmund Freud's essay of the same name, relating how the incest evokes what cannot be represented (Morris 311). DiPlacidi and Campbell both believe as well that this relationship was incestuous, since, even though Isabella and Manfred were not blood related, they shared an in-law bond (DiPlacidi 47, Campbell 252). I argue that this notion of incest, while it inserts into the gothic form of fear of the unknown and the forbidden, is not necessarily related to the female fear of being raped by a villain, and, therefore, the threat of incest as a source of horror in this case is just a supplementary factor of being sexually harassed.

Manfred is a representative of patriarchal society, particularly feudal patriarchy. At the beginning of the narration, we know about his impatience to marry his son Conrad, in order to prevent the prophecy that affected his dynasty. He blames his wife for not having given him more children, revealing that he only believes in masculine dominance. He also confirms his preference for his male heir over Matilda, feeling a brief moment of anguish at the time of his son's death: "But what a sight for a father's eyes! [...] The horror of the spectacle, the ignorance of all around how this misfortune had happened, and above all, the tremendous phenomenon before him, took away the Prince's speech" (Walpole 13). This horror cannot be offset by his daughter's desire to help him. Later on, he rejects her compassion and company for the loss of Conrad, saying: "Begone! I do not want a daughter." (Walpole 15)).

These first instances of Manfred's relationship with his children are of importance to understand his fixation for the male gender, in disdain for his heiress. DiPlacidi has noted that "In Walpole's tale order is restored when the rightful male heir is placed in his kingdom, while in later Gothics it is the heroine who reclaims her usurped property, wealth and lineage." (45). This marks the particular distinction that sets aside *The Castle of Otranto* as substantially different from its successors. I think it is important to underscore, however, that it is the bringing back of the feudal patriarchal principle that the following gothic novels inherited, as I shall explain later, according to the character of Isabella.

The relationship Manfred has with his children is different from the one he has with Isabella. Introduced as the soon-to-be wife of Conrad, Isabella ends up being the victim of Manfred's lust, who seeks to abuse her to have a male heir. According to Morris, Matilda and Isabella have interchangeable roles, because Frederic (Isabella's father) feels the same passion about Matilda. Furthermore, Morris mentions that the incest is a common subject of the gothic, because, through the concept of the sublime, he connected terror and love in the exploration of the incest as a social taboo: "In the Gothic novel, love and terror prove inextricable" (306).

I cannot help but reject Morris's claims. The fact that he even understands sexual abuse as a deep desire for the sublime, a Freudian taboo, suggests that there is somehow consent on the part of the abused person (in this case, Isabella) or a hidden desire of being part of this relationship, which is clearly not the case. For Morris, "Death and supernaturalism are closely linked for Freud because they both derive their ultimate terror from a return of the repressed" and this is portrayed in the novel (310). But fear of being raped is not a repressed feeling. The female fear of being abused does not lie in repression of what we know, but in our historical collective past.

Focusing on Isabella means also focusing on what would later become the archetype of the gothic heroine. Intrepid and courageous, she flees from Manfred's grasp. The first

interaction between the two is commanded by Manfred and later encouraged by Hippolita, who tells Isabella that by time of Conrad's death, Manfred could not support the sight of his own family, and she tells her: "He thinks you less disordered than we are, and dreads the shock of my grief. Console him, dear Isabella" (Walpole 15). It is suggested here that Manfred did not necessarily regard Isabella as a daughter in the way that he viewed Matilda. Once reunited, Manfred tells Isabella that Conrad did not deserve her, and that in a few years they would rejoice his death (16). Confronted with Manfred's inappropriate words, Isabella encounters the terrifying experience of what it means to be a gothic heroine. Manfred offers himself to her to have a son, and dread seizes Isabella, "half dead with fright and horror" (16). It is important to understand what happens in this scene, since we can observe in this moment an elementary trait of Manfred's character, his obstinacy for wanting to abuse Isabella: "Heaven nor Hell shall impede my designs" (17) he says. Whether it is from his ambitious desire to keep his dynasty in Otranto or a whim of sexual desire, sexual abuse is still abuse, and it remains with Manfred the decision of forcing it.

He pursues and harasses Isabella just because he can do it. At the same moment, the portrait of Manfred's grandfather hanging over them "uttered a big sigh" and then descended onto the floor with a melancholic air (17). In astonishment, Manfred cannot take his eyes from the portrait and somehow faces the supernatural events. Meanwhile, Isabella is shocked at Manfred's behavior. She never sees the ghost or spectrum, because Manfred is her figure of horror. This is a standard of the gothic form that Walpole

introduced in *The Castle of Otranto*, although it was later challenged and disarmed by authors who either placed the female heroine in different circumstances to flee from their abusers or bypassed completely the figure of the male predator. The fact that Manfred remains an abusive villain in the first gothic novel implies that in patriarchal societies the female fear of being abused by a man sustains the system to keep on prevailing. Here, it seems for me that the first gothic novel suggests that women can only fear men while men can fear supernatural elements.

The most striking quote in which Manfred establishes his male dominance is right after Isabella flees from him: “I will now use the human means in power for preserving my race; Isabella shall not escape me” (17). Yet, those are not his human means, most likely, the patriarchal male means in his power, he will not ask Heaven nor Hell for support because he can already do whatever he wants. For academics Kaur and Singh, gothic fiction was a “precursor of modern society where male child desire, dynasty promotion, incest, female’s exploitation and submission, amalgam of politics and religion were hinted at” (4). It seems to me that these elements are prominent in Manfred: his position of aristocracy, his misogynistic attitude, and the way they represent terror are all part of building rules towards the patriarchal narratives that endure to this day.

As a villain, Manfred is meant to provoke an emotion on the reader, to trigger an atmosphere of fear, but as I previously mentioned, the consideration of Manfred as an

incestuous predator has been taken as a core idea by critics. His position as guardian of Isabella stands in opposition with the figure of Frederic, whose identity we learn in a confusing fight against Theodore (who just rescued Isabella from Otranto). MacAndrews established another important inflection that the tale sets for its successors, which is the figure of the woman as nothing else than a sexual object of desire: “In its association with the incest theme, the conflict over the daughter figure between the boyish hero and the two father figures suggests an Oedipal struggle between son and father for sexual possession of the woman” (MacAndrews 16). Isabella is an elemental character that preceded for gothic heroines such as Adeline (*The Romance of the Forest*), Emily (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*), Antonia (*The Monk*) and in contemporary gothic, even Bella Swan (*The Twilight* saga), and, although she was conceived by pure means of sexual objectification, she manages to get away and escape from the circumstances in which Manfred (and at a certain point, his own father, during the proposed exchange for Matilda) puts her.

Parallels such as Manfred being father of Matilda and father-in-law/guardian for Isabella, but at the same time, neglecting the first and being sexually harassing the latter display the prince's contradictory personality. Wanting to isolate himself from his family (who at that point were only Hippolita and Matilda) after the death of his Conrad, Manfred makes a distinction of how useful or not useful were these women for him. He asks Isabella to forget about Hippolita, and he will do the same (16), but in order to justify his desire for Isabella, he later confesses:

Oh! Sirs, if ye were acquainted with that excellent woman! if ye knew that I adore her like a mistress, and cherish her as a friend – but man was not born for perfect happiness! She shares my scruples, and with her consent I have brought this matter before the church, for we are related within the forbidden degrees. (Walpole 45)

This contradiction between cherishing his wife but blaming her for not being able to give him another son speaks about his emotional instability and, at the same time, his lack of temperament to control his sayings and deeds. While he spends most of the novel mistreating Hippolita, in this monologue he mentions that he shared a relative degree with his wife, and therefore he had the right to claim Isabella “fix on a successor” (46). He will always blame others for his own actions, as if he were the victim.

This type of temperament is intrinsic in sexual abusers. According to gender studies scholar Rita Segato, gender structures respond to hierarchical structures (304), which in the case of sexual abuse means a performance of power and control over the victim. The patterns of abusive behavior Manfred’s personality shows are closely related to the way he wants to keep dominance over both the castle and Isabella. The act of harassment against the lady fits under Segato’s view on rape:

Rape is precisely the offense that demonstrates the fragility and superficiality of the contract when it comes to gender relations, and it is always a contractual breach that highlights, in any context, the submission of individuals to hierarchically constituted structures. (307)

If we see rape as the infringement of a contract (in words of Segato, the infringement of sex), then Manfred's act as a sexual predator, whether considered incestuous or not, is a demonstration of power and a quest for domination to subdue Isabella to have a male heir. This "offense" to gender relations evidences the patriarchal structure in which the novel is constructed.

Manfred as a character has been settle down as the villain of the narration. Nevertheless, as the main character, he holds with him the power to perpetuate not only the structure of the male dominance throughout the novel, but also to bequeath this structure to its successors, as the form of the gothic that triggers an atmosphere of danger. Although it is possible to interpret that the figure of the villain as both a sexual harasser and a tyrant, the meaning of his existence as a sexual abuser is not justified by the perpetuation of male characters that propel patriarchy.

Chapter III: Guilt, Forgiveness and Redemption: Manfred's Closing Arc.

Redemption is one of the most crucial acts a gothic character can encounter. The redemption for a hero typically includes a circular cycle in which a character starts in a point of stillness, and travels a path in which they find the worst of themselves and get back to the starting point. Manfred as a gothic villain questions the nature of the hero, perverting the ideals that are commonly associated with the hero as a canonically good character. In this last chapter, I will again review the contradictory personality of Manfred, with special focus on his final redemption, examining some relevant academic literature in order to understand his guilt, forgiveness and redemption.

Guilt seems to be a strong emotion that Manfred feels in the climax of the story. Right after stabbing his daughter Matilda in a fit of rage, taking her for Isabella, Manfred immediately feels the need of killing himself (Walpole 71). This type of behavior in human beings has been addressed and studied by psychologists, who note that “guilty people punish themselves if they have no opportunity to compensate the transgression that caused them to feel guilty” (Nelissen & Zeelenberg 120). According to this definition, Manfred felt the need to punish himself for having stabbed Matilda, because of his guilt. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the patriarchal structure in which Manfred operates prevents him from seeing the abuse of power towards Isabella as sexual harassment. However, the guilt of having stabbed his daughter is related only to having killed his heiress, a guilt that arises from having ended his dynasty (taking into account that at the

beginning of the novel he told her that he did not want a daughter). There is no sign suggesting that any of that guilt has to do with Isabella, so, once again, Manfred is feeling guilty just because he fell into the trap of self-harm.

It is difficult to delimit the correlation between guilt and forgiveness in matters of sexual assault. Understanding fiction as imitation of reality allows for a much broader debate. Much of gender studies focuses on the forgiveness of the victim towards the abuser, and those that do treat of the abuser's guilt and "self-forgiveness" focus on statistics². The motto that assures that rape is not about sex, but about violence or power/control, prevails in gender studies (McPhail 1) is probably related with this, as the psychological analysis of the aggressor is little addressed. Although it is understood that our focus when considering abuse must always be on the victim (or, as I prefer to say, on the survivor), there seems to be a gap in academic literature concerning the guilt of the abuser. In matters of this dissertation, the relationship between guilt and forgiveness in Manfred's personality and actions is ambiguous.

² Grubb, Amy, and Julie Harrower. "Attribution of Blame in Cases of Rape: An Analysis of Participant Gender, Type of Rape and Perceived Similarity to the Victim". *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 13.5, (2008): 396-405. Elsevier BV.

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In terms of the narrative, just as Matilda recognizes that it is her father the one who stabbed her, Manfred wakes “as from a trance, beat[s] his breast, twist[s] his hands in his locks, and endeavour[s] to recover his dagger from Theodore to despatch himself” (Walpole 71). This waking-up comes along with Matilda’s cursing Theodore for calling his father a tyrant and asking him to forgive Manfred as she did herself. She also asks her father to forgive her mother Hippolita for sending her there. Yet, Manfred, finally becoming aware of his cruel actions, begs:

‘Forgive thee! Murderous monster!’ cried Manfred, ‘can assassins forgive? I took thee for Isabella; but heaven directed my bloody hand to the heart of my child. Oh, Matilda! – I cannot utter it – canst thou forgive the blindness of my rage?’ (71)

The word heaven here has a special connotation, as he blames it for directing his hand to his child. Earlier in the novel, when he was pursuing Isabella, he stated that heaven nor hell shall impede his designs (17). The correlation between the two shows the great difference in Manfred’s self-confidence. At the beginning of the narration, Manfred is confident that he will be able to have one male heir with Isabella, and that not even heaven as destiny could stop him. Now for the murder of his child, he blames heaven. Failing to prevent the prophecy that indicated that he would no longer have the lordship of Otranto, he decides to accept that it is Heaven that determines his fate and not his own actions. The ambiguity remains: Does he really accept that he cannot control fate, because he has no other choice? Or is he trying to put the blame on Heaven, because he does not want to take responsibility for his actions?

Exaggeration (especially when it is related to the supernatural) as an element of the gothic form intervenes when the prophecy is fulfilled: a thunder shook the castle to its foundations when Manfred asked if Matilda was dead (Walpole 73). When a giant vision of Alfonso, working as a divine agent, proclaims Theodore as the real heir, Hippolita is the first that acknowledges that Manfred's doom is pronounced. She also virtuously includes herself in that doom (as I previously mentioned, contributing to Manfred's patriarchy). Then, Manfred explains how his ancestor poisoned Alfonso and usurped the lordship of Otranto. And he clarifies: "His crimes pursued him –yet he lost no Conrad, no Matilda! I pay the price of usurpation for all!" (74). Even after Matilda's death, the destruction of the castle and the divine apparition of Alfonso, he feels sorry for himself, saying he pays the price for his ancestor's mistakes. In his view, Conrad and Matilda did not pay for this – even though they died. As if their deaths were intended to punish him. Here he mentions no regret or critical thinking whatsoever of his actions: from his point of view, someone deserved to receive punishment, and it happened to be him.

All the harassment and persecution that Isabella suffers seems to be absolutely accepted and forgotten by all. In fact, Isabella ceases to have a dialogue in the narrative after Matilda's death. She is briefly mentioned accompanying Hippolita in her suffering and she also takes Manfred away from Matilda's deathbed, "apprehensive that these struggles of passion were more than Matilda could support" (Walpole 72). Being

Matilda's last wish that her mother forgives her father, it is a bit strange that she does not ask Isabella the same, considering that she does have time to ask her to take care of her mother: "Isabella, thou hast loved me; wouldst thou not supply my fondness to this dear, dear woman? Indeed I am faint!" (73). I have noticed here a detailed difference between Matilda and Isabella (again, disagreeing with Morris, who states that they are "doubles or mirror images" (305)). For Matilda, her father's mistakes are forgivable, no matter how serious they are. In a similar way to her mother, they allow Manfred, even outside his lordship, to have undeserving mercy. For Isabella—we do not know. She ceases to have a dialogue. In the end, three key elements in Manfred's denouement—the guilt, his daughter's forgiveness, and his redemption—all revolve around Matilda's death, not about the harassment of Isabella.

In a study of *The Castle of Otranto* and its similarities with the Shakespearean tragedy, Kristina Bedford notes that "Walpole has not entirely succeeded in enticing the reader to participate in the tragic action. It is Matilda's fate, rather than Manfred's fall, to which one principally responds" (429). I think that this statement not only works when analyzing the novel as a tragedy, but also when we consider the closure of Manfred as a character. His sudden conversion from bad character to good character seems to be part of the previously mentioned satiric form of the novel (as I mentioned in Chapter One), for a disengaged reader, but what about Isabella? Manfred also seems to completely forget about her once Matilda dies. Somehow the plot falls short from the female point of view, as there is an abrupt end in which Theodore stays with Isabella just because with her, he

could “indulge the melancholy that had taken possession of his soul” (Walpole 75). This is a very weak ending for Isabella as well, considering that he did not love her back as she loved him, but rather the union was out of pity and due to Matilda’s absence. It is the death of Matilda what moves the end of the story, not a voluntary transition from Manfred.

It seems that his misdeeds against the lady are simply forgotten or obscured. We do not know anything about him after he takes the habits of religion with his wife. They decide that they have no other option, as they no longer have children or properties. There is also no real explanation why Hippolita carries away Manfred’s guilt, more than being blinded about his power over her³. I believe that this “forgiveness” works not only for the conclusion of the story, but also, in a metaphorical sense. The forerunner of gothic literature forgives his villain, thus allowing the perpetuation of patriarchal structures. Manfred even mentions that

‘To heap shame on my own head is all the satisfaction I have left to offer to offended heaven. My story has drawn down these judgments: Let my confession atone – but, ah! what can atone for usurpation and a murdered child? a child murdered in a consecrated place? List, sirs, and may this bloody record be a warning to future tyrants!’ (Walpole 74)

³ As I discussed in the previous chapters, Hippolita has a strong attachment and dependence with Manfred, as their relationship is conceived under patriarchal structures. The most evident example of this is Hippolita's statement: “‘It is not ours to make election for ourselves: heaven, our fathers, and our husbands must decide for us’” (Walpole 60).

This “warning to future tyrants” hints that any other tyrant will suffer the same consequences as Manfred, but what consequences does Manfred really suffer, besides giving up his desire of ruling the castle? Being the main character of the first gothic novel, Manfred cleared the ground for other villains to sustain their evil and misogyny in a similar development: by being sources of fear for women. The noticeable difference is that they are not forgiven as Manfred, but rather die at the end of the narration. These are the cases of characters such as Vathek, the Marquis from *The Romance of the Forest*, Montoni from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Mr Hyde⁴ (along of course, with Dr. Jekyll, but ultimately, in the form of Hyde), and Dracula. Regardless of their nature as protagonists or secondary characters, it is important to identify how a trend was established by the representation of the earliest gothic villain. These figures, aside from being narcissistic also teaches women to be afraid of men.

Particularly, the way things end in *The Castle of Otranto* is what reinforces the patriarchal structures. Feminist scholars such as Kate Ferguson Ellis have mentioned that “the genre that Walpole launched, whose themes of terror, intrigue, mystery and grotesquerie play out in ancient castles, does not symbolize the destruction of the old” (qtd. in Derochers 5). With Manfred in retirement and Theodore as the new heir and ruler

⁴ Although one might argue that Mr. Hyde’s villainy in the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was not directed towards assaulting or abusing women, the very first act of cruelty that we know of Hyde was his trampling over a little girl. This could be interpreted as a demonstration of his cruelty over “weaker” people, but also, and decisively, as a demonstration of power in front of others, as Manfred did.

of Otranto, there is a restoration of the patriarchy in which the original lineage returns through a male heir. I consider this interpretation correct, but I also agree with Mahjoub Hachmi who says that “The social context of the eighteenth century was so much based on the male order that no realistic literary work could deal with women’s conditions or promote any changes of the status quo” (118). While Hachmi is referring to how the gothic heroines were in fact symbols of resistance to male power, it is unrealistic to expect that Walpole (or even Radcliffe) would write from a feminist perspective. From my point of view, Manfred’s attitude and personality towards women, and specifically towards Isabella, is not approached or solved at all, and his redemption, while passed as “warning for future tyrants”, also disregards completely Isabella’s harassment.

The understanding of Manfred as a gothic villain and his sudden development as a character takes place just after Matilda’s death, his own mistake. This virtue is not enough for Manfred to be classified as a gothic hero, but indeed, as a villain who is also a primary character. This brief moment of redemption reinforces the idea that it is okay to forgive and forget the harassment of women. As a result, as the forerunner villain who is also a misogynist for others works of gothic literature. The fact that Manfred strongly represents men who get away with mistreating women perpetuates the patriarchal structures that prevailed in gothic fiction.

Conclusion

The patriarchal paradigm that appears in the earliest pieces of gothic fiction is common to male and female writers, and for Horace Walpole, having Manfred as his main character gave continuity to the misogynistic attitudes held by the gothic villains. Furthermore, whether on purpose or not, the influence of feudal patriarchy was casted upon the whole genre. Many novels inherited from *The Castle of Otranto* complex villains that were figures of terror for women, condemning them to be afraid of men. This perpetuation of patriarchal narratives contributes to an environment in which the heroine becomes a central piece of the gothic, but also obstructs the genre into a cycle of repetition.

Manfred could totally bypass his sickening predator behavior around Isabella, and he could still be the gothic villain, having his feud with the prophecy, Frederic and Theodore. The novel would work just the same without the allusion of rape. Manfred being such a disastrous character and still getting forgiveness at the end of the narrative is an erasure of his acts. This erasure eventually sets up and restores the roles of patriarchy once again—Theodore becomes the prince of Otranto and Isabella returns to the position Hippolita once had, a distressed wife. Manfred did exactly what *The Castle of Otranto* did as a novel, while the first is considered to establish the gothic as a genre, Manfred restored a patriarchy that did not have to be restored.

The ambiguity of the gothic hero-villain is one of the important points of this study. While Manfred is a gothic villain, his position as a main character makes us fluctuate between the morally ambiguous within gothic literature. Characters who inherit this ambiguity are nevertheless relevant within the genre. An interesting point for future studies would be to analyze the characters of Ambrosio (The Monk) and Victor and the creature, both characters of Frankenstein (1818). Only after Mary Shelley's novel we could explore the succession of the sublime in the gothic genre, with characters that did not harass women but that killed and played God. Characters like Manfred could be avoided.

The importance of gender studies within literature remains relevant for us to assess how is patriarchy portrayed in the gothic fiction. Sexual harassment coming from gothic villains as a form of terror is a matter of importance not only from the literary theory, but also for the gender studies academic field. Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto* is just one of many literary characters whose actions can be reflected in our society. Further contemporary research over gender studies and gothic fiction would be a great contribution to literary theory, starting with the deconstruction of the male and female gothic as separated subgenres.

The representation of the gothic villains and the traces they leave in further pieces of fiction it is genuinely important in the way we analyze gothic literature today. Particularly, the fine line between the sublime and the terror and the misogyny that might

be portrayed in the villains needs to be carefully evaluated. Manfred may be the predecessor to the gothic villains of the past centuries, but his existence has no place in contemporary gothic literature, and of course, not in the real world either.

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