

“What is this secret sin, this untold tale . . . ?”:

**The Representation of Incest
in Early British Gothic Narratives¹**

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Abstract

Various patterns of the representation of incest in the turn-of-the-19th-century British Gothic novels will be analyzed from a Foucauldian perspective in this paper. The Foucauldian model emphasizes the tension between two modes of familial organization—“alliance” and “sexuality”—and this tension often occurs in representations of the modern nuclear family. In the 18th century, the period when this clash between familial alliance and sexuality began, there was an acute anxiety about incest, which was represented in the Gothic novel with its wide range of scenarios. Some Gothic writers wavered between the modes of alliance and sexuality while others preferred to look back nostalgically at the traditional alliance-based model of the family. Some were so concerned about the potential confusion between domestic affection and erotic attachment in the newly-emergent nuclear family that they looked suspiciously at the sexual “connections” of couples who were not blood kin but acted as if they were—the so-called “familialized incest.” Domestic space—and how it is compartmentalized, controlled, and infiltrated—plays an important role in the way incest is imagined as haunting horror or unconscious wish. It will be argued that the incest of Early British Gothic fiction is above all a symptom or expression of the problem of meeting the contradictory demands of familial alliance and sexuality.

¹ The research for this paper is funded by a grant from a joint project, “Gender and Culture,” under the Top 100 University Advancement Task Force at National Cheng Kung University.

Keywords

Early British Gothic, Foucault, incest, modern nuclear family, *The Castle of Otranto*,
The Mysterious Mother, *The Recess*, *The Monk*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Italian*,
Sentimental Novel

The quote used as the title of the present essay comes from a lesser-known 18th-century Gothic work, *The Mysterious Mother*, a closet drama by the inaugural Gothic writer Horace Walpole. The question, raised by two Catholic monks attending the Countess of Narbonne with the evil intention of manipulating her reign through access to her secret, motivates the plot. The “secret sin” is of course incest: the queen’s one-night incestuous meeting with her unknowing son Edmund has produced a daughter, Adeliza, with whom the father-brother then unwittingly falls in love. This secret is discovered too late by the countess herself, for Edmund has already wedded Adeliza (though not yet consummating the marriage); the countess ends her life by throwing herself onto Edmund’s drawn dagger, leaving the half-knowing daughter in a convent and the suicidal son plunging into his old way of life as a mercenary.

This plot seems a bit “extreme” even for a genre (in)famous for its wild pursuit of horror and its uncanny indulgence in coincidences. Yet the story of incest is far from being an “untold tale” in the Gothic narrative, even in the early stages of its development. In fact, when literary historians catalogue defining features of the Gothic genre, “incest” as a plot component is rarely left out. Early British Gothic fiction, along with its literary siblings, such as the novel of sentiment, is primarily concerned with “family” stories, and the “merit of Gothic” lies fundamentally in its representation of transgression (Punter 61). Thus “the mysterious crime at the heart of most Gothic plots is a transgression of legal barriers as well as . . . a transgression of the stronger barriers of taboo—incest, the murder of a brother, patricide” (DeLamotte 21-22). While the novel of sentiment in the eighteenth century was more concerned about representational decorum when telling its no less eventful “family romance,”² Gothic fiction is characteristically less careful about such decorum and so became a dark supplement to its respectable literary sibling, exposing quite unabashedly (and often literally) the “skeletons in the closet.”³

² The term is not used here in a Freudian or psychoanalytic sense, complete with terminological paraphernalia like “the unconscious,” “trauma,” or “castration.” Instead, “romance” is understood in a more literal sense as a story of strange incidents and irregular passions. These implications of the term are actually in Freud’s mind when he elaborates on the Oedipal scenario, and the Gothic fictions discussed here deal with the same scenario, though they are not approached from a properly psychoanalytic perspective in this essay. In the conclusion to the essay, I will explain the historical and sociological reason why a Foucauldian approach is preferred to that of Freudian psychoanalysis in my reading of the Gothic fiction.

³ Indeed it is often difficult to distinguish between the Gothic fiction from the novel of sentiment (or sensibility) in the eighteenth century since both shared such important motifs as virtuous women in distress and tensions in familial relationships. Ann Radcliffe’s works like *The Mysteries of Udolpho* are perfect examples of the integration of the generic conventions. Julie

Instead of portraying a rosy picture of the newly-emerging familial organization based on emotional bonds among family members,⁴ Gothic fiction almost seems “a parody of the modern introverted nuclear family” (Shaffer 76), alerting its readers to the nightmarish possibility that familial love could turn into incestuous obsession.

However, despite the high incidence of incestuous encounters in the plots of Early British Gothic novels, literary critics’ abundant analyses of the motif are surprisingly sporadic and incoherent. Most of them appear in the form of short passages in book-length studies of Gothic conventions or journal articles on specific Gothic novels, especially Matthew G. Lewis’s *The Monk*. This absence of systematic in-depth research on the incest motif in Early British Gothic fiction is understandable inasmuch as this genre has only started to attract literary critics’ serious attention in the past three decades, and their comments remain mostly at the “introductory” level. Related studies of the incest motif in the literature of the age either cover a broad range of texts not specifically Gothic⁵ or focus on cases of sibling incest in the lives and works of certain Romantic poets.⁶ However, some more recent studies have started to consider the incest motif in literature around the turn of the nineteenth century in a way that is systematic and theory-informed. Julie Shaffer’s essay “Familial Love, Incest, and Female Desire in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century British Women’s Novels” integrates many previous scholars’ observations on the connections between conceptions of familial bonds at the time and the problem of incest; Schaffer also clarifies a conceptual confusion between familial incest *per se* and so-called “familialized” incest. Even though the

Shaffer notes that, if parental-filial incest represents “the most dire female suffering,” which both subgenres dwell on for emotional effects, “the theme of incest thus proves to be as central to the novel of sensibility as it is to the Gothic” (76).

⁴ This does not mean that family before the eighteenth century simply went without emotional bond among its members, but it was indeed not a built-in feature of the traditional alliance-oriented family, which was concerned about “the preservation, increase, and transmission through inheritance and marriage of the property and status of the lineage” (Stone 69). Since arranged marriage was the norm and romantic love came as a dispensable condition, “a ‘low affect’ marriage [was] often perfectly satisfactory” (82). Equally revealing of the “normal” lack of the emotional bond in the traditional family was the practice of entrusting a newborn to the care of wet-nurses (often outside the household) until he or she was six or eight years old and then sending the child away to a boarding school for the adolescent years (285-86).

⁵ One ground-breaking example of this research effort is W. Daniel Wilson’s work.

⁶ A path-breaking study is done by Peter L. Thorslev, Jr. He, however, is dismissive of the use of the motif in the Gothic fiction, which according to him takes it up only “for its shock appeal and for an additional source of sensationalism” (43). Indeed, Thorslev’s attitude is typical of the academic snobbery in the sixties against popular fiction; he despises the whole Gothic subgenre and finds it “difficult to credit ‘Monk’ Lewis or Mrs. Radcliffe with serious use of literary symbolism” (44).

literary texts she chooses for discussion are not strictly Gothic, her study of the novel of sensibility is very relevant to the present discussion. Still, Schaffer does not discuss Gothic fiction proper. Judging from its title, Ruth Perry’s essay “Incest as the Meaning of the Gothic Novel” seems to promise analyses of the motif in specific texts, but her argument remains schematic and her discussion of the texts short and segmented. Equally unfulfilled are the expectations aroused by the chapter “Family Plots” in Anne Williams’ *Art of Darkness*, where a Foucauldian exposition of the incest issue in the new familial organization of the eighteenth century seems to be offered as a preliminary model for analyses of Gothic texts. Perry in fact also resorts to the same Foucauldian expository model (without really using it) when she opens her discussion of the Gothic incest motif.

The present essay intends to pick up, then, on the interpretive work left unfinished by Perry and Williams, following the Foucauldian expository model already laid out by them. I will first briefly explicate this model, which emphasizes the tension between two modes or “deployments” (to use Foucault’s term) of familial organization—“alliance” and “sexuality”—a tension that is often manifested in representations of the modern nuclear family. In the 18th century, the period when (for Foucault) this clash between familial alliance and sexuality began, there was an acute anxiety about incest and it was represented, directly or obliquely, by that newly emerging narrative form, the novel—and above all, late in the century, by the Gothic novel with its wide range of scenarios and of renderings of them. Some Gothic writers wavered between the modes of alliance and sexuality while others preferred to look back nostalgically at the traditional alliance-based model of the family. Some were so concerned about the potential confusion between domestic affection and erotic attachment in the newly-emergent nuclear family that they looked suspiciously at the sexual “connections” of couples who were not blood kin but seemed to act as if they were—the so-called “familialized incest.” Domestic space—and how it is compartmentalized, controlled, and infiltrated—plays an important role in the way incest is imagined—whether, for instance, as haunting horror or unconscious wish. It will be argued in this essay, then, that the incest of Early British Gothic fiction is above all a symptom or expression of the deeper problem of meeting the contradictory demands of familial alliance and sexuality. Indeed, Gothic fiction has continued to return obsessively to this problem because no facile solution (e.g. that of a “perfect” father/patriarch) can be found.⁷

⁷ A brief discussion of the theoretical implication of the explicatory model adopted here seems necessary here. Foucault’s disapproval of psychoanalysis as both a discipline and an institution is well known; however, in the following “Foucauldian” reading of the Gothic fictions, analytical

Incest at the Interface of Two Familial Deployments

Since Perry and Williams have explicated the Foucauldian model quite clearly,⁸ there is no need to rehearse all its specific features; I will just summarize several major points. First, sexual relations in the 18th-century West witnessed a shift from the old “deployment of alliance” to the new “deployment of sexuality,” with the latter being “superimposed” on the former without annulling it. While the “deployment of alliance” consists “of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions,” the “deployment of sexuality” is concerned with “the sensations of the body, the quality of pleasures, and the nature of impressions” (Foucault 106). The family, then, as the primary locus of “relations of sex,” underwent at this time an “interchange of sexuality and alliance,” with the old kinship ties being heavily invested with emotive or affective elements (Foucault 108). As historians of family like Lawrence Stone put it, the family started to center around a couple united under the new ideal of “companionate marriage,” which stressed the couple’s emotional bonds and downplayed considerations of enhancement of the two families’ financial interests and social statuses through the alliance (217-24, 181-91). Intra-familial emotive investment also intensified as the nuclear family began drifting away from its clan networks and became self-sufficient, not only economically but emotionally (247). The danger of incest therefore arose when the deployment of sexuality began to bear down on that of alliance, for “the family has become an obligatory locus of affects, feelings, love” (Foucault 108).

concepts that seem to derive from psychoanalysis inevitably come up in discussion. Still, the issue of incest is considered here in a more sociological than psychological fashion, as the present essay generally focuses on the “outside” cultural factors of incest like familial organization and social role of each familial member, not on the “inside” subjective factors like generation, repression, diversion, or transformation of familial love. The only exception to the application of the Foucauldian model in this essay is the analysis of *The Mysterious Mother*, as a psychoanalytic reading can yield more fruitful understanding of the play. Even there the central concern is the father’s ambivalent function in the intersection of both familial deployments of sexuality and alliance.

⁸ Indeed, Foucault himself already delineates the model in great length in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (106-11). Williams condenses her argument and stresses its relevancy to study of Gothic fiction: “the ‘secrets’ to be revealed [in a Gothic narrative] are always private sexual secrets” (94). Perry focuses on those passages in Foucault’s book directly related to incest and draws a feminist extrapolation: “one sign of this erosion of consanguineous responsibility [in the new familial organization] was the increasing extent to which sisters and daughters came to be seen as sexual prey at the mercy of their male relatives . . .” (261-62, 264-66).

When erotic feelings are first cultivated in the family and “sexuality is ‘incestuous’ from the start,” incest then takes an ambivalent position in the modern nuclear family and causes tensions among its members, tensions which since the 18th century Gothic fiction has never stopped playing upon: “[Incest] is manifested as a thing that is strictly forbidden in the family insofar as the latter functions as a deployment of alliance; but it is also a thing that is continuously demanded in order for the family to be a hotbed of constant sexual incitement” (Foucault 109). Gothic fiction may then be seen not just as a dark version of the Freudian “family romance” but as “a narrative built over a cultural fault line—the point of conjunction between the discourses of alliance and sexuality” (Williams 95). In fact, though Foucault never alludes to the Gothic while explicating his theoretical model about modern nuclear family, no one has pointed out its Gothic potentiality more succinctly than the theorist himself: “the family, the keystone of alliance, was the germ of all the misfortune of sex” (111).

It should be noted that Foucault’s use of the word “sexuality” is both more general and more specific than our everyday understanding of it (Williams 92). Foucault’s inclusion of both familial emotion and erotic feeling under the same term may also be confusing to some; if so, the confusion may be deliberate. Foucault clearly indicates two emotive “axes” in the nuclear family—the “husband-wife” and the “parents-children” axes—along which sexuality develops, but he does not differentiate the nature of the two emotional ties (108). In fact, incest happens when one axis of sexual development transgresses the rules of alliance and imitates the other; in the enclosed intra-familial circuit of emotive transference, “the two impulses can feel separate yet verge on overlapping through proximity” (Shaffer 67). In other words, the familial identity of each member in an incestuous connection suffers curious transposition and transfusion, as a woman, say, remains a daughter but becomes a mistress to her incestuous father at the same time; the moral structure into which each family member is supposed to be securely ensconced will collapse and endanger the deployment of alliance. Whether dictated by the laws of the old deployment or not, horror or disgust at incest often (though not always) rises against the incestuous momentum of the deployment of sexuality. Experiencing clashes between the two types of familial deployments, the eighteenth-century British society grew obsessed with the problematic of incest and, in some cases, imposed the taboo onto sexual relationships outside the consanguineous or even affinal circle. Shaffer discovers in many eighteenth-century novels of sentiment a fascination with as well as discomfort about what she calls “familialized incest”—sexual connections with persons whom someone has already

loved as parents or siblings, even though they do not seem to be related to him/her (67). In fact, a common twist of plot in these novels and their Gothic counterparts is that the man a heroine originally treats as a father or brother figure turns out to be literally related to her in this way, usually at the moment when their sexual love is to be legitimized or consummated. This variation on the incest taboo actually harks back to the old anxiety over the possible mutation of parental-filial and sibling affection into undisguised erotic attachment.

As evidenced by its literature, 18th-century Europe involved both great intellectual minds and common readers in the contemplation of the issue of incest (Wilson 249). When the deployment of sexuality only started to bear down on that of alliance and the negotiation between them was still in its violent, conflict-ridden stage, many possible or imaginary scenarios were generated in the minds of novelists. This diversity of scenarios was further amplified as the range of relationships legally defined as incestuous fluctuated widely in Early Modern Britain, and actual marital practices or people's perceptions of them may no longer have matched their legal definitions (Shaffer 70-71). Consequently, there is no single version of the dark "family romance" in Early British Gothic fiction. Highly different renderings of the incestuous scenarios can be found in the texts, which document the wishes and fears that emerged in the minds of their writers and readers when the rules of the old familial mode of alliance came under strain and had to be reconsidered, and when erotic feelings crept up disturbingly in places inside the familial space where they were not supposed to belong.

Trapped between Two Familial Modes

Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) surely deserves the honor of the first Gothic novel, at least as far as the treatment of the incest motif is concerned. Elizabeth MacAndrew believes that the moral which the presumed "editor" of the story ironically dismisses in the "preface" to the first edition, "that *the sins of fathers are visited on their children*," indeed obliquely suggests that "the psychological aberration of incest . . . is Walpole's central theme" (11). However, the psychosexual significance of this moral lesson is not quite so clear when one examines the plot more closely. Manfred's "sin of sins," which he actually inherits from his ancestors, is that of usurpation—a crime (to use a more accurate word) defined by the old mode of alliance, which concerns issues of title and property inheritance more than those of familial sexuality. In fact, the moral structure of Walpole's story is built on the unstable conjunction of the two familial modes

discussed above, tilting toward the side of alliance, so to speak. The only realized case of incest in the story turns out to be Manfred’s long marriage with Hippolita, who “is related to [him] in the fourth degree” (*The Castle of Otranto* 49), but this “incestuous” connection is understood solely according to the legal terminology of the old alliance mode and is completely deprived of erotic association. Although Manfred’s shocking proposal to and attempted rape of Isabella take on a strong incestuous affect (as the victim’s repeated expressions of horror testify), not only the proposal cannot be technically considered “incestuous,”⁹ but his attempts are not ostensibly motivated by lust, either. In fact, Manfred takes over his dead son’s marital contract with Isabella primarily for the purpose of legitimizing his inheritance of Otranto. One may say that, in this “incestuous” attempt, Manfred is actually identifying too aggressively with the demand of the inheritance law dictated by the alliance mode, at the expense of “decorum” in familial relationships. The narrator’s apparent alienation from and impatience with the codes of either familial modes renders the narrative tone highly equivocal in presenting Manfred’s pursuit of Isabella through the dark galleries of the Castle. Most critics (especially female ones) follow the bourgeois ideology of sexual decency in interpreting this exemplar Gothic scene as an allegorical representation of female victimage within domestic space and stress the “horror” it can arouse in the reader. However, a critic more alert to Walpole’s problematic conception of his own class position and writing career may sense an “incongruity between sublimity and smiles” in the novel’s treatment of incest motif, for it is indeed ludicrous for an old man to pursue a young woman, not out of lust but of greed (Frank 419). Maurice Frank then takes Walpole’s story as a “double-edged parody,” targeting both “the aristocratic investments in the inheritance of property” and “the sentimental ties of the bourgeois family” (418). *The Castle of Otranto* is indeed a unique Gothic story in its simultaneous identification with and alienation from the demands of both familial deployments in its treatment of the incest motif.

Some Early Gothic stories show an awareness of the existence of the two conflicting familial modes but apparently decide to avert any possible confrontation between them, not playing one against the other deliberately as *The Castle of Otranto* does. Sophia Lee’s sensational novel *The Recess* (1783-85), spinning the lives and adventures of two fictional daughters, Matilda and Ellinor, of the historical Queen Mary of Scots, can be classified as Early British Gothic fiction because its popularity in the late 18th-century consolidated the Gothic plot

⁹ Manfred’s attempt and his proposal to Frederick of marrying each other’s daughter should be taken as extreme cases of the so-called “familialized incest,” which will be discussed later.

convention of “virtue in distress,” and contributed to the career of the “Queen of Gothic,” Ann Radcliffe, in the next decade (Botting 56; Alliston xx). The narrative displays a sadistic tendency in plot development, as the two heroines are thrown, almost without any time or space to catch their breaths, from one misfortune to another; these misfortunes mostly result, of course, from the persecution of men. “The world of *The Recess*,” as Punter succinctly puts it, “is one in which women are in constant danger . . . , a world in which men as protectors pass almost naturally from kindness to rape” (59).

However, among all the sufferings the male protectors have inflicted on the heroines, they are curiously spared from incest—a form of female victimage that eighteenth-century novel readers had already gotten used to as a staple plot element. Lee could not have been ignorant of this potential of incest motif for sensationalism because the story in fact includes at least one episode of sibling incest: Mrs. Marlow’s discovery of her beloved Anthony to be her brother at the eve of their wedding (18). In fact, the two major, plot-propelling love relationships in the novel—between Matilda and Earl of Leicester, as well as between Ellinor and Earl of Essex—are redolent of incest, at least of intergenerational eroticism. Leicester is not only a friend to Matilda’s father, Duke of Norfolk, but was briefly enamored with Mary of Scots (49-50); his plea with Antony “to claim the guardianship of the Royal Mary’s beauteous children”—a disguised request for Matilda’s hand—thus sounds highly ambiguous and suggestive (61). In addition, Leicester was/is Essex’s stepfather—a historical fact that, though being kept unaltered in the story, Lee passes over and keeps from complicating the double-plot structure of the novel. Last, deepening the incestuous hue of the relational networks of the major characters, the affair between Matilda’s daughter Mary and King James’s heir apparent, Prince Henry, is actually one between first cousins. Matilda’s admission of the young couple’s cousinship, however, is highly revealing: she uses the word “cousin” only once when she describes the scene of bringing the already enamored Henry to the presence of Mary. This moment renders the mother “sickened with very extasy [sic]” because she “exalt[s] in my Mary’s *hereditary* right even to this distinction” through “an *alliance* so dear” (287-88; italics added).

Here Matilda’s political (and also Lee’s narrative) intention is laid bare. Despite the ostensible theme of secluded, virtuous women being exposed to a public world of sexually rapacious men, the underlying plot is actually ordered by concerns with familial alliance. No matter how wildly passionate the two pairs of “noble” lovers grow over each other’s physical, sexual bodies, their overriding “interest” lies ultimately in the political advantages the heroines’ political “bodies”

can guarantee to their aristocratic protectors through “alliances.” This is indeed a keyword that keeps coming up in the two sisters’ accounts, whenever their lovers (already Queen Elizabeth’s favorites) look to or the girls themselves fantasize over the “distinction” their men could be further raised to—the spouse of a Queen of England and its *de facto* ruler. When “hereditary right” combined with “alliance” could strengthen the old familial deployment and bring along such a huge political profit, incest as an ethical concern recedes from the narrative. In a much more serious but oblique way than that of Walpole, Lee looks back to a Gothic past (though not necessarily a historical reality) in which blood and affinal ties ensured transmission of title and property, and with which Lee’s own historical age of weakening kinship was fascinated. As long as the outrageous parent-child and brother-sister sexualities are avoided, incest *at another historical age* could be winked at for an excusable reason.

A “Cry of Blood” for and against Incest

However, as Shaffer points out, in spite of the high incidence of the incest motif, “literary works [in the eighteenth century] . . . rarely represented any sort of incest as surviving” (69); *The Recess* is no exception to this rule of literary decorum. The “alliance” Matilda arranges for her daughter and nephew does not work out because it turns out, to the mother’s shock and dismay, that Mary is never in love with Henry; instead, she is hopelessly hooked on the Prince’s companion, that dissolute dandy, the Earl of Somerset, the last man Matilda would want her daughter to marry. What concerns the present discussion is the dramatic manner the mother and daughter come into acquaintance with the two noblemen. During one of the ladies’ outings on carriage, the noisy approach of the Prince’s train frightens the horses and causes an overturn. While the dazed mother, after a brief moment of confusion, soon identifies the Prince from the two gentlemen coming to their rescue and focuses her admiring eyes on him, the passed-out daughter, as she later confesses, “conceives [a] partiality my reason could never erase” for Somerset the moment she is revived (316). In this curious variation of the Sleeping-Beauty scenario, Mary’s instant choice of a mate against her reason’s best counsel may be taken as a case of unconscious incest avoidance, “instantaneous and inexplicable repugnance to sexual contact with blood kin,” which is a common plot variant on the incest motif in eighteenth-century literature (Perry 271). It may thus become a convenient ploy in the Gothic or Sentimental Novel to withhold an unwitting incestuous relationship at the threshold of its consummation.

However, a far more frequent literary treatment of the motif is based on the flip side of the moral instinct against incest—a folkloric myth called “*cri du sang*” (or “the cry of blood”): “special feelings of connectedness experienced by persons who are related to each other but are unaware of their consanguineous status” (Perry 270). The rising popularity of this plot device in the late eighteenth-century English novel¹⁰ was probably symptomatic of the disruptive intrusion of codes of the new familial mode of sexuality into the old one of alliance. With gradual disintegration of kinship network and independence of domestic economy, father (figure) as a diminished patriarch in the nuclear family requires emotional attachment of its members to strengthen his weakening authority (based formerly on the old familial organization) and to maintain his control over the household. This transition from an authoritative patriarchy to an emotive one could not proceed without resistance from the vested interests of the old familial deployment. For example, the “*cri-du-sang*” belief, along with a whole set of cultural paraphernalia related to the old “blood-tie” myth, was reasserted in the literature of late eighteenth-century England to stress the social relevance of the codes of alliance deployment—usually through incredible plot devices in the Gothic and Sentimental Novels.¹¹

Still, the already-suppressed mode of alliance could no longer return in its original pattern, as it must have been distorted through the incorporation of the heterogeneous concerns of the mode of sexuality; emotive investment in familial relationships inevitably leads to sexualization of the older mode or deployment. Therefore, the “*cri-du-sang*” plot device in the late eighteenth-century novel could become a thinly-disguised excuse for the expression of incestuous feelings emerging within the newly-burgeoning nuclear family: the characters can easily “confuse the force of blood with romantic love and mistake the magnetism of kinship for erotic attraction to someone who is really [a close relation]” (Perry 417). Although this scenario, as Perry notes it, had already been popular in the seventeenth-century French drama, it probably gained renewed narrative momentum in the late eighteenth-century English novel because it catered to the

¹⁰ Perry in another article notes that literary treatments of incest in the early eighteenth-century novel, notably Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*, do not resort to idea of “the cry of blood.” Moll feels no consanguineous call in her heart when she meets her brother/husband and, when she is informed of the blood tie, her “discomfort with her doubled relationships is intellectual, not visceral” (“De-familiarizing” 420).

¹¹ Telltale birthmark implying a mysterious hero’s royal lineage (as in the case of Theodore in *The Castle of Otranto*) and highly identical physiognomies of two strangers who turn out to be closely related (as in Emily St. Aubert’s resemblance to Marchioness de Villeroi in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*) are common tropes of the insistence on the deployment of alliance and usually facilitate the hero(ine)’s inheritance of restored family properties.

sexual dynamics of the nuclear family at the time, where familial stability rested at least partly on the mutual adoration between parents and children. Shaffer in her studies of the Sentimental Novel notes a parallel case wherein the alliance idea, “blood tie,” is sexualized: a gentleman feels erotically attracted to his son’s betrothed out of her physiognomic resemblance to his late wife; the girl, of course, turns out to be a daughter he believed to be dead and thus his son’s half sister (86). This typical scenario in the novel of the age *inversely*—from the outside in—demonstrates the shift from familial to erotic love, suggesting how easily the erotic investment in the husband-wife axis can spill into the parent-child (especially father-daughter) or sibling axes and chaotically conflate or cause to converge these supposedly separate relationships (Foucault 108). William P. Day identifies the same “familial secret” in the castle/manor house of Early Gothic fiction:

. . . incest is a typically Gothic extension of the affectional-sentimental family, in which the members are bound together by ties of love, rather than ties of power. The attempt to transform emotional and spiritual relationships into sexual ones is . . . an attempt to extend and strengthen the family and the identity it supports, though obviously a perverse one. (120)

One of the most thorough renderings of the transformation of “the cry of blood” into a disastrous siren-call is the story of the incestuous encounter between Ambrosio and Antonia in Matthew G. Lewis’s Gothic masterpiece, *The Monk* (1796). The star-crossed¹² siblings’ first awareness of each other’s existence produces typical responses of *cri du sang*: Antonia “feels a pleasure fluttering in her bosom which till then had been unknown to her” as “the sound of [Ambrosio’s] voice seems to penetrate into her very soul” (Lewis 18). However, the transgressive implication of Antonia’s feeling is also apparent, for the narrator’s depiction is strongly indicative of an overwhelming impression caused by sexual love. Although Ambrosio “feels not the provocation of lust” when first contemplating Antonia’s beauty, the “mingled sentiment of tenderness, admiration, and respect,” along with “a soft, delicious melancholy infus[ing] itself into his soul,” also goes beyond *purely* familial attachment (Lewis 242); no wonder he immediately starts

¹² Ambrosio’s lethally sexual encounter with Antonia in the sepulcher of the abbey apparently echoes Romeo and Juliet’s meeting at the end of the play. Shakespeare was hailed by Walpole as the predecessor of his “alternative” aesthetics in the preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, and all major Gothic writers turned to the Bard as an important source of literary inspiration.

regarding Antonia as a sex object by comparing her “charms of modesty” with Matilda’s sexual audacity. Another factor that makes the sibling encounter sexually wrong is, paradoxically, their excessive social ignorance, which leaves them uninformed of the codes that differentiate supposedly familial feeling from sexual love “proper.”¹³ Their emotive confusion, however, takes opposite directions: while Antonia, who was surrounded only by relations before she arrives at Madrid, harbors only quasi-familial feeling to people around her, Ambrosio, who has recently tasted erotic pleasure, conceives of all pleasant sensations with women as being sexual ones.

Playing on this discrepancy, Lewis presents with black humor the key conversation between the two unrecognized siblings, just before the first attempted rape takes place. To Ambrosio’s ambivalent question, “Have you seen no Man, Antonia, whom though never seen before, you seemed long to have sought?” (Lewis 261). Antonia actually lets her “cry of the blood” answer for her, “Certainly I have: The first time I saw you, I felt it” (261). This unconscious admission of familial bonding, of course, is interpreted as a typical love confession, and Ambrosio has never changed his perception of Antonia as a sexual prey since. From the viewpoint of Jungian psychology, Day observes that the monk throughout the novel is questing for his lost, repressed feminine half, and the substitutes for it range from religious icon (the portrait of Madonna) to sexual object (Matilda); among them “the woman who most fully completes Ambrosio is his double, his sister” (122). In other words, the female who can “complete” a man can be either sexual or familial, but a figure combining the two is *perverse*ly the “best” choice of object.

Although, as discussed above, clues decipherable by an eighteenth-century reader are already left in the story to enable him/her to guess at the real relationship between Ambrosio and Antonia, neither the monk nor the reader are informed of the incestuous nature of the rape until the Devil declares it at the end of the novel. This belated recognition may have two levels of significance—one is inter-textual and the other socio-ethical. It is known that Lewis read Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) with great enthusiasm and that his writing of *The Monk* was probably inspired by this exciting experience (McEvoy xiii; Kilgour 142). However, it is actually difficult to establish a connection in terms of textual influence between

¹³ As Foucault has pointed it out, the social institution that teaches an individual how to repress incestuous feeling by telling apart familial and sexual love is indeed the very source of the forbidden passion—the family, complete with both parents and siblings. This site of socialization is exactly what Ambrosio and Antonia do not have access to in the story.

the two novels, as they are extremely different in tone, style, characterization, plot, and so on. Since Lewis confessed that he was impatient with the maudlin first part of Radcliffe’s novel and *The Monk* “smacks of wicked exposure” of conventions of sentimentalism, the story of Ambrosio and Antonia might have been inspired by a submerged, semi-incestuous relationship adumbrated in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*—of course not the one between Emily and Valancourt, but that between Mr. St. Aubert and Marchioness de Villeroi.

One of the “mysteries” Emily has to solve in order to establish her identity is that of her father Mr. St. Aubert’s frequent, tearful contemplations of a lady’s miniature portrait. Emily starts to suspect a *seemingly* illicit nature of his relationship with the lady when the daughter is forced to follow her father’s deathbed injunctions to bury his body near the grave of a Marchioness and to destroy documents and articles concerning the mystery (though she still keeps the miniature). Later she comes to know the mysterious lady and the Marchioness are the same person, to whom she bears great resemblance in appearance; she even begins to fear “her birth [to be] dishonorable to her parents” (*The Mysteries of Udolpho* 650). The mystery and fear are eventually dispelled, as it turns out that the Marchioness was actually St. Aubert’s sister, whose unhappy marriage and untimely death he constantly lamented over and refused to confide to Emily in fear of offending her sensibility. This familial variation on the famous Radcliffean narrative technique of “the explained supernatural” has actually invoked an evil the narrator cannot easily exorcise at the end: just as the sense of hauntedness lingers even after a rational explanation is given of a seemingly supernatural incident, so incestuous overtone actually creeps into the sibling attachment after the relationship between St. Aubert and the Marchioness has been sexualized (though in a sentimental manner) for so long. In the light of their connection, his secretive ways in handling it transforms him from a married man, who harbors hidden regret over the marital misfortune of his old love, to a jealous brother who reluctantly yields to the demand of the patriarchal system of exchanging women outside the familial circle. (Otherwise, no matter how “fine” Emily’s sensibility is, how offensive can an aunt’s marital misfortune be to justify total secrecy about her own *existence* to her niece?)¹⁴ Radcliffe’s play with “the-explained-unnatural” narrative technique does not, of course, bring the story wholly back into the “natural” order of things: a

¹⁴ Kate Ferguson Ellis argues forcibly how threatening it is to Emily’s social identity for St. Aubert to conceal his connection with the Marchioness. Although the critic questions the justifiability of St. Aubert’s decision, she seems to accept at face value the ostensible reason for the secrecy, without seeking any further psychological cause (112-24).

specter of “unnatural” passion is still left at the fringe, haunting the graves of the St. Aubert siblings.

Familialized Incest

The socio-ethical significance of the belated recognition of incest in *The Monk* rests on a moral concern shared by most Early British Gothic and Sentimental Novels treating (quasi-)incestuous themes. In Lewis’s novel, the Devil’s revelation of the sin comes so late (just a few pages before the appalling description of Ambrosio’s death throes) that its moral horror has no time to sink into the reader’s mind. However, the reader has probably been no less exasperated and nauseated by the description of Antonia’s abduction and rape; in other words, even before the additional sin of incest is made known the reader has already been shocked by the rape. Thus Coleridge, in his famous critique of Lewis’ novel, expressed not only disgust, but also disbelief in Ambrosio’s characterization, partly for the reason that he is “impelled to incontinence by friendship, by compassion, by gratitude” in his relationship with Antonia (41). In fact, Lewis simply goes over the edge in resorting to a common scenario in the contemporary Gothic and Sentimental Novels, one which Shaffer calls “familialized incest”—“loving someone as a sibling, parent, or child before loving him or her as a spouse” (67). In its Gothic variation, this scenario shows a male protector, as father figure or brother substitute, forcing unwanted sexual attention onto a weak, innocent girl who comes under his power. Ambrosio’s harassment of Antonia already smacks of incest not only because he is a priestly “father” but because she always turns to him as a daughterly or sisterly ward, spiritually as well as materially; the epithet “incestuous Ravisher” which the monk receives from the Devil simply identifies literally the figurative meaning of his crime.

Another instance of how “familialized incest” is understood as and then revealed to be “familial incest” proper may be found in the nineteenth Gothic novel *The Libertine* (1807) by Charlotte Dacre, whose “sundry novels [were] in the style of the first edition of *The Monk*.”¹⁵ Angelo, an Italian gentleman whose morals are characterized by the novel’s title, is once attracted by the figure of a veiled

¹⁵ The quoted comment on Dacre is made by Lord Byron in a note to his satirical poem “English Bards and Scottish Reviewers.” Dacre was active in the first decade of the nineteenth century, near the end of the first wave of so-called “Gothic Revival” in the history of English novel. Her penname “Rosa Matilda” apparently derived from the succubus character in Lewis novel *Matilda*, who once assumes a male name Rosario. For a short biography, please refer to Kim Ian Michsiw’s introduction to *Zofloya, or The Moor* (x-xiii).

incognita on a Naples street and, following her for some distance, comes to her help when a small accident happens. After showing up as her protector several times in the villa where she lives alone, Angelo suspects her to be a kept mistress of certain gentleman and decides to rape her when he is drunk and admitted into her place one night. During the struggle, a miniature portrait of Angelo’s father falls out of her dress, and Angelo identify his victim as a daughter he begot in a sexual escapade of his younger days. Although he married the mother to whom the miniature was given as a pledge, he could not recover their lost child Agnes until now. As if experiencing the “*cri-du-sang*” situation reversely, “now he discerns in [her features] an evident correspondence with those” of his late wife (Dacre 228). However, after listening to Agnes’ account of her adventure, in which she was passively involved in a love triangle with a betrothed couple but emerged “virtuous,” Angelo still declares her “infamous” and refuses to acknowledge her (Dacre 233). One may strongly suspect that Agnes’ hardly blamable behavior in the triangle intrigue is not the true cause of Angelo’s decision. It is more probable that he tries to escape from the psychosexual conflicts related to this incestuous desire by disowning her because “he has lately beheld [her] with feelings and sentiments so opposite to those of the parent” (Dacre 228). In addition, maybe the fact that she was once in love with a man outside the family has put her into the patriarchal network of “women-exchange” and rendered her incestuously “useless” to the father, who after all has harbored little parental feeling for her in the first place.

Of course, not every case of “familialized incest” in the novel of the time is as morally offensive and emotionally excessive as the two examples discussed above; neither is every case “literalized” and “sexualized” to the same extent. After all, some relationships are simply situated at the juncture of the two familial modes of alliance and sexuality, embracing and rejecting the codes of each in an inconsistent manner. For example, Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto* seems ambivalent about which set of ethical codes, related specifically to each familial mode, he should follow in soliciting his reader’s moral responses. Manfred and Frederic’s exchange of daughters is indeed motivated by two different kinds of interest: alliance and sexuality. However, although the proposal is not technically incestuous, it feels glaringly so not only to the young ladies but to the reader (Shaffer 90); even in Isabella’s case with Manfred, who shows no strong erotic interest in her, the horrifying sexual aspect is continually highlighted: Isabella protests to Hippolita, “I was contracted to the son; can I wed the father?—No, madam, no; force should not drag me to Manfred’s hated bed” (*The Castle of Otranto* 87-88). On the other hand, Frederic’s passion for Matilda appears “incestuous” because of their generation and

age difference, and Walpole's portrayal of the passion, from Fredric's viewpoint, is more sincerely romantic than sordidly sexual (103). Their relationship is also interrupted not really due to some "romantic" scruple that the lady is reluctant, but due to the overarching "alliance" concern that the usurper's family should no longer lay claim to the Castle by any means; even Theodore cannot marry his beloved Matilda out of the same alliance concern. Walpole's waver between the concerns of the two familial modes suggests that sexualities in familialized relationships became a problematic issue at the historical junction of transition in familial organization. At the same time, the issue provided a fertile ground for contemporary fiction writers to work on. As mentioned above, elements of the deployment of sexuality had already infiltrated familial relationships in the eighteenth century, but erotic feelings developed along the parent-child and brother-sister axes were still regulated vigilantly. So, the most common form of familialized incest that the Early Gothic novels portray, with at least a pretense of maintaining literary decorum, become the affinal form—that is, sexually illicit interactions between brothers- and sisters-in-law.¹⁶

Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron*, Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*, and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* are three major instances of this affinal form of incest. In each of these novels, the villain or villainess harbors a strong sexual desire for his brother's wife or her husband's brother and attempts to fulfill his/her wish for sexual union with the object of choice by murdering the lawful spouse. This scenario, however, betrays certain ambiguity in the treatment of affinal incest: while murderous violence characterizes the unreturned passion the villain(ess) expresses through affinal connection to an adored in-law, the passion itself is rarely identified as incestuous—though it is repeatedly asserted to be "unlawful" or "unhallowed." Indeed, affinal relations are acquired by a family through marital alliance, the desire a person in the family nurtures for one of the relations should hardly be considered endogamous, unless the fulfillment of the wish involves perpetration of other sins, as happens in the stories of the three Gothic novels. However, the consistently violent consequences of the affinal eroticism in these three elaborations of the scenario still betray certain uneasiness about the nature of such relationships among

¹⁶ Except for the glaring exception of *The Castle of Otranto*, episodes of incest with (even potential or future) parents-in-law seem to be rare in the Gothic novels. In *The Recess*, Matilda's adoration of Prince Henry indeed verges on sexual love; their interactions are so frequent and intimate that the reader may wonder who Henry is really courting, the mother or the daughter. However, here the cross-generational relationship still proceeds in a sentimental and non-erotic manner. In addition, Matilda's concern throughout the relationship is primarily of the deployment of alliance—her daughter's accession to queenship.

in-laws. One probable reason for the uneasiness lies in the liminal status of in-laws in relation to modern nuclear family, with which they usually do not live together but to which they are granted almost unconditional admission. Lord Walter Lovel in *The Old English Baron* and Count di Marinella (i.e. Schedoni) in *The Italian* are either long-stay or frequent visitors to their brothers' households, where they develop erotic longings for their hosts' wives. (In *Zofloya* the transgressive affinal feelings grow in a similar pattern but in an opposite direction, as Virginia falls in love with her husband's brother, Henriquez, when he comes back after years of traveling abroad and stays with the married couple.) Under the deployment of sexuality, modern nuclear family becomes a space of great erotic potentiality; when someone who strictly speaking is not a family member is constantly present in the household and his or her interactions with the family, being supposedly non-incestuous, are thus less watchfully checked, the relationships paradoxically get sexualized more easily. The situation in which an in-law becomes the object of a transgressive, quasi-familial eroticism simply highlights the structural aspect of “familialized incest,” raising the question of the proper boundaries of the modern nuclear family and exposing once again the potential conflict between the familial modes of alliance and sexuality.¹⁷

Incest and Patriarchal Control over Domestic Space

The above discussion of representations of “borderline” incest cases in the Gothic novel shows that, along with factors like generation, age and social role, *space*—and the concomitant idea of privacy—plays a key role in “familialized incest.” Lawrence Stone talks about how the addition of corridors to the architectural design of upper-class households in the eighteenth century ensured personal privacy for family members (169-70). The deployment of sexuality in a

¹⁷ A glaring omission in the present discussion of “familialized incest” is that between (foster-) siblings, an important motif in the poetic works of such Romantics as Byron and Shelley. As Alan Richardson has pointed out in his two essays on the Romantic renderings of (quasi-)sibling incest, the relationship is consciously idealized by both the Romantic poets and the hero(-ines) of their verse narratives, while Gothic fiction writers exploit the shock value of the motif and arrange the plot of belated recognition (“Re-thinking” 553; “Dangers” 739). In fact, like the story of the Ambrosio/Antonia pair in *The Monk*, blood-sibling incest happens in the Gothic fiction usually because the couple have been separated since their early childhood and do not know about their relationship until too late. On the other hand, cases of familialized sibling incest in the Gothic fiction are few. The only one as far as I know is between Edmund and Emma in *The Old English Baron*, who are raised together but love each other in a romantic way. Reeve does not seem to find anything inappropriate in the relationship.

“normal” modern nuclear family not only incites erotic feeling within the walls of the home but also compartmentalizes sexuality into specific spaces. If the Gothic castle is, as feminist critics never stop pointing out, a metaphor of the bourgeois home gone sexually awry,¹⁸ the immured heroine is not just locked inside it: she is actually locked from the outside into a room where she cannot lock herself in, as Gothic villains or ghosts, like uninvited family members, can always find means of entry. As the domestic space is already eroticized, all forms of male forced entry into a woman’s private space amount to incestuous violence, figuratively speaking. Radcliffean heroines suffer their typically Gothic experiences of sexual and spectral horror, tinged with incestuous overtone, in their own bedchambers. Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is once disturbed in the dead of night by a human figure looming in a darkened corner of her room, who turns out to be a friend of her late aunt’s husband Montoni and whose wild style of courting her verges on attempted rape; he is dissuaded from further advances only when Emily silently and falsely admits that she is in love with her uncle (260-67).¹⁹

Another illuminating example comes from the first encounter between the heroine Ellena and the villain Schedoni in *The Italian*, who afterwards misrecognize each other for father and daughter—though, as is characteristic of Mrs. Radcliffe’s style of plot complication, they turn out eventually to be niece and uncle, with the latter guilty of killing the former’s father. When Schedoni first meets and stops the escaping Ellena on the seashore near the house where she is kept captive, the ferocious monk experiences formerly unknown fits of “pity” and “compassion” for her—a variant of the typical “voice of blood,” of course (228). As he makes up his mind to complete his bloody mission of murdering her during her sleep, his conversation with his accomplice oddly turns to the obvious fact that the monk has “bolted” the door to her room when she is left inside (231)—as if the narrator could never emphasize enough the vulnerability of a young woman inside the domestic space. Even more incestuously suggestive is the description that the priestly “father,” drawing near with a dagger in hand “prepared to strike,” is “perplexed” by

¹⁸ This point is one of the major arguments Kate Ferguson Ellis makes in her study, *The Contested The Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*; see particularly x and 3-11.

¹⁹ Shaffer claims, without giving textual evidence, that “Emily projects incestuous desire onto Montoni, her male guardian” though he obviously lacks sexual interest in her; maybe the episode just recounted gives the critic this idea. Besides, although the gender positions in the scenario are reversed here, Raymond’s harrowing “affair” with the Bleeding Nun in *The Monk* is another instance of spectrally incestuous encounter; the ghost, whom he mistakes as his beloved Agnes and woos with a love song, is “the great Aunt of your Grand-father” (173).

“her dress” and has to “turn her robe aside, without waking her” (234). After another fit of “shuddering horror” (apparently of *cri-du-sang* origin) has “restrained him,” he discovers on her bared bosom a miniature portrait of his own image, which then misidentifies him as the girl’s father. Even without resorting to the crude Freudian interpretation of dagger thrusting as a violent sexual act, the plot arrangement that allows Ellena’s plea for mercy from the Catholic “father” to be indeed made to her (supposedly) real father completes the incestuous message of the episode, and Mrs. Radcliffe does not fail to play on the double meaning of the title here (235).

Mrs. Radcliffe, as a respectable professional writer of popular fiction, had after all to take codes of literary decorum into consideration; her treatment of the incest motif, though ingenious, could not afford to be undauntedly straightforward. For an ultimately “gothic” realization of the potential ramifications of incest as a familial and sexual issue, one has to move outside the genre of the novel while paradoxically turning to the reputed founder of Gothic fiction, Horace Walpole, who wrote a closet play on the incest theme, *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), which domesticated Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* but sensualized Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. In his insightful study of this often-neglected masterpiece of Early British Gothic literature, Paul Baines claims that, compared with *Hamlet*, Walpole’s play centers on a “more private domestic scope,” as “the Narbonne family have no stake in the state” (291). Baines’s observation is probably based on the textual evidence that the two Catholic priests are eventually powerless to manipulate the Countess and that she never changes her mind of giving over the state power to her son when the time comes. However, this apparent security in legitimate inheritance does not really preclude considerations of state management in the play. When Edmund returns to Narbonne, he declares two intentions for coming home. On the one hand, he laments that during his wandering abroad, “in ruin laid / My mouldring The Castles” and promises to restore the past glories of his “brave progenitors” (2.1.88-89, 95); on the other hand, he thinks that “‘Tis time to bid adieu to vagrant pleasure, / And fix the wanderer love”—that is, to enjoy “domestic bliss” with his newly beloved Adeliza (2.1.154-55). In other words, Edmund’s wish is to end his situation of unanchored vagrancy and to found an ideal family that lives up to the demands of the two familial modes of alliance and sexuality. These two familial concerns are closely connected in Edmund’s mind because he believes that “union with that favour’d maiden / Might reconcile my mother” (2.1.175-76), who has assumed the position of *father* to the son since the Count’s death and whose *patriarchal* power Edmund expects to inherit so that he can build a powerful clan / loving family, like

the one of his parents. However, though the Countess displays “Strength, courage, all our [men’s] boasted attributes” (3.3.177), the message concerning familial politics that this play sends is that a mother holding a father’s position may neither be a truly functional patriarch nor a respectable androgynous figure possessing the best of both worlds; instead, she may “collapse [from] a venerated idol into a castrating witch.” The fatal catalyst, in the case of the Countess, is her “disruptive sensuality” (Baines 291), which, in the moral universe of the play, is the inseparable basis of female sensibility.

Sensual Mother, Dysfunctional Father, and Presumptuous Son

Although Baines insists that the play eventually “fail[s] to demonize the Countess in this [sexually perverse] way” and admits positively to female sexual desire (291, 293), a misogynistic ideology underlies almost all (male and female) characters’ attitudes toward women (especially the Countess), and they are looked down upon just for their immoderate sexuality. The opening scene sets the moralistic tone against female sensuality right away when Edmund’s friend Florian wonders at how the Countess lavishes on Catholic rituals and priests and he protests, “I never knew a woman / But lov’d our bodies or our souls too well” (1.1.33-34). In addition, when speculating on the nature of the Countess’s “secret sin” that has tortured her since her husband’s death, her confessor Benedict also “fix[es] on love, / The failure of the sex, and aptest cause / Of each attendant crime” (1.3.36-38). As is characteristic of the perspicacious villains of Shakespeare’s tragedies which Walpole models after, the evil “Benedict’s ruinous Gothic mythology of female depravity is perversely vindicated” (Baines 296). In fact, while the Countess herself admits that she is “of nature warm” (1.3.42), what is truly disturbing about her “nature” is that even her son—the last person who should know about it, according to a code of the familial deployment of sexuality—admits to it airily. When he tries to convince Florian that his mother will forgive his secret return to Narbonne from exile, which she imposed on him for the ostensible offense of his fornication with a servant maid, Edmund claims:

No, Florian, she herself was woman then;
 A sensual woman. Nor satiety,
 Sickness and age, and virtue’s forwardness,
 Had so obliterated pleasure’s relish –

She might have pardon'd what she felt so well. (2.1.19-23)

Baines perceptively comments on this passage: “It is tempting to ask here how Edmund knows this . . .” (294). Under a “normal” familial deployment of sexuality (as a modern nuclear family *should* be) children are not supposed to relate sensuality consciously to motherhood even though the status is a direct consequence of marital eroticism, which suffuses the whole domestic space. Indeed, Edmund not only knows about the Countess’ sensual nature but also chafes at her determination not to display it to him, as if he were dealing with a frigid lady of courtly-love convention: “This cruel parent, whom I blame, and mourn, / Whose harshness I resent, whose woe I pity, / Has won my love, by winning my respect” (2.1.118-20). At the end of the play we know that it is the mother who arranged the incestuous deception at the night of the Count’s death, but the son’s feeling for her has been no less transgressive before he knows the truth.

In fact, one can take *The Mysterious Mother* as a perfect fictional demonstration of Foucault’s conception of incest as the denied core of the modern nuclear family under the deployment of sexuality. Conforming to Foucault’s theory that the family is a “hotbed of constant sexual incitement,” the Countess confesses to Benedict that she harbored no desire for her husband “till the nuptial rites / Had with the sting of pleasure taught her passion” (1.3.45-46). If the Countess’ sexuality proves to be excessive and disruptive, she nurtures her excessive sexuality in a “normal,” marital fashion and contains its disruptive expressions within the “normal” familial sphere. The irony in this Oedipal scenario results, of course, from the convergence and replication between the two axes of familial attachment—the “husband-wife” and “parent-child” ones, as Foucault suggests. The process that one emotive axis replicates the other also proceeds in a reciprocal manner, not just from the child to the parent but vice versa. Walpole exploits the familiar Gothic plot devices of physiognomic similarity and “voice of blood” metaphorically to describe how the sexual sentiments contained in the husband-wife relationship transfer over to the parent-child one. Throughout the play Walpole keeps stressing Edmund’s similarity to his father not just in physiognomy but also in temperament; he assumes “his father’s very image” and denounces the insinuating Benedict with noble eloquence as if “there spoke the sire.” Indeed, the agitated Countess has mistaken him for the father twice—with much more disastrous consequence on the night of their incestuous encounter (1.2.76; 3.3.163). In addition, the extremely modest Adeliza cannot escape the net of incestuous deception (though unwittingly laid down for her) because the strong inclination she feels for Edmund apparently

springs from a *cri-du-sang* sympathy mistaken for romantic love: “his earnest words / Sound like the precepts of a tender father” (3.1.103-04). Much darker in tone and implication is the delusion Edmund suffers during his feverish request for Adeliza’s hand, which leads to a wedding as abrupt and violent as a rape (5.1.6-14):

. . . As he urg’d
 His suit, the maiden’s tears and shrieks had struck
 On his sick fancy like his mother’s cries!
 Th’ idea writhing from his brain, had won
 His eye-balls, and he thought he saw his mother! (5.3.8-12)

Baines already suggests darkly that the Countess’s final confession of incestuous violation of her son “is less a surprise than it ought to be” to the victim (294). It is thus not far-fetched to infer that Edmund unconsciously attempts to replay the frenzied Oedipal scene with his mother by forcing himself sexually on her daughterly ward, who looks just like the mother.

In view of Edmund’s frantic unconscious desire to play the role of the already dead Count, one suspects that the truly mysterious force propelling the plot of the play is not the inscrutably horrible sexuality of the mother but rather the ambivalent function of the father, who faces self-contradictory demands from the familial deployment of sexuality. On the one hand, he is the initiator of sexuality in the domestic space; like the case of the Countess, no matter how fierce and perverted maternal sexuality could be, it is initiated by the father. The mother remains passive to it, for she is more often mastered by this alien, imposed sexuality than a *mistress* of it. On the other hand, the father takes the role of inhibitor or at least regulator of the flow of familial sexuality; his children (especially his sons) therefore resents but also envies the father, who suppresses their expressions of sexuality but seems to express his own sexuality without restraint. In view of this Oedipal complex, one may understand better Edmund’s motive for the strangely unfilial act of arranging sexual assignation with the servant maid Beatrice on the very night of his father’s death. When the obstruction against his access to familial sexuality is removed, Edmund cannot wait to assert his newly acquired freedom by having sex with one of “his father’s women.” Beatrice as a female subordinate under the Count’s patriarchal power is actually a metonymic substitute for the ultimate object of Edmund’s sexual desire in the familial space, so the maid is “reasonably” replaced by her psychosexual “original.” What is still missing in this Freudian interpretation of the Oedipal scenario in the play is an opposite aspect of the father’s function,

related to the familial mode of alliance. This aspect is particularly highlighted in the Count’s role as a ruler of the state, as his concerns and even identity can be subsumed under those of the state; the Countess, for example, often refers to him simply as “Narbonne.” The Count’s function, as required by the mode of alliance, must differ from, and may simply conflict with, his role dictated by the mode of sexuality. It is significant at this point to note that the Count fails to enjoy his privilege in familial sexuality because “for eighteen months / An embassy detain’d him from [the Countess’s] bed” (5.6.43-44), and “embassy” is an important duty imposed by the deployment of alliance, at least as far as an aristocratic clan is concerned. In the play, the absence of a perfect patriarch/father as both maintainer of clan alliance and regulator of familial sexuality leaves the state of Narbonne in self-engrossed desolation and incites the Narbonne family to incestuous anarchy.

Although Edmund is not really negligent of his patriarchal duty to restore the clan’s glories, he is too obsessed with the father’s privileged position in the mode of familial sexuality to regulate properly his relationships with the women of the family. As a son, he should pursue an eminent military career the Countess desires and wait for his inheritance till the due time, not trying to woo his mother back to an ambiguous intimacy with him. When the “fatherless” orphan Adeliza turns to Edmund, she actually wants from him “the precepts of a tender parent”—that is, the guidance of a father who offers kindness, protection, and advice, but the father/brother just takes advantage of her daughterly/sisterly dependency and imposes himself sexually onto her. Though not really evil or vicious in moral character, Edmund is actually typical of those so-called Gothic villains that would haunt the households in many late eighteenth-century novels. Like Edmund, they look up to the dignifying role of patriarch/father who can live up to the conflicting demands of the two familial modes, but they are eventually found incapable of playing the balance game and brought to downfall for it. To be more specific, these Gothic villains (sometimes villainesses or simply “good” characters harboring inadequate ambitions or passions) pursue the concerns of one deployment so obsessively that they allow the potentially disruptive forces underlying the other deployment to surface and overtake them. They are either so obsessed with or indifferent to familial/marital affections that they handle either neglectfully or over-enthusiastically their clan “interests” and familial “business.”

Incest, as represented in Gothic fiction, in fact results from the conflicting concerns of the two familial modes (deployments); thus it is not a matter only of “sexuality.” Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto* is so obsessed with the legitimacy of his inheritance that he ignores his familial duty to care for his wife and daughter and

violates sexual decorum by demanding the hand of his would-be daughter-in-law. Matilda in *The Recess* cares so much about restoring herself and her daughter to political eminence that she thrusts Mary into her royal cousin's company without truly consulting her preference. Mr. St. Aubert in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* engrosses himself so completely with the past misfortunes of a sister to whom he harbors questionable attachment that he fails to manage his financial investment and family estate competently and thus endangers his daughter's social identity and economic independence. Schedoni in *The Italian* manages his alliance with the Vivaldi family in such an excessive Machiavellian style that Ellena remains an instrument for his inordinate ambitions, either before or after he discovers her to be a daughter, whose life and happiness he almost sacrifices. Ambrosio in *The Monk* is so assured of his power and position in the social network of ecclesiastic hierarchy that he forgets the consequent moral duties and starts seeking the lost familial affection in sexual terms, no wonder ending up with matricide and incestuous rape. Virginia in *Zofloya* and Angelo in *The Libertine* simply renounce all sense of familial duties and boundaries in their heated pursuit of sexual gratification, regardless of whether it comes (legitimately or illegitimately) from inside or outside their own familial sphere. These Gothic stories are then "family romances" not just in a Freudian but also a Foucauldian sense; they relate not only traumatizing vicissitude of emotional bonds among members of a nuclear family but also violent intrusion of alliance concerns that disrupts the bonds as well as transgressive extension of the emotional bonds that disturbs the alliance interests.

Conclusion

Williams observes that "critics have succeeded in uncovering Freudian psychosexual 'meanings' in Gothic because Freudian theory and Gothic narratives are 'homologous' realms of discourse" (94). She therefore asserts the importance of such theories as Foucault's argument about "discourse of sexuality" in revealing the socio-cultural significance of the "Gothic family" in these narratives. Familial organization in late-eighteenth-century Europe was in fact going through a major shift—from the deployment of alliance as dominant to that of sexuality. Yet the shift toward sexuality did not obliterate the traditional role of alliance, and middle- and upper-class households at that time, though starting to assume the form of the modern nuclear family, had not yet been so self-contained as Freud imagined them to be at the turn of the twentieth century. In other words, concerns related to the deployment of alliance still dominated patterns of relationships among family

members, despite the rapidly rising awareness of new, more obviously affection-based, erotic, and sexual concerns. “Domestic problems” like incest, therefore, would not take on exactly the same form or meaning in people’s (writers’ and readers’) imaginations at that time that the Freudian version of the Oedipal scenario does today. In view of this historical difference, the Early Gothic narratives that represented these problems cannot simply be taken “homologous discourses” with Freudian psychoanalytic theories. The homogeneity in meaning actually stops at the psychosexual level, and the Gothic diverges from the Freudian in its conception of the socio-cultural *ramifications* of these domestic problems. As the fundamental features of today’s literary-Gothic mode still remain as they were two hundred years ago, therefore, literary critics reading the Gothic through a Freudian lens may have to turn around and ask themselves what this lens’ purely intra-familial perspective may have prevented them from seeing.

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[Received 30 September 2006; accepted 19 January 2007; revised March 9 2007]