Castles, Forests, and Literary Syncretism. An Analysis of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*

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Abstract

The Castle of Otranto has been considered a turning point in eighteenth-century literature and in fiction in general. This study intends to highlight some aspects that are not generally taken into consideration, such as the historical context, the architectural descriptions and the use of landscape, which will become essential in subsequent romances and novels that belong to the Gothic genre. This article also underscores narrative techniques that marked a change in the history of prose-writing. Finally, it focuses on important works, contemporary of Horace Walpole's masterpiece that played an important role in the long eighteenth-century.

Keywords: early Gothic novel, Gothic architectures, Gothic landscape, Gothic supernatural, eighteenth century

Resumen

El Castillo de Otranto ha sido considerado un momento fundamental en la historia de la literatura gótica y de la narrativa en general. Este estudio intenta desvelar algunos aspectos que han sido generalmente poco analizados, como por ejemplo los falsos contextos históricos, los evidentes anacronismos, las descripciones arquitectónicas ambiguas y el uso insólito de paisajes y cavernas. A pesar de su falta de plausibilidad, todos los elementos ambiguos de la narración tenían que transformarse en aspectos esenciales en romances y novelas en las siguientes décadas del siglo dieciocho. Este estudio tiene el objetivo de subrayar la hibridación

cultural de Horacio Walpole que creó una forma de escritura que podría considerarse como posmoderna. Este artículo se concentra también en las técnicas narrativas que marcaron una transformación en la historia de la ficción. Analizando la original obra maestra de Walpole junto a otras importantes publicaciones que fueron imprimidas en los mismo años del Castillo de Otranto, se pueden descubrir varias facetas y fuentes culturales en el largo siglo dieciocho y en la génesis del género gótico.

Palabras claves: primera novelas góticas, arquitecturas góticas, paisajes góticos, lo sobrenatural gótico, siglo dieciocho

The Castle of Otranto was presented as a translation from the original Italian and it was called "A Story" as can be observed in the initial frontispiece of the first edition. In the following editions, the first of which came out only a few months after the original publication of 1764, Walpole made two significant changes.[1] As a first step, he added a second preface to the original one, where he unveiled the mystery behind his authorship, and justified the use of a pseudonym, related to a fear that the work would not be accepted by the public. After considering the enthusiasm caused by the novel, he decided to declare the authorship of the book. Secondly, he added the word "Gothic" to the subtitle "Story". Whereas the term "Gothic" started being used and commented during the eighteenth century, both for cultural and political reasons, the idea of "Gothic" as a literary genre did not exist, or, as a definition of the story, had not been conceived by the author from the start. Walpole's addition of the term Gothic had important repercussions in order to recognize the birth of the new genre in the British context, as Markman Ellis explains (History of Gothic Fiction 2000, 17):

It is clear that to eighteenth century readers, the term 'gothic' identified a complicated and slippery topic connoting a number of related but distinct judgments about medieval culture, national history, civic virtue and the enlightenment. Judgments about the propriety and value of the gothic lay behind Horace Walpole's decision to rename the second edition of his novel, The Castle of Otranto: when it had first appeared on 24th December 1764, the anonymous novel was subtitled "A Story". (…) In later decades, the other writers followed Walpole by identifying their work as "gothic", such as Clara Reeve's The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story (1777).

CO, conceived as a divertissement, was to play an important role in the decades to come. Our aim is to analyse some of its fascinatingly contradictory features.

Anachronisms, ambiguities, and fake architectures

In the first preface the author had explained that the original manuscript of the events narrated in his novel,

supposedly found in the library of an ancient family in the north of England, had been printed in the year 1529 in Naples, that is to say, when the Renaissance was in full swing in Italy. However, Walpole specifies that the story may have taken place between 1095 and 1243, between the first and the last crusade. Considering the actual historical events of the time, it is possible to assume that the story of CO could have developed during completely different kingdoms: it may have taken place under the Salian rule, or under the Supplinburger dynasty, or even under the House of the Hohenstaufen, all Germanic families that in turn took the power and ruled over the Holy Roman Empire in Germany, and in that part of Italy which was south of the Papal State. The period included by Walpole may also have coincided with the Norman Conquest of Sicily (which at the time was under the Arab rule). The Normans later expanded to conquer the whole of the South of Italy, where the real Otranto was located.[2] Walpole's stratagem of the manuscript was meant to convey a realistic sense of the events. In spite of his device, historical facts are vague in Walpole and the atmosphere of the novel recalls a fairy tale rather than a chronicle.[3] If we consider art, we may suggest that the period of Walpole's story was probably characterised by proto-Romanesque, Romanesque and/or Norman styles. The Gothic style was not called Gothic until the Renaissance when Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), who was among the first commentators of this architectural development, proclaimed it as originated by the Goths. The new form of architecture was characterized by the improvement and

development of pointed arches, ribbed vaults and flying buttresses; its architectural characteristics allowed a remarkable vertical expansion and greater luminosity, which were not present in the Romanesque style, from which it originated. The church of Saint Denis in France is supposed to represent the actual beginning of the new architectural trend in the twelfth century that would expand all over Europe with different regional variations.[4] On the other hand, Italian Gothic developed towards the end of the thirteenth century, being more an extension of the existing Romanesque (locally described as Romanico), and it did not include certain features of the Northern Gothic such as depressed arches and flamboyant arches. The simplicity of Italian Gothic is a characteristic that is especially evident in the South of the Peninsula. Verticality was used in Town Hall Towers in City-States, such as in Siena's Palazzo dei Priori (the city's governors), or in high towers belonging to aristocratic palaces, being a status symbol of the town's ruling families, as in the little borough of San Gimignano.[5] An interesting architectural contradiction lies in the fact that the castle of Otranto is not really a castle but an ancient stronghold, which completely surrounds a small town. Otranto represents the most eastern part of the Italian land that projects between the Adriatic and the Ionic sea towards the Mediterranean, Greece, the Eastern part of Europe, and the Orient. The strategic position of the real Otranto had forced the inhabitants and the rulers of the territory to protect it by the construction of a citadel, which had acquired its final form during the reign of Aragon in the sixteenth century, when

the Spaniards managed to conquer and take possession of extended parts of the Peninsula. The Spanish character of its fortress mirroring on the beautiful turquoise sea in that section of the Adriatic, may have been known only to expert historians.[6] The Spanish conquered the southern territories after a long series of gory battles with France that went on for almost a century on the Italian territory.

Whether Walpole had the chance to see the place directly during his Grand Tour or wheather confirmed he got information about it by hearsay cannot be confirmed, even though twenty years later, in a conversation with Lord Hamilton, he admitted choosing the name Otranto while looking at a map of Southern Italy.[7] Although many critics have identified the castle in the novel with the writer's unusual creation - Strawberry Hill - and even though Walpole makes reference in his correspondence to his neo-Gothic dwelling as a source of inspiration, it is not possible to detect concrete analogies as the descriptions provided in the novel are not actually sufficient to recognize the place. The castle itself is not described in detail. Its parts are frequently described as "the court", "the steps" "the stairs", "the window", "the trapdoor", "the black tower" that may belong to any place, not necessarily to a castle, or to a Gothic castle, or even to Walpole's Neo-gothic mansion. When Matilda retires, we learn that she goes to "her chamber', while her father Manfred, the most important character in the story, often muses on the events in "his chamber". There are no concrete or realistic descriptions of furniture, styles or structures. Architectural descriptions are completely vague, an aspect that leads to a restricted view of the scene. This claustrophobic sense of space obliges the reader to remain in constant contact with the characters' limited perspective. Whereas all other characters seem to be moving freely, the castle becomes an impediment for Manfred. Even his secluded and passive wife Hippolita, in spite of having been ordered to remain in her room, wanders freely and goes to the monastery to meet Father Jerome, who at his turn moves to and fro all the locations in the story, with an unusual, and almost supernatural, rapidity.

A baffling aspect resides in Walpole's choice of names for his characters. The protagonists' names curiously sound Teutonic in the usurpers' family (Manfred, Conrad, Matilda). They sound Italian (Isabella, Bianca), or Greek (Theodore, Hippolita) in other characters. They also sound French (Gerome, Jaquez), and Spanish (Diego) in the case of potential antagonists. Manfred's enemy, Frederic, can sound either Mediterranean or Northern, a duplicity which reflects the personality of the character. The two worlds, Northern and Southern, are blended in a form of onomastics, which probably came from Shakespeare and which was going to influence Walpole's imitators in the process of defining the protagonists' names. If Gothic was supposed to express the positive values of the Northern cultural superiority, we may wonder why Southern and Mediterranean places were chosen as Gothic locations in many of the stories, or why Northern countries, being connected with Teutonic ideals, were depicted under a dark and cruel shadow when the locations chosen by the authors were in Britain or in the North. The most

evident examples were Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, and Charlotte Smith who wrote Gothic stories one or two decades after the publication of CO, setting them in the North.

We might argue that the setting of CO is not actually Gothic as far as history, art, and architecture are concerned. Mark Madoff (1979, 336-7) justifies the lack of historical accuracy as it is counterbalanced by the functional use of the past. The blatant anachronisms and the lack of precision in Walpole are seen as a form of connection between a mythical past and the present of the story by Dale Townshend (The Orders of Gothic 2006), in his study of Lacanian and psychoanalytical aspects in the Gothic novel. The following text underlines the connection of the Gothic with patriarchal issues. Townshend (87) claims that the Gothic may be interpreted as a way of representing the power of the father. The passage highlights the contradictions of the term 'Gothic':

> Insofar as Gothic, in part, implies for the late eighteenth century a sense of things medieval, and by implications, things older, more traditional and ancestral, the term conveniently recommended itself as a means of grounding the new conceptualization of fatherhood in a fabricated line of tradition. The term Gothic to the late eighteenth century was characterized by a playful dissemination of meanings, only one of which was medieval (…) Walpole in the Castle of Otranto, reiterating the use to which the term was put in Bishop Hurd's Letters on Chivalry and Romance, uses the term primarily for its medieval implications.

In his article of the history of the word Gothic in England and in Europe back in the 1920s, Alfred E. Longueil ("The Word Gothic" 1923, 453) claimed that Walpole's novel introduced a new lasting nuance of the word Gothic: "Critical terms, like other speculations, have their ups and downs. So it has been with the adjective gothic. The term had its inception humbly enough as a Germanic race-name. But because the Goths, being Teutons, conceived and built upon an ideal of beauty foreign to the world they overset; and because mediaeval men, fashioning their new world, rebuilt it nearer to the Teutonic than the classic heart's desire; and because to Renaissance sceptics the Gothic ideal, wrought in castle and cathedral, seemed dark and thwarted beside the measure of a Parthenon, it came to pass, in the early Renaissance, that the term "gothic" took on a new and coloured meaning, a meaning that masked a sneer. To the Renaissance, Mediaeval or Gothic architecture was barbarous architecture. By a trope all things barbarous became Gothic".

Narrative strategies, ineffective communications, and limited perspectives

Notwithstanding all the various plausible hypotheses about the creation of the new literary genre, we may argue that Gothic narrative starts with an intrinsic imprecision that reflects, on the one hand, the general taste of the reading public for exotic narrations and locations while, on the other hand, it tends to create the Italianate aura reproducing a stereotyped idea of Italy

and the South, filtered by a British perspective that did not fully reflect reality. Williams (1995, 22) explains that the reading public was eager for "otherness" and "exoticism" and Italy could provide both. As Williams puts it, "Walpole's choice seems so suitable that critics have seldom ventured beyond a few generalizations about these continental places as the obvious 'other' for late eighteenth-century Britain". A further aspect is the need, not new in literature, for strong emotions, which was developing at the time, and that could be satisfied with images of fear and terror.[8] Emma Clery investigated the "development of the emotion of fear" that characterizes the 1760s in Britain. Starting from the "case of the Cock Lane Ghost", which took place in 1762, just two years before the publication of Walpole's novel, she concentrates on CO, The Mysteries of Udolpho and The Monk to define the presence of the supernatural in literature which, she explains, dates back to the seventeenth century. In her opinion, the increase in the apparitions of ghosts and the proliferation of their descriptions were supposedly meant to fight against atheism, and to create a connection with the after world.

CO has five chapters, a division which reproduces a standard dramatic structure. Walpole declares that his work is a "romance", but also a "drama". The events take place in three distinct settings, the castle, the monastery, and the church of Saint Nicholas, which is near the castle. The most dramatic as well as inexplicable event takes place in the very beginning in the castle courtyard where Conrad, who is supposedly one of the most important characters, suddenly dies in a mysterious way, crashed by a giant helmet before being able to reach the chapel where his "hasty" (15) wedding should have been celebrated. At this point begins the friendship pace of the story, as it has been acutely observed by Elisabeth Napier (The Gothic Failure 1987, 88-90):

> The tonal instability of the Castle of Otranto leads an air of recklessness to the novel which is intensified by the story's pace. (…) There are no digressions, or unseasonable descriptions, or long speeches. Every sentence carries the action forward. The excitement is constantly renewed. (…) The pace of Walpole's tale begins to escalate immediately after the introduction of the main characters and the relation of the prophecy [that concerns his family and his power].

After the shock of his son's sudden and inexplicable death, which does not last long, however Manfred becomes the main character of the story. He decides to act immediately, but his frantic activities do not obtain any results. The more he frets, the less he is able to accomplish any action or to obtain any concrete results. He is incapable of acting concretely to change the turn of events, and all his desires actually remain frustrated. Sentencing young Theodore to death, divorcing from his wife Hippolita, making an alliance with his enemy Frederic, trying to seduce Isabella (the girl that was supposed to marry his son) and, most important of all, saving his usurped kingdom, are all projects included in his secret agenda that he is incapable of carrying out. He moves around the castle, which

actually represents a claustrophobic space that he cannot really control and where he is virtually entrapped.

On a linguistic level, the story is characterized by a lack of effective communication: Manfred orders his servants to do things for him, but their linguistic interaction is not complete as they are taken by a sort of aphasia, which blocks verbal exchanges, especially when the situation is on the brink of drama. Their words are broken and the communication is imperfect on three different occasions, causing frustration and rage in Manfred. His patriarchal power and his irrational violence are diluted by his servants' linguistic inertia. The first time that verbal interaction stagnates is when the frightened servants are not able to speak and describe Conrad's horrible death, "clashed to pieces" by a mysterious huge helmet fallen from the sky. The second time that the dialogue is incomplete is when Manfred wants to know from his servants whether they were able to find the fugitive Isabella: the two servants continue delaying their answers, feeling their incapacity with extreme fear. The third time, the dialogue between Manfred and Bianca, Isabella's maid, does not proceed because of the servant's ambiguity and cunning reluctance in answering Manfred's questions. In all cases Manfred is frustrated, enraged, and offended. Because of these obstacles, he seems to progressively lose all authority, as he does not have access to essential knowledge. Walpole motivates the insertion of these pseudo comic interludes in order to add realism as well as irony to the various scenes, just in the same way as Shakespeare was able to mix genres in his works.

The only time when Manfred can communicate smoothly with his servants is when he receives some intelligence that will tragically lead him to commit a fatal murder.

The limited vision on contexts is an interesting aspect of the narration. When Isabella pursues her flight from Manfred, she finds herself in a vault surrounded by darkness. She can hear a voice but she cannot see the person who is helping her. Similarly, Matilda eavesdrops on a person that moans and lament through her window at night, but she cannot see who is uttering sweet words of love. The other occasion when characters are surrounded by obscurity is when Theodore and Isabella meet again, both escaping from the castle eventually and meet in the forest among "gloomiest shades". The final occasion when darkness is dominant in the story is when Manfred actually takes action for the first time and goes out of the castle, or at least, this is the first time that the reader can actually see him leave his mansion. In the "gloominess of the night":

> Manfred, whose spirits were inflamed, and whom Isabella had driven from her on his arguing his passion with too little reserve, did not doubt but the inquietude she had expressed had been occasioned by her impatience to meet Theodore. Provoked by this conjecture, and enraged at her father, he hastened secretly to the great church. Gliding softly between the aisles, and guided by an imperfect gleam that shone faintly through the illuminated windows, he stole towards the tomb of Alfonso. (CO, 104)

Indifferent to the soft light of the moon that may help him see, Manfred is blinded by the flames of his passion and the pangs of his jealousy, which lead him to the murder of an innocent and to his inevitable destiny.[9] The novel is in general characterized by limited visions. The characters cannot explain or see what is really happening during the most crucial events. Whereas the labyrinthine palace is a form of metaphorical seclusion and immobility, the protagonist is in a perpetual but ineffective motion. Manfred's agitation is totally inconclusive. There is no real movement, and there is no control over the territory. The claustrophobic confinement together with the constant rage of the protagonist, reproduce the repetitive movements of wild animals inside a cage.

What is intriguing is the fact that Walpole does not use landscape in his text but for a single exception. Interestingly, the entire tale only includes one mention to the sea and the coast (CO 71), which is on the contrary a basic feature of the real Otranto that is built next to the sea. Apart from this imprecision, which can be included together with the other misrepresentations that we analysed before, the text contains only one allusion to landscape. The central chapter includes the episode of the forest where two characters, Theodore and Isabella, have flown for different reasons. Theodore has been unjustly condemned to death by Manfred for witnessing Conrad's death whereas Isabella is escaping Manfred's dangerous courtship and has therefore abandoned the castle in secret. The two elements of landscape are the forest and the grotto. The forest, is "to the east" of the castle. Behind "that forest is a chain of rocks, hollowed into a labyrinth of caverns" (CO 70). Theodore escapes with a heavy heart from the castle, reluctantly leaving his beloved Matilda behind, for whom he has developed a strong feeling. Instead of staying in the convent, as father Jerome had suggested, he starts "hovering between the castle and the monastery (...) determined to repair to the forest that Matilda had pointed out to him" (CO 71).[10] This wandering, which actually takes place in a few pages, and is marginal in CO, provides the beginning of a narrative scheme that will be absorbed and reproduced by Gothic authors that later followed Walpole's steps. "Regardless of the tempest [announced] by a clap of thunder" Theodore goes in search of "the gloomiest shades, as best suited to the pleasing melancholy that reigned in his mind". The place is surrounded by the "power of darkness". He imagines creatures living in the solitary places he crosses and thinks they might be "hermits". He even becomes frightened in thinking of the "evil spirits" that may inhabit in mysterious cavities. Theodore "indulges in his curiosity in exploring the secret recesses of this labyrinth" (CO 72) when he finds Isabella. He tries to help the fugitive girl by hiding her in "a cavern" and "its inmost recesses". He [intends] to conduct [her] to the most private cavity of these rocks" (CO 73). The images and the language that Walpole uses to describe the scene of the cavern are extremely ambiguous, as Elisabeth Napier (85) highlights when she speaks of the latent aspect of burlesque in Walpole and the impossibility to determine whether the ambiguity is unconscious or deliberately chosen. W. Lewis (iv) finds a justification for Walpole's choices:

I have suggested elsewhere that he accepted the artificiality of the genre he had chosen as composers of grand opera and ballet accept the artificiality of their arts. If we also accept it in this spirit, we find that the style which at first seems to us comic becomes rather pleasant and even stirring.

Apart from Walpole's tone, partly pathetic, and sometimes even fastidiously bathetic, the presence of caves, which recall grottoes, has a symbolic and cultural value. Imposing and romantic caves were painted by a famous contemporary English painter, who was very popular in Britain during the second half of the Eighteenth Century - Joseph Wright of Derby (1734-1797). His paintings of Italian landscapes with caves and labyrinthine grottoes near the sea were highly appreciated. Wright had gone to Italy to find inspiration, but his dramatic and spectacular caves were painted around the 1770s, which is after Walpole had written CO. In order to find caves in painting before Walpole, we have to go back to the previous century for outstanding rendering of grottoes. The German Philipp Roos, born in Frankfurt in 1655, moved to Italy where he was nicknamed Rosa da Tivoli. One of his most visually dramatic works is Grotto with banditti where the rocks at the entrance looks like a dark fierce animal. Before him, David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690) painted an impressive Landscape with Grotto and a Group of Gypsies in the 1640s. Between 1639 and 1640 Salvator Rosa's completed the Grotto con cascata (Grotto with Waterfall), the perfect representation of the sublime spirit. The painting's dramatic rays of light, majestic ruins and a melancholic atmosphere introduced picturesque and dramatic images that were to influence eighteenth century Gothic and the Romantic poets. The representations of natural grottoes, which were frequently painted in the seventeenth century derived from the fashion that started during the Renaissance, and even earlier, during the period known as Humanism (also known as Quattrocento). Hazelle Jackson, provides an interesting historical insight (2001, 4-6):

> Renaissance architects in Italy revived the grottoes of Ancient Rome to add an air of historical authenticity to their neoclassical villas and garden. The celebrated architect Leon Battista Alberti even gives a 'recipe' in De Re Aedificatoria (1485) for pouring green molten wax on to the stonework of a new grotto to simulate mossy growth. Renaissance grottoes were decorated with chips of lava rock and coloured marble, shells, coral, pebbles and spugne, plastered textured to resemble coral. Renaissance gardens were designed with complex iconography. Francesco Colonna's mythic romance, The Dream of Polyphilus (1499), which describes the hero's search for self-knowledge in an architectural classical landscape, was the theme for a number of allegorical gardens where a grotto with a water source was reached at the top of a terraced hillside, signifying the visitor's spiritual journey through life to knowledge. (...) by the seventeenth century the influence of the Renaissance had spread out across Europe and reached the British Isles.

Rocks, caves and grottoes had been introduced in painting at the end of the fifteenth century when the emphasis of representation was no longer in the sacred protagonists of the scene, but it focussed on the elements of nature. Landscape acquired importance both in the Florentine and in the Venetian Renaissance. The most enigmatic and intriguing representation of a cave was the Virgin of the Rocks (1508), a metaphorical painting by Leonardo da Vinci. A collector of art, Walpole owned paintings from various epochs. Walpole introduces the image of the cavern, which he might have had many an occasion to observe either in his country or during his journeys.

Cultural syncretism, hybridism and the Gothic after Walpole

According to Elisabeth Napier (1987, 80), CO may be considered a 'pleasanterie' In effect, the work by Walpole is characterized by a sort of original, even if naive, cultural syncretism. When Matilda disobeys her father's orders to climb the Black Tower and save Theodore, she is welcomed as if she were 'an angel' (CO 68) or 'a blessed saint' (CO 69). It is easy to detect courtly atmospheres of the French Troubadours and, in particular, the exaltation of the woman in the manner of the Italian Dolce Stil Novo, or Stilnovismo, the new poetic style introduced by Guido Guinizelli at the end of the thirteenth century and amply used by Dante and his contemporaries. Like Guido Guinizelli's angelical woman or Dante's Beatrice, the young Matilda is an apparition that changes Theodore's mind forever. She does not

only physically save him from certain death but she conquers his heart for ever. He "fervently entreated her permission to swear himself eternally her knight" (CO 70). Therefore, he becomes her slave of love, but their union is impossible as the text is strictly following the canons of Stilnovismo. Dante and Petrarch exalt the absence of the loved ones who, after their death, become the inspiration of the poets' lives. The closure in Walpole's story does not follow the style of sentimental novels, but it isn't completely compatible with Gothic atmosphere either: "[Theodore] could know no happiness but in the society of one [Isabella] with whom he could forever indulge the melancholy that had taken possession of his soul" (CO 110). Theodore gives voice to his sorrow, which reflects Dante's distress and anguish in losing Beatrice, and Petrarch's lifelong nostalgia of Laura, prematurely passed away.[11]

Walpole's example had initially remained without imitators for more than a decade when Clara Reeve's The Old English Baron was published in 1777. Gothic fiction became the literary trend at the end of the century, during the decade that Robert Miles (1993) described as the effulgence of Gothic. CO is an interestingly bizarre literary phenomenon, which provides a never-ending source of possible interpretations. The existing critical literature gives many different and equally interesting perspectives to the novel. The common denominator is that the text marks the actual beginning of Gothic fiction. The story is relatively short and the velocity of events highlighted by Napier is one of the major causes of the brevity of the novel. Nevertheless, the text contains important ideas in

nuce. These ideas were developed by the Gothic novelists that became active during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. The supernatural, historicism, mysterious landscapes, old castles, gloomy dungeons, and a persecuted heroine are some of the multiple ingredients introduced by Walpole and later used by a variety of authors in the decades after the CO. We can suggest that if Gothic fiction is generally thought to be connected with Italian settings it is because Walpole's novel introduced a special location that was absorbed by readers' imagination and often applied to the genre in general by critics. Choosing Italy as an exotic place for the Gothic was introduced by Walpole. However, the bases for such a choice are not completely satisfactory as Williams (1995, 22) interestingly suggests: "[i]n retrospect, Walpole's choice seems so suitable that critics have seldom ventured beyond a few generalizations about these continental places as the obvious 'other' for late eighteenth-century Britain: absolutist and long-standing feudal governments in contrast to English 'liberty', 'superstitious' Roman Catholicism in contrast to enlightened Protestantism". Later on Williams posits that "fantasies of 'otherness' are historically contingent" but are determined by "a private dimension as well".

In fact, Gothic fiction is set in a variety of places, not only Italy. One of Walpole's merits was his ability to mingle different sources and influences to create what Emma Clery calls "hybridism", the taste for assembling together different narrative modes and models that can be traced in CO.[12] The alternating introduction of semi-farcical situations, such as the verbose servants who slow down the action with their useless blabbering, later inherited by Ann Radcliffe and Matthew G. Lewis, represents an imitation of Shakespeare's mixing of genres. Walpole's technique shows his need to blend tragic and comic issues.

Adopting the post-modern definition by Fredric Jameson, who described pastiche as an ironic form of mimicry Molesworth ("Syllepsis, Mimesis, Simulacrum", 2009, 405) identifies the stylistic device in M. Lewis's The Monk. The pastiche tends to absorb different literary and poetic influences and unite them in peculiar narratives. The pastiche is an original form of literature, which can be applied to Walpole's romance, and was later inherited by William Beckford in his visionary creation, Vathek, and by Lewis, who adapted it to his strange novel. Reactions to CO and to subsequent Gothic literature were mixed. Caught by surprise, critics tried to find reasonable motivations for the public's enthusiastic reception. While analysing the critical literature on phantasmagoria, Fred Botting (Limits of Horror 2008, 101) compares it with Gothic literature, which was equally composed of "absurdities". He argues that with the passing of time and the creation of Gothic clones, critics hoped for the approaching end of Gothic narrative, which actually never came. W. Lewis ("Introduction to CO", viii) posits that although Walter Scott only partially appreciated Gothic literature, he contributed to raising awareness of the genre, to which other authors and poets, especially the Romantics, became indebted, despite their reluctance to admit its influence. In his introduction to the 1811 edition of the CO, Scott

defined the novel as "remarkable not only for the wild interest in the story, but as the first modern attempt to found a tale of amusing fiction upon the basis of the ancient romances of chivalry".

The Gothic became the object of scrutiny in different periods, starting from its development during the second half of the eighteenth century until the present day.[13] Michael Munday investigated the attention that early critical reviews paid to the Gothic and highlighted the splenetic reactions to it. Even though the originality that Walpole professed may not be completely genuine, it is undeniable that he was the beginner of a new form of writing.[14] Also, the year of the publication seemed to play a major role in literary, poetic, artistic, and cultural contexts. Johann Winkelmann gave his influential History of Ancient Art to the press in 1764, when Walpole was publishing CO. Winckelmann, like Goethe, was fascinated by Italy, its majestic past and its present ruins. His Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works (1755) was equally important for a new vision on Antiquity. John Fuseli (1741-1825) considered the text revolutionary and translated it into English. Winckelmann's History of Ancient Art and Walpole's CO were not the only significant texts to be published in 1764. An Essay on Crimes and Punishments was printed anonymously in the same year in Italy. It was the work of Cesare Beccaria, an important magistrate from Milan who spread the Illuminist ideals in Italy. After eighteen months, it had already been reprinted six times and had been translated into French. When it was first "englished" in 1767, it was initially attributed to Voltaire.[15] The anonymous translator claimed in

the preface that "perhaps no book, on any subject, was ever received with more avidity, more generally read, or more universally applauded" (iv). The "long eighteenth century" was an over-flowing and culturally challenging period, when literature, art, philosophy and science progressed admirably.[16] We can argue that Horace Walpole was part of that remarkable cultural explosion, with an original masterpiece that still offers many hypotheses to be discovered and investigated.

Notes

1. The Castle of Otranto will be henceforth defined as CO. The very first issue was published on 24th December 1764. Bathoe and Lownds of London published the second edition in April 1765, where the word 'Gothic' was added to the frontispiece. During the same year J. Hoey of Dublin published the novel without adding the word 'Gothic' to the main title. The front-page of the second edition dating 1765 is still printed with the subtitle 'A Story' as can be seen in Lewis' introduction to the novel (Wentworth Lewis 1969, xix).

2. Massimo Montanari summarizes the different phases of the middle ages in his text: Storia medievale, Bari, Laterza, 2002. The conquest of the Southern territory of the peninsula was carried out by the Normans after settling permanently in the North West of France and later invading Britain in 1066. Interestingly, there was no longer trace of Goths when Walpole's story took place. In spite of having given the fatal blow to the Roman Empire, the Goths had been erased from the Italian territory by the Byzantine emperor Justinian in the sixth century.

3. Umberto Eco (1932-2016) frequently used the manuscript device in many of his novels. The Name of the Rose (1980) was thought to have been taken from a real manuscript for a relatively long period of time, until the Italian author himself decided to reveal the truth about the fake.

4. The Metropolitan Museum of Arts in New York organized a symposium on the Church of Saint Denis and the Abbot Suger who was the mind behind the project. The text dedicated to the event was published in 1986, and it included a series of studies introduced by Paula Lieber Gerson.

5. Flamboyant arches can be mainly found in the North of the Italian Peninsula which was more receptive to foreign influences. A clear example can be admired in Milan cathedral, the Duomo.

6. An intriguing aspect that sometimes emerges from Gothic literature is the interchangeability of Italian and Spanish names, settings, and even words. An example is represented by Matthew G. Lewis's The Monk (1796), where some characters use Italian words when in distress, in spite of Spanish locations and contexts.

7. "Walpole would confess to Sir William Hamilton that he had chosen the word 'Otranto' [because] the word was "well-sounding", suitable for his gothic story." (Williams "Horace in Italy" 1997, 22). In her article, the scholar also analyses some of the writer's experiences as a supposed spy in Southern Italy. When he arrived in Calabria, he was so appalled by the general poverty and the awful conditions in which people lived, that he decided to abandon the place and return to his aristocratic circle of friends in Rome and Florence.

8. Examples of horror can be found in the literature of Antiquity. Ghosts and the supernatural were common in Greek and Latin literature and can be found in works by Aristophanes, Euripides, Aeschylus, Hesiod, Herodotus, Homer, Plutarch, Apuleius, Lucan, Horace, Ovid, Macrobius, Plautus, Tacitus, Seneca. One author that rejected any form of magic or superstition was Cicero. In his work, De Divinatione he treated supernatural themes with irony.

9. In Chapter VII of The Prince (1513), dedicated to those rulers who were able to acquire their position by means of luck, or by the use of the arms, Nicolò Machiavelli explains that they face higher risks of losing what they conquered and that their reign will be more difficult to maintain. Manfred belongs to this category; he is doomed to lose his power and his kingdom. However, whereas for Machiavelli the reasons of the risks belong to political science, in the case of Manfred, the loss is caused by a supernatural intervention.

10. The solitary wandering of a protagonist can be found in the autobiographical Reveries of a Solitary Walker by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, published in 1782. Walpole may have inherited the notion of an isolated context and a nostalgic mood from his friend Thomas Gray and his Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard dating back to 1751.

11. Peter Walmsley ("The Melancholy Briton" 2009) argues that the problem of melancholy, which had been thoroughly analyzed by Robert Burton in his encyclopedic publication in 1621, continued to be part of intellectual men's the cultural background in the eighteenth century.

12. Williams (1995) posits that Samuel Taylor Coleridge was dismissive of Walpole, especially of his tragedy

The Mysterious Mother that he deeply detested. Interestingly, Michael Gamer (2000) considers Coleridge's systematic negative criticism of Gothic novelists as a strategy to highlight the importance of Romanticism, an attitude that can be found in Wordsworth as well. Like a number of critics, Gamer does not exclude that their rejection of the Gothic may have been dictated by their failure in Gothic literary experiments. This hypothesis is supported by Gillespie (2011) in his study on English Translation and Classical Reception in the section dedicated to William Wordsworth.

13. With the exclusion of a number of articles in specialized reviews, literary historians in the first half of the twentieth century either minimized the importance of the Gothic or did not even consider it worth mentioning in their anthologies and studies. David Daiches considered the Gothic as "a dilettante interest in the Middle Ages" (A Critical History of English Literature II: 740). The American scholar Samuel Chew completely ignored it. In Art of Darkness, Anne Williams shows how twentieth-century eminent critics such as F. R. Leavis, Wayne Booth and Ian Watt, who exalted the realistic tradition of fiction, definitely excluded Gothic authors from their critical analyses. The Italian scholar Elio Chinol compiled various anthologies of English literature, which provided minimal elucidations about the Gothic. It was necessary to wait for Northrop Frye, Montague Summers, and Devendra Varma to obtain a revaluation of the genre, defined as Romance.

14. In Art of Darkness (1995), Williams argues that many themes of the Gothic fiction may be found in Augustan writers, among whom Alexander Pope is one of the most important sources with his Eloisa to Abelard (1717), which features a remarkable Gothic imagery before Gothic as created.

15. The 1775 English edition still bears Voltaire's name on the frontispiece. The verb to "english" is used by Stuart Gillespie and David Hopkins, and critics concerned with literary translation in England.

16. Frank O'Gorman's idea of the chronological expansion of the century originally applied to British history (1688-1815), has been adapted by critics to literature (Miriam L. Wallace, among others), both British and European.

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