‘My more than sister’: re-examining paradigms of sibling incest

[T]he blush that suffused her cheeks … declared how tenderly she was interested in his concerns, and breathed more than sisterly affection.

Eleanor Sleath, The Orphan of the Rhine (1798)

In the first chapter relationships between fathers and daughters were examined; in particular, how the transgressive nature of father–daughter incest can cause a breakdown of patriarchal society that is more complex than the conventional positioning of paternal incest as representative solely of a threat to the heroine. Incest in the Gothic does not, however, exist exclusively between heroines and their fathers and/or father figures. The relationships between female characters and their brothers or brother-substitutes are often fraught with underlying incestuous desires that are expressed as hidden subtext or explicit incestuous love. In contrast to the potential for abuses of power with which father–daughter relationships are endowed by the nature of the familial bond, the relationships between siblings are grounded in a more even distribution of power. Ruth Perry locates the brother as equally as dangerous to the heroine as the father or uncle, arguing that: ‘both fathers and brothers began to see their female relatives … as possessions in their power and hence possible sex objects’. However, in the Gothic novel the brother rarely presents a threat to the heroine, instead functioning more commonly as an equal sufferer under patriarchal power. It is, I argue, the potential for equality – akin to what Caroline Rooney calls ‘a feeling of
universal sympathy associated with the sister’ – that underpins the relationships between brothers and sisters and makes the bonds between siblings so dangerous and potentially destructive to patriarchal society. This potential for unravelling society (in a way that renders father figures both obsolete and unnecessary) causes sibling desire to be treated as, perhaps, the most dangerous and complicated of all the incestuous relationships represented in the Gothic. The destruction of patriarchal society is effected through the dissolution of social growth into a condition of familial stasis that, unlike father–daughter incest, excludes any paternal or head of family position.

The anthropological understanding of the incest taboo as necessary to culture advanced by Claude Lévi-Strauss is similarly argued for by Leslie White, who describes the taboo’s sociological impact as overcoming the human inclination to mate with intimate associates. While White, like Lévi-Strauss, views this taboo as necessary to ensure the growth of communities and the formation of social ties, his analysis points to a human tendency towards incest. This qualification is essential to an examination of sibling incest in the Gothic, which scholarship has often viewed as an extension of the paternal incest threat, as many of these depictions are in fact bound up in the language of natural tendencies and desires. Such representations frequently position brother–sister erotic love and familial love as equally instinctive emotions that grow alongside one another. For example, Leopold in Sarah Sheriffe’s Correlia (1802) develops an incestuous love for his sister that is analogous to his brotherly love for her: ‘he had imperceptibly, and without any sensible change from fraternal affection to one of a more tender nature, conceived a warm and lively passion for the humble companion of his infancy’. White argues that the inclination towards incest would bar the alliance-building necessary to society and so ‘a way must be found to overcome this centripetal tendency with a centrifugal force. This way was found in the definition and prohibition of incest.’ In other words, though we may instinctively sexually desire those with and by whom we are raised, society prohibits this inclination in order to promote group or social growth.

Feminist criticism has remained largely silent on the instances of brother–sister desire, which far from seeming threatening, in many cases exemplify an ideal relationship. In addition to the paternal threat model, the understanding of representations of sibling incest as a form of Romantic narcissism has been taken up by scholars to argue that sibling incest in the Gothic inverts Romantic paradigms. However, both of
these accounts fail fully to explore the complexities of the incestuous sibling relationships within the Gothic, on the one hand applying a model of incest that is predicated on a domestic and/or power threat and on the other employing retrospectively (and somewhat reductively) a paradigm of incestuous inversion. Rather than rely on these established modes of viewing sibling incest in the Gothic it is necessary to analyse the representations of brother–sister romantic love through a broader lens. In addition to relying on White’s definition of incest as a basis of exploration, this chapter views sibling incest in the context of a wider anthropological and sociological understanding of the incest taboo. From this position analyses of sibling desire in the Gothic are revealed as being engaged not only with these understandings of the taboo but also with the corresponding concerns of the nature of family and attraction that prefigure the wider current scientific discourse on genetics and attraction. The desires that underlie sibling relationships in the Gothic provide eighteenth-century accounts of the pull of blood that, when examined through a modern scientific lens, illuminate the ongoing relevance of kinship to attraction. Genetics, though not labelled as such at the time, of course, is always at play within the Gothic. The bloodlines that are so integral to the novels’ plots, convoluted and complex as they often are, are essential to both the incest thematic and to understanding the uniquely erotic and egalitarian nature of the brother–sister bond. This shift in disciplinary approaches is necessary given the many representations of sibling incest that resist dominant understandings of incest as a threat or inversion, which do not account for the ways these relationships are tied to questions of equality, natural desires, the bonds of blood and the law.

Those accounts of sibling incest that do exist are incomplete in part due to their reliance on Romantic and sentimental modes of understanding such relationships in the Gothic. Romantic models of narcissistic love presume a heightened self-love often not present in Gothic heroines, while sentimental models of incest rely frequently on a post-coital discovery of kinship or an implicit didacticism that is rarely present in the genre. The idea of blood telling, that blood will out, that nobility of birth shines through impoverished or hidden circumstances, is an oft-used trope within the eighteenth-century novel. The widespread use of this convention created a context for readers of the Gothic; spontaneous attraction culminating in the discovery of blood kin would have been familiar to the eighteenth-century reader. However, the way in which Gothic writers subvert this device by both building on and altering it
until blood and attraction become integral to their narratives emphasises the focus on incest and kinship in the genre. Nowhere are the ties of blood more important than within the Gothic, where hidden, missing and unknown relatives are often linked by familial blood as well as bound by sexual desires.

E. J. Clery refers to the Gothic combination of sexual, familial and economic restrictions that creates a constrained environment and forces the heroine to recognise ‘the inescapable bonds of kinship’. The hidden identities of characters and these ‘inescapable bonds of kinship’ that are linked to sexuality are revealed by endowing kin with either strikingly similar or opposite traits. Relatives are presented as either alike to the point of being interchangeable in looks, name and nature or as stark opposites. In this respect, Gothic writers foreshadow many of the theories of geneticists regarding attraction and kinship recognition before their advancement. What seems scientific precognition on the part of eighteenth-century writers is rather the articulation of their understandings that bad and good blood is passed down through the generations and that nurture does not eradicate those bloodlines that will frequently inspire attraction. The nature versus nurture question that continues to be debated underlies Gothic representations of kinship and sibling incest that are now being increasingly substantiated by modern scientists.

Genetics – or blood – will tell, familial traits will be passed down and the power of attraction between two like beings is seen nowhere more strongly than between siblings.

Geneticists call it GSA (genetic sexual attraction) and it is a seemingly simple term for the complex realm of familial desires and the underlying factors that inspire incestuous attraction. The blood tie – or the genetic similarities – between two people often results in likenesses in looks, intellect, speech patterns, handwriting, even in the way people move and the gestures they make. These similarities are the often unconsciously desired qualities we search for in a mate. A 2004 study on sexual imprinting argues that regarding mates or long-term partners: ‘positive correlations have been found between their socioeconomic status, age, intellectual ability, education, personality variables, physical attractiveness, vocational interests and anthropometric measures … One possible explanation is genetic-similarity theory’. Like Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection, so too do many people fall in love with the familiar or recognisable. Scientists focusing on mate selection contend that at the heart of desire is the pull of the similarities often found in
shared genetic material. The concept of GSA is based on these notions and research suggests that sexual attraction between consanguineal relatives exists at unexpected rates.\textsuperscript{18} Maurice Greenberg, who studies the prevalence of GSA between family members reunited after life-long separations, describes the attraction as both a form of mirroring that occurs most often between siblings who look similar and a normal reaction to reunification with a blood relative.\textsuperscript{19} In fact, GSA is thought to occur in 50 per cent of reunions between long-lost relatives.\textsuperscript{20}

What renders GSA particularly relevant to examining brother–sister attraction in the Gothic novel is its core premise that the familiar and the similar cause an intense desire. Catherine's declaration "‘Heathcliff is me!’" in Emily Brontë's \textit{Wuthering Heights} (1847) is in essence true: if Heathcliff is indeed her bastard half-brother, he is her; her blood, her genes, her double.\textsuperscript{21} Desire, attraction, love, here, stem from the premise of sameness and are equally sought by the brother or the sister. The foundation of equality is consanguineally rather than socially formed; the siblings are born with a biologically based parity of genetics that causes similarities which effect desire, although society ultimately refuses the potential for equality to exist between male/female siblings. In addition, the location of the brother as the other half – the sibling as a double of the self – contributes to an understanding of the brother as a self-reflexive equal. The brother as other is the most dangerously seductive figure within the Gothic, presenting at once a mirror image and an escape from the patriarchal exchange of women, similar to that effected through father–daughter incest. As White clarifies, 'the desire to form sexual unions with an intimate associate is both powerful and widespread' and it is society and culture rather than instinct that create the taboo to prevent these unions.\textsuperscript{22} The potential equality that siblings were born with was qualified by the laws of inheritance, such as primogeniture, as well as the social and cultural ideologies that enforced female subordination within and without the family. To achieve the potential equality, the siblings must remove themselves from the society that forbids its realisation. The Gothic deconstructs the family and social structures that prohibit incest in order to further exogamy, thus allowing the siblings to achieve endogamy.

The pathological exploration of kin and desire in the Gothic is at its pinnacle in the representations of sibling incest that are almost always shown to be ideal, positive, possible or limited only by the bounds of the arbitrarily created incest taboo. Sibling blood ties are presented as the cause of attraction rather than a hindrance to love and desire in a
number of important Gothic texts. I will examine these bonds and the concurrent destruction and formation of familial and social structures to argue that a compelling model of Gothic sibling incest was established by Ann Radcliffe and taken up by subsequent writers in important ways, ending with the culmination of sibling ties and desires in Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. Beginning with Radcliffe’s *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), an overlooked work that centres on a brother–sister relationship, and tracing the development of these themes in *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), I argue that Radcliffe’s first two novels establish a paradigm of the brother as hero which, given the immense popularity of her novels, provided a model to which subsequent Gothic writers adhered or from which they departed. The inclusion of Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796) is essential to disrupt the Gothic genealogy that so frequently reads Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797) as a reaction to Lewis’s novel without first examining *The Monk* as a response to and radical departure from the Radcliffean model of sibling incest. Eleanor Sleath’s *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798), a Gothic novel that lacks detailed scholarly analysis, provides a fascinating and unique account of brother–sister desire intertwined with criticisms of the law. Sleath’s novel adheres to the Radcliffean sibling incest model while inverting the incest plot of the sentimental novel by revealing the siblings to be non-kin after they fall in love. I conclude my analysis with an examination of Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* that follows a gap of some forty-seven years that often causes it to be read within a well-established tradition of Romanticism and narcissistic incest. By repositioning Brontë’s novel away from the texts it is normally read alongside, I find that a wider range of interpretative possibilities of the incest thematic becomes available: Heathcliff follows a Radcliffean sibling-hero model before evolving into the Radcliffean uncle-villain while encompassing aspects of the Romantic narcissistic incest model. Disrupting the established genealogy of reading these texts is essential to breaking away from limiting models of incest and to place their subversive ambitions within a broader framework of incestuous desires, attraction, legal and familial structures and understandings of kinship.

In making this claim, this chapter does not suggest that all Gothic texts are necessarily intentionally subversive; neither does it intend to conflate the texts themselves by setting out deliberately to unify them under one thematic intent. The goal of examining the role that incest plays within the texts is not to reach an overarching conclusion about
brother–sister relationships, but to understand several crucial things about the treatment of sibling love and how scholarship has traditionally treated it. Since the reclamation of the Female Gothic by feminist critics in the 1970s the genre has been delineated as articulating fears of domestic entrapment and patriarchal power. The incest thematic has primarily been theorised in such scholarship as a means of underscoring these fears as opposed to a means of resisting the forces of violence. But as demonstrated in Chapter 1 this assumption is destabilised upon closer examination of specific incestuous configurations and the narratives that shape them. Sibling love is similarly represented in a number of texts as being incompatible with the view of the Female Gothic as subversive and feminist through this particular type of attack on the patriarchy. While the genre functions as a space in which writers articulated these views it does so as part of the wider Gothic genre rather than from within a Female Gothic tradition that questions patriarchy by presenting incest as a sexualised abuse of the power imbalance inherent in the familial and social structures. When Fred Botting and Dale Townshend state that ‘incest in the Gothic novel is the visible or secret or absent centre of forbidden desire to which terror, always, ultimately, returns’ they suggest that incest should be read ultimately as a terror convention. However, as I will argue throughout my examinations of the aforementioned texts, depictions of brother–sister incest trouble the heteronormative ideology of culture by presenting the relationship’s potential for equality rather than through uniting sibling desires with terror. Representations of this egalitarian potential alongside rejections of paternal authority and the natural development of sibling desires that are frequently couched in legal language cause such relationships to resist placement within the traditional scholarly models of incest in the Gothic. Sibling bonds constitute a radical mode of destabilising contemporary understandings of desire, laws and kinship.

THE MISPLACEMENT OF THE MONK

A great deal of scholarly attention on incest in the Gothic has focused on Lewis’s representation of sibling rape in The Monk, which is taken to be paradigmatic of sibling relationships in the genre. This understanding of Lewis’s text as establishing a model of violent brother–sister sexuality has distorted readings of Radcliffe’s sibling relationships and those that follow her example. This is in part because of the way The Italian has
been read as a response to *The Monk* without first addressing Lewis's novel as a counter to Radcliffe's already well-established Gothic tradition. As Kate Ferguson Ellis has observed: 'the earliest male Gothicists undertook to wrest the form from the female hands in which they saw it too firmly grasped … [Lewis] liken[ed] himself to the “Villain” of *Udolpho* in a letter that acknowledges his debt to Radcliffe.'

Although Ellis points to Lewis's self-conscious use of Radcliffean elements, Lewis's novel is still frequently considered as offering the originary text of sibling incest. This understanding has limited readings of Gothic sibling incest to what is described as Lewis's perversion of the idealised sibling incest found in the works of the Romantics. The model of Gothic sibling incest as a distortion of Romantic narcissistic incest is exemplified by scholars such as Alan Richardson, who argues it is 'a perversion or accidental inversion of the normal sibling relation’ that is intensified and idealised in Romantic works.

While scholarship has begun to restore Radcliffe's body of work as a precursor of Lewis's, an adherence to the model of incest that arose from the misplacement continues to limit treatments of sibling incest.

Locating Gothic incest as 'a perversion or accidental inversion' of the sibling bond rather than a Romantic intensification of it risks reducing the thematic to a generic convention employed to produce disgust and terror. The conflation of the incest device with other Gothic tropes has supported scholarly readings of the brother–sister relationship as one fraught with violence and abuses of power. Similarly, the sibling relationship's alignment with the father–daughter and uncle–niece configurations of dangerous incest assists in this reductive understanding. Lewis's representation of a brother who rapes his younger sister is not the standard brother–sister Gothic relationship; rather it represents a deviation from the tradition that Radcliffe established. This misidentification has caused Lewis to be perceived as the subversive writer to whom the conservative Radcliffe reacted and offered correction.

However, Lewis's depiction of a rape committed at the urging of a demonic woman presents sibling desires as far less transgressive of the unequal and gendered power structures than Radcliffe's representations of egalitarian incest. It is Radcliffe who influentially placed the brother as the sibling-lover in the Gothic and removed this incestuous configuration from its location as a social taboo.

E. Baker's 1906 introduction to *The Monk* claims that Lewis's novel achieves the genre's promise of unrestrained terror in contrast to the
inadequacies of Radcliffe’s novels as Gothic fiction which lack the appropriate masculine confidence:

Instead of the mild titillation of the nerves produced by Mrs. Radcliffe’s timid trifling with the world of phantoms and nameless terrors, [The Monk] threw away all restraint. There is nothing supernatural in Mrs. Radcliffe’s novels; her ghosts are all make-believe, and the reader’s alarm is carefully soothed before it exceeds the point of pleasant excitation … [Lewis] outdid Mrs. Radcliffe, and in the same way he outdid every other writer from whom he borrowed.31

Baker represents the belief echoed in more recent criticism that Radcliffe’s novels embody a delicacy that Lewis ‘threw away’ and implicitly correlates his gender with his rejection of Radcliffe’s supposed timidity. The conclusion is clear: Radcliffe’s femininity precluded her from depicting the masculine displays of violence that Lewis revelled in and that, although failing in producing true ‘terror’ in the reader, succeed in producing ‘horror’.32 While Radcliffe’s atmospheres, Baker concedes, ‘have not been without their influence on later literature’, he simultaneously consigned her novels to the dustbin of feminine failure – narratives of terror bound by timidity from being transgressive.33 Baker’s introduction, albeit dated, continues to represent the assumption that male-written Gothics employ a ‘masculine’ ability to depict violence in ways that women cannot accomplish successfully.

As Clery notes, ‘literary history provided a neat exemplification of the binary liberated/repressed … by the couple Lewis/Radcliffe. The analogy was strengthened by speculation that The Italian had been written as a moralising corrective to The Monk.’34 This idea is furthered by Fitzgerald’s summary of scholarship that positions Radcliffe as writing a ‘point-by-point’ response to The Monk:

According to Syndy Conger, The Italian is ‘a sustained counterstatement’ to and a ‘near point-by-point refutation of’ The Monk. And for many critics, Ross reports, ‘Radcliffe had the last word in this “debate”’. Emily is finally able to reclaim her Gothic territory from Montoni; likewise, ‘Radcliffe succeeded in claiming Gothic as “female”’, Susan Wolstenholme argues, and in ‘reclaiming a certain textual space’ from male writers of the Gothic, particularly Lewis.35

The traditional scholarly understanding of Radcliffe as countering Lewis, while it may be appropriate in terms of The Italian, which chronologically follows Lewis’s novel, ignores what Ellen Moers calls ‘Matthew Lewis’ avowed imitation of [Radcliffe’s] work in his shocking novel’.36 Much
like the establishment of the binary to which Clery points, male-written Gothics are often viewed as creating and establishing models for incest that are used to shore up the bifurcation of the genre into the Male Gothic and a Female Gothic counter.

It is essential to recognise that The Monk was written within the context of Radcliffe's established oeuvre in order to examine how Lewis's aggressive and violent portrayal of sibling rape reinforces patriarchal power and values and has come to be understood as paradigmatic of Gothic sibling incest. The horror and disgust evoked by Lewis's deployment of the incest trope are viewed by scholarship as characteristic of Gothic sibling incest: representations and perverted inversions of Romantic sibling relationships. Claudia L. Johnson offers the compelling argument that:

In a fairly transparent opposition to Lewis's gothic, which inflates Ambrosio by its own hyperbole and thus both enjoys and colludes in the Promethean grossness of his crimes, Radcliffe's more muted representation of atrocious power – so often dismissed as emerging from bourgeois prudishness about sex – precludes such proto-Byronic reading by banalizing power, exposing the meretriciousness of its motives, and diminishing its sway by refusing its mystique.

Johnson offers an important mode of retheorising Radcliffe's treatment of sex. Along these lines, I suggest that Radcliffe's novels' lack of horror and disgust in association with sibling incest does not demonstrate a repressed, timid femininity that shies away from such representations, but rather undermines the very notion of incest as taboo. Contrary to the scholarly model of incest based upon Lewis, it is Radcliffe who imagines truly unrestrained sibling incest. I argue that the normalising of incest that occurs from Radcliffe's conflation of sibling and hero is a radical disavowal of incest as perverted or disgusting and affirms the potential for an ideal, incestuous relationship.

**The Comparison of Brother and Hero: Confusing Lovers and Siblings**

The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne (1789) is Radcliffe's first, and most overlooked, Gothic novel. Johnson describes this work and Radcliffe's subsequent A Sicilian Romance (1790) as 'fascinating … in the sheer accretion of their conventionality'. While the overwhelming body of scholarship on Radcliffe regards her first novels as conventional and
focuses instead on her later novels, this tendency overlooks Radcliffe's innovations, which only later become conventions of the genre and which were established in these early works. Part of the focus on her last three novels may also be because of the progression of these works that critics can easily – though perhaps mistakenly – identify as improving successively.40 To analyse incest within Radcliffe's works it is essential to examine closely the first two novels in which the heroines interact with siblings. That this kinship bond is not present in her following novels is further significant.41 While scholarship has noted this later absence it has never been satisfactorily accounted for. I argue that Radcliffe eventually abandons the use of sibling relationships as the brother and the hero/lover are first made synonymous and then integrated in The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne and A Sicilian Romance in a conflation of the familial and romantic that leads to the erasure of the brother's role in subsequent novels.

The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne centres on two families connected through their sufferings at the hands of the proud and jealous Baron Malcolm. Malcolm murdered the late Earl of Athlin, who was survived by his widow, the Countess Matilda, and children, Osbert and Mary, who reside in the castle of Athlin. Malcolm lives in the nearby castle of Dunbayne, where he has imprisoned his brother's widow – his sister-in-law the Baroness Louisa – and her daughter Laura. The families are also connected through the peasant Alleyn, who loves Mary and is eventually revealed as the long-presumed dead son of the Baroness. Alleyn was given as an infant to a peasant couple by Malcolm, who reported him dead to the Baroness in order to inherit his brother's title and land in lieu of a male heir. They are further linked through Osbert, who, while imprisoned by Malcolm, meets and falls in love with the captive Laura, who strikingly resembles his sister Mary. The relationships between Laura, Alleyn, Osbert and Mary are not explicitly incestuous but the similarities between and interchangeability of the siblings render their eventual marriages substitutions for incestuous sibling desires. Osbert and Mary’s bond acts as an idealised model for male–female partnerships and marriages, grounded in a basis of equality and similarity of age, class, education and resources and based in respect, mutual love and reason. Each of these factors is demonstrated within the text to be fundamental to happiness, yet Radcliffe indicates that such egalitarian unions are unattainable in a society in which incestuous relationships, threatening to the patriarchal order, are forbidden. The only option for an ideal relationship is
to remain in a sexless, unwed partnership with one’s brother – the closest alternative is to marry a sibling-substitute – thus, Osbert and Mary essentially marry mirror images of one another.

Much like the novel’s double sibling wedding, depictions of families bound by consanguineal and conjugal ties and its various imprisonments, the plot points upon which the work progresses are claustrophobically parallel representations of passions, violence and sexual desire. Osbert’s desire for revenge on his father’s murderer leads to his imprisonment by the Baron that in turn forces Malcolm to choose between his warring passions for Mary and his desire to kill her brother. Radcliffe places Mary as the object of Malcolm’s masculine gaze: ‘An accidental view he once obtained of her, raised a passion in his soul, which the turbulence of his character would not suffer to be extinguished … [H]e resolved to obtain Mary, as the future ransom of her brother.’

While the situation is not unique – Gothic heroines are frequently subjected to sexual or romantic advances after being viewed without their knowledge – what is unusual here is the ransom of a brother as a bargaining chip to gain the heroine. Malcolm requires that Mary choose to sacrifice herself in marriage to her father’s murderer or allow Osbert to be executed, forcing her compliance without resorting to threats of physical violence or rape. Mary is never in immediate bodily danger; rather, it is an emotional threat that compels her to choose to trade her freedom and virginity for Osbert’s life. Malcolm’s wish to kill Osbert that cedes to his desire to wed Mary is ironically summarised as ‘revenge, at length, yielded to love’ (p. 84).

Malcolm’s proposed exchange of Osbert’s life for the body of the beautiful, virginal teenager exposes the asymmetrical gender and sexual politics of the exchange of women.

The wounded and imprisoned hero, a frequently addressed element of Radcliffe’s later works, is one of the crucial points in identifying the fusion of the brother with the lover because in this first novel it is Osbert, the brother – not the hero – who is held captive and wounded. During her brother’s imprisonment Mary’s lover Alleyn assists her and offers emotional support. In Radcliffe’s second novel, A Sicilian Romance, the roles shift so that the brother supports his sister while the hero is wounded and imprisoned. The plot lines of these texts and Radcliffe’s third novel, The Romance of the Forest (1791), in which the heroine is held hostage by an older man who wounds and imprisons her lover, are strikingly similar. However, by the third novel the figure of the brother has disappeared. Instead, in The Romance of the Forest and The Mysteries of
Udolpho (1794), Radcliffe introduces an obliging, noble friend (respectively, the young De la Motte and the Chevalier Du Pont) who loves the heroine but whom she views platonically. The substitution of this character for the brother appears unnecessary as both figures appear to fulfil the same position. However, the inclusion of the non-kin figure becomes imperative when it is understood as functioning not as a replacement of the brother, but of the lover as represented in the first novel. The brother is reimagined in Radcliffe’s later novels as the lover whom the heroine eventually marries. The merging of the lover and the brother that occurs in the second novel is realised fully in The Romance of the Forest, wherein the newly introduced figure of the platonic friend performs the actions of the first lover, Alleyn, while the role of the lover corresponds to that of the original brother, Osbert. The lover is replaced with the friend and the brother is replaced with the lover. In Radcliffe’s novels the brother, lover and friend are virtually interchangeable, being similar in looks, characteristics, education, class and desires; the difference between them lies not with the individual but with the heroine’s identification of them as kin or non-kin, marrying only him who is most like a brother.

The interchangeability of the brother and lover is underscored when Mary is confronted with the possibility of endangering Alleyn to save Osbert. In contemplating the two men Mary conflates the presumed peasant with her noble-born brother, assigning equally to Alleyn the personal qualities of nobility, bravery and virtue associated with the aristocratic Osbert. When Matilda requests that Alleyn lead the rescue attempt, Mary glowed with the hope of clasping once more to her bosom her long lost brother; but the suspicions of hope were soon chaced by the chilly touch of fear, for it was Alleyn who was to lead the enterprise … adorned with those brave and manly virtues which had so eminently distinguished his conduct: the insignificance of the peasant was lost in the nobility of the character. (pp. 73–4)

Alleyn, the long-lost son of Malcolm’s imprisoned sister-in-law, is of noble blood, but Mary is unaware of this. It is not proof of his bloodline but her thought processes that link Alleyn’s demonstrated virtues to a wider network of aristocratic qualities, producing his conflation with Osbert. Mary’s hopes for a physical reunion with her brother are followed by her fear for Alleyn and his elevation to the same social status as her brother. Alleyn’s virtue and class are merged with Osbert’s in Mary’s mind; contemplation of her brother has allowed the peasant to be raised to noble status.45
Though Radcliffe’s social criticisms are often overlooked by scholars who view her as a conservative bourgeois writer, her representation of aristocratic pride as a source of incestuous desires renders her Gothics socially subversive. Osbert’s rejection of Alleyn as Mary’s suitor is based on familial pride and social status, informed by his desire that his sister marry someone like himself. When Alleyn expresses his love for Mary, ‘the Earl listened to him with a mixture of concern and pity; but hereditary pride chilled the warm feelings of friendship and gratitude’ (p. 195). Osbert’s pride precludes him from contemplating his sister wed a peasant. The importance placed on heredity and the ensuing sense of male ownership over female bodies cause Osbert to revolt at the idea of unlike blood joining. Osbert’s honour extends from the past into the future: Mary’s womb and potential children fall equally under the domain of his pride. While in Mary’s mind Alleyn’s conduct elevates him to her class, Osbert’s need to maintain control over Mary’s (and his) noble bloodline creates an incestuous jealousy. This is the cornerstone of the novel’s criticism of a social system that creates incestuous possessiveness that renders integrity irrelevant in the face of blood. David Durrant claims that Radcliffe’s novels begin and end in ‘the pastoral Eden of safe family life’ and suggest that ‘the only solution to the problems of adult existence lies in returning to traditional, conservative values’. But this assessment overlooks the atmosphere of grief, anger and vengeance that fills the castles of Athlin and Dunbayne as well as the potential threat of incest caused by familial pride. Radcliffe’s novels do not depict the heroine’s return to the archaic model of the family that privileges noble hubris, but instead portray her abandonment of this flawed structure in favour of a new composition of kinship. Misreading these plot developments leads to critical misunderstandings of the representation of family, desire, incest and thus Radcliffe’s criticisms of society, class structures, the family and women’s roles therein.

These arguments are furthered by the double sibling wedding that fuses two sets of siblings into two couples and that relies partly on Osbert’s amalgamation of his sibling and his lover. The description of Laura, the ‘beautiful luxuriance of her auburn hair, which curling round her face, descended in tresses to her bosom’ (p. 125), is uncannily similar to that of Mary. Just as Mary flushes when she sees Alleyn, so too does Laura blush faintly when she perceives Osbert. Both women are ‘of the middle stature’ and ‘extremely delicate and elegantly formed’ and Laura, like Mary, has ‘the bloom of her youth … shaded by a soft and pensive
Osbert falls in love with the doppelganger of his sexually inaccessible sister. In fact, Mary and Laura are so similar that Osbert, feverish after his near death wounding, mistakes his sister for Laura: ‘Seizing one day the hand of Mary, who sat mournfully by his bed-side, and looking for some time pensively into her face, “weep not, my Laura,” said he, “Malcolm, nor all the powers on earth shall tear you from me”’ (pp. 244–5). Once Osbert mistakes one girl for the other their melding is complete and Osbert can marry Laura, who is now interchangeable with Mary. Osbert gives away his sister (and her reproductive capabilities) only once he has secured her replacement. Biologically, Osbert and Mary’s unconsummated incestuous desires subscribe both to the theory of GSA and to Westermarck’s theory of sexual aversion. Mary and Osbert would have a natural repugnance towards each other because they were raised together as children; however, the siblings are also inherently attracted to those who look, act, speak and think similarly to themselves. That Radcliffe highlights familial and amatory ties in this way underscores her recognition that consanguineal ties are enmeshed in a complicated nexus of kinship, desire and ownership that can only be uneasily resolved through a conflation of sibling and lover.

It is no coincidence that Radcliffe’s novel, in which overt sexual incestuous desire plays little part, concludes with the brother giving away the sister as a gift in order to unite two households and fortunes. The marriages fix together the sets of siblings in what Robert Miles describes as a double union ‘which not only restores order, but which binds together the formerly antagonistic houses with indissoluble ties of kinship and property.’ Radcliffe reveals that a society governed by patriarchal and aristocratic notions of kinship that in turns incites, idealises and ultimately forbids incestuous desire serves to strengthen the unjust system of inheritance and wealth. The ideal relationship exemplified by Mary and Osbert cannot be realised in the castles of Athlin and Dunbayne and so substitutive marriages that can only mimic this relationship while perpetuating an antiquated familial and social structure take place. Unlike her novels in which the heroine escapes the archaic castles that constrain female desire, here Radcliffe depicts the world before later heroines destroy it. The castle is fortified in an ironic strengthening of the patriarchal bonds through a trade of sisters that shows women to be paradoxically interchangeable yet necessary to exchange, forcing them into exogamous marriages that have a distinctly endogamous feel. The apparent strengthening of familial ties is precarious, threatened by the...
incestuous desires underlying the sibling bonds. Radcliffe heightens the representation of sibling relationships in *A Sicilian Romance*, intensifying the bond into an overtly sexual desire that develops and complicates her subversion of normative social restrictions, particularly those concerned with male control of female bodies and the sexual constraints imposed on women.

**The Integration of Brother and Hero: How the Sibling Became the Lover**

In *A Sicilian Romance* the heroine's father is one of two chief villains and poses a threat to her freedom, chastity, choice and a danger to her sister, brother and mother. Of Radcliffe’s deployment of violence and threats against the heroine, Durrant claims that ‘to Mrs. Radcliffe, the world outside the family is utterly perverse in its villainy’. Durrant’s reading, which posits Radcliffe’s adherence to a nuclear family structure, overlooks both the father’s potentially incestuous longings for his beautiful daughter, Julia, and his imprisonment of her, which is intended to force her acquiescence to an undesired marriage. It similarly disregards the brother’s more overt incestuous desires for his sister, the murderous step-mother and the father’s imprisonment and attempted murder of his first wife. Family is rendered as at once the seat of threats against female sexuality (the father confines his daughter’s unruly desires to her chamber) and the potential for its liberation (the brother frees his sister in defiance of the father’s law), acting as a core of potential villainy, coercion and enslavement.

The plot of this novel differs substantially from that of Radcliffe’s first novel; Miles describes it as demonstrating ‘a developed form that feminist critics have come to call the “female Gothic”, a narrative in which a daughter seeks for an absent mother’. Julia resides with her sister, Emilia, and Madame de Menon, their governess and companion, in the Castle of Mazzini. Their mother, Louisa Bernini, is believed to have died after bearing the two daughters and a son, Ferdinand, to the father, Ferdinand, the Marquis of Mazzini. Subsequently the Marquis marries Maria de Vellorno, a devious step-mother whose adulterous affairs with younger men lead her to hate Julia’s lover, Hippolitus de Vereza. I argue that Radcliffe’s Gothic novels move from using the figures of the brother and the hero as their principal male characters to those of the hero and friend, beginning with *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* and concluding with...
The Italian. This shift, demonstrating Radcliffe’s conflation of the hero and brother, constitutes a profound challenge to constructions of law and desire. The transition of brother to lover is perhaps nowhere more important to examine than in A Sicilian Romance, the final Radcliffe novel in which the heroine has a brother.

The relationship between Ferdinand and his sisters is complicated by the fact that the two daughters have been raised in seclusion by Madame de Menon. They have not seen their brother for years and cannot identify him by sight. When, after the lengthy absence, the Marquis, his second wife and Ferdinand return to the Castle of Mazzini to refurbish it and host a series of parties there, confusion between the identity of Ferdinand and that of the novel’s hero, Hippolitus, occurs: ‘Julia pointed out to her sister, the graceful figure of a young man who followed the marchioness, and she expressed her wishes that he might be her brother.’54 That Julia desires a handsome young man to be her brother – though this man is in fact Hippolitus – indicates an immediate blurring of the boundary between sibling and lover.55 Already Julia conflates the instant erotic desire she experiences on seeing Hippolitus with her familial love for her brother: she believes that the physical attraction she feels for the stranger proves a pre-existing kinship. This explains her later disappointment and confusion when she discovers Hippolitus is not in fact her brother, or, indeed, a relative: ‘the eager eyes of Julia sought in vain to discover her brother, of whose features she had no recollection in those of any of the persons then present. At length her father presented him, and she perceived with a sigh of regret, that he was not the youth she had observed from the window’ (I, pp. 35–6). Julia’s regret that the unknown man she desires is not her brother is explicit and locates her understanding of consanguineal kinship bonds as compatible with – perhaps even productive of – physical attraction. Julia’s sense of the mutual nature of sibling love and attraction establishes from the narrative’s outset that this unification of desires is a natural consequence of the brother–sister bond.

Julia’s hope that her brother is the object of her attraction is united to her desire that Ferdinand will alleviate the control of her father and stepmother. Francisco Vaz da Silva discusses the role of the hero as saviour and supplanter of the father, describing ‘the universal dragon-slayer theme in which “to kill the monster means to incorporate it into oneself, to take its place. The hero becomes the new monster, clothed in the skin of the old.”56 These folkloric allusions, which da Silva locates as the basis of Freud’s Oedipus complex, explain the son’s role as slaying the father
and assuming his position as ruler of the kingdom and husband of the mother. I argue that when the traditional Oedipal theme is complicated by the father's incestuous pursuit of the daughter the son's sexual role emerges in relation to the sister, rather than to the mother. In either case, the defeat of the father results not in the liberation of the daughter but in the creation of a new monster in his place. The folkloric tradition of this pattern, in which the son usurps the father, is thus an important one to regard in light of Radcliffe's plot developments throughout her career. As Radcliffe rewrites the myth, the son does not slay and take over the father's role. The father is always killed by another person: an evil, jealous, passionate man or woman who, far from usurping the role of the father and taking over the kingdom, is killed or dies themselves. In this reworking of the myth, the brother does not inherit the throne of patriarchy but is conflated with the hero and becomes the ideal other half of the heroine. The distinction between brother and hero is erased just as the distinction between brother and sister is negated, paradoxically, through the incestuous union. As da Silva argues, 'the sexual drive minimizes ontological division after the model of mingling with one's own flesh and blood. And such mingling, of course, is what incest is about.' This definition of incest suggests that the integration of the brother with the hero is a means for Radcliffe to allow her heroine a return to the pre-divided state, before marriage and before the incest taboo itself.

The brother, Ferdinand, and the lover, Hippolitus, love and interact with Julia in equal measure. Ferdinand demonstrates the shift from the previous figure of ideal mate to one who has clear sexual desires for his sisters (particularly Julia) that cause his conflation with the hero and thus his subsequent elimination from the texts in the role of the brother. Even before Ferdinand is confused by Julia with her eventual lover, he is the figure of a hero or saviour to both his sisters: 'The purposed visit of their brother, whom they had not seen for several years gave them great pleasure … and [they] hoped to find in his company, a consolation for the uneasiness which the presence of the Marchioness would excite' (I, p. 32). A similar disordering of roles is engendered when Ferdinand replaces himself with Hippolitus: 'the confusion of Julia may be easily imagined, when Ferdinand, selecting a beautiful duet, desired Vereza would accompany his sister' (I, p. 50). Ferdinand replaces himself in his sister's arms with Hippolitus, who acts as Ferdinand's physical surrogate regarding Julia throughout the novel. When the Marquis discovers Julia and Hippolitus's love that will hinder his plan for her to marry the
obsessive and wealthy Duke du Louvo, Hippolitus and Ferdinand decide to rescue her. Her brother says: “I love you too well tamely to suffer you to be sacrificed to ambition, and to a passion still more hateful” (I, pp. 140–1). Julia is distressed because, although she wishes to flee with Hippolitus, she is fearful of damaging her reputation. Ferdinand encourages her thus: “Do not suffer the prejudices of education to render you miserable. Believe that choice which involves the happiness or misery of your whole life, ought to be decided only by yourself” (I, p. 143). Ferdinand regards Julia as more capable than their father of making decisions regarding her future happiness. He embodies the qualities of the ideal mate whose desire is to see the woman he loves happy and who wishes that she make her own decisions on solely those grounds. Much as with Osbert and Mary we can see here the potential in the sibling relationship for happiness.

After Julia agrees to elope with Hippolitus he says he may now call her 'my love' but it is interestingly Ferdinand who next uses this appellation when he and Hippolitus return to her room the night of the planned escape. “Come, my love,” said he, “the keys are ours, and we have not a moment to lose” (I, p. 152). Ferdinand and Hippolitus have, like Laura and Julia and Alleyn and Osbert, become interchangeable at this point; the sister can safely marry the hero and thus the brother. However, the family offers no security here; rather it is precisely from family and home that Julia must flee. Julia, ‘almost fainting’, gives her hand to both Hippolitus and Ferdinand, an indication that she sees them both as the hero. When the trio hear noises behind them, Julia ‘hung upon Ferdinand’ while Hippolitus ‘vainly endeavoured to soothe her’ (I, p. 154). Julia places herself physically in the hands of both men. It is soon thereafter that Hippolitus is wounded and disappears from the text while Ferdinand remains to assist and comfort Julia, completing the reversal of roles from Radcliffe’s first novel, in which the brother is wounded and held hostage while the lover offers support to the heroine.

The scenes in which sexual desire and tension between Julia and Ferdinand are most clearly demonstrated are those in which Ferdinand makes repeated midnight visits to his sister’s room in order to discover the origin of the mysterious noises therein. Radcliffe uses deliberately sexual pacing and language to underscore the incestuous desires between the protagonists. Importantly, these desires do not cause terror in the heroine; rather, Ferdinand’s presence reassures Julia, who, with her sister Emilia, begs his assistance in their chamber. Ferdinand feels an intense
urge to comply, accounted for by his desire to resolve the mystery of the southern side of the castle: ‘his imagination … inspired him with an irresistible desire to penetrate the secrets of this desolate part of the fabrick. He very readily consented to watch with his sisters in Julia’s apartment; but as his chamber was in a remote part of the castle, there would be some difficulty in passing unobserved to hers’ (I, pp. 84–5). Ferdinand’s urgency to ‘penetrate’ the secrets of his sisters’ room is rooted in sexual desire and mirrored by his psychological need to ascertain the source of the unknown sounds. Miles describes the narrative style in instances such as these as creating ‘tension between Radcliffe’s surface narrative, which appears to go in a conservative direction, and her subtext, which moves in quite other ways, [and] is the source of Radcliffe’s aesthetic dynamism’.61 The dangers in passing to Julia’s room unobserved highlight the necessity to hide the midnight visit from observation, hinting at its sexual nature. The description resembles that of a secret assignation more than a brother visiting innocently his sisters’ chamber. Perry describes incest as ‘the meaning of the gothic novel’ that represents through its repeated depictions of ‘a girl singled out, against her will, in her own domestic space, for the sexual attentions of a father, an uncle, or a brother’ the dangers of male tyranny.62 In these bedroom scenes, although Julia is in her own private domestic space and her brother’s attentions are implicitly sexual in nature, she invites her brother into her room, an active participant in the incestuous desires. Rather than the brother being complicit with male tyranny through an undesired sexual pursuit, his position in the family is aligned with the sister’s as equally fearful of paternal threats and power, thus necessitating the secrecy of his visits.

Alan Richardson claims that ‘in eighteenth-century novels … the incestuous love (actual and apparent) is inspired before the revelation of any kinship bond. The same holds true for the British gothics that feature incestuous couplings for their shock value and to further intensify an atmosphere of moral squalor.’63 However, in this novel the question of whether incestuous love is inspired before or after the revelation of kinship is vexed. The siblings’ reunion functions in some ways as a revelation of kinship bonds because, although Julia knows Ferdinand is her brother, they have been parted for so long that she no longer recognises him. That the incestuous desires are present before the sibling reunion and intensify thereafter serve the opposite function of Richardson’s explanation of such desires inspired before kinship revelations. Ferdinand’s desires and the encouragement they receive from Julia create an atmosphere of
heightened arousal rather than one of shock or immorality; they add a pleasing tension to the narrative. As Julia waits for her brother she ‘began to fear that Ferdinand had been discovered, when a knocking was heard at the door of the outer chamber. Her heart beat with apprehensions, which reason could not justify’ (I, p. 85). Hearing nothing for several consecutive nights, Ferdinand grows frustrated with waiting; he wants to ‘penetrate’ the mystery in his sisters’ room without further delay. He ‘determined, if possible, to gain admittance to those recesses of the castle which had for so many years been hidden from human eye’ (I, p. 86). While one result of this search ‘gives us … the “female Gothic”, a narrative in which a daughter seeks for an absent mother’ the more immediate and tangible effect is that of the sibling interaction.64

The description of the castle’s passages is highly reminiscent of Ferdinand’s sisters, hidden from the world for years and suddenly coming to life. Julia’s sexual development that occurs in response to Ferdinand’s and Hippolitus’s arrival mirrors the castle’s internal stirrings. The language here is explicit. The castle represents Julia’s genitalia: a hidden, unseen area that is awakening and to which entry is sought by the brother. When penetration of the castle wall seems imminent, Ferdinand ‘removed the tapestry, and behind it appeared, to his inexpressible satisfaction, a small door. With a hand trembling through eagerness, he undrew the bolts, and was rushing forward, when he perceived that a lock with-held his passage … he was compelled to submit to disappointment at the very moment he congratulated himself on success, for he had with him no means of forcing the door’ (I, pp. 88–9). Ferdinand cannot access the castle’s secret areas because his father has the necessary keys; the Marquis bars entrance to the impenetrable castle recesses just as he bars entrance to Julia’s body by Hippolitus, holding her chastity captive under lock and key.65 But if Hippolitus is the hero, why is it Ferdinand who seeks entry? The brother, I argue, functions as the hero in his need to defeat the imprisoning paternal power to gain access to the unexplored areas of the castle and, metaphorically, his sister’s sexuality. The conclusion to this usurpation of the heroic role by the brother is for Julia to marry Hippolitus, the non-blood-related brother-substitute and for Ferdinand to join the army. Ferdinand never finds a non-kin substitute for Julia as Osbert does for Mary and having used Hippolitus as his surrogate he is unable to regain Julia; consequently, he remains unmarried. In A Sicilian Romance, Radcliffe has moved from her first novel’s plot towards the more patriarchal-order destructive/escapist plots of her later
novels, in which the brother, in his new role as the hero, becomes part of the heroine's created world. This completely reimagined and female-constructed world is, however, difficult to understand without examining how Radcliffe leads us there via her first two novels through the use of transgressive and idealised incestuous desires.66

In Radcliffe's novels a conflation of the brother and the hero creates the somewhat uneasy sense that the ideal spouse with whom the heroine escapes the patriarchal castle is the sibling. The uneasiness derives, in part, from the way that incest is traditionally viewed in scholarship on the Gothic: as oppositional to Romantic portrayals of incest and as representative of the threats of male power. Richardson describes Romantic incest as fundamentally different from Gothic incest because it is portrayed 'not as a perversion or accidental inversion of the normal sibling relation, but as an extension and intensification of it.'67 However, Ferdinand and Julia’s relationship is natural and ideal, corresponding more closely to Richardson’s description of Romantic, rather than Gothic, portrayals of incest. Scholarly arguments that place Romantic sibling desires and Gothic representations thereof at opposite ends of a spectrum are prevalent, yet incest in the Gothic is so varied that an overarching generic consolidation of its depiction becomes an impossible task. In tracing the evolutions in representations of brother–sister incestuous desires, the sibling bond emerges in Radcliffe’s novels as an idealised, egalitarian bond that necessitates male and female cooperation to escape paternal power.

SIBLINGS AND LOVERS: DEFYING THE ‘LAWS OF DELICACY’

Eleanor Sleath is one of the more obscure Gothic writers, her works being almost lost until Michael Sadleir, book collector and novelist, discovered a copy of Sleath’s 1798 work *The Orphan of the Rhine* during the mid-1920s. Sadleir, who had been searching for the books listed in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1817), proved the existence of the novel previously presumed a creation of Austen’s imagination.68 Some forty years later, Gothic scholar Devendra P. Varma, who acknowledged the difficulties in tracing the author definitively, located Mary Eleanor Sleath (born 1763) or her brother’s wife, Eleanor Martin Sleath, both of Leire, as the most likely candidates for the text’s authorship.69 Yet in spite of the claims of romance novelist Carolyn Jewel to have ‘rediscovered’ Eleanor Sleath, factual material to support any one attribution remains to
be found. Although interest was kindled by the find of Sleath’s novel in the 1920s, little criticism since has focused on Sleath’s works in their own right. Instead, most focuses, misleadingly, either on The Orphan of the Rhine’s inclusion within Austen’s Northanger Abbey list or on the novel’s relationship to the works of Radcliffe. When Sleath has been compared to Radcliffe it has been negatively; one contemporary reviewer, after describing Radcliffe’s ‘creative genius’, writes ‘if we have sinned in suffering ourselves to be seduced by the blandishments of elegant fiction, we endure a penance adequately severe in the review of such vapid and servile imitations as The Orphan of the Rhine’. The language of seduction used in the review corresponds to the eighteenth-century view of women novelists as morally jeopardised and Gothic novels as particularly sexually dangerous, suggesting that Sleath is a temptress whose wares are so second rate that their consumption is a punishment. In spite of such criticism, the novel deserves a place within the genealogy of the Gothic on its own merits: that is, as a novel of complex, layered incestuous relationships that are both unique in the reactions they cause in those surrounding the sibling pair and radical in their conclusion.

The Orphan of the Rhine tells the story of the beautiful Julie de Rubine, who, having been orphaned, is sent to live with her aunt, who attempts to force her into an undesired marriage. Julie marries the Marchese de Montferrat to escape the forced marriage and bears a son, Enrico, before the Marchese sends them away, telling her that their marriage was a sham and her infant is illegitimate. Four years later the Marchese gives Julie a baby girl to raise and moves them to the Castle of Elfinbach. Julie presumes the infant is the illegitimate offspring of the Marchese and his last known mistress, the Signora di Capigna. The four-year-old Enrico and infant Laurette are raised as siblings and although no information is ever given to the girl about her father, she knows the Marchese is responsible for her protection. The exact blood ties between the children are unknown to Julie, Enrico or Laurette, but Julie believes them to be half-brother and -sister. Enrico and Laurette know only that they have been raised together by Enrico’s mother, who has cared for Laurette, since infancy, as a mother.

As we have seen, the Westermarck effect that posits children reared together will likely not be capable of sexual attraction towards each other – ‘generally speaking there is a remarkable absence of erotic feelings between persons living very closely together from childhood’ – indicates the development of any sexual attraction between Enrico and Laurette
to be unlikely. Westermarck’s claim – ‘their aversion to sexual relations with one another displays itself in custom and law as a prohibition of intercourse between near kin’ – suggests that the natural aversion to sexual relations felt by those who live together from a young age has been absorbed into the collective cultural consciousness and is reproduced in the legal bans on incest. The theory unites biological understandings of the incest taboo that argue the aversion is a natural repugnance to protect against inbreeding with a sociological position that focuses on co-rearing as creating aversion. It thus reveals how societies implicitly and explicitly acknowledge understandings of the taboo as both natural and socially constructed and enforced. Although he does not use the term, Westermarck identifies this implicit social ban on incest as ‘custom’. It is an extension of what Foucault describes as a type of discipline within power relations that functions to prohibit a behaviour that threatens the dominant social ideology. The legal ban is the explicit prohibition – or punishment, in Foucauldian terms – of such behaviour. Foucault’s models of power and their relation to incest have been examined by Vikki Bell, who points out that these models, particularly juridico-discursive power ‘in the capacity to command and to receive obedience’ and disciplinary powers ‘that “imprison” the one who is being abused’, inform feminist analyses of incest. My interest in these analyses, Foucault’s understanding of knowledge and power and Bell’s account of their overlap, lies in how their intersections permeate representations of Gothic incest. That this is so reveals understandings of incest avoidance as having been historically located in both legal bans on the practice as well as prohibitions that are enforced by the dominant sexual and familial ideologies. These cultural and legal prohibitions on incest are challenged in Gothic works such as Sleath’s, as they are in Radcliffe’s, and demonstrate a resistance to the dominant ideology of heteronormativity.

David Livingstone Smith, whose research concerns the biological roots of human nature, breaks Westermarck’s claim into three distinct hypotheses, one of which corresponds closely to the situation of Enrico and Laurette: ‘protracted childhood coresidence inhibits sexual desire and promotes sexual aversion’. Smith uses Arthur P. Wolf’s studies of Taiwanese simpua marriage (arranged marriages in which an infant girl is adopted by the family of the boy she is to marry and is raised with him by his parents) to conclude that ‘these negative effects [infidelity, divorce and infertility caused by sexual aversion] only occur if the simpua bride is adopted before her third birthday, which led [Wolf] to
believe that the first three years of life are a sensitive period for imprinting on siblings.81 Although Enrico is four when Laurette joins the family, Laurette herself is only an infant, making Sleath’s treatment of Laurette as attracted equally and reciprocally to Enrico problematic in terms of the Westermarck effect. As the novel progresses Sleath shows the romantic love develop between Enrico and Laurette mutually, but, as is also the case in Eliza Parsons’s The Castle of Wolfenbach (1793), the sexual attraction manifests after an absence occurs during which the female goes through puberty.82 What is particularly interesting about the relationship between Laurette and Enrico (and Radcliffe’s model of sibling incest) is how both Radcliffe and Sleath prefigure Westermarck’s position that kin aversion manifests itself as custom and law and Foucault’s description of power and discipline. Radcliffe, as we have seen, foreshadows such insights through the evolution of her brother figure into the hero; Sleath does so through her depiction of natural sibling desires that defy laws and customs. In their novels, sibling love and co-rearing does not create a natural aversion that is confirmed by the cultural and legal prohibitions; rather sibling love, erotic love and romantic love are mutually informing expressions of emotion that are not naturally exclusive. In this regard, Sleath’s use of Enrico as brother and lover epitomises the model of sibling love as ideal romantic love that Radcliffe has set her readers up to expect, frequently framing the relationship between Enrico in Laurette in terms of legal language. The use of this language shows Sleath’s treatment of incest and its legal prohibition, rather than stemming from a natural sexual aversion, as denouncing laws that arbitrarily limit human behaviour. Far from being a servile imitator of Radcliffe, Sleath, in her depictions of constraining laws, both works within Radcliffe’s established pattern of heroines fighting against unfair legal systems regarding female inheritance and property and furthers the understanding of laws as unfairly limiting sexual desires.

In The Orphan of the Rhine the sexual desire between the siblings is established quickly and shown to be reciprocal. After Enrico returns from his first two years in the army he is described from Laurette’s perspective as ‘tall and finely proportioned; his eyes were full of fire, yet occasionally tender; and his countenance, which was frank, open, and manly, being animated with the most lively expression, betrayed every movement of his soul’ (p. 123). Enrico describes Laurette, now fourteen, as having: ‘just attained the age when the playful simplicity of childhood is exchanged for the more fascinating charms of the lovely girl … [H]er features, which
were soft, pensive, and interesting; and though not exactly answering to the description of a perfect beauty, possessed something beauty alone could not have bestowed’ (p. 123). These descriptions are followed by Julie’s – now known by her pseudonym, Madame Chamont – uneasy realisation that romantic emotions are developing between Enrico and Laurette:

Madame Chamont was not insensible to these emotions, nor unsuspicious of the cause; she observed, with tender anxiety, the looks of her son when the subject of his departure was touched upon, and saw the colour fade from the cheek of Laurette as the necessity of it was mentioned, with evident concern. The suspicion that she was the daughter of the Marchese de Montferrat, and consequently nearly allied to Enrico, was a sufficient cause for distress; and as every circumstance she had collected seemed to confirm the justice of the supposition, the evidence, upon the whole, nearly amounted to conviction. (p. 125)

Madame Chamont is nearly certain that Laurette is the daughter of the Marchese and thus Enrico’s half-sister, but her feelings of distress are couched in a fascinating use of legal terms. Sleath uses words such as ‘suspicion’, ‘collected’, ‘confirm’, ‘justice’, ‘evidence’ and ‘conviction’ to describe Madame Chamont’s reaction to witnessing her son and Laurette falling in love. Madame Chamont’s designation of what she believes is a half-brother/sister blood tie as ‘nearly allied’ is a pointed refusal to label the alliance incestuous.

That Madame Chamont characterises the relationship through legal language rather than in the terminology of morality or nature, coupled with her refusal to cast the siblings’ bond as incestuous, indicates that her objections to it are based in its legal prohibition and, specifically, in the possibility of evidence being used to convict the lovers of a crime. If, as she suspects, Signora di Capigna and the Marchese are the parents of Laurette, making Enrico and Laurette half-siblings, her knowledge would render her a party to the incestuous relationship. Sleath’s characters show a natural propensity towards incest that undercuts Westermarck’s claims that aversion is caused by co-rearing. It presents sibling love as a normal development yet threatened by the law that is assumed to be a reproduction of the natural – or nurtured – aversion to incest. Sleath’s siblings, raised in isolation beyond the implicit prohibition of incest that Westermarck calls ‘custom’, are similarly unaffected by the explicit ‘law’ of which their mother, familiar with social prohibitions on desire, is very
Incestuous sibling desire adheres to the Radcliffean model of brother as hero and also depicts incest as the expected consequence of an upbringing outside of the prohibitive customs and laws of a society that uses these prohibitions to maintain its hegemony.

The legal focus on incest is sustained when Madame Chamont discovers that Signora di Capigna, the Marchese’s mistress who she believes is Laurette’s mother, never had a child. This pleases her, as she concludes:

if Laurette was not the daughter of this unfortunate … it appeared highly probable that she was the orphan child of some deceased friend of the Marchese’s, whom pity had induced him to patronize; and possibly, should time and reflection fix the attachment between her and Enrico upon a still firmer basis, no adverse circumstances might prevent their union. (p. 136)

Madame Chamont moves with ease from having believed for fourteen years that Enrico and Laurette are half-brother and -sister to being convinced that they are of no relation. Knowing the character of the Marchese, having once ascertained Signora di Capigna is not the mother of Laurette, surely the assumption would be that Laurette is the fruit of another illicit union of the Marchese’s and thus still Enrico’s half-sister. The possibility that the Marchese was induced by pity to patronise an orphan is an unlikely conclusion for the scorned mother of his neglected son to draw. However, not only does Madame Chamont not even touch upon the possibility that Laurette is the Marchese’s daughter, but she also refers to the half-brother–sister tie as no more than an ‘adverse circumstance’ that might have prevented her children’s union. Madame Chamont was, after all, so little bothered by the prospect of Enrico and Laurette forming a lasting attachment that she never even hinted to Enrico that he might be indulging in an incestuous love. She does not see incest as horrifying or repulsive, but rather as having the potential to be proved illegal. Once the possibility of proof of a blood tie through Signora di Capigna is removed, instead of desiring firm knowledge of Laurette’s birth parents, she refuses to entertain any further possibilities of kinship that would place Laurette in the ‘adverse’ sister relationship and approves of their union. Incest is not so horrifying to Madame Chamont as the possibility of her children’s love being thwarted, further evidence that her previous objections are based on legal rather than moral grounds. Madame Chamont merely requires proof that the evidence she had been aware of was false, any further proof is unnecessary; the letter of the law has been fulfilled. She is concerned with eluding potential punishment, not
in adhering to implicit customs framed as morality dictated by the social structures.

As Enrico’s feelings for Laurette develop he stresses the unfamiliar quality of other girls: ‘whose manners contrasted with hers were coarse or unnatural; her superiority was too evident not to attract his admiration, and that admiration was of too exalted and refined a nature not to terminate in a softer passion’ (p. 125). Laurette is the standard by which Enrico measures other women who fail to meet his expectations, in part, because of their ‘unnatural’ manners. While ‘unnatural’ may mean ‘affected’ it seems more likely that the unnatural quality Enrico attributes to other women is meant literally. Their manners seem such to him because they are different from Laurette’s, which are the ones to which he has been accustomed his whole life. They are not familiar because they are not familial. This sense deepens when we consider manners as ‘the morals, the general way of life’; Enrico’s identification of the customs of others as unnatural constitutes a significant commentary on the morality, customs and habits of society in contrast to his attraction to Laurette, which is cast as a normal emotional development unaffected by the arbitrary customs of the wider society.\(^8^4\) Sleath thus suggests that incestuous feelings are inherent. Positioning Laurette as the natural choice for Enrico, given her questionable and potentially illegitimate origins, further naturalises, or legitimates, both her origins and incestuous desires.

Laurette’s feelings for Enrico are similarly bound up in the language of custom and law that at once distinguishes between the two restrictions on incestuous behaviour while blurring the boundaries between them. Sleath uses the term ‘manners’ to describe these customs or social norms and casts them as unnatural and so regulated that, in spite of being unenforced by legal punishment, they nonetheless become law. These social norms, or manners, are imposed to a greater extent on women, who must regulate not only incestuous behaviour, but also the very appearance of sexual desire of any kind: ‘Laurette, whose feelings were not less awakened or acute, was condemned by the laws of delicacy, which are sometimes severe and arbitrary, to conceal them under an appearance of tranquility’ (p. 127). Gayle Backus claims that ‘with the nuclearization of the family, the incest taboo … came to depend on the contingent goodwill, integrity, value and self-discipline of individual fathers and brothers.’\(^8^5\) Yet Sleath’s depiction of Laurette’s love constitutes a formulation of female incestuous desire of which understandings of incest as sought by the male omit the possibility. Although bound by social rules to hide her
feelings, Laurette experiences the same intensity of desire as her brother. Sleath's designation of the customs that restrict Laurette's expression of natural feelings as 'severe and arbitrary' affirms that 'the laws of delicacy' are social standards that uphold norms of gender and sexuality through normative behaviour expectations until they are as constractive as a punishable law. Foucault's understanding of observation as a discipline that enforces behaviour is relevant here, as is Judith Butler's discussion of gender as performance. Laurette is forced to perform appropriate feminine tranquility because custom forbids her expression of desire. Laurette is 'condemned' or found guilty for her desires and her self-imposed punishment is silence. However, Laurette eventually transgresses these modes of discipline and punishment when she can avoid the social repercussions to which her desire exposes her. Sleath departs from representations of female sexuality such as Beatrice de las Cisternas's masculine and unnatural passions in *The Monk*, depicting Laurette's desires as natural, though restricted by customs and laws that are indeed severe and arbitrary.

Enrico and Laurette's growing desires shed light on and complicate Westermarck's theories regarding non-blood kin and Greenberg's alternative studies of genetics and attraction. As Smith argues GSA both supports and detracts from the cogency of [Westermarck's hypothesis]. On the one hand, it demonstrates a clear relationship between early co-residence and incest avoidance. Reunited relatives do not have an opportunity to develop sexual aversions that would have protected them from incestuous passion. On the other hand, it suggests that inhibitions against incest must operate against an especially potent prior attraction: sexual feelings experienced by reunited relatives are often especially intense, suggesting that sexual aversions between co-reared non-kin and co-reared kin are not entirely comparable.

Smith's account suggests Enrico and Laurette should not develop incestuous feelings because their early co-residence would cause sexual aversion but this is clearly not the case and GSA is somewhat at a loss to explain how Enrico and Laurette are capable of sexual attraction towards one another. The eventual revelation of their lack of a blood tie may contain the answer. Greenberg argues that co-reared kin develop a strong sexual aversion to one another in response to a genetic predisposition towards a strong attraction, while co-reared non-kin do not have the same initial attraction and do not develop a corresponding and intense aversion. Thus, Enrico and Laurette, who do not share
a genetic attraction, would not become averse to one another. Smith’s ’shared mother hypothesis’ seems relevant here. It bases its theory on incest avoidance between co-reared children on a slightly different footing; the mother figure with which a given child identifies becomes that child’s mother and the child consequently responds to the mother figure’s kin as equally his/her own relatives. According to this model, Laurette would be averse to Enrico because she has always identified Madame Chamont as her mother and, consequently, Enrico as her sibling. Alternatively, however, the hypothesis that ’the lack of a single, consistent, unambiguously maternal figure might create a situation in which most of the adults … are treated as potential kin’ might suggest that even if Laurette did not identify Madame Chamont as her mother she would likely be sexually averse to Enrico based on her uncertainty of their kinship. The potential for kinship would create sexual aversion towards any possible mates not clearly distinguished as non-kin. This aversion theory has ramifications for all Gothic novels in which a heroine’s birth parents are unknown and for understanding her reactions towards the advances of older men. In terms of anthropological explanations of incest avoidance, Westermarck’s hypothesis does not allow for the attraction between Laurette and Enrico, Smith’s almost forbids it, but Greenberg’s allows for the possibility.

Throughout the remainder of the novel, having made clear their mutual love, Enrico and Laurette identify themselves simultaneously as siblings and lovers. After finding Laurette, who is being sexually pursued by the Marchese at his estate, Enrico says: ‘I resolved to hasten to the castle; by these means to soften, if I could not eradicate my grief, and to convince myself whether you, my Laurette – my more than sister, was in safety’ (p. 190). By having Enrico characterise Laurette as ’my more than sister’, Sleath refuses to let the reader forget the original, and still potentially present, tie between the pair. Enrico views Laurette as his sister, but now something more as well. The sibling tie has not evaporated but has been enhanced by romantic love. This is akin to the definition of Romantic sibling incest discussed earlier. When Laurette expresses her concerns regarding Enrico’s safety, ‘the blush that suffused her cheeks, and the tremulous accent in which the words were delivered … breathed more than sisterly affection’ (p. 184). Far from being ’too safe a writer to truly explore issues of sexuality’, Sleath forces a re-examination of the boundaries of sexuality and family. Romantic love and sexual attraction are an intensification of, not a departure from, sibling love.
This is confirmed when Laurette asks Enrico why he gazes earnestly upon a portrait of the Madonna; his response is: “because it resembles … my too charming sister; she whose image is ever present to my mind, and who is dearer to me than my existence” (pp. 198–9). Enrico uses the term sister, rather than lover, to define his primary relationship with Laurette. Doing so in the context of viewing a painting of the Madonna compares Laurette to the virgin mother; a move that seemingly erases her sexuality yet simultaneously recalls The Monk, in which Ambrosio’s sexual attraction to Rosario/Matilda is heightened by her resemblance to a painting of the Virgin Mary. Sleath unites increased sexual desire with intense emotional attachment and frames both by a context of forbidden or effaced sexuality that mirrors incestuous desire; sexuality is found in a traditionally taboo place. After they have confirmed their mutual desire, Enrico asks Laurette in a letter: ‘but why, Laurette, will you forget that I am your brother? Why would you deprive me of the sacred power of protecting you, the primary wish of my soul; of defending you from future injuries, or of redressing them if committed?’ (p. 236). Enrico does not want Laurette to forget he is her brother, that his primary wish is to protect her even if this is equally his wish as her lover. He has, after all, been raised with her as his sister regardless of their actual blood tie; there will be no sudden realisation that they are not related for either Enrico or Laurette. The relationship between them does not require any such revelation because it was never an obstacle to them, either because they never believed themselves to be blood kin or because it was irrelevant to their feelings. For Enrico and Laurette, the terms ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ will be forever, inextricably, linked to that of ‘lover’.

In seeming contrast to her ability to overlook brotherly bonds that have been in place since birth, Laurette assures the Marchese that she cannot disregard the idea of a paternal bond and love him romantically: “I was taught from the earliest period of my existence, to consider you as my only surviving friend; and, when personally unknown to you, to honour and revere you as a parent; – forgive me when I say no other sentiment can be excited” (p. 244). Smith’s shared mother hypothesis, which states that ‘the mother’s behavioural markers of one’s probable father and siblings activate different intensities of sexual aversion’, functions here in relation to the parent. Laurette is averse to a union with the Marchese due to Madame Chamont having raised her to view the Marchese in a paternal role. But Laurette’s argument only further complicates her romantic love for Enrico, which easily overcomes the same
boundaries she cites as prohibiting her from viewing the Marchese as more than family. It also recalls Manfred’s attempt to claim incest as grounds for divorce in Walpole’s Otranto in order to pursue an equally incestuous relationship with his contracted daughter-in-law – Laurette names the parental bond an insurmountable obstacle to a union with the Marchese so she can pursue her own desires for Enrico. Indeed, the only familial feeling the Marchese holds for Laurette is via his son, for whom he still maintains some semblance of fatherly feeling. This paternal feeling spares Enrico when the Marchese discovers him to be his rival for Laurette but also heightens his rage: ‘had his rival been any other than his own son, he would probably have meditated some dreadful revenge; but the ties of blood … prevented him from exercising any actual cruelty, though it tended not to mitigate his resentment, but rather added warmth to the violence of his unrestrained passions’ (p. 237). As discussed in Chapter 1, the paternal figure fears not only the removal of his object of sexual desire and opportunity to use the female as an object of exogamic exchange, but also the dissolution of his power via a younger generation’s endogamic choices.95

Gillian Beer says of Sleath’s work that ‘the heroine’s female condition of passivity, isolation, and privation is strongly identified with silence both within and without doors … In women’s Gothic the woman author writes while the heroine is mute’ in order to rebel against the muting of women.96 Beer correctly locates the author as one who challenges the status of women and Sleath does so in part through Laurette, who, although not silent or passive, is ‘condemned’ to ‘conceal’ her feelings by the society she inhabits. This concealment allows for a position of absolute refusal of male propositions while maintaining desire for her sibling. Laurette refuses to consent to the Marchese’s sexual desires and marriage proposals and overhears his murderous plans. She is subsequently imprisoned by the Marchese and, when Enrico finds her, he realises from viewing ‘her thin emaciated form’ (p. 287) that she has been starved to the point of near death.97 Laurette’s noncompliance with patriarchal demands of marriage for male sexual gratification and her very existence (as heiress to the fortunes the Marchese has illegally claimed and her discovery thereof) cause the near erasure of her body. Her ability to speak – to refuse, to bear witness against the Marchese – is a threat to the dominant paternal figure. The female body that voices resistance or defiance, particularly in favour of the brother, becomes the site of punishment by the patriarch who demands compliance to the heteronormative exogamic culture.
The complications of the novel’s incestuous world culminate with Enrico inheriting the Marchese’s fortune in a plot twist that reveals the marriage between the Marchese and Madame Chamont to be legitimate. But the hero’s legitimacy has consequences: Enrico discovers Laurette is also legitimate and was orphaned when the Marchese killed her father to steal her inheritance; the money that Enrico inherits is rightfully Laurette’s. Enrico conceals from Laurette the murder of her father by his and the novel ends with their wedding. Such a conclusion effectively negates the potential implications of Enrico’s inheritance having rightfully belonged to Laurette and brings to the reader’s attention the laws that govern female property; had Laurette been the recipient of the Marchese’s wealth rather than Enrico he would still have gained control of the fortune with their marriage.

Sleath expresses through sibling kinship in *The Orphan of the Rhine* a defiance of unnatural social customs and laws, an organic development of romantic love stemming from sibling love and a reliance on individual choice in spouse selection. Westermarck’s, Smith’s and Greenberg’s hypotheses on incest avoidance, genetic sexual attraction and shared mothering contribute to understandings of the complicated nature of kinship, siblings, attraction and aversion and the deployment of the incest taboo in Sleath’s novel. Foucault’s, Bell’s and Butler’s insights into the power relations underlying discipline and punishment and the performative quality of gender offer further important models through which to theorise incestuous behaviour in the text. Sleath’s treatment of siblings blurs the lines between brother and lover, demonstrating that siblings and spouses are far from antithetical. This understanding of incestuous love as a heightened culmination of brother–sister affection that ends happily and prosperously locates Sleath as a radical writer of the Gothic who presents patriarchal control, the incest taboo and social dictates of female behaviour as at once severe and arbitrary.

**THE ROMANTIC GOTHIC: NARCISSISM AND INCEST**

Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* is the fullest expression of the brother–sister incestuous bond, distinct from other Gothic novels in its representation of sibling desire as an apex of, paradoxically, equality and domination. The almost fifty-year gap between Brontë’s text and the Gothic novels analysed in this chapter is bridged by the tradition of Romantic narcissistic incest that has been established in the interim.
Brontë’s novel is best re-examined within the genealogy of brother–sister incest in the Gothic that is itself frequently read within the later context of the Romantic incest model. This repositioning places Brontë’s novel as simultaneously aligned with the Gothic texts and the Romantic tradition preceding it, allowing discussion of the distinct paradigms of incest from which the novel borrows and departs.98 If Westermarck’s, Greenberg’s and Smith’s theories combine to help explain the formation of incestuous desires within Sleath’s work, one need look no further than Greenberg to explain the magnetic attraction between Catherine and Heathcliff. While the concept of GSA as such was of course unknown to Brontë, the intensity of desires that manifest as recognition in her characters is a nineteenth-century representation of what was then understood as the *cri du sang*.99 Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship, re-examined from this new vantage point, can be identified as a spectacular portrayal of sibling incest’s power of attraction and the concurrent subsumption of individual identities within the network of kinship.

In spite of the importance of the incestuous desires between Catherine and Heathcliff to understanding *Wuthering Heights*, the classification of their relationship as incestuous, though part of critical discourse for some decades now, is variously assented to and resisted within the scholarly community.100 Some scholars hesitate to include the possibility of incest as part of their focus. Marianne Thormählen writes that the element of incest ‘would go some way towards accounting for the kinship one senses between them … But if Catherine and Heathcliff are indeed related by blood, they will hardly know it themselves … Consequently, talk of “incest” seems a little off-target.’101 Yet if the potential for incest is overlooked, along with its contextualisation within the conventions of Gothic and Romantic sibling incest, analysis of the relationship veers off course. The argument that Catherine is an egomaniac who views Heathcliff as an extension of self speaks to the flaws in overlooking the incestuous nature of the Catherine–Heathcliff bond: ‘nor does she [Catherine] feel erotically attracted to him [Heathcliff]; “one does not mate with one’s self, with one’s kind”, as one critic has pointed out’.102 Thormählen’s point relies on denying the presence of incest in general and its function as an established convention of Gothic and Romantic texts.103 Other scholars similarly dismiss the possibility of incest. In the words of William A. Madden, ‘Mrs. Leavis revives the unprovable and, in my judgment, unnecessary assumption that Heathcliff is Mr. Earnshaw’s illegitimate son.’104 Characterising the incest potential as a theory ‘unprovable’ and
unnecessary’ reveals an anxiety regarding a consanguineal bond that would render Catherine and Heathcliff half-siblings. Scholarship that seeks to avoid the incestuous implications of the novel argues the existence of a blood relationship is not capable of being proved, echoing the legal language of evidence Sleath employs to challenge such requirements. The demand for proof and the assertion that its absence renders a consideration of incest irrelevant effaces incestuous and female desire from the body of the text in a reinforcement of the gender and sexual ideologies that Gothic representations of sibling incest seek to subvert.

The consequences of denying the incestuous element of Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship are a denial of their love and a reduction of it to a pathological egotism. When, for example, Thormählen states that ‘I have avoided referring to the bond between Catherine and Heathcliff as “love” … because the nature of their passions fits no description of the concepts known to me’, she disregards the established conventions of Gothic and Romantic incest in which the representation of their love is, in part, grounded. Without taking the possibility of blood kinship into account, the Catherine–Heathcliff bond is instead viewed as a function of egomania: ‘Catherine’s inability to recognise the reality, even existence, of human needs and wishes outside her own is itself a sign of mental disturbance, and her self-identification with Heathcliff is another … Catherine and Heathcliff might be called schizoid’. Identifying the Romantic, narcissistic sibling love/self-love convention at the heart of the Catherine–Heathcliff relationship is crucial to understanding the bond without classifying it as schizoid; one need look no further than to similar instances of incestuous sibling love in many Romantic texts.

My discussion of Catherine and Heathcliff as siblings is not without precedent. William R. Goetz argues: ‘the novel presents a narrow, conspicuously defined set of relationships that practically begs to be considered in light of the incest prohibition and rules of exogamy’ and that ‘even if we do not accept the speculative hypothesis that Heathcliff is … a half-brother to Catherine, it is indisputable that Heathcliff’s adoptive place in the family turns him into a brother of Catherine’. Goetz’s assertions highlight the multi-layered nature of the incestuous links between Catherine and Heathcliff, the fusion of ambiguous blood ties and their shared childhood. Alan Richardson points to Romantic literature’s emphasis on sibling incest to argue that ‘the strength of the sibling relationship is founded more on a shared childhood than on the blood tie’. Even so, the possibility that Catherine and Heathcliff share both
childhood experiences and a blood tie is strong. Recent scholarship that examines race and slavery in the novel illuminates the power dynamics of Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship; Maja-Lisa von Snejdern cites a wealth of textual and historical evidence to argue compellingly that Heathcliff, brought home from the port city of Liverpool that was home to thousands of black slaves, is of African descent and that his ‘racial otherness cannot be a matter of dispute’.110 Susan Meyer points out that locating Heathcliff’s origins in ‘England’s largest slave-trading port’ causes other characters to view him as a ‘racial outsider’ and that Mr Earnshaw gives Heathcliff the name of a son in an attempt to ‘give him a more favourable social status’.111 Such accounts locate Heathcliff as racial outsider yet, tantalizingly, they also do not preclude the existence of kinship, but suggest that Heathcliff’s illegitimacy could originate with Mr Earnshaw and a mistress of African descent. Detaching Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship from its incestuous aspect based on the lack of proof of a blood tie thus becomes increasingly problematic from several perspectives. My designation of the bond as incestuous relies not only on the potential that Heathcliff is an illegitimate half-sibling, but also on the understandings of kinship that define as family those with whom one is co-reared and the presence of this convention in Romantic literature and draws on the intensity of the attraction as exemplifying the pull of blood experienced by reunited kin in current studies of GSA.112

Gail Finney’s treatment of incest in the works of the German Romantics provides a useful definition of the narcissistic Romantic sibling love present between Catherine and Heathcliff: ‘the myth of Narcissus … reveals the underlying nature of the incestuous bond: erotic energy is transferred from the narcissistic individual to the object most like himself, his sibling.’113 This reflective self-love is further magnified by Heathcliff’s obscure origins and his status as Catherine’s adopted brother. Heathcliff is at once a reflection of Catherine and her creation, her possible blood kin and her adopted brother. Any one of these facts makes a discussion of incest relevant to the text; all four render it essential. The model of Romantic narcissistic incest serves as the basis of John Allen Stevenson’s argument that Brontë purposely crafts illegitimacy and mysterious origins for Heathcliff to necessitate the contemplation of Heathcliff as Mr Earnshaw’s son, rendering him Catherine’s half-brother and mirror-image lover.114 Stevenson argues that Heathcliff is ‘the forbidden outsider and the forbidden brother’ who ‘perform[s] a paradoxical double-role, both brother and other … [that] demonstrates
the dangers of both incest and excessive exogamy’. In contrast, I argue that the presence of Romantic narcissistic incest confirms Heathcliff’s identification with Catherine and, moreover, his representation as other is produced through his degradation at the hands of Catherine’s other brother, Hindley. In this context, Heathcliff’s othering is a failed attempt by Hindley, who fears Heathcliff’s potential to usurp both his position as older brother and his inheritance, to prevent the dispersal of wealth and property that could occur if Heathcliff is identified as an Earnshaw.

The othering of Heathcliff via Hindley (and to an extent through the servant, Nelly’s, characterisation of him as alien and foreign) is temporarily successful as it propels Catherine into marrying Linton, the similar though non-related marriage choice that ends so disastrously. In an early analysis of the novel, Lord David Cecil argues that destructive marriages in *Wuthering Heights* occur from unlike marrying (Cathy to Linton and Heathcliff to Isabella); I extend this argument to contend that only like marrying like creates a non-destructive marriage. Indeed, every disastrous event that occurs in the novel does so because Catherine cannot marry Heathcliff – her kin – and instead chooses the unlike or non-kin. Heathcliff, the half-brother, the blank slate onto which she projects her self, is her true love – her soul – and her only real potential mate in the novel. Even critics who conclude Catherine is an egomaniac regard her and Linton as simply too different ever to be reconciled with each other.

In contrast to Catherine and Linton, Stevenson argues that the bond between Catherine and Heathcliff has some of the practical effects of an actual wedding between them, effects that mirror the dangers of incest as Lévi-Strauss describes them. Their love for each other encloses them in Wuthering Heights, making it impossible for the Earnshaw household either to give or receive [women] … Her brother/lover has enclosed her heart, if not her body, in Wuthering Heights, and she finds herself unable to participate in that process of separation from the household of her parents and incorporation into the family of her husband that constitutes marital exchange.

Stevenson asserts that Heathcliff’s incestuous love for Catherine exemplifies the dangers of Lévi-Strauss’s theory, acting as a ‘paradoxical double crime in terms of conventional marriage customs, at once a hoarding and a theft’, placing Catherine as the object of transfer. This is true of her relationship with Linton but not with Heathcliff. Her daughter and Hareton later repeat this endogamic move but again it is not shown
as a danger. The ‘hoarding and theft’ Stevenson ascribes to Heathcliff are not actualised through marriage to Catherine – society as represented through the class spectrum of Nelly and Hindley has rendered that impossible. The question of likeness is framed by the eternal bond between Catherine and Heathcliff (regardless of its perception to others) that is presented as the most important of their lives. The social demands of parity in class and exogamy that forbid incest must be transcended for Catherine and Heathcliff to unite. Their likeness – be it born of projection, genetics or nature – draws them together and when thwarted leads to disaster; it is a similarity of self that is capable of realisation only in nature or the afterworld. Society and its prohibitions that forbid their love and demand Catherine’s exchange must be left behind for the self to be reconciled to the self. Catherine cannot be with her brother/lover, herself, her soul, until the boundaries imposed by the incest taboo are disintegrated with death.

In Romantic and neo-Romantic literature, Finney states that ‘narcissism in the guise of incest is a particularly effective expression of the individual’s exclusion from society, since it adds the solitude of self-love to the guilt of a sexual taboo’.119 Her reading of the twins Siegmund and Sieglinde in Wagner’s Die Walküre (composed 1854) concludes that ‘the attraction between the two intensifies rapidly. Its narcissistic overtones echo and re-echo. For what joins them is their common isolation, their shared suffering as members of a strange breed … which all others shun.’120 The attraction and shared isolation of the siblings locates the work as operating in the tradition of Wuthering Heights, which Finney describes as an example of ‘the siblings-as-soulmates configuration; in which incest is ‘committed in conscious defiance of the norms of the society that has excluded them’ and designates Catherine and Heathcliff ‘typically Romantic heroes, outsiders by virtue of their inherent social position or because of an exceptional sensibility which leads them to cast in doubt or completely reject their society’s values’.121 Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship is situated alongside Wagner’s in terms of the protagonists’ common status as outsiders and their incestuous love that transcends the values of the society that rejects them and the event of death itself. Catherine and Heathcliff’s bond is unique, embodying neither solely the siblings-as-soulmates incestuous narcissism of Romanticism nor the isolated individual narcissistic incest of neo-Romantic works. Rather, Brontë’s novel unites these incestuous conventions and exhibits a variation of the Gothic’s egalitarian and idealised brother-as-hero paradigm.
that corresponds to the work’s status as both a late Gothic and a late Romantic novel. Catherine and Heathcliff’s love does not simply fit the incest as Romantic narcissism model, though it is aligned to what Finney describes as ‘an irresistible, unconsciously generated passion, [where] the Romantic lover is defeated by his conscious rebellion against the society which has stigmatized him’. Brontë’s lovers, though self-obsessed and self-destructive, are very definitely lovers who define themselves through and by their love and identification with one another.

Catherine’s cry of ‘‘I am Heathcliff’’ is the ultimate identification and integration of self with other that, even without the existence of a consanguineal bond, renders them kin through the declared melding of identity (p. 82). The affirmation of self and kinship through identification with the sibling that Catherine displays here is similar to that which Rooney observes in Sophocles’ Antigone through Antigone’s burial of Polyneices – an act that affirms her brother’s existence and ‘with this her own existence in that the brother and sister are conjoined, co-conjured, interdependent, similar but not identical beings’. Although Goetz sees the marriages of Catherine to Edgar and Heathcliff to Isabella as fundamentally supporting the exogamic rules of marriage detailed by Lévi-Strauss, this overlooks the complex endogamic nature of the unions that Goetz points to as appearing in the repetition of characters’ names. The surface appearance of exogamy is in actuality flawed and in danger of collapse: ‘these doublings or overlappings of names … they insist upon that general threat of incest that overhangs society, the threat of a union between characters who are too “alike”’. The repetition of names, as I have already argued, is common in Gothic novels and the subsequent creation of an ever-diminishing familial circle that is reborn in future, near-identical generations causes relationships to be endowed with incestuous undertones. Goetz’s view of Catherine’s marriage to Linton as ‘the surmounting of the incest temptation and the willingness to leave the parental home and to become part of the system of exchange’ is difficult to reconcile with her continued relationship with Heathcliff. What is perceived as a willingness to leave the parental (or paternal) home is undercut by her desperate need to return to the wild nature of the heath. Rather than overcoming the incestuous temptation of Heathcliff, she joyfully welcomes him back upon his return, risking her marriage to resume a relationship with him.

Catherine’s self-identification with Heathcliff situates them as kin who are positioned as equally outside the kinship circles of the Earnshaws,
who refuse fully to incorporate Heathcliff, and the Lintons, to whom both Catherine and Heathcliff remain perpetual outsiders. It is their self-reflexive love that excludes them from subsumption into another family that causes all other relationships they undertake to fail, rather than the Freudian explanation that Catherine’s unsuccessful marriage with Edgar is due to her inability to transition from childhood to adulthood and overcome the Oedipus complex. \(^{126}\) Madden notes the outsider status of Catherine and Heathcliff and although he argues it motivates Catherine’s ‘attempt to re-enter society through marriage to Edgar’ he recognises it as ‘an attempt to evade the basic truth about herself, her being wedded to Heathcliff as a fellow outcast from that society … Heathcliff is inseparably connected in Catherine’s mind with her beloved moors “out there” beyond society.’\(^{127}\) Catherine’s entrance into the exogamic system fails, not because she wants to return to Heathcliff as an aspect of her childhood, but because her attempt at exogamy in Heathcliff’s absence is unable to lessen her incestuous love for him.

Indeed, Catherine never overcomes her love for Heathcliff; the narcissistic, outsider nature of their bond makes this impossible. To overcome Heathcliff would be to overcome herself. Her renunciation of Heathcliff is only ever a verbal one that when overheard by Heathcliff instigates his departure. Catherine never resists the love she claims would degrade her; Heathcliff simply leaves her behind to answer Linton’s proposals. On his return their relationship is the same as ever, much to her husband’s disapproval. In fact, Catherine sides with Heathcliff against Edgar during an argument between them, saying to her husband: ‘“if you have not the courage to attack him, make an apology, or allow yourself to be beaten. It will correct you of feigning more valour than you possess”’ (p. 114). Catherine does not choose Edgar and exogamy over Heathcliff, evident in her defiant refusals to stop seeing Heathcliff. This is reinforced particularly in her death scene when she cries at the prospect of Heathcliff releasing her from his arms even though Edgar approaches: ‘“Oh, don’t go, don’t go. It is the last time! Edgar will not hurt us. Heathcliff, I shall die! I shall die!”’ (p. 164). The notion of being without Heathcliff – who is as integral to her survival as herself – prompts a syntactic confusion over whether it is Heathcliff’s proposed absence or an awareness of the severity of her illness that causes her to declare she will die. Heathcliff, of course, remains with her, stating: ‘“Hush, hush, Catherine! I’ll stay. If he shot me so, I'd expire with a blessing on my lips”’ (p. 164). Heathcliff and Catherine
defy not only propriety (or custom) but threats of violence and death (or punishment) in order to remain in each other’s arms.

Catherine and Heathcliff are duplicated in the younger generation by Catherine’s daughter, Cathy Linton, and Hareton Earnshaw, the son of Catherine’s brother Hindley. The novel’s culmination in their eventual union, which is made possible only after obstacles identical to those faced by Catherine and Heathcliff are overcome, constricts the already endogamic circle created by their names and appearances. While Goetz claims that ‘likeness in physical appearance … has been offset by a difference, or removal, in blood kinship’ to explain their marriage, this union feels even more incestuous than that of the preceding generation. Cathy’s marriages to her cousin Linton and then to her cousin Hareton resume rather than amend her mother’s story. Cathy makes the same misguided first marriage to a weak, blonde Linton (the result of blackmail and lies which call into question Catherine’s motivations for marrying Edgar Linton given the other parallels between the marriages) and then makes the correct marital choice in the form of the dark, brooding, handsome, strong Hareton. If Cathy is happy in her second marriage it only reinforces the misery of the first one, to which Catherine’s marriage to Edgar Linton is the mirror. To interpret their first-cousin blood tie as a weaker consanguineal bond than the adoptive brother–sister bond of Catherine and Heathcliff ignores the near-identical structure of Cathy and Hareton’s existence, that of (after Edgar Linton’s and Linton Heathcliff’s deaths) two teenagers under the roof of an abusive father figure. Before their love develops Cathy and Hareton have become Catherine and Heathcliff, foster-siblings sharing the domestic space of a violent patriarch. But while Hindley stood in the way of a union between Heathcliff and Catherine by degrading Heathcliff and the existence of the Lintons provided an alternative marriage option, Brontë has removed any such threat to the happiness of this younger generation. Cathy and Hareton are more isolated from society than Catherine and Heathcliff were and are placed within a disruptive, fractured home environment even more conducive to and receptive of incestuous sexual union than that of their predecessors.

The unstable and isolated family that Brontë creates for Hareton and Cathy is in anthropological terms explicable as the consequence of incestuous desires; Brontë’s reversal of what would become common knowledge in anthropology offers an alternative model of incestuous cause and effect. Malinowski states: ‘the sexual impulse is in general a very upsetting and socially disruptive force … incompatible with any
family relationship ... A society which allowed incest could not develop a stable family; it would therefore be deprived of the strongest foundations for kinship. Brontë's unstable family structure follows the incestuous desires of Catherine and Heathcliff and precedes the sexual impulse of Cathy and Hareton, in effect, becoming part of its cause. Brontë allows no exogamic possibility. Cathy and Hareton are the only option for each other, and in their relationship, rather than a weakening of kinship, the blood tie is strengthened and clarified. They look alike, they are unquestionably blood kin, they become foster-siblings and they will be married; the possible consanguineal ties that trouble Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship are here an absolute. It is within the fractured kinship circle of Wuthering Heights that Cathy and Hareton combine notions of family and desire, defining one another, eventually, as both kin and beloved.

Cathy creates Hareton in her image just as her mother did with the 'gypsy' Heathcliff, teaching him to read, write and behave properly. Although Hareton initially is kind to his cousin, her anger at her forced marriage to Linton and habitation at Wuthering Heights escalate tensions that damage their tentative friendship. When Cathy seeks Hareton's friendship again, apologising and flirting with him, she does so in a language that blends consanguineal kinship, ownership and desire: "Come, you shall take notice of me, Hareton – you are my cousin and you shall own me" (p. 313). Cathy is not an object of exchange, she is the agent of it, choosing to give herself to Hareton and take him in return. Hareton steadfastly ignores her until 'she stooped, and impressed on his cheek a gentle kiss' (p. 314). With the kiss Hareton and Cathy begin the transformation from kin and foster-siblings to lovers, the same transformation that Heathcliff and Catherine underwent. Scenes of Cathy teaching Hareton reading and pronunciation heighten the sense of a shared childhood, of siblings learning and developing together. It is not that 'the threat of incest ... loses the greater part of its force' but that the threat of incest is finally realised. Endogamy is not threatened, it is actualised; the effect of their sexual impulses towards one another functions not to fragment a stable family structure, but rather, to allow its creation.

_Wuthering Heights_ is the climax of sibling incest in the Gothic, in part, because of its Romantic influences. The self-reflexive sibling incest evidenced in the works of Romantic writers features in Brontë's treatment of Heathcliff and Catherine. Despite Heathcliff's seeming dominance over all the characters, he and Catherine are undeniable equals in their
relationship because he has been created from Catherine’s imposition of herself onto him. Their bond, however, is deeper than just this reflexive nature. Likely half-brother and -sister and certainly adoptive siblings, their shared experiences as social exiles, as the unwanted children of Wuthering Heights, heighten the incestuous and exclusive nature of the relationship. Brontë creates a community in which Catherine is propelled into an exogamic marriage as an object of exchange; the inevitable failure of the union and exchange engender the breakdown of the social world. For the attempted exchange, just like incestuous relationships, ends without any exchange at all: Brontë ensures this with the future generation, a mirror of Catherine and Heathcliff who unite the properties of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights and choose to live at the Grange. Rather than property being exchanged and expanded on, the social world becomes ever smaller. Cathy and Hareton embody the incestuous relationship Catherine and Heathcliff shared but failed to realise; they fulfil its promise by having no non-kin marital choices within their society or paternal agents to require Cathy’s exchange outside the family.¹³¹ Their status as orphans and shared isolation allow them to become their own agents and owners, capable of giving or keeping themselves as they wish. Brontë’s treatment of incest is a revolutionary reimagining of the causation and consequences of familial sexual desires. Self-reflexive sibling love is shown as a lasting bond that transcends barriers of disparate class, birth, wealth and education in its egalitarian nature and creates a stable and complete family structure in counterpoint to what is approved of by society and state.

These depictions of incest challenge the established models of sibling love and trouble the traditional placement of Gothic texts as working in Lewis’s paradigm. Radcliffe’s paradigm of the brother/lover conflation establishes the brother as an equal and a friend, a beloved companion of the heroine, before integrating him with a physically and emotionally similar lover. The model established, brother as unified with lover, is shown as an almost unattainable goal in a society that forces exogamy and one that can only be realised once the integration of roles is completed. This formation of sibling incest is altered within The Orphan of the Rhine, where Sleath reworks Radcliffe’s model by focusing more strictly on the unnatural taboos that society places on desire and behaviour to control and limit female action, allowing for a radical acceptance of the possibility for sibling incest with the brother himself.¹³² In Wuthering Heights the Radcliffian model is complicated by Brontë’s deployment
of the conventions of Romantic sibling incest and the distortion of the hero-villain into the bad uncle before he is immortalised as the eternal brother-lover. Generations mirror previous generations in an incestuous cycle, but rather than this depiction ending on a note of degenerative failure, the endogamic union of Cathy and Hareton creates an egalitarian relationship that suggests wider social and political changes and, as Rooney claims, such brother-sister sympathy and love might serve as a revolutionary inspiration for such transformations. Although there is seldom one clear, distinct message to be extracted from the varieties of and forms incestuous desire takes in the Gothic, there is an overwhelming insistence to re-evaluate the demands and laws of patriarchal society. The construction of rules and laws that enforce and govern behaviour is often shown as nothing more than a veneer of civilisation that keeps in check any desires – female or incestuous – that threaten its hegemony. In the representations of sibling incest, its potential for equality and its natural occurrence, the laws that society defines as natural are exposed as unnatural constructions that are enforced to maintain male control over female bodies and behaviour.

NOTES


4 Caroline Rooney, *Decolonising Gender: Literature and a Poetics of the Real* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Rooney refers to this quality in terms of Lord Byron’s incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh and Goethe’s description of this relationship as ‘poetical’ (p. 29). Rooney argues the destruction of patriarchy is possible through the sibling bond, examining Sophocles’ *Antigone*, in which the sister stands against the state for her dead brother, and points to Nelson Mandela’s view of Antigone as symbolic of struggles against government (p. 19).

The paternal threat model of incest that is often applied to brothers in scholarship is also apparent in Kate Ferguson Ellis’s examination of the threatening father figure and incest in *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989) and in Margot Gayle Backus’s *The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).


Perry examines incest in the Gothic as an exaggerated trope common to sentimental novels and eighteenth-century literature more generally (*Novel Relations*, pp. 375–6).

Perry’s comprehensive *Novel Relations* explores the appearance of the *cri du sang* throughout the eighteenth-century novel.


Examples of such siblings include Ambrosio and Antonia in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), Isabella and Linton in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and the brother and sister in Regina Maria Roche’s *The Children of the Abbey* (1796).


Bereczkei, Gyuris and Weisfeld, 1129.
18 Maurice Greenberg’s studies document family members who, after reunification with previously unknown kin, experience borderline obsessive attraction that often culminates in sexual affairs. See Greenberg, ‘Post-adoption reunion: are we entering uncharted territory?’, paper read at the Hilda Lewis Memorial Lecture given to the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (5 October 1993), 1–22. Paper available online at www.geneticsexualattraction.com/AAPostAdoptionReunion.pdf [accessed 21 May 2009].


21 Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), p. 82. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

22 White, 433.

23 Radcliffe’s treatment of uncles is analysed in Chapter 3. Examples of Romantic narcissistic incest include Victor and Elizabeth in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818) and Astarte and Manfred in Byron’s Manfred (1817).


26 Ellis, ‘Can You Forgive Her?’, p. 257.


28 Scholars such as Clery in The Rise of Supernatural Fiction and Lauren Fitzgerald in ‘Female Gothic and the Institutionalization of Gothic Studies’, in Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith (eds), The Female Gothic: New Directions (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 13–25 work against the dominant scholarly positioning of Lewis and Radcliffe, arguing instead that Lewis reacted to a Radcliffean tradition.

30 I do not intend to suggest Radcliffe did not respond to Lewis, rather, that analyzing incest in the genre without understanding Lewis as first responding to Radcliffe’s oeuvre and tradition of sibling incest will produce a limited understanding of the incest thematic. For recent scholarship that offers important insights into Radcliffe’s novel and its engagement with Lewis’s work, see Jerrold E. Hogle’s chapter ‘Recovering the Walpolean Gothic: The Italian: Or, the Confessional of the Black Penitents (1796–1797)’, in Dale Townshend and Angela Wright (eds), Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 151–67.


32 Terror in the Gothic is produced after a finely drawn atmospheric scene evokes fear, while horror is evoked through depictions of graphic violence or gore. Clery points to this divide in The Rise of Supernatural Fiction (p. 110), as does Robert Miles in Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 44.

33 Baker, p. viii.

34 Clery, p. 110.

35 Fitzgerald, p. 13.

36 Moers, p. 137.

37 Radcliffe’s inclusion of material from Horace Walpole’s The Mysterious Mother (1768) as epigraphs in The Romance of the Forest (1791) and The Italian is consistent with an evaluation of her oeuvre as consciously subversive. The reproduction of Walpole’s ‘disgusting’ tale discounts public opinion (read: social control) and attaches the spectre of horrifying maternal incest to Radcliffe’s own – according to critical accounts – comparably cautious representations of incest, asserting the counter-hegemonic nature of her work. See Ellen Malenas Ledoux’s forthcoming book Fantastic Forms of Change: Mass Persuasion and Policy in Gothic Writing, 1764–1834, which examines Radcliffe’s use of Walpole’s works in her epigraphs.


39 Johnson, p. 76.
Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 69. Gamer argues that few writers ... have responded so directly to periodical criticism. Each successive work saw previous "errors" corrected, viewing these corrections as negotiations that enabled Radcliffe to continue publishing. Gamer's analysis helps to understand why Radcliffe's earlier works are overlooked: her first novels are frequently read as conventional and inexperienced compared to the progressive modifications of her later works to reflect criticism.

Miles in *The Great Enchantress* and Hoeveler in *Gothic Feminism* note that siblings appear in Radcliffe's first two works but are not present in the later novels.


Antonia in Lewis's *The Monk*, Adeline in Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*, Julia in Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*, Ellena in Radcliffe's *The Italian*, and Laurette in Sleath's *The Orphan of the Rhine* are among the many heroines subjected to a masculine gaze that turns sexually aggressive.

Hoeveler discusses the wounded hero in *Gothic Feminism* as have George E. Haggerty in *Queer Gothic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006) and 'Psychodrama: hypertheatricality and sexual excess on the Gothic stage', *Theatre Research International*, 28:1 (2003), 20–33 and Miles in *The Great Enchantress*.

Radcliffe works against the representation of male social elevation as impossible in eighteenth-century novels such as Samuel Richardson's 1740 *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). In Richardson's novel Mr B says 'a Man ennobles the Woman he takes, be she who she will; and adopts her into his own Rank, be it what it will: But a Woman, tho' ever so nobly born, debases herself by a mean Marriage, and descends from her Rank, to his she stoops to' (p. 422). The subtext is that a woman debases herself through a union predicated on her sexual desire while the male's role as the head of the patriarchal family permits both his sexual desires and the elevation of the low-born woman he desires. Radcliffe's presentation of Mary as mentally elevating Osbert to her brother's rank challenges the rejection of female desire and ability to ennoble the male's social status.


While Osbert's jealousy never causes him to harm his sister, in Radcliffe's subsequent works such passions incite the incestuous and/or prideful crimes of the father and then uncle figures.
The pastoral, Edenic upbringing to which Durrant claims Radcliffe forces her heroines to return is also undermined by the neglected adolescence in *A Sicilian Romance*, the abandonment and near coercion into becoming a nun in *The Romance of the Forest* and the orphaned existence of Ellena in *The Italian*. 

The baroness's criticism of this system reinforces reading Radcliffe as equally condemnatory of the limitations of the legal institutions to protect female interests, a criticism that will find full expression in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794).

Durrant, 525–6.

Miles, p. 90.


See Ruth Perry, ‘De-familiarizing the Family; or, Writing Family History from Literary Sources’, in Marshall Brown (ed.), *Eighteenth-Century Literary History: An MLQ Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 159–72. Perry, in an analogous reading, refers to the sibling desire in Aphra Behn’s *The Dumb Virgin; or, The Force of Imagination* (1688) as a ‘confusion of family feeling and erotic love’ (p. 163). Perry argues, however, that the sisters in Behn’s work can mistake another man for their brother because ‘so weak is the voice of blood’ (‘De-familiarizing the Family’, p. 163). In contrast, I argue that Julia mistakes Hippolitus for her brother because of her desire to discover that the attraction is inspired by consanguineal kinship.


Da Silva, 5.

The role that the language of individual choice and rights plays in the context of incestuous relationships in the Gothic is examined in Chapter 4.

Durrant, 523.

The assertion that the brother/father/uncle threatens the heroine in the Gothic is here undermined by the sister’s entreaty of the brother to come to her; her desire creates the situation meant to represent male threats (see Perry, *Novel Relations*, p. 389).

Miles, p. 176.


Richardson, ‘Rethinking Romantic incest’, 554. Richardson usefully summarises the Westermarck effect, arguing that ‘British Romantic writers did come up with a model for representing sibling incest with remarkable parallels to Westermarck’s hypothesis … [I]t is in the unique and specific character of Romantic-era culture and discourse that an interpretation of the literary Westermarck effect must be sought’ (563).
The father’s control of his daughter’s sexuality extends here to control of his son’s sexuality. The brother is as incapable as his sister of defying patriarchal control at this point, which renders the siblings equally oppressed by and desirous of escaping paternal authority.

The incest is transgressive in that it ultimately allows penetration through the locked areas of the castle (metaphorically, Julia’s genitalia) and is idealised in its portrayal of oppressed siblings working together to escape the confines of the paternal castle.

Richardson, ‘Rethinking Romantic incest’, 555. Richardson argues that Romantic portrayals of incest are unique in their paradoxical and ambivalent presentations of the bond as at once ideal yet capable of being viewed as unnatural (569).


Carolyn Jewel intended to deliver a paper, ‘Eleanor Sleath: a writer rediscovered’, at the March 2008 Popular Culture Association Annual Conference; however, notes on the conference show that she was unable to attend, http://teachmetonight.blogspot.com/2008_03_01_archive.html [accessed 20 January 2010]. Jewel states she ‘discovered what no one else knew; that Eleanor Sleath was a wealthy widow who married the Reverend John Dudley under rather scandalous circumstances’ in an interview with Megan Frampton, ‘Friday with Carolyn Jewel!’, Risky Regencies: The Original, Riskiest, and Forever the Friskiest Regency Romance Blog, 13 February 2009), http://riskyregencies.blogspot.com/2009/02/friday-with-carolyn-jewel.html [accessed 20 January 2010]. However, I am unable to find any material to support these claims and Jewel offers no sources.

Many of the references to The Orphan of the Rhine appear in catalogues of Northanger Abbey’s Gothic list or in discussions of Austen’s and/or her heroine, Catherine’s, reading habits. See, for example, L. Erickson’s ‘The economy of novel reading: Jane Austen and the circulating library’, Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900, 30:4 (1990), 573.


Varma, p. ix. The religious language of the review offers implicit support of Varma’s argument that Sleath, unlike Radcliffe, was likely Catholic.


Westermarck, p. 80.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley (1979) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, repr. 1981), pp. 83–9. Foucault describes the juridico-discursive model of power as a ruler or head of state's ability to create laws and punish those who disobey them that he argues has ‘gradually been penetrated by quite new mechanisms of power that are probably irreducible to the representation of the law’ (p. 89).


Foucault refers to this enforcement in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), stating that ‘we are forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands … in order to function’ (p. 93).

Parsons’s novel (explored in the following chapter) depicts an aggressive uncle whose sexual desires for his niece begin after she develops physically during his absence.

Perry uses a similar situation in Eliza Haywood’s *The Force of Nature; or, The Lucky Disappointment* (1724) to argue that Haywood’s siblings who are raised together (though ignorant of their kinship) ‘can hardly be said to illustrate the voice of blood, since they grew up together and their love developed from deep and familiar knowledge of one another rather than from mysterious, unseen forces’. She concludes, contrary to my reading of Enrico and Laurette, that the ‘cri du sang’ motif, central to [the] plot without ever providing definitive proof of the instantaneous power of kinship, come so close to the traditional use of the topos that their subversive differences almost seem like denials of its force’ (Perry, ‘De-familiarizing the Family’, p. 163).

The definition of ‘manner’ as ‘a custom, a habit’ and of ‘manners’ as ‘the morals, the general way of life’ is found in John Ash, *The New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols (London: Edward and Charles Dilly and R. Baldwin, 1775), I.
In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault describes self-regulation as the effect of observation: ‘he who is subjected to a field of visibility and who knows it assumes responsibility for the constraints of power’ (p. 202). Bell uses Foucault’s understanding of this type of disciplinary power to argue that ‘if power is exercised and not possessed, contingent rather than static, feminist opposition to the various operations of power may expect to find more gaps and weaknesses in power’s operations’ (p. 41). Laurette demonstrates what Bell theorises – an ability to find the gap in the power operations through the eventual expression of her incestuous love for her brother.

Smith, 206.

See Greenberg, ‘Post-Adoption Reunion’.

Smith, 208.

Smith, 209.

Beth Kilkenny, ‘Representation of the repressed: women and the feminine in Eleanor Sleath’s *The Orphan of the Rhine* and *The Nocturnal Minstrel*, *The Corvey Project at Sheffield Hallam University*, http://extra.shu.ac.uk/corvey/corinne/1%20Sleath/Sleath%20critical%20essay.htm [accessed 8 July 2009].

*The Monk* often locates sexual desire in a forbidden context of religious vows, imagery and setting; Sleath combines religious imagery and a familial context that, unlike Lewis’s novel, de-emphasises the taboo nature of the sexual desire.

Smith, 210.

This is similar to da Silva’s discussion of the dragon-slayer myth, the themes of which are identifiable in Radcliffe’s use of the incestuous siblings to defeat the father in *A Sicilian Romance*.

Gillian Beer, ‘“Our unnatural no-voice”: the heroic epistle, Pope, and women’s Gothic’, *Yearbook of English Studies*, 12 (1982), 151.

Her imprisonment and starvation are noticeably similar to that of Louisa Bernini in *A Sicilian Romance*.

This tradition is examined in Richardson’s ‘The dangers of sympathy’, 737–54.

Perry, ‘De-familiarizing the Family’, p. 161. Perry describes eighteenth-century French comedy and tragicomedy novels in which ‘a sudden and instinctive sympathy between strangers that signaled consanguinity – enabled family members … to recognize one another in time to avert, betrayal, incest, and murder’ (p. 161). She argues that in French dramas characters sometimes ‘confuse the force of blood with romantic love and mistake the magnetism of kinship for erotic attraction to someone who is really a sibling’ and that this literary convention reappears in English fiction in the latter half of the eighteenth century as a ‘plot in which biology asserts itself as intuition’ (p. 161).


Thormählen, 186.


Thormählen, 196–7.

Thormählen, 190.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Osorio* (1797) and Ludwig Tieck’s *Der blonde Eckbert* (1797) include examples of Romantic sibling incest.


Richardson, ‘The dangers of sympathy’, 740.

Maja-Lisa von Sneidern, ‘*Wuthering Heights* and the Liverpool slave trade’, ELH, 62:1 (1995), 174. Von Sneidern argues that ‘the Catherine/Heathcliff dyad is peculiar in its passion and commitment’ (177), asserting this is due to the master/slave nature of their bond. Consequently, the pleasures ‘of a conventional marriage pale when confronted with the addictive pleasure of absolute possession free of restraint and control of “human” passions’ (178). Von Sneidern also points out the similarities between Heathcliff and Hareton, noting that ‘although Hareton is Hindley’s by blood, we are inclined to think of him as Heathcliff’s “immaculate” creation, embodying his masculinity and vigor – traits systematically denied a racial hybrid, but afforded the racial other and racial ancestor’ (187). She notes that a ‘disquieting element that stubbornly persists at the ending of the novel is imagery of bondage, chillingly domesticated and civilized’ (187).


Catherine and Heathcliff fall into both the category of co-reared kin as they share a childhood and that of reunited kin as they are past the age of reverse sexual imprinting, generally agreed to be before the ages of three to eight, when they begin their co-residence. See Smith, 203; Joseph Shepher, *Incest: A Biosocial View* (New York: Academic Press, 1983); and Chuang Ying-Chang and Arthur P. Wolf, ‘Marriage in Taiwan, 1881–1905: an example of regional diversity’, Journal of Asian Studies, 54:3 (1995), 781–96 for discussions of the critical period of reverse sexual imprinting.

Finney, 243.


Stevenson, 73–5.

117 Stevenson, 77.

118 Stevenson, 78.

119 Finney, 245.

120 Finney, 248.

121 Finney, 248.

122 Finney, 253.

123 Rooney, p. 21. Rooney’s argument is situated in the context of Judith Butler’s work *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), in which, Rooney argues, Butler is concerned with giving ‘the rhetorical speech act precedence over an action that would otherwise precede it so that the speech act appears to be the originating phenomenon. This is a matter of attempting to defend the logo-centric theory of performativity, together with the theory of gender as performativity, from the ways in which Antigone might occasion a call for the rethinking of such theories’ (Rooney, p. 21).

124 Goetz, 365.

125 Goetz, 367.

126 Goetz, 368.

127 Madden, 149.

128 Goetz, 369.


130 Goetz, 369.

131 Cathy’s marriages to her cousins as endogamic exchanges are examined in Chapter 4.

132 Smith, Wolf, Shepher and Westermarck believe that co-residence is detrimental to incestuous sexual attraction; Littlewood in *Pathologies of the West* argues for the inverse: that it is a lack of co-residence that allows for incestuous desire in the many incest cases that he and Greenberg interviewed that involved ‘first-degree relatives who are unfamiliar with each other [and] later have sexual access to each other’, noting that such situations ‘were a common theme of nineteenth-century Romantic literature’ (pp. 136–7).