More than just kissing:
cousins and the changing status of family

‘My Welch cousin is the very thing for a tête à tête.’
Charlotte Smith, *Emmeline* (1788)¹

Amongst the many tangled familial relationships in the Gothic that are fraught with incestuous desires and passions, cousin relationships occupy a curious space in which the incestuous nature of the bond is at once diminished and heightened by its relative acceptance by both English society and the law. Cousin marriages may be more permissible than other relationships between blood kin because the consanguineal tie, in terms of shared genetic material, is weaker than those between the more taboo incestuous relationships, such as mother–son, father–daughter or brother–sister. The difficulty in coming to a clear consensus regarding the incestuous nature of cousin marriage is demonstrated by the irreconcilable differences between leading scientists and anthropologists on cousin incest. Sociobiologist Joseph Shepher argues that ‘most cultural forms of mating’, including preferential cousin marriages, ‘represent cultural regulations aimed at optimum inbreeding.’² Shepher defines incest as ‘mating between relatives, called inbreeding’ and that ‘as a technical term, inbreeding is reserved for cases in which discernible traces can be followed back to common ancestors within two to three generations.’³ Certainly cousins count in this regard, their shared relations being grandparents. But not everyone agrees with this definition of incest. Biologist William Shields contends that while extreme inbreeding
is ‘associated with incest’, incest is defined only as ‘parent-offspring or full sibling matings’. However, while children generally lose sexual interest in the siblings with whom they are raised, geneticist Patrick Bateson argues that people also tend ‘to choose partners who are a bit different, but not too different’, making the case that cousins fulfil this urge to mate with the similar. So similar, in fact, that Shepher demonstrates that while paternal uncertainty means that all cousin marriages are not genetically equal, nonetheless, ‘to marry your mother’s brother’s daughter is to marry the closest kin of your generation who is not from your own clan’. First cousins share 12.5 per cent of their genetic material, compared to the 50 per cent shared with full siblings and parents, or the 25 per cent shared with grandparents; one is as genetically similar to one’s first cousin as to a great-grandparent and half as related as to a half-sibling.

Genetic and anthropological reasons for and against cousin couplings may seem to be coming from irreconcilably different schools of thought, but they both examine the seemingly contradictory nature of cousin marriage or mating. Genetically, such relationships can either benefit or harm a group depending on the presence of detrimental recessive alleles, making it a gamble, health-wise. In anthropological terms, cousin marriage can result in either endogamy or exogamy, depending on the descent pattern of the social group and the type (cross or parallel) of cousin marriage. While Claude Lévi-Strauss’s view is that cross-cousin marriage is exogamous and parallel-cousin marriage is endogamous, other anthropologists, such as Martin Ottenheimer, challenge this assertion: ‘close kin marriage does not necessarily result in social or genetic isolation. Marriages within a group may lessen the number of affinal connections between that group and others, but there are many other ways for alliances between groups to be established: trade, agreements, treaties, adoptions and the like’. It seems, inevitably, that a consensus on either the genetic or anthropological consequences of cousin marriage is impossible to achieve. What becomes clear is that relationships between cousins are capable of benefiting or harming a family group in terms both physical and social.

The social aspects of cousin marriage that anthropologists have observed are equally scrutinised by historians and scholars who examine family and marriage in eighteenth-century British society. Ruth Perry analyses the change in kinship structures throughout the eighteenth century as emphasising conjugal ties over consanguineal, stating that ‘the overdetermined emphasis on conjugality in English culture and
the shedding of wider kin ties grew out of another economic imperative related to, but distinct from, issues of lineal inheritance or romantic love. Perry argues that the need for increased personal wealth in the changing economic structure contributed to making cousin marriage desirable, particularly among the members of the upper classes. Cousin marriage became a viable option to allow the transfer of property from one paternal family to another while at the same time allowing the bulk of an estate or title to remain within the wider family line. In these instances cousin marriage is viewed, not with the horror of incestuous couplings that would destroy a patriarchal structure of exchange, but as a union that ought to be encouraged. Alternatively, it is just as possible for certain cousin marriages to do the opposite: to create an endogamic family that allows for title or wealth to remain in the family but does not allow for property or fortune to increase, or for the cousin to inhabit a position either outside of or socially inferior to the family. In these cases cousin marriage would ultimately damage the patriarchal structure that demands the exchange of women and would thus require a prohibition. The changing structures that allowed the cousin to, in certain circumstances, become a desirable marriage choice positions this family role as alternately kin or non-kin, one that is capable of a flexibility that renders it particularly profitable to politically conservative and radical writers of the Gothic.

One of the difficulties faced in attempting to trace representations of cousin incest in Gothic novels is not a lack of representations but an over-abundance. The variety of cousin relationships has led me to include a greater number of texts here than in the previous chapters, in order more fruitfully to tease out the social, legal and anthropological implications of their representation. The Gothic novels included do not focus solely on first-cousin marriage or relationships, but rather on a sampling representative of the range of cousin relationships, including first cousins, half-cousins, cousins by marriage, double cousins (the offspring of two sets of siblings) and cousins by adoption. Each of these different relationships is deployed in the novels to which they belong to emphasise a unique concern regarding questions of kinship and through a detailed analysis of the nature of the relationship, the relevance of the blood tie becomes clear. How cousins are viewed within the novels, as family members or as non-kin, is one of the ways we can understand whether the author is privileging the conjugal or the consanguineal bond. Some of the cousins examined equate their familial bond to that of siblings, placing their
love on an even more consanguineal and egalitarian footing with parallels to the positioning of the brother-as-lover, while for others the cousin bond is utterly insignificant to their romantic love. Interestingly, Perry reads the legality of cousin marriage in the eighteenth century as implicit compensation for the loss of brother–sister kinship: to allow cousin marriage ‘is to assume that there is no sibling unity that transcends generations and that the sibling tie is dissolved by adulthood and marriage … Marriage between the children of siblings also strengthens consanguineal ties, cementing the connections among members of natal families of origin in the next generation.’ Perry’s point reinforces the idea that conjugal ties were increasingly more important than consanguineal ties and establishes the desire to link related families through marriage as based on economic necessity as well as a sense of familial obligation. The characters in the Gothic are driven to participate in cousin marriage from a variety of different motivations (duty and honour, threats, romantic love, sexual desire, financial need). Such a range of motivations and responses to cousin marriage establishes the complicated nexus the cousin as kin and/or spouse position inhabits, being at once legal and questionable, pressed for by family members and alternately repulsed by them.

It is essential to keep in mind when analysing kinship systems and marriage that people readily manipulate their kinship bonds to attain the most desirable result. The very history of cousin marriage in England shows this to be the case. Henry VIII, for example, to pursue his own matrimonial desires, instituted legislature that allowed first-cousin marriages when previously such marriages had been illegal. Cousin marriage remained an issue of debate throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in spite of Henry VIII having persuaded the church to accept it. Ellen Pollak points towards Samuel Taylor’s Marriages of Cousin Germans (1673) and later works such as John Fry’s The Case of Marriages between Near Kindred (1756) as evidence of the ongoing controversy. Pollak states, referring to the various changes in statutes following the 1503 papal bull that allowed Henry to marry Catherine: ‘Henry’s determination to make the rules bend to dynastic and personal interests made them seem arbitrary.’ This ongoing confusion over the (il)legitimacy of cousin marriage continued for centuries, beyond even Chief Justice Vaughan’s 1669 declaration of the legality of cousin marriage, and especially between secular and spiritual courts because the declaration ‘challenged canon law’. The challenge, however, did little to jeopardise the ecclesiastical courts’ control over marriages between persons within the
prohibited degrees for some centuries to come. As Polly Morris observes, ‘In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England … canon law treated incest as an aspect of the church’s regulation of marriage and dealt with it in the ecclesiastical courts.’

The question of whether eighteenth-century literary representations of cousin marriage offer a suggestion of impropriety or immorality is contested by scholars in the field. Perry suggests such unions are presented as culturally accepted, stating that ‘eighteenth-century fiction corroborates the cultural standing of these legal regulations. There is not the slightest indication of the least impropriety in first-cousin marriage in eighteenth-century novels.’ Pollak, however, argues in relation to Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814) character Sir Thomas Bertram that ‘his scruples also pertain to the moral character of close kindred marriages. Although its respectability was much debated, cousin marriage in and of itself was not illegal.’ Such disagreements speak to the contested nature of the marriages that, while not illegal, occupied an uneasy place between acceptable and unacceptable unions between kin and continue to cause scholarly divide on their deployment in the literature of the time. Pollak’s examination of the writings of Bishop Simon Patrick (1626–1707) underscores the extent to which law and religious and social values coalesce in late seventeenth/early eighteenth-century discourse on matrimony between family members. ‘Commenting on Leviticus, Patrick acknowledges that moral determinations concerning the legitimacy of close kindred marriages are not solely matters of conscience but are also intimately tied to the vagaries of inheritance and property, as well as to prevailing definitions of honor – or, as it was sometimes also termed, honesty.’ Concerns over conjugal legitimacy may account for the low occurrence of such marriages: ‘it was uncommon in practice in aristocratic circles in the eighteenth century, when only one percent of aristocrats married their first cousins.’ These moral and legal concerns regarding cousin marriage and incest eventually gave way to questions of a political and philosophical nature.

Pollak notes this shift, arguing that in respect of the earlier debates on cousin marriages that tended to locate the point of argument in ‘the discourse of Reformation anticlericalism and seventeenth-century natural law, eighteenth-century writing about incest eventually reconstitutes its subject as part of a discourse of natural liberty.’ Pollak’s understanding of this emergent discourse – which privileged the nature of the human subject over the institutions of law – exemplifies the philosophical
changes leading up to the French Revolution. These eighteenth-century philosophical discussions of natural liberty and rights, such as those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, used notions of contract theory and obligation to the state to argue that women’s duties within the state should be to raise good citizens through their status in the family. These eighteenth-century philosophical discussions of natural liberty and rights, such as those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, used notions of contract theory and obligation to the state to argue that women’s duties within the state should be to raise good citizens through their status in the family. Such political and philosophical positioning of women as fundamental participants in the formation of good citizens cast their role in the language of both state and familial obligation. Eighteenth-century feminist thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft worried that the notions of contract theory and obligation to the state were manipulated unfairly by men in order to uphold familial models that denied women the right to exist as citizens and the freedom of choice, forcing them instead to exist as dependants within the familial structure. Wollstonecraft intervened in Rousseau’s debate, arguing that women must be citizens in order to fulfil this role and asserted the necessity of female citizenship and rights. The social and familial demands on women without benefit of liberty and rights were thus repositioned as an unfair burden: an obligation without the corresponding gift of freedom or choice. Perry picks up on this in her analysis of how eighteenth-century spousal selection took on a new weight when tied up in these notions of individual rights. Representations of cousin marriage, which so often depict the competing demands of family and individual desire, are thus equally grounded in the discourse of republicanism, natural rights and obligation inherent within these debates and become endowed with political significance in their appearance in the Gothic – a genre preoccupied with subversion and rebellion. Gothic writers used the genre’s convention of incest and the contemporary discourse of natural liberty to charge representations of cousin marriage with an endogamous and disruptive potential that questions notions of female obligation to families (read: states) that would deny them the gift of individual rights and choice.

Cousin relationships in the Gothic frequently subvert the importance placed on blood ties and compliance with familial marital demands and negotiate a focus on individual desires and choice. These themes develop and manifest in the different varieties of the Gothic I examine: the Radcliffean Gothic, the anti-Gothic and the sentimental Gothic. By locating the cousin as either kin, non-kin or a combination thereof, in order to trouble contemporary understandings of family and outsider, the figure of the cousin becomes the most readily manipulated figure through which writers could locate anxieties over the changing status of family
and marriage. Cousin marriage is a versatile union in which incest is legal while still capable of being opposed on moral, familial, financial and emotional grounds. As such, the role of the cousin is of particular interest to writers of the Gothic, who can use it to represent an aristocratic, patriarchally sanctioned incest, a threatening familial force, an ideal spouse reflective of self or a sibling-like friend incapable of being viewed sexually. Through these different representations of the cousin as fluctuating between inside and outside the natal family, Gothic writers reveal their moderate, conservative or radical views regarding the struggles between the individual and the family.

Beginning with Charlotte Smith’s *Emmeline* (1788), which blends the genre of the sentimental eighteenth-century novel with the Gothic, the cousin is ultimately rejected as a spousal choice in favour of non-kin. Smith’s constant repositioning of Emmeline as kin and non-kin shows such classifications to be based on economic and social structures similar to the structure of the patriarchal family and render them irrelevant to the heroine, who privileges individual choice. It is an important place to start examining the figure of the cousin because it is the novel that most clearly demonstrates the struggle of the individual against a larger and more powerful institution – in this case, the heroine’s family – in a radical rejection of kinship ties with parallels to the French Revolution. As such it stands at the beginning, chronologically, thematically and contextually, of the debates on kinship and conjugality that are played out via the role of the cousin that develop in the subsequent Gothic novels. In *Clermont* (1798) by Regina Maria Roche, the mysterious familial ties surrounding the heroine and her lover (her almost double cousin) emphasise instant familial attraction and female choice in spousal selection. Roche complicates an endogamic union sought by kin that creates a static family unit by making the marriage a love match based on the heroine’s instant attraction to a penniless suitor. The novel is unusual in having the male love interest discovered to be the destitute son of an illegitimate younger brother; he is kin, but is compromised by his father’s illegitimacy and his own lack of fortune.

Anna Maria Bennett’s *Ellen, Countess of Castle Howel* (1794) is a sentimental novel with Gothic elements that positions the cousin as sibling-lover and highlights the tensions between economic familial duty and individual choice, establishing the egalitarian consanguinity of the cousin/sibling as synonymous with romantic love. Cousin marriage is represented as a mature and sensible choice in Elizabeth Thomas’ 1816
Purity of Heart, or, The Ancient Costume, which identifies kin as ultimately safe in comparison to the unknown non-kin. The author makes clear in her preface that the novel is written to ridicule Lady Caroline Lamb’s Gothic novel Glenarvon (1816). As such, the novel is a sort of anti-Gothic, an interesting piece of the incestuous milieu, literary and public, surrounding the Gothic novel and its writers and readers. The Sons of the Viscount and the Daughters of the Earl: a Novel; Depicting Recent Scenes in Fashionable Life (1813) by Selina Davenport, while not strictly a Gothic novel, revolves around a castle, an abandoned abbey, a feud and a family secret. These highly Gothic themes and settings surround the multiple sets of cousins who are married and/or pressured to marry each other and present the role of cousin as one capable of fulfilling a variety of positions (sibling, spouse, protector, friend, beau) at once. The cousin becomes a safe option for the heroine to treat as a suitor without endangering her reputation; with him she can explore emotional and physical desires rendered socially acceptable by their kinship tie. Finally, Jane Eyre (1847), Charlotte Brontë’s Gothic novel, and Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights (1847) use intriguingly contradictory portrayals of cousin love and hate to disrupt notions of female respectability, familial obligation, individual choice and social requirements, revealing as erroneous the understanding of the cousin as safe. Jane Eyre’s reiteration of the marriage service that describes husband and wife becoming one flesh dismisses the notion that consanguinity creates family as it confirms her husband as her true kin, the final privileging of the conjugal bond. This variety of Gothic and Gothic-themed texts shows how the role of cousin was understood, portrayed and manipulated to privilege either conjugal or consanguineal bonds, emphasising the contemporary ideological uncertainties of cousin marriage and the cousin as kin. It is as a consequence of its uncertain status, as inside or outside of the family, that the cousin becomes the most versatile figure through which Gothic writers of conservative or radical political persuasions can engage with questions of inheritance, family, conjugality, individual choice, sexual desires and duty, often revealing their political orientation in the process.

EMMELINE AND CLERMON: FAMILIAL OBLIGATIONS AND INDIVIDUAL CHOICE

Charlotte Smith’s Emmeline deploys the insatiable desire of a male relative to trouble sentimental notions of the family as a safe haven. The novel
negotiates the value of kinship and portrays a shifting definition of family through the depiction of cousin desires that are prohibited by family on the grounds of money and pride. Perry locates in the novel the ‘conflict between romantic love and filial obligation … [M]orally impeccable heroines always cast their lot with the consanguineal rather than the nuptial principle – proving their moral worth by siding with families against upstart lovers.’ Smith’s novel initially designates its eponymous heroine as the illegitimate daughter of Mr Mowbray, an elder son who died while Emmeline was in her infancy. Emmeline is raised in the family seat by the indulgence of her uncle, Mr Mowbray’s brother, Lord Montreville. His son, Lord Delamere, meets and instantly desires his indigent cousin, much to Lord Montreville’s displeasure. The novel follows Delamere’s parentally forbidden pursuit of Emmeline, her refusals and eventual acceptance of his proposals when his father reluctantly relents. Emmeline uncovers her birthright and fortune, is freed of her engagement with her cousin and marries the man of her choice, Godolphin. Emmeline’s exogamic marriage displaces her uncle’s ill-gained fortune out of his family and her cousin’s death represents the end of the Mowbray and Montreville family lines. Endogamy is revealed to be a potentially resuscitative force for the family that Emmeline ignores, leaving the family to die out instead.

Emmeline’s conflict, regarded as she is by her uncle and his wife as less than kin, is made easier; she can be both the morally impeccable heroine and choose the non-kin lover, in spite of a promise to marry her cousin, because she has been relieved of filial obligation. The disruption of Emmeline’s sense of familial obligation reveals traditional understandings of family as flawed and calls into question the motivations behind her aunt’s and uncle’s actions. Smith’s deliberate repositioning of Emmeline as kin and non-kin throughout the novel illuminates the changing importance of consanguineal family, only ultimately to place her within a new family, one she has discovered and chosen for herself. Not only does the novel’s chronology place it ahead of the texts to come, but its treatment of cousin incest as being alternately dangerous and desired, inhabiting a first forbidden and then permissive place, also foregrounds the representations that follow and their attempts to negotiate the demands of kin and non-kin. Emmeline’s fluctuating status as family, mirroring the contemporary view of the cousin, renders the demands of consanguineous relations inferior to individual choice.

Emmeline’s supposed illegitimacy leaves her potentially vulnerable to the sexual designs of her cousin, Frederic Delamere, as she would
not be her legitimate kin, and makes her a non-viable marriage option. Rehearsing a conventional sentimental literary trope, Delamere falls for Emmeline instantly: he ‘fix[es] his eyes on her face … examining the beauties of that lovely and interesting countenance which had so immediately dazzled and surprised him’ (I, p. 42). Although struck by Emmeline's beauty, Delamere has no interest in marrying her; his desire is initially only sexual: ‘“I like her so well that I think it’s a little unlucky I did not come alone. My Welch cousin is the very thing for a tête à tête”’ (I, p. 45). Lord Montreville perceives the danger and determines to stop the situation lest ‘his son should form an attachment prejudicial to his ambitious views’ (I, p. 48). This seems a perfect literary example of Adam Kuper's point that ‘the formal rules [of cousin marriage] do not determine how the game is played. People act selfishly on the whole, but they can usually find some socially acceptable justification for their actions … the genealogies offering different options, kinship terms themselves open to manipulation.’

Lord Montreville manipulates Emmeline's kinship status to suit his inclination, claiming her as his niece when demanding her obedience and casting her off as illegitimate when his son expresses an interest in her.

The ambitions that Montreville has for Delamere complicate his more general sense of Mowbray family pride. When the castle steward tells Lord Montreville that he would like to marry Emmeline, ‘family pride made a faint struggle in his Lordship's breast on behalf of his deserted ward. He felt some pain in determining, that a creature boasting a portion of the Mowbray blood, should sink into the wife of a man of such inferior birth’ (I, p. 50). But family pride in relation to Emmeline is not enough when pitted against ambitions for his son and so he agrees to the marriage. When Emmeline refuses the proposed union she is sent away with a small yearly stipend contingent on staying away from her cousin. Montreville clarifies that, ‘“to Mr. Delamere, my son, the heir to a title and estate which makes him a desirable match for the daughters of the first houses in the kingdom, you can have no pretensions”’ (I, pp. 61–2). Regardless of their kinship, Emmeline's fortuneless state and questionable birth render her unmarriageable. Perry states that Montreville, ‘opposes the marriage between Emmeline and his son, Delamere, not because they are first cousins – which appears to be irrelevant – but because she has no fortune.’ Montreville's determination to sacrifice Emmeline, despite her 'portion of the Mowbray blood' to the greater ambitions he has for his son show the soluble nature of kinship and the disposability of women. The
natal family and legitimate kin are given higher preference than lineal kin such as Emmeline. Smith shows definitions of family and blood are fluid, susceptible to change for material benefits. Although Montreville overlooks the blood tie between himself and Emmeline, Delamere uses it as a partial justification for his desires. When Emmeline’s friend Mrs Stafford will not counsel Emmeline to elope with a man whose family would not own her, Delamere asks ‘“And who, Madam, has said that I dare not own her? Does not the same blood run in our veins?”’ (I, pp. 126–7). Delamere points to their relationship as cousins as being grounds for their union to be accepted; he sees their kinship as proof she is not beneath him.

These multiple ways of viewing the cousin bond are reiterated when Mrs Stafford says to Montreville (thinking he is foolish for prohibiting the marriage), ‘“Miss Mowbray will reflect as much credit as she can borrow, on any family to which she may be allied”’ (I, p. 153). The irony is apparent: Emmeline is already allied, consanguineously, to Montreville’s family; the affinal connection he so strenuously opposes has nothing to do with her character and everything to do with her lack of fortune. Viewing Emmeline as an outsider, as non-kin, is dangerous for her uncle and his wife because they give her no incentive to deny Delamere’s proposals. When Delamere presses his suit for a secret marriage, Emmeline ‘feared her resolution would give way … [S]uch unabated love […] was seducing; and the advantages of being his wife, instead of continuing in the precarious situation she was now in, would have determined a mind more attentive to pecuniary or selfish motives’ (I, pp. 238–9). Emmeline weighs the considerations of her obligations to Montreville and her loyalty and friendship with Augusta (Delamere’s sister) over the pecuniary advantages of a secret marriage, but it is her friendship with Augusta and a general disinclination to unite herself to Delamere that make her unwilling to upset her family, not a sense of obligation to her uncle. Emmeline discusses Augusta’s family members as if they are exclusive of her own, rather than her kin too. Her aunt also accuses Emmeline of non-kinship, telling her: ‘“you would like to hide your own obscurity in the brilliant pedigree of one of the first families in Europe. But know, presumptuous girl, that the whole house shall perish e’re it shall thus be contaminated”’ (II, p. 37–8). Lady Montreville views Emmeline as conniving and artful, a dangerous outsider attempting to trick her way into a ‘pedigree’, posing a threat to both the family’s ambitions for Delamere and its very bloodline.

Although Emmeline has everything to gain from an alliance with Delamere she cannot consider him as non-kin: ‘and had rather the
friendship of a sister for him than any wish to be his wife’ (I, p. 179). Describing Delamere, Diane Long Hoeveler writes that ‘the dominant and threateningly odious suitor has about him an incestuous air of familiarity’.35 Delamere, though hardly odious, certainly occupies a more incestuous role than cousin. He and Emmeline are put into a sibling context by both her resemblance to his sister – ‘there was in figure and voice a very striking similitude between her and Emmeline’ (II, p. 173) – and by Emmeline’s attachment to him, which is ‘the affection of a sister’ (II, p. 172). This is similar to how the cousins in *Mansfield Park* relate to one another for a large part of the novel. In her analysis of Austen’s treatment of the cousin union Eileen Cleere writes: ‘[Fanny’s] move from cousin to sister to wife in relation to Edmund has generated a large body of criticism about sibling incest.’36 But while Fanny loves Edmund as a brother and a lover, Emmeline is unable to make this shift.37 When Montreville and his wife eventually concede to the marriage, Emmeline’s promise to marry Delamere is reluctantly given; she claims she can only love him as a sibling. The affinity of values and social situation that make cousin marriage desirable do not here apply.38

Emmeline is released from her promise to marry Delamere and falls in love with Captain William Godolphin. Her origins are proved to be legitimate when she finds her parents’ marriage certificate and her father’s will, which ‘confirmed every claim which they both gave Emmeline to her name and fortune’ (IV, p. 21), a fortune previously claimed by Montreville. When Delamere proposes again Emmeline refuses him but her birthright and claim to Castle Mowbray is now (ironically) an impediment to a union with Godolphin:

[S]he reflected on the character of Delamere, and remembered that his father would now claim an authority to control her actions – that one would think himself at liberty to call any man to an account who addressed her, and the other to refuse his consent to any other marriage than that which would now be so advantageous to the family – she saw only inquietude to herself and hazard to the life so dear to her, should she suffer the passion of Godolphin openly to be avowed. (IV, p. 152)

The restoration of her name and fortune positions her as legitimate kin with wealth – a viable option for Delamere now that her uncle desires their marriage to regain the lost estate and money. Emmeline’s reflection demonstrates what Hoeveler describes as the ‘sense of powerlessness experienced by a woman in the grip of two generations of patriarchal
The status of niece is paradoxical. As Cleere writes, she is ‘simultaneously inside and outside of the family’, capable of being exchanged in either direction. Emmeline is ‘the compromise between exogamy and incest, the sexual commodity that can be either exchanged outside the family, or “made the most of” within the family’. Smith’s and Austen’s heroines are family and not quite family, a moveable good through which ‘endogamy itself becomes an economic strategy’. Emmeline is aware this strategy motivates her uncle’s acquiescence to Delamere’s wish to marry her; she says, “the authority of my uncle … ’till I am of age, will probably neither restore my fortune nor consent to my carrying it out of his family” (IV, p. 175). This recirculation of property and kin within the structure of the family is noted by A. H. Bittles, who argues that it allows ‘the maintenance of family structure and property; and the strengthening of family ties’. Strengthening the family structure through cousin marriage would, however, benefit the Montrevilles while placing Emmeline even more under familial power and she rejects this authority, resolving instead to wait out the familial demands.

Emmeline declines the endogamous exchange that would further entrench her in the structure that allows Montreville’s assumption of paternal authority and demands for her obligation. Scholars such as Cynthia Klekar point to Emmeline’s awareness of Montreville’s generosity, which leaves her obligated to his paternal authority; Klekar argues that Emmeline is unable to ‘escape the asymmetrical cycle of exchange that subjects her to competing forms of male control’. Klekar suggests that Emmeline’s ‘promises to Montreville and Delamere cast the heroine’s reliance on patriarchal authority in the language of the gift and obligation, depicting these relations as ostensibly based on filial affection’. Yet Emmeline’s earlier acquiescence to Montreville’s demands that she not marry Delamere let her fulfil her own wish to refuse him. Emmeline’s engagement with the language of paternal obligation allowed her to appear compliant with her uncle’s request; however, her seeming participation with the patriarchal ideology was not grounded in filial affection or obligation but because it corresponded with her desires. Smith reveals the falsity underlying notions of paternal gifts and corresponding female obligation. Klekar asserts that in Smith’s work: ‘women can manoeuvre within but never escape from the sense of obligation to a patriarchal ideology’. However, it is not Emmeline’s sense of obligation that Smith cultivates when she describes Emmeline’s ‘indebtedness’ to her uncle.
‘suffering’ her to live in the castle, or her ‘sacrifice’ in continuing to refuse Delamere’s proposals. Smith ironically points to Montreville’s greed and foolish insensibility to both Emmeline’s legitimacy and rights to the castle and demonstrates that Emmeline uses her uncle’s demands for her obligation to his will to assert her own.

Klekar suggests that Emmeline lacks self-assertion and individual rights; that Emmeline is only freed of Delamere when he dies; and that Smith is ‘unable to imagine a narrative conclusion in which self-assertion, a claim to individual rights, or reason can release the heroine from her obligations’.47 But, in fact, Emmeline is freed before Delamere dies in a duel, when Montreville returns her signed promise to marry his son. Emmeline’s refusal to become engaged again to Delamere, in spite of his pleas, those of his sister and the acquiescence of Montreville, is a strong expression of self-assertion given her fears regarding Delamere’s and Montreville’s power over her. To deny Emmeline’s self-assertion is to diminish her bravery and defiance of her cousin’s will and her uncle’s desires to see the fortunes united. Emmeline’s individual rights are self-asserted and hard won. To ignore them, and Smith’s ironic undermining of the idea of obligation, is to misunderstand Smith’s beliefs regarding individual rights.48 The novel is a radical rejection of notions of female economic value, familial dependence and obligation to kinship bonds. Rather than being obligated to the familial structure, Smith shows Emmeline’s roles as cousin and niece as ones that require no sense of obligation because these roles are in permanent flux depending on the caprices of her relatives.49 Her status as kin is alternately claimed or denied, and this constant repositioning causes notions of kinship obligation to become moot, leaving her free to escape familial bonds and marry the non-kin man of her choice.

Roche’s Clermont, in seeming opposition to Emmeline, concludes with a close kinship marriage highly sought by the cousins’ fathers. But the endogamic union that seems to privilege consanguineal bonds also, as seen in uncle–niece relationships, exposes the dangers of patrilineal descent systems that bestow wealth upon the elder son. The novel’s heroine, Madeline Clermont, uncovers family secrets, falls in love, is abducted, nearly raped and murdered and is eventually repositioned as a wealthy heiress who marries her (almost double) cousin. Madeline’s father, Clermont, is a man without a history, living a simple life below the status to which his educated background seemingly entitles him. The novel is discussed in scholarship almost exclusively in terms of Austen’s...
Northanger Abbey (1817) list.⁵⁰ However, Clermont is worthy of much closer analysis as it subverts its location of kin as a family-approved marriage choice. Roche manufactures this subversion by initially depicting the protagonists’ mutual desire as an instant attraction that occurs prior to the revelation of kinship and is disapproved of by the heroine’s father. Allowing for a close kin marriage that is based on love rather than the blood tie or familial urgings privileges choice while incidentally accommodating the family’s wishes. The complex genealogies that are unravelled throughout the novel eventually lead to recognition and familial acceptance for Madeline and her father, and the very complexity of the bonds of kinship makes Roche’s work fascinating. Family is represented at once as friend and foe, the seat of companionship and cheerful domesticity and equally capable of inspiring jealousy and murder. Relationships interweave and overlap; sets of siblings marry sets of half-siblings and legitimacy and inset narratives are interwoven in such layers that it is only through careful analysis that the true bonds of kinship can be understood. Roche’s representations of family show individual romantic choice located within seemingly inescapable consanguineal bonds, allowing self-assertion while exposing the dangers of kinship.

Kuper analyses the preference of the bourgeoisie for ‘marriages within the kinship network’ and points to Goethe’s characters in The Man of Fifty (1829) who are ‘cousins … expected to marry each other in order to preserve their patrimony’.⁵¹ He argues that sets of elite and upper-class families in the eighteenth century ‘coalesced into clans that persisted for several generations’ to protect their fortunes, particularly in volatile times.⁵² This seems an appropriate place to start an analysis of Roche’s novel in which an upper-class family is presented in light of the marriage choices of its members. Roche depicts individuals marrying outside of their kinship circle with people unapproved of by their families with disastrous consequences and this mistake, made by the older generation, is righted in the next. But the marriage of Madeline and Henri de Sevignie is not motivated by a desire to appease familial demands or to correct previous mistakes; rather it represents an individual choice made by both the cousins before their familial bond is revealed. Their fathers’ desire to see Henri and Madeline wed to protect the patrimony and unite family fortune with family name reveals that the older generation is continually misguided despite their children’s correct ability to assert personal choice that happens to coincide with their family’s desires. The cousins’ mutual attraction and love cause them to risk parental disapproval to be
more than just kissing

205

... before the plot revelations render this unnecessary. But rather than being the happy coincidence Perry deems revelations of this sort to be in eighteenth-century novels, here the disclosure is cast in a darker endogamic light that hints at the danger of such close family ties.53 Madeline and de Sevignie share an instant attraction portrayed as a ‘magic spell’ that renders Madeline incapable of movement, suggesting that she is pulled into a stasis by her cousin and the bonds of kinship he represents: ‘as if riveted to the spot by a magic spell, she stood immovable’ while the stranger ‘wildly, yet delightedly, gazed on her’.54 Although a stranger, de Sevignie is accepted into the family fold until Clermont sees his love for Madeline and, concerned by his inability to locate himself within a family and provide a personal history, orders him to leave them. De Sevignie’s lack of history and kinship network is perceived as ominous. But Madeline’s other suitor, D’Alembert (her second cousin, Clermont’s cousin), has too much history, is too connected with her family’s past, making him an even greater danger (he wants to kill his wife to marry Madeline, who is, unbeknownst to her, heiress to a fortune). Eventually we learn that de Sevignie is Madeline’s cousin; in fact, they are almost double cousins as his mother and Madeline’s mother were sisters and his father is Clermont’s half-brother. De Sevignie is ignorant of this as he was raised in obscurity in an effort to conceal his true origins.

The plot, uncovered via memories and inset stories, requires some summary. Clermont was the son of Count Montmorenci and his first wife. The count, knowing his father would disinherit him if he discovered his marriage to his penniless wife, denies the union. Clermont’s mother leaves him to be raised by friends (the De Valdores), eventually dying in a nearby convent. Clermont’s father, meanwhile, commits bigamy by marrying a rich heiress with whom he has a son, Philippe – the recognised heir. Clermont discovers his true origins and meets and befriends his younger half-brother, Philippe. The two travel, meeting sisters, and Clermont marries one, Geraldine, not knowing his half-brother has secretly married the other, Eleanora. Philippe and Clermont’s uncle by marriage, D’Alembert, is heir to his brother-in-law Montmorenci’s estate if Clermont and Philippe are dead or disinherited, and, in a further criss-crossing of familial and affinal ties, is father-in-law to Viola De Valdore – the daughter of Clermont’s adoptive sister. Due to D’Alembert’s conspiring, Clermont wrongly believes Philippe guilty of an affair with Geraldine and stabs his half-brother. Clermont has since lived in obscurity, believing his brother dead, but after Madeline meets her grandfather,
Montmorenci, as she flees from young D’Alembert (Clermont’s cousin/Viola De Valdore’s husband), Clermont is re-established as his father’s heir. The senior D’Alembert threatens to reveal Clermont’s crime and forces Madeline to promise she will marry his son in exchange for his silence (Viola, reported dead, is in fact imprisoned so the young D’Alembert can marry Madeline). Eventually the truth is revealed: Philippe survived the wound and was kept imprisoned by D’Alembert. De Sevignie (who is nearly identical to his father, Philippe) was raised by D’Alembert’s colluding servants. After learning this, de Sevignie rescues Madeline and Clermont from their imprisonment by the D’Alemberts. Clermont is restored as the heir of the Montmorenci estates, Philippe forgives him and Madeline and de Sevignie marry.

These relationships are excessively incestuous even for the family-centred plots of Gothic novels, creating a series of affinal and consanguineal ties that repeatedly cross. Marriages unite families – the De Valdores and the D’Alemberts, the Montmorenci half-brothers with the sisters Geraldine and Eleanora, and proposed marriages would unite Madeline with the D’Alemberts and de Sevignie with the D’Alemberts – though both Madeline and de Sevignie are, in the end, shown to be Montmorencis. In fact, throughout the novel, the number of people originally thought to be unrelated diminishes until virtually all the characters are proved to be related to one another through blood or marriage. In this way, Roche effectively dissolves differences between affinal and consanguineal kin. When D’Alembert proposes to Clermont that his son and Madeline should marry she refuses, but her grandfather favours the union because ‘he highly approved of the projected alliance: he wishes to have the fortunes of the family united’ (IV, p. 41). A marriage between his granddaughter and nephew would unite the family fortunes through an affinal connection to a blood connection, reinforcing the kinship tie with a legal one. But Madeline replies: ‘“The fortunes of the family! … and are such the considerations that sway the great world? Ah! no wonder, if the union of fortunes, not of hearts, is alone considered, that misery, vice, and dissipations from such connections should ensue”’ (IV, pp. 41–2). Her position is clear: to marry to unite family fortunes is essentially sinful; it is the heart that should be consulted. Madeline asserts her right to individual choice (similarly to Emmeline), but, ironically (and unlike Smith’s heroine), she unknowingly falls in love with, other than her father, her closest living kin. Scholars are divided on the cultural and legal implications of first-cousin unions; Pollak’s examination of the influence of property and
More than just kissing

inheritance laws on the status of cousin marriage demonstrates the desirability of these unions, just as Cleere points out their economically frugal nature. Madeline faces familial pressure to marry D’Alembert because of the desire, exacerbated by the lack of a direct male heir, to consolidate wealth in the family.

Madeline’s uncle, Philippe, views her as a potential gift to his son via marriage that would reimburse him for his suffering. Philippe tells Clermont, “by giving your daughter to my son, you can make me amends for all my sorrows” (IV, p. 322). Clermont readily consents:

‘[I]n seeing the precious offspring of Elenora and Geraldine united, the most ardent wishes of my heart will be accomplished: in giving her to de Sevignie, I give her to a man, in whose favour I felt a predilection from the first moment I beheld him – a predilection, excited not only by his manner, but his strong resemblance to you. Take her’ (he continued, presenting her hand to de Sevignie), ‘take her with the fond blessing of her father.’ (IV, pp. 322–3)

Clermont’s words are powerfully loaded with the language of exchange and ownership coupled with that of kinship recognition. If ever there were an eighteenth-century case of genetic attraction, it is clearly articulated here. Clermont and his brother see Madeline as a peace offering, a gift from Clermont to Philippe’s son that will compensate Philippe for years of misery. In an exchange reminiscent of the incestuous uncles examined earlier, the younger brother demands the daughter of the elder. The overlapping familial bonds cast Madeline and de Sevignie’s proposed marriage as incestuous; as one-and-a-half first cousins, they share three out of four grandparents – all but their paternal grandmother. Even half-siblings share only two out of four grandparents. Yet their bond does not give Clermont or Philippe pause; indeed, it strengthens their desire for the union. Perry’s belief that ‘marriage in some sense neutralizes siblinghood so that sibling incest taboos are not transmitted to the next generation’ underscores the extent to which Clermont and his brother’s siblinghood and that of their sibling wives must be neutralised to promote the union between their children. However, far from offsetting the tie of siblinghood, Clermont and Philippe reconfirm it. Clermont points to Geraldine and Eleanora’s sisterhood as the reason he wants their children united and declares de Sevignie’s resemblance to his brother caused an instant predilection for his nephew. Endogamy is achieved through the union of Madeline and de Sevignie and the family has closed itself off from outsiders, inhabiting a closed-circuit environment.
In spite of this endogamic ending, Roche achieves a curious balance between conjugal and consanguineal ties, privileging choice but causing it to exist within the blood tie. For whenever it appears she is granting blood ties primacy we are quickly reminded that the most egregious crimes of the novel (murder, attempted murder, attempted rape, kidnapping, imprisonment) are perpetrated by family against family. In allowing Clermont to ‘give’ Madeline to her cousin – who is as related to her as a half-sibling, or, as closely related as Clermont is to Philippe – Roche allows her heiress heroine to marry the penniless son of the illegitimate Philippe. (Montmorenci’s bigamous second marriage renders Philippe illegitimate, although this plot consequence is never mentioned.) This overlooked outcome of Montmorenci’s bigamous marriage is that the lover is both kin and an outsider, like Emmeline’s status before she discovers her legitimacy, except that for de Sevignie’s father there is no legitimacy to find. Madeline’s choice is de Sevignie before she knows he is kin, before their union is sought by their parents; Roche allows individual liberty but undercuts it by making kinship selection seem inevitable. In so doing, the dangers implicit in the exogamic exchange of women so necessary to patriarchy (there are virtually no examples of happy marriages in the novel) and the threats of being pressured into a kinship marriage to maintain family fortunes are underscored and given equal weight. Roche hints that only marriage to kin for love can manage to escape either of these traps of women as exchange, but the language of Clermont that offers Madeline as a gift renders this option a highly uneasy compromise. Such an ending, subversive in its exposure of dangerous consanguineal demands, threatens to destabilise the radicalism of its own endogamy did it not ultimately privilege Madeline’s desire for her cousin.

**INSTRUCTION OR DESTRUCTION:**

**THE DANGERS OF NON-KIN UNIONS**

In *Ellen, Countess of Castle Howel* Anna Maria Bennett couples the sentimental and the Gothic in a plot line that focuses on Ellen Meredith, her husband – who also serves as a father figure – and her cousin by adoption and second husband, Percival Evelyn. The incestuous implications of Ellen’s marriage to her first husband, Lord Howel, are explicit: he sees her as an engaging child he wishes to educate and help raise properly, but also loves and marries her. Ellen, although she grows to love her much older husband, is always in love with her cousin by adoption. Percival
is only able to marry his beautiful and wealthy cousin after finding his
true name and genealogy. Bennett’s novel is distinctive in its handling of
the reformation of its chief villain, Lord Claverton, who turns out to be
Percival’s father. The incestuous bond between Percival and Ellen, unsub-
stantiated by blood, is nonetheless depicted as a relationship between
kin through their sibling-like bond formed in early childhood. They
constant attachment to one another and eventual union demonstrate the
interchangeability of familial and sexual emotions, the ease with which
non-kin becomes kin through a shared childhood and the need to bal-
ance individual liberty with familial duty. Bennett portrays desires and
romantic relationships as inherently incestuous but reveals the egali-
tarian cousin-sibling incestuous bond as most closely aligned with the
brother-as-lover.

Bennett distinguishes Percival as Ellen’s true choice by positioning
them as equals. In a socially accepted model of the sibling–lover rela-
tionships analysed previously, the cousin can fulfil the role of the sib-
ling in a legal marriage, being an equal other half and viable marriage
option. In opposition to the sibling-like bond she shares with Percival,
Ellen is viewed as a child by the other men cast in the role of lover (and
lover-villain), a beautiful girl whose innocence and unformed mind
(and body) is appealing. Lord Howel, ‘undertook himself to begin the
formation of a mind so open and naturally ductile’ before ‘his heart
claimed a different interest in’ the ‘beautiful and amiable child’ (I, p. 176).
Lord Howel’s love for Ellen is, like Ellen’s love for Percival, an example of
familial or near-familial love evolving into or existing alongside romantic
love, though it positions him as the father/instructor. Lord Claverton,
a friend of Ellen’s uncle, also views her as a child and his sexual desires
are focused on this quality, explicitly centred on entrapping and ruining
Ellen: ‘Tis true, beautiful as Ellen was, it was the beauty of a tall child;
but neither did that matter, it was a fault every day would mend’ (I, p. 34).
He reflects upon seeing her: ‘Heavens! What an object for attention –
for admiration – for ruin!’ (I, p. 42). These very different types of men
(Lord Howel is kind, intelligent and generous while Lord Claverton is
dissipated and calculating) expose the pervasiveness of masculine desires
centring on a younger girl they can either educate or ruin. Male passions
are revealed as incestuous when shown to focus on the malleable, child-
ish and immature qualities of their objects of desire. Percival, however,
both kin and contemporary, sees Ellen as an equal companion instead of
an object for instruction or destruction and, as such, proves himself her
true partner. By creating this companionate, sibling-like bond with the adopted cousin, Bennett’s heroine marries the forbidden brother without having completely to deconstruct the family structure to allow it, as Brontë does in *Wuthering Heights* or Eleanor Sleath does in *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798). The cousin is here a viable alternative to the brother-as-lover so often presented as the ideal relationship in the Gothic.

Ellen’s uncle Edmund Meredith is so attentive to his ward, Percival, that many believe Percival is Edmund’s illegitimate child: ‘Mr. Meredith’s attention to his morals and learning was incessant, and as he grew up the affection of a father, was blended with the instruction of a tutor, in so much that many people gave him the credit of being one’ (III, pp. 70–1). Percival views Edmund as his adopted father and he is treated as kin by the Meredith family. Before the truth of Percival’s birth is revealed (he is the legitimate son of Lord Claverton and his deceased wife, daughter of the conniving neighbour who nearly cheats the Merediths out of their family seat, Code Gwyn) Ellen believes Percival is not only her adopted cousin, but also her cousin by blood:

Ellen’s infant years had passed in the exchange of kindnesses with Evelyn, without thinking of enquiring about his parents; as love began to usurp his sway in her young heart, Evelyn’s *self* still more engrossed her, but … since she had by accident heard the report of the country, her own observation on her uncle’s extreme fondness, and Evelyn’s implicit duty, had partially confirmed these reports. (IV, p. 190)

Part of what has caused Ellen to believe that Percival is her blood cousin is the ‘implicit duty’ that Percival shows her uncle. Similar to Smith’s use of irony to undermine notions of familial obligation, Bennett’s unification of family ties with notions of duty and obligation creates an association that renders family burdensome. Likewise, the passage depicts these infant years together as inspiring the cousins’ mutual love. Relevant here is Kuper’s claim that the casual nature of cousin relationships facilitated romantic love: ‘cousins grew up in friendly intimacy … free to mix unchaperoned, cousins readily fell in love.’

Percival and Ellen’s shared childhood and mutual love corroborates Kuper’s findings, rather than those of statistical geneticist Steven Buyske and anthropologist Alex Walter. Buyske and Walter argue that ‘early childhood cosocialization makes a male over 3000 times more likely to be rejected as a marriage partner later in life … daily social contact in the first seven years ubiquitously disqualifies individuals as marriage
candidates for female participants. Ellen and Percival’s childhood does not disqualify Percival as a marriage candidate; rather, it cements his place in Ellen’s heart. Their relationship develops similarly to the sibling bond Enrico and Laurette share in Sleath’s novel; Percival and Ellen’s unchaperoned childhood allows for the strong development of emotional attachment that moves seamlessly into romantic love. The connection is a familial tie supplemented with passion; ‘a stronger attachment than that which grew up between Evelyn and our heroine, could not perhaps be’ (III, p. 169), and ‘as Percival was three years older than Ellen, he led in all their infant sports, and became her habitual protector’ (III, p. 72). Their childhood bond develops and Ellen is described as: ‘the companion, who from his infant state, became a part of his vital existence’ (III, p. 74). While initially positioned as a protective figure who leads Ellen, Percival’s location as leader is destabilised through Ellen’s maturation. Ellen becomes integral to Percival’s existence because of how they are raised together; this is intriguing because it seems to repudiate traditional anthropological views on how kin is rendered unattractive.

Bennett shows the cyclical and confining nature of kinship obligations through Ellen’s first marriage. Code Gwyn, the family seat, is threatened by a neighbour who has put the Meredith family deeply into his debt, in large part because they are generous landowners. In order to keep the ancient castle in the Meredith family Ellen’s relatives persuade her to marry Lord Castle Howel, the paternal figure who undertook her education. The marriage required by the bonds of familial duty preserves the Gothic relic that represents ‘imperfect laws’. After Ellen’s marriage to Lord Howel and the birth of their child, she still harbours romantic feelings for Percival: ‘Ellen could not help remembering, the companion of her youth; she could not help feeling how superior he tower’d, both in person and understanding, above any young man she knew; but he was not her husband, the tender kind husband’ (III, p. 170). She is torn between her conjugal tie to Lord Howel and the sexually attractive Percival. Klekar’s analysis of obligation to family is relevant here; Ellen is obligated to her family because they raised her after she was orphaned and to her husband whose wealth has saved her family home. After Lord Howel’s death and the restoration of Percival’s birthright, any barrier to a union with Ellen is removed. As Smith’s Emmeline disrupts the tradition of familial duty and obligation that plagued female marital choices by casting off family, Ellen
also avoids the snare of consanguineal pressures in her second marriage choice by marrying her childhood love.

Bennett strikes a complicated balance between the demands of consanguineal, conjugal and affinal ties and personal desires, showing her heroine burdened with familial obligations that negate her ability to assert individual choice, yet fulfilling her obligations before choosing a second spouse. By making this spouse Percival Evelyn, Bennett creates an alliance that escapes the exchange of women (in this marriage, only Ellen and Percival benefit and Ellen’s widow status means no father figure controls her exchange) and eludes the common societal reasons for allowing cousin marriage: to preserve a familial estate or fortune. As non-kin, Percival is excluded from the patriarchal reason for permitting cousin marriage and their union falls outside the traditionally proscribed option of either exogamous or endogamous to fulfil both positions. As such, this marriage between cousins/non-cousins represents a negotiation between familial duties and individual choice that concludes by privileging the ties of romantic love grounded in equality and individual choice and the security of near family.

Elizabeth Thomas’s novel *Purity of Heart, or The Ancient Costume* is written in an anti-Gothic mode and demonstrates that the fulfilment of duty rather than individual desire or choice is essential to happiness. The heroine, Camilla, avoids making her own spousal selection when she marries her parentally endorsed cousin in a relationship close to Bennett’s depiction of Ellen’s marriage to Lord Howel. Camilla’s marriage, based on filial duty, proves her to be the ‘morally impeccable heroine’ Perry describes by siding with the ‘consanguineal rather than the nuptial principle’. An attack on Lamb’s *Glenarvon*, *Purity of Heart* has a preface in which Thomas describes how her motivations for writing the novel stemmed from the dangerous and profane impressions left on her by Lamb’s novel:

The novel of Glenarvon … and its horrible tendency, its dangerous and perverting sophistry; its abominable indecency and profaneness, struck her with such force, that she could not resist the wish which started into her mind, of ridiculing it. The speeches of Lady Calantha Limb, are many of them copied from Glenarvon; and the greater part of them may be fairly inferred from the incidents and conduct of the Hero, and the Heroine of that work … if the world has indeed saddled the production of Glenarvon on the right owner, she hopes and believes it is one solitary incident of depravity which cannot be paralleled.
I include much of Thomas’s preface because the language used to describe Lamb’s novel is important in establishing the milieu surrounding not only Thomas’s own work, but also that of *Glenarvon* and the incestuous Byron-Lamb-Leigh scandal, which is itself reminiscent of a Gothic text. In attempting to ridicule the excesses of the Gothic, Thomas reveals her understanding of the form to be one that grants individual choice and desires precedence over the demands of family and duty. Thomas’s text and commentary are highly illuminating in their positioning as a literary antidote to the subversive radicalism of Gothic sentiments. The novel, in its declared intention of ridiculing Lamb’s work for its profaneness and depravity, offers the antithesis of Lamb’s Lady Calantha in the heroine, Camilla.

In *Glenarvon* Lady Calantha (meant to represent Lady Caroline) is intended to marry her cousin William to preserve the family estate and title – the marriage does not take place and is rendered undesirable by its economic motivation and the murderous machinations of William’s mother, Calantha’s aunt. Lamb presents cousin marriage as a contract entered into under familial pressures and doomed to failure, yet presents an equally dire portrait of the relationship between Calantha and Glenarvon (the character representing Byron), based on sexual desire and attraction. Thomas’s novel replaces the heroine with Lady Camilla, but keeps Lady Calantha as her antithesis. The portrayal of cousin marriage, devoid of love in Lamb’s novel, becomes the type of marriage that Camilla chooses and fights to preserve. Disappointed in love with her first fiancé, Camilla obeys her parents’ advice to marry, selecting a cousin of whom her mother approves. Camilla’s cousin/husband proves unfaithful and after her first lover returns to England Camilla battles rumours and the threat of divorce to win back her husband. Thomas’s novel and her declared intention in writing it place consanguineal and conjugal duties as compatible in moral characters and expose their conflict with dangerous individual desires. Incest is depicted as a horrifying taboo via Calantha’s characterisation, while cousin marriage is portrayed as a responsible choice for virtuous women. Camilla’s and Calantha’s representations imply that sexual desire is incompatible with virtue in women and that such rampant desires inevitably lead to horrific incestuous couplings and unstable, unfeminine behaviour. But if Thomas’s aim is to condemn female sexual desire by uniting it with the incestuous and unfeminine and to sanctify female obligation and duty to family and husband, her lacklustre portrayal of the latter compromises her purpose.
The marriage of Camilla and Sir Lusignan is described in loveless terms: ‘Camilla had … in compliance with the wishes of her parents, selected … her present husband; who was the only surviving son of the elder brother of her mother; and who was in the possession of a very large fortune … together with a baronetcy, which gave him the title of Sir Lusignan Dellbury’ (pp. 33–4). Thomas establishes Sir Lusignan’s pedigree as kin, wealthy, titled and one of many candidates for Camilla. Camilla evinces no preference for him but accepts him to comply with her parents and because his character and military achievements have fixed his position in the public world.\(^76\)

The many amiable qualities of Sir Lusignan, the pleasure which her mother seemed to take in his society, the high character he bore in the world, and the splendour which military achievements had thrown around him, all contributed to fix the choice of our heroine; and her parents in giving her to their nephew, felt certain that they had secured her happiness. (p. 34)

Sir Lusignan, a member of her family, is unlikely to cause any disruptions as Camilla’s first lover, the erratic Lord Ellesmere, did. Ellesmere, non-kin, is dangerously emotional, violent in his passions and temper and jeopardises Camilla’s position in society before she breaks their engagement due to his demanding nature.\(^77\) Camilla’s cousin is far from demanding. At first he plays the doting lover, but once they are married, Sir Lusignan ‘slighted and forsook her’ (p. 35). His inattention contrasts the obsessive love Ellesmere displays for her and, intriguingly, Thomas suggests this inattention is superior to being an object of sexual desire; better to be forsaken for mistresses than be treated as one.\(^78\)

Camilla’s overinflated sense of familial duty and wifely obligation engender a childlike dependency on her husband that robs her of what Perry points to as the more radical implications of a consanguineal relationship that ‘advantages women with respect to gender politics and sexual power’.\(^79\) Camilla puts herself into the parent/child binary from which Ellen must escape in order to find happiness in Bennett’s novel, saying to her cousin/husband, ‘“in my dependence upon you, Dellbury, I wish always to be a child”’ (p. 37). The role of the wife is made equivalent to that of the child by virtue of its dependency. Her obedience to her husband is reiterated when her father tries to persuade her to divorce her husband; while she pleads the marital tie over the consanguineal, she remains dutiful to family as her conjugal bond is also a blood one. The only instance in which Camilla defies parental authority is to abide by
the higher authority of her cousin/husband. Camilla states "from the moment I gave myself to Sir Lusignan, I lost my individuality ... I can think only as the wife of Sir Lusignan; to make him happy, to dwell in his house, to nourish his children, to pray for his reformation, and to wait ... for his return; this, this is my duty” (pp. 140–1). Camilla views herself, her possessions and her children as the property of Sir Lusignan. Her complicity in the patriarchy’s placement of children and possessions under the husband’s domain and adherence to conjugal and consanguineal ties is shown as Camilla’s duty as a virtuous woman, regardless of how it renders her powerless and inactive. Her refusal to divorce Sir Lusignan fulfils Camilla’s duty to him as both husband and family, privileging the marriage and blood bond in a subordination of her individual rights and liberties to consanguineal and conjugal duties. Camilla ignores his affairs, remains faithful and, when he departs with his current lover, tracks him to the continent and takes a residence near him. Presented throughout as almost saintly in her behaviour, Camilla is more the angel of the house of Victorian fiction than a Gothic heroine.

Part of what distinguishes Purity of Heart as a conservative text is the way it sets itself up as a foil to Lamb’s novel; designed to react against a radical Gothic work it becomes anti-Gothic. In spite of Thomas stating that Glenarvon is a work of dangerous depravity, her representation of Calantha at times glamorises her. Calantha is so unfettered by social restrictions that this portrayal comes across as less a condemnation than a comparison of two women fighting to save their relationships. That Calantha does so through an act of trasvestitism troubles Camilla as it empowers Calantha. While Camilla waits to hear from her husband, Calantha joins a Prussian corps and dresses as an officer to fight in the Algerines: ‘‘De Lyra ... was taken prisoner by the barbarians, and I am going ... to save my love. O how exquisite will be my delight in fighting against these renegades, in rescuing him” (p. 191). Calantha explains if the fight fails, she will take off the uniform, charm the enemy captain and then stab him. Camilla’s response, ‘‘you are beyond nature horrible’’ (p. 193) demonstrates the unnatural way she sees Calantha. It is unnatural for women to act, to fight, to prefer their lover to their husbands and to declare it to the world: it is unnatural for a woman to speak of ‘stabbing’ a man when tradition specifies that act as the special prerogative of men. Calantha bends gender ideologies in, not only her actions, but also her costume. This is an important point; the novel concludes in Sir Lusignan’s words: ‘‘Virtue, Camilla, is the ancient costume of Britain; let us not cast
it aside for foreign frippery and tinsel”’ (p. 273). To Sir Lusignan and the system for which he and Camilla stand, virtue is a British quality and Calantha has compromised her nationality as well as her gender in casting it aside and donning the Prussian uniform in favour of freedom and choice. In Thomas’s novel, foreign costumes (or customs) are highly dangerous to British values of virtue and female nature.85

Calantha’s character is that of a transgressor. Unlike Camilla, Calantha cannot be swayed by family pressure; she has no sense of obligation to conform to social mores or gender and sexual ideologies. She says to Camilla: ‘‘I love to step over every bound, to run to every verge, to post myself on every promontory. I love to scale fences, break walls, throw aside props, and walk alone; I love to run fearlessly forward, in spite of the maxims of the world; to do that which no one has ventured to do”’ (p. 181). Camilla, in response to this speech, says, ‘‘the woman who moves out of that beaten path, which custom has prescribed for her footing, will generally make some false steps”’ (p. 182). Camilla is content only to follow in the beaten path prescribed for women; Calantha’s desires move her beyond attempts to control her. Thomas attempts to privilege Camilla’s sense of duty, obligation and custom and to cast Calantha as a dangerous and unnatural madwoman. Calantha cites incest as an example of how much allure the taboo holds, ‘‘As if love is not twenty times more attractive, when it is forbidden, and sinful … it would have tempted me to fall in love with my great grandfather, if I had had the awful prohibition always before me”’ (pp. 175–6). Thomas’s deployment of cross-generational incest, the type of incest considered the most distasteful,86 demonstrates the unnatural and horrific nature of Calantha’s desires in contrast to cousin incest, which is represented as having little to do with desires. Camilla and Sir Lusignan are restored to one another after she nurses him through a fever and he forgoes his adulterous ways to enjoy domesticity with his wife.87 Camilla, however, never views him with the desire and liberty of choice that make the cousin the flexible kin/non-kin role inhabiting both familial and sexual roles that it is in the Gothic. Thomas’s depiction of the cousin as entrenched in the kinship bond despite being a marriage choice unintentionally reinforces Gothic novels (and specifically Glenarvon) that identify a strict fulfilment of duty as incompatible with individual choice.88

What becomes of Calantha and her lover is never related and so the reader is left with two contrasting images: the angelic Camilla who patiently waited for her adulterous husband and the transgendered
Calantha, described by Camilla as having a ‘masculine daring in her air and manner, which terrified and alarmed … so totally dissimilar from all other women’ (pp. 67–8). The two women embody binary representations of incest: Camilla’s first-cousin marriage is desired by her parents as a safe matrimonial option that keeps her childlike and submissive to her husband’s will, while Calantha claims she so loves the forbidden that she would desire her great-grandfather. The representations of incest and gender intended to make Calantha ridiculous may succeed in places, but Thomas’s ridiculing of Glenarvon also effectively resuscitates Lamb’s Calantha from a watery grave and turns her into a sword-wielding soldier on the brink of rescuing her imprisoned lover. In the end, Thomas seems incapable of escaping from this highly Gothic plot line; in spite of the attempt to position Camilla and Sir Lusignan as the domestic ideal, it is Calantha with her transgressive desires who lives to fight, avoids Camilla’s beaten path and continues to ‘run fearlessly forward, in spite of the maxims of the world’.

The burden and benefit of kinship: The many roles of the cousin

The Sons of the Viscount and the Daughters of the Earl by Selina Davenport is a sentimental Gothic novel with similarities to Emmeline. But while Emmeline’s cousin defies paternal orders to abandon her, the protagonists of Davenport’s novel struggle to obey parental commands. Angeline and Elvira De Courci are orphaned sisters raised in their ancestral castle by an aunt and under their uncle’s care. Lord Fortescue, owner of the nearby Fortescue Abbey, has forbidden his sons, Henry and Sidney, any contact with the De Courcis. In spite of the prohibition, Sidney meets and falls in love with Elvira. In the following London season Elvira marries another man in a fit of pique at Sidney. Meanwhile, though Henry and Angeline are attracted to each other, Henry is obliged to marry his cousin. Eventually Henry’s wife dies in childbirth, Sidney marries his sister’s friend and Elvira dies. The secret that caused the Fortescue–De Courci enmity is revealed (Lord Fortescue’s sister was engaged to Elvira and Angeline’s father, who had sex with her before the wedding, causing her to be ‘ruined’ and die) and Henry and Angeline overcome the paternal ban on their union. Incestuous marriages between cousins are portrayed as highly sought by the older generation: Henry’s father promotes his marriage to his cousin; Lord De Courci tries to persuade his son Lord
Reginald to propose to his cousin Elvira; and Angeline’s cousin Desmond is advanced as a potential suitor. But just as the older generation advocates these unions, they are undesired by the cousins themselves. The younger generation is more outward-looking, moving beyond the realm of kinship to find spouses from other, forbidden families. The role of the cousin is multifaceted, portraying the subordination of individual desire to family duty and honour while ultimately rewarding choices that defy paternal expectations. The cousin’s position as alternately kin or non-kin incorporates the respectability of family protection with the potential for romantic attachment, reflecting the ease with which the familial bond can coexist with sexual desire and granting cousin relationships a flexibility and liberality denied in other male–female courtships.

Lord Fortescue phrases his ban on involvement with the De Courcis in the language of blood, telling his sons “never to let the pure and noble blood of the Fortescues be contaminated by mixing with that of the detested Earl”.

Much as Emmeline’s blood is described as a contaminant to the Montreville line, Lord Fortescue believes pure bloodlines can be sullied by mixing with impure ones. Henry’s marriage to his first cousin, the daughter of Lord Fortescue’s brother, has been arranged for some time. Perry refers to the preference of the aristocracy for first-cousin marriage, explaining that:

[T]he marriage-of-incorporation did not pose the same kind of threat to the consanguineal family as the marriage-as-alliance because by extending and adding to the natal family it shored up the principle of consanguinity. The marriage-as-alliance on the other hand expressly put the interest of the new unit above the interests of either of the spouses’ natal families.

Marriage-as-alliance, already attempted by the Fortescue family, ended with the corruption and death of Lord Fortescue’s sister and the dissolution of Lord Fortescue’s engagement with Lady Desmond, Lord De Courci’s sister. Now Lord Fortescue looks to his own family for his son’s spouse in a relationship that Perry would describe as a marriage-of-incorporation, which will ‘shore up the principle of consanguinity’ that is so important for Lord Fortescue to maintain. Incest, in this case, is sanctioned and promoted by the older generation, which has the interest of the natal family at heart.

Familial resemblances – physical traits and personalities – are represented as a method of making compatible pairings. Lord De Courci promotes cousin marriages in his family, requesting his son, Lord Reginald,
to marry his niece, Elvira. He says: ‘“Reginald will not make a bad beau for Elvira; and should the young Lord Desmond resemble his mother … he will be an excellent companion for my little Angeline”’ (I, p. 149). Lord De Courci, knowing his sister’s qualities, decides that if his nephew resembles her he will be a good spouse to Angeline. But when Lord De Courci tells Reginald he wants him to marry Elvira, his son replies: ‘“My heart will never feel any other affection for Elvira but that of a relation”’ (I, p. 188). Reginald’s statement, juxtaposed with his feelings for Angeline, demonstrates the cousin bond as one in which kinship affection and romantic affection can become interchangeable. While Reginald says he will only ever see Elvira as a relation, he views Angeline as a potential mate: his ‘heart immediately acknowledged a preference, which increased as he became more intimately acquainted with [Angeline’s] virtues’ (I, p. 157). The instant attraction he feels for Angeline is grounded in the language of siblings: ‘Lord Reginald took her hand, and with the affection of a brother carried it to his lips. “With such a companion as you, my dear cousin, the country would be a paradise at any season of the year”’ (I, p. 161). Davenport uses the word ‘brother’ to desexualise the attraction Reginald feels for Angeline. But Reginald explains to his new wife Mary Evelyn: ‘“had my heart been free from the magic of thy charms, my Mary, it would certainly have been devotedly attached to my cousin Angeline”’ (I, p. 208). The language of fraternal affection is at once belied by Reginald’s description of his bond with Angeline as one in which kinship is not incompatible with desire.93

Davenport suggests that endogamy is the inevitable consequence of familial pride as, in order to keep valuable women within the family and to marry a spouse at the same level of birth and blood, kin must marry kin. Elvira’s beauty makes her a possession that her uncle is eager to maintain. Lord De Courci says to her, ‘“I wish to secure you, my beloved niece, in my own family. When you are presented, some happy man may run away with my charming Elvira; and I shall lose all the pleasure I have promised myself from her society”’ (I, p. 190). Lord De Courci promotes cousin marriage to keep a prized beauty in the consanguineal family (he is, like Sir Thomas, being economical), believing that her perfect form and face make her highly valued. De Courci is already titled, landed and wealthy, so the need for exchange is lessened. Elvira’s beauty and the pleasure her uncle takes in her company make retaining her more advantageous than an exchange and De Courci is eager to ‘secure’ her in his own natal family, where he will have continued access to her society.94 Lord De Courci
is furious with his son’s lack of familial duty in refusing to propose to Elvira, not merely because Reginald defies his parental command, but also because he will lose his niece to an outsider (again, the uncle tries to control access to the niece’s body either himself or by proxy).  

That cousins are perceived as safe companions in terms of sexual reputation is an idea Davenport portrays particularly through the relationship between Angeline and her cousin Desmond. When the cousins meet they are instantly attracted to each other; Desmond thinks Angeline’s amiable nature renders her ‘an object to inspire the tenderest affection, the most lasting friendship; and he regarded her in the light of a beloved sister’ (I, p. 191). Angeline is equally fond of Desmond, and their family and friends desire their marriage as their status as cousins makes the potential union an appropriate option. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall point out, ‘cousins were favoured as close friends … The fact that cousins could marry, however, could make the relationship of male–female cousins problematic … Male cousins could be called upon to perform general masculine functions of advice and protection, if not support.’  

Lord Desmond feels that Angeline is like a sister and they also look alike; they ‘would have passed for brother and sister’ (I, p. 163). While the older generation hopes that they will marry, the cousins view their bond as a sibling one, though their relationship is charged with sexual undertones. When Desmond discovers Angeline crying, ‘accustomed to look upon him as a brother she threw her white arms around his neck, and wept unrestrained, while his lordship, pressing her still closer to his bosom, wiped away her tears’ (II, p. 160). Desmond is described as a brother rather than a cousin, but there are still frissons of sexuality in the interaction. The label of brother does not preclude desire, as seen in Sleath’s depiction of the siblings Laurette and Enrico, but it is here shown as a safe way of exploring desires. Desmond is positioned as an almost-suitors, a companion who offers the safety of kinship with the power of attraction.

The cousin is a person with whom the heroine can indulge sexual desires, constant attention and familial affection without the censure of society. No other role allows for an unmarried woman to hold constant discourse with a man in such a way without being married or engaged to him. The cousin’s status as kin makes him a safe person with whom the heroine can dance, flirt, appear in public, be alone and have as a constant escort and companion without a loss of reputation. He can be relied on for the kind of physical comfort (such as hugs and ‘brotherly’ kisses) that would be proscribed with a non-relative and the heroine can use
his presence to discourage unwanted suitors. When Desmond faints, Angeline ‘pressed her lips to his cold damp face – her tears, her sobs, alone possessed the power to reanimate him. He groaned as he again felt the pressure of her lips to his’ (IV, p. 6). Henry, in love with Angeline, views this interaction as enviable but they are actions that Angeline can commit without risk of her reputation specifically because it is her cousin, a relation, who receives her kisses.

Henry’s marriage to his cousin Lucinda is similar to Perry’s description of Edmund and Fanny’s marriage in *Mansfield Park* as one that will ‘strengthen consanguineal bonds and consolidate family feeling’. While Lucinda loves Henry as a husband, he describes his attachment to her as solely familial and their marriage as a duty he was obligated to fulfil. Henry says ‘“my uncle’s partiality made him desirous that the happiness of his child should be committed to my care. My dear father’s heart was also fixed upon the match”’ (I, p. 128). As Lucinda’s cousin, Henry is a safe option for her father to fix upon; he knows that Henry will provide protection and constancy to his daughter because he knows that his character and understanding of familial obligation will render him a good husband. Thomas’s *Purity of Heart* also attempts to show the cousin as a safe option encouraged by the family; though she endangers this positioning of kin as safe with Sir Lusignan’s repeated infidelity, he is eventually redeemed through Camilla’s goodness (as Lucinda is not), which rewards filial and conjugal duty and obligation. On Henry and Lucinda’s wedding day, Lord Fortescue says to Lucinda: ‘would that your father was here, my dear child, to witness this happy event, to behold the long desired wish of his heart gratified!’ (I, p. 184). His phrasing is akin to that in Roche’s *Clermont* regarding the parents’ desires to see Madeline and De Sevignie married; but in Roche’s novel, the cousins both wish for the union. This is not the case in Davenport’s text, where the cousin marriage is destined to fail.

The parental generation that so earnestly desires Henry and Lucinda’s union is blinded to the cousins’ incompatibility. Henry says, ‘“I love Lucinda with brotherly affection […] but the differences in our tastes, in our inclinations, are so striking … I foresee we shall lead a life but little consonant to my taste or wishes”’ (I, p. 178). Henry knows the marriage will be unhappy as he and his cousin have little in common and his affection for her is fraternal. His father does not realise this until after the marriage, ‘convinced, when too late, that his niece was not the woman calculated to make happy such a heart and mind as his beloved Henry’s’
Davenport complicates the meaning of ‘brotherly’ when even after Henry impregnates Lucinda he continues to describe his feelings for her as brotherly. After Lucinda dies in childbirth, Henry reflects again on Angeline, whom he continues to love despite his father’s ban on the De Courci family. Henry describes to Angeline his marriage to Lucinda as follows:

‘The engagement … was made by my father and uncle … Duty and honour overcame, for a time, the secret prepossession of my heart, but even these were insufficient to wholly banish the angel form of her who alone had taught me the sweet feelings of a lover. Attached from childhood as a brother to my cousin … I mourn her loss as a beloved sister.’ (IV, pp. 174–5)

Even the duty and honour that Henry feels for the Fortescue family are insufficient to let him forget Angeline, his forbidden love of choice. Once Lord Fortescue releases the ban on Fortescue–De Courci marriages, Henry weds Angeline without defying the paternal prohibition.

Davenport’s novel is rife with endogamous marriages and near marriages and more are implied than are supported by consanguineal ties. Lady Desmond describes the childhood relationships between herself, her brother and the Fortescue siblings by saying, ‘“From infancy … we seemed to be but one family, and as we grew up to years of maturity our affection increased”’ (II, p. 149). The original inhabitants of the abbey and the castle grew as one family, intimacy developing alongside familial love. Those previously engaged couples, as sets of siblings, would have made Elvira, Sidney, Desmond, Angeline, Reginald, Cecil and Henry all double cousins. The families, structured as separate and forbidden, are only so divided because of the ban that severed what had promised to be one large family united through marriages and sibling ties. In a statement that equates love to an inheritance, Cecil says to her father of her feelings for Desmond, ‘“But is it to be wondered, that his child’s heart should not prove insensible to the merits of the son of his once adored Emma?”’ (III, p. 191). Indeed, the children of the De Courci and Fortescue families seem destined to fall in love with each other.

The paradoxical representations of cousin relationships show them to be analogous to a sibling bond but also sexualised. Just as the De Courci and Fortescue families are delineated as kin who love and sexually desire one another, the cousin tie allows for the coexistence of familial and erotic love. The role of the cousin, shown through the relationships of Desmond, Reginald and Angeline, offers practice in relating to the
opposite sex, protection from undesired suitors, shared mutual sensibilities and desires and opportunities to display affection in ways forbidden to non-kin. The relationships between cousins are rife with opportunities to explore emotions and physicality in a socially acceptable way, protected from disgrace by the consanguineal bond that allows sexual attraction within the safety of a familial relationship. In Davenport’s text cousins can be family or lovers, but they must make this decision for themselves without the interference of an older generation who, blinded by family pride and honour, attempt to wrest individual rights from their children in favour of tightening consanguineal bonds. A careful balance between family duty and individual desire is essential for happiness.

REJECTING THE COUSIN AS FAMILIAL OBLIGATION OR DUTY

A later debate in the Gothic is interesting because in the more than thirty years between Davenport’s novel and those of the Brontë sisters, while political reforms occurred, the essential position of women as lacking citizenship remained unchanged. Historian Constance Rover points to the Reform Act of 1832 as one that, while enfranchising male persons, provided an explicit statutory bar to women’s voting. The ongoing exclusion of women from the political and public arena in spite of the newly afforded rights granted to men makes these later representations of cousin marriage in the Gothic and their privileging of female rights over familial obligations demonstrably relevant to an analysis of the Gothic’s subversive and politicised use of such unions. In Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights (1847) two disparate cousin marriages underscore the extremes of dangerous consanguinity and patrimonies and the rejection of exogamy in favour of familial anarchy. The first union, between Cathy Linton and Linton Heathcliff, represents the violent power and destructive nature of paternal authority wielded by Heathcliff as a perverse inheritance from Mr Earnshaw and his son, Hindley. The second marriage, between Cathy and her cousin Hareton Earnshaw, allows an endogamic union that stems from an overabundance of overlapping family ties yet is utterly devoid of familial interference. Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre (1847) also features a heroine with two very different male cousins; and though only one of them proposes, she rejects the offer in favour of a marriage of questionable respectability. In Wuthering Heights the consequences of patriarchy are apparent in Heathcliff’s schemes for his son’s marriage to Cathy while these consequences are absent in the ensuing union of Cathy
and Hareton. Both heroines marry husbands who are masculine, dark and powerful; in Emily Brontë’s novel the sexualised hero is the cousin and in Charlotte Brontë’s he is non-kin, but both novels reflect a rejection of the duties that coincide with family in favour of individual rights and desires.

Pauline Nestor, in her introduction to *Wuthering Heights*, argues against the conclusion of scholars such as David Cecil who suggest that the union of Cathy and Hareton brings a restoration of order to the novel. Instead, she focuses on the ‘ever-present potential for reversion’ in the novel: ‘we cannot assume that the change in Hareton is any more secure’. Nestor’s point about the ‘precarious nature’ of conversion is convincing, as is her scepticism regarding the novel’s ending as representing a restoration of order. Heathcliff’s determination to destroy the Earnshaw and Linton familial lines has been partially realised; certainly, there are no Lintons left as Cathy Linton has become a Heathcliff and is on the verge of becoming an Earnshaw. Neither, however, is there any real order; the two large estates are managed by two young people, but primarily by the old housekeeper, Nelly. Wuthering Heights is on the verge of being left to the servants when the young couple moves to the Grange and it is hard to imagine Hareton playing convincingly the role of landed gentry, no matter how well his cousin has taught him to read. But what the ending means, and how Brontë structured the familial ties in order to arrive there, ought to contribute to the way the novel’s conclusion should be read.

Nestor writes that ‘the transgressive power of the novel is further evident in its flirtation with the fundamental taboos’, of which incest resonates in the ‘intermarriages of the second generation, in which Catherine marries her two cousins in succession, virtually without ever meeting an eligible male outside her family’. The novel’s incestuous insinuations are apparent from the outset and Catherine’s marriages, made without any extra-familial courtship, heighten the claustrophobic sense of endogamy and confusion over character roles and relations. The narrator, Lockwood, not knowing the genealogies of his landlord, incorrectly guesses first that Catherine is Heathcliff’s wife, then Hareton’s: ‘The clown at my elbow may be her husband. Heathcliff, junior, of course. Here is the consequence of being buried alive: she has thrown herself away upon that boor, from sheer ignorance that better individuals existed!’ Lockwood, the unreliable narrator, manages to get everything wrong and right at once. Catherine is not Heathcliff’s wife (though he wanted her mother to be), she is not Hareton’s (though she becomes his wife) and Hareton is not
Heathcliff’s son (though he resembles him more than he does his father Hindley). But his incorrect/almost correct assumptions reflect the distorted genealogies and incestuous endogamy of the household he has stumbled upon. Wuthering Heights is established as a location filled with overlapping and confusing relationships of kinship and marriage, where almost all the characters are related to each other via both blood and marriage.105 They also all resemble each other in different ways; Nestor discusses the confusion of names and resemblances, writing that ‘lineage seems unclear … Cathy’s nephew Hareton resembles her more closely than her daughter Cathy, while Hareton seems the truer son of Heathcliff than his biological offspring Linton.’106 In this exceptionally small family group, lines of blood and resemblance intersect. Both the family and their crossing ties of consanguineal and affinal connections allow Heathcliff to achieve his goal of securing Linton’s estate and fortune for his own.

Catherine’s first encounters with her cousins are far from the instant attraction/recognition-filled meetings common in the Gothic. She meets Hareton when she is thirteen and he is ‘a great, strong lad of eighteen’ (p. 193). She initially thinks his father is the owner of Wuthering Heights and is upset to find out that this is not the case, mistaking him for a servant.107 Another servant corrects Cathy, telling her, ‘“Though Mr Hareton, there, be not the master’s son, he’s your cousin’” (p. 195). Cathy is appalled: ‘“my cousin is a gentleman’s son – That my –” she stopped, and wept outright; upset at the bare notion of a relationship with such a clown’ (p. 196). Cathy is aggrieved to discover she is kin to a servant; when she hears her father will be bringing home her cousin Linton she is overjoyed: she ‘indulged the most sanguine anticipations … of her “real” cousin’ (p. 199) who will be the ‘gentleman’s son’ Cathy believes her cousin should be. Cathy’s meeting with Linton, however, also fails to meet her expectations. The ‘pale, delicate, effeminate boy’ with a ‘sickly peevish-ness’ (p. 200) does little more than sob and complain before Heathcliff sends for him to live at Wuthering Heights.

In spite of Linton’s initial poor impressions Cathy desires to renew their acquaintance and her father, because of the kinship tie, eventually acquiesces. Both Heathcliff and Linton seek a union between the cousins, though for opposing reasons. Heathcliff confides his plan to Nelly:

‘My design is as honest as possible … That the two cousins may fall in love, and get married. I’m acting generously to your master; his young chit has no expectations, and should she second my wishes, she’ll be provided for, at once,
as joint successor with Linton. ‘If Linton died … Catherine would be the heir.’ ‘No, she would not … there is no clause in the will to secure it so; his property would go to me; but, to prevent disputes, I desire their union, and am resolved to bring it about.’ (p. 215)

When Linton is irritable and sickly Cathy placates him, stroking his hair and saying ‘“Pretty Linton! I wish you were my brother”’ (p. 238); an interesting shift in roles from a cousin with whom she has just been exchanging love letters. As in Davenport’s and Bennett’s novels and Emmeline and Jane Eyre, the cousin bond is again manipulated into one of siblinghood, regardless of romantic desires. Edgar hopes that the cousins may form an attachment and wed primarily because Linton, his male next of kin, will inherit his property and he wants Cathy to be able to stay in Thrushcross Grange after his death. Nelly states that Linton ‘had a natural desire that she might retain, or, at least, return, in a short time, to the house of her ancestors; and he considered her only prospect of doing that was by a union with his heir’ (p. 259). Linton’s desire for this seems woefully naïve; he is aware of Heathcliff’s ability to manipulate and the power he has over his son but he still hopes that the cousins could have a happy marriage. Brontë emphasises not only the injustice of patrimony, but also Linton’s childlike trust in the system of inheritance and kinship, a trust that is proved to be ill-founded. Heathcliff desires the marriage as a legal means to solidify his grasp on the Grange when Linton dies and, as Cathy’s money would become her cousin’s once married, to claim the fortune as well as the estate.

When Heathcliff tricks Catherine into accompanying her cousin into Wuthering Heights, locking her and Nelly in, Linton explains, ‘“Papa wants us to be married … he’s afraid of my dying, if we wait; so we are to be married in the morning”’ (p. 272). Nelly is outraged beyond Cathy, saying her charge would never marry such a weakling. The comparison to her other infant charge, Hareton, is clear; Hareton and Cathy are strong and alike and Linton is a weak ‘changeling’ unfit to marry Cathy. After Cathy is forced into the cousin marriage, Linton tells Nelly that his uncle Edgar is dying:

‘I’m glad, for I shall be master of the Grange after him – and Catherine always spoke of it as her house. It isn’t hers! It’s mine – papa says everything she has is mine. All her nice books are mine – she offered to give me them, and her pretty bird, and her pony Minny, if I would get the key of our room, and let her out: but I told her she had nothing to give, they were all, all mine.’ (p. 280)
Linton, vicious, weak and petty, delights in the benefits granted to him by his sex. He is infuriated by the notion that Catherine should claim as ‘hers’ anything that is ‘his’ based on either the patrimony or their marriage that rendered her personal possessions also ‘his’. Part of Perry’s argument concerning cousin marriage in Austen revolves around an uneasiness occasioned by the motivation of wealth accumulation; she writes ‘the possible paternal first-cousin matches … are tainted by social ambition and the venal desire for accumulation of wealth … because of the concentration of wealth and title in the male line. Maternal first-cousin marriage did not profit from this fact of inheritance’. Linton exemplifies cousin marriage for wealth accumulation; manipulated into the match by his father, he delights in the rewards he reaps from the marriage.

Because Edgar Linton realises on his deathbed Heathcliff’s goal of gaining Cathy’s personal property as well as the Grange, ‘he felt his will had better be altered – instead of leaving Catherine’s fortune at her own disposal, he determined to put it in the hands of trustees … By that means, it could not fall to Mr Heathcliff should Linton die’ (p. 282). The lawyer, however, is under Heathcliff’s command and the will remains unaltered. Cousin marriage is exposed as a sham sought to gain control of property and fortune and marriage in general is presented as fraught with the danger of being under the command of tyrants who gain control of female property and fortune. Linton dies within a month of his marriage to Cathy, though it is too late for her to retain any of her personal possessions. Heathcliff is now owner of everything relating to the Grange and Cathy; as described by Nelly, Linton: ‘bequeathed the whole of his, and what had been her moveable property to his father … The lands, being a minor, he could not meddle with. However, Mr Heathcliff has claimed, and kept them in his wife’s right, and his also … Catherine, destitute of cash and friends, cannot disturb his possession’ (p. 294). Cathy is far from reconciled to this appropriation; when Heathcliff upbraids her for daring to disturb bushes in the garden she says, ‘“you shouldn’t grudge a few yards of earth, for me to ornament, when you have taken all my land! … and my money … and Hareton’s land, and his money”’ (pp. 319–20).

Instead of the landed aristocracy desiring this union between cousins to maintain familial wealth and title, it is sought by two servants; one because she raised and loves them both, one because she wants to see Cathy lowered. After Linton’s death Hareton makes overtures of friendliness to Cathy; he is attracted to his cousin as a ‘child to a candle’ (p. 296).
but after she unleashes her temper on him – emphasising his ignorance – he will have nothing to do with her. This does not long continue. Cathy, trapped indoors or within the boundaries of the garden on Heathcliff’s orders, is bored beyond measure. Echoing Lockwood’s earlier remarks regarding ‘the consequence of being buried alive’ (p. 13), Cathy looks to Hareton for companionship. Zillah, the housekeeper, wants to see Cathy’s pride lowered, saying to Nelly: “you happen to think your young lady too fine for Mr Hareton … but, I own, I should love well to bring her pride a peg lower”’ (p. 295). A potential union between the two is shown as degrading to Cathy, who nonetheless persists in seeking a relationship with her cousin. Apologising for her previous bad behaviour – “I should like you to be my cousin”’ (p. 312) – she uses their kinship as a basis for a friendship that would be impossible without it, given his position as a destitute, uneducated servant.112 Cathy says, “Come, you shall take notice of me, Hareton – you are my cousin, and you shall own me”’ (p. 313). They fall in love and Nelly says to Lockwood that “the crown of all my wishes will be the union of those two”’ (p. 316). The lowering that Zillah refers to is akin to the degradation Catherine feared through a union with Heathcliff, her inferior in social class, though it was her union with her social equal, Linton, that was so unhappy.113 Brontë represents surface and social differences – such as Hareton and Heathcliff’s darker complexions and lack of status – as minor impediments while underscoring consanguineal likeness as crucial to conjugal happiness.

With no families to whom Catherine owes obligation and duty and no paternal figures against whom to fight, the estates have evolved into a state of near anarchy, with the housekeeper in charge and the heiress marrying the former stable boy. When Lockwood returns he asks Nelly for the master in order to pay the rent and Nelly tells him, “it is with Mrs Heathcliff you must settle … or rather with me. She has not learnt to manage her affairs yet, and I act for her; there’s nobody else”’ (p. 309). Now engaged to her cousin Hareton, Cathy is prepared to return to the Grange as mistress. Although it is not explicitly stated, it seems Wuthering Heights is now Hareton’s property in the absence of a will, given his family’s ancestral ownership of the estate. Nelly’s words “there’s nobody else”’ are the stark truth: Cathy is alone in the world; all the Earnshaws, Lintons and Heathcliffs, with the exceptions of Hareton and her, are dead. This reiterates Lockwood’s words regarding Cathy and Hareton – is she only marrying him because there is no one else? Brontë takes care to show the evolution of their relationship and
Hareton’s manners, but she is equally careful to position an unreliable narrator and Zillah to trouble our conception of their potential happiness. Regardless, what is explicit is the absence of family besides the cousins; there can be no consanguineal obligation or duty that presses them to wed. Cathy and Hareton are free to assert their individual rights, but by the time this is true, they have already been raised in the highly incestuous environment of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights. If Cathy has seen only three eligible males in her life, Hareton has seen only her. Heathcliff uses consanguineous marriage to achieve the exact opposite of the traditional reasons permitting it – maintaining estates, wealth and lineage – in a distortion undertaken to disperse and destroy these symbols of the Linton and Earnshaw families. The ending may be many things, but Nestor is right, a return to order it is not. Brontë’s final cousin marriage is agreed upon for none of the traditional reasons therefore and is achieved in the absence of any familial interference in the cousins’ spousal selection.

The novel that perhaps most clearly embodies the shift from the privileging of consanguineal obligations to the increasing importance given to individual choice is Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. While her sister’s novel shows an eventual removal of family members until there is no one left but the cousins-in-love, Charlotte Brontë’s novel places her heroine within a family but without familial ties. Jane Eyre is raised in her uncle’s home but the Reed family is unkind to the niece/cousin they treat as inferior and Jane discovers sympathetic family only later in the three Rivers cousins. Jane rejects her cousin St John Rivers’s marriage proposal and its basis in his desire for respectability, instead marrying Rochester in a celebration of mutual love. Critics such as Eugenia C. DeLamotte point to the novel as having a ‘domestic’ ending with a sexually tamed husband.¹¹⁴ I argue in contrast that the novel’s conclusion emphasises the role of the sexual desires between Jane and Rochester in creating a kinship bond between the two. The importance of sexuality to the novel is pointed out by John Maynard, who refers to the ‘process of emotional and sexual maturation’ that Jane undergoes before returning to and marrying Rochester.¹¹⁵ *Jane Eyre* is a strong assertion of female rights and desires, presenting a radical realignment of what constitutes consanguineal and conjugal bonds. Showing the sacrament of marriage that unites husband and wife in a bond of kinship as essential to Jane’s understanding of her relationship with Rochester, Brontë equates the conjugal tie to the consanguineal in a love-based egalitarian union.
In her Rivers cousins Jane finds perfect sympathy with her female kin, but none with her male kin. Jane compares St John Rivers to a statue with a ‘high forehead, colourless as ivory’ and understands that ‘he might well be a little shocked at the irregularity of my lineaments, his own being so harmonious’ (p. 396). Jane and St John do not resemble each other; she is unattractive to him and he seems like a marble sculpture to her. Ambitious and unhappy in his profession as a minister, Brontë portrays St John as the icy antithesis to Jane’s fiery temperament. DeLamotte writes: ‘The ice-cold St John … offers religious ecstasy, enlightenment, release. But in the imagery associated with their relationship Jane suffers torture, darkness, and imprisonment instead.’ In contrast, in her female cousins, Jane discovers a pleasure ‘arising from the perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles’ (p. 402). Jane divides her inheritance of £20,000 between herself and her Rivers cousins, splitting the wealth four ways to give each cousin freedom; in dismantling the inheritance Jane does away with the system of keeping wealth intact through the generations by dispersing it amongst the kin laterally. Dispersal of wealth weakens the total power of a family but increases the individual power of its members, a revolutionary idea that St John hesitates to agree to. When he suggests that she could marry well with the fortune intact, Jane says (perhaps unconsciously describing St John and then Rochester): ‘I do not want a stranger – unsympathising, alien, different from me; I want my kindred: those with whom I have full fellow-feeling’ (p. 447). They agree to view each other as siblings; St John says ‘I feel I can easily and naturally make room in my heart for you, as my third and youngest sister’ (p. 447), while Jane thinks: ‘it seemed I had found a brother: one I could be proud of – one I could love’ (p. 444).

In Brontë’s novel opposites destroy each other; like must be allied with like in marriage but such a bond is not found with kin. St John’s relationship with Jane develops but she finds he gains a control over her through a withholding of emotion she finds unbearable. The cousins may think they share a sibling-like bond but in his treatment of Jane, St John comes closer to Lord Howel’s education of Ellen; he appears as a father figure rather than a brother. St John proposes that Jane marry him and accompany him to India, enumerating the qualities that make her a good missionary’s wife. Jane contemplates the loveless marriage they would have and decides ‘as his sister, I might accompany him – not as his wife’ (p. 467). St John recoils at this idea but Jane knows that their natures are incompatible: ‘I daily wished more to please him; but to do so …
I must disown half my nature’ (p. 460). St John uses respectability as a reason to press for the marriage, saying ‘“How can I, a man not yet thirty, take out with me to India a girl of nineteen, unless she be married to me?”’ (p. 470). When Jane declares she will go only as his assistant he is icily enraged; her willingness to go with him without benefit of marriage makes him view her as sexually accessible. In a complete dissolution of the notion of the cousin as safe, St John reveals the bond as providing no protection for the reputation. Jane, however, does not regard preserving her reputation as incentive to marry without desire, offering him only her companionship. St John uses the language of heavenly duty and respectability rather than that of familial obligation and duty to persuade her to marry him but his rhetoric leaves her unconvinced. Maynard refers to the choice between Rochester and St John as one between the ‘two versions of the sexual openness and sexual suppressions that are built generally into the structure of the book.’

After she rejects her sexless, icy cousin it is to Rochester and his fiery nature that Jane runs and she is rewarded for her rejection of endogamic celibacy with a virile and masculine lover. DeLamotte argues that ‘the ideology of Gothic romance idealises female passivity and dependence. At the crucial moment Gothic heroines are rescued, almost always by a man,’ stating that Rochester’s cry for help is Jane’s salvation from St John’s marriage proposal. But this seems an odd kind of rescue, for Jane has already refused St John when she mentally hears Rochester’s cry and goes to save him. Jane finds him missing an eye and a hand, nearly blind from the injuries sustained in the fire, though he looks remarkably unchanged. Jane reflects, looking at him, ‘not in one year’s space, by any sorrow, could his athletic strength be quelled or his vigorous prime blighted’ (pp. 497–8). He is hardly the wounded hero rendered feminine, as scholars have frequently cast him. DeLamotte, for example, perceives Rochester as somehow neutered, pronouncing him ‘a husband whose sexual energies have been distinctly tamed.’ But this does not correspond to Jane’s description of Rochester as strong and vigorous; the wound sustained damaged his vision rather than his genitals. While the wounding may have had a levelling effect on their relationship, it is premature to conclude his sexual energy has diminished. In fact, Rochester’s injuries have only made him more attractive to Jane: ‘“it is a pity to see … the scar of fire on your forehead: and the worst of it is, one is in danger of loving you too well for all this”’ (p. 503). The mark of fire on his forehead, much like that of thunder on Satan in Paradise Lost, pulls Jane to
him;\textsuperscript{126} she is drawn to the darkness and signs of sin that brand him. St John's purity and punctilious duty to God were never the enticement that Rochester's fierce strength and desires are. Rochester describes St John as Apollo and himself as a Vulcan. The reference to Vulcan, the Roman god of destructive fire, emphasises his heightened sexuality and contrasts it to St John's marble sexlessness. It relates not only to Rochester's physical appearance – dark and powerfully built – but the mythical being is also associated with male fertility.\textsuperscript{127} Jane's stated 'danger' in loving Rochester 'too well' after seeing the mark of fire alludes to a heightened sexual relationship, not a 'tamed' one. She is at liberty with him: 'there was no harassing restraint, no repressing of glee and vivacity with him; for with him I was at perfect ease, because I knew I suited him' (p. 504). Rather than having to repress half her nature as she did with her cousin, Jane finds in Rochester complete freedom of self-expression and sexuality that proves him to be truly kindred.

The kinship bond between them is reinforced with the imagery associated with their union, a melding of flesh and bodies both sexual and spiritual. After their marriage Jane reinforces their unification by saying 'no woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh' (p. 519). When before their first failed marriage attempt Rochester employed 'the rhetoric of romantic love' Maynard suggests that 'the metaphors of his loving her as his flesh could emerge as emotionally real threats of incest'.\textsuperscript{128} Now Jane joyfully embraces this rhetoric and its incestuous kinship implications. Stevie Davies notes that 'the Book of Common Prayer incorporates this kinship into the sacrament of the marriage service'.\textsuperscript{129} Brontë affirms that Rochester is absolutely Jane's family through Jane's reiteration of the sacrament; that true kinship is of the soul. DeLamotte argues that Brontë sees domesticity as blissful only with 'the self-knowledge and mutual knowledge the male–female relationship at its centre is capable of accommodating … [A] vision of such radical equality of communication at the centre of a marriage was not common'.\textsuperscript{130} However, this radical equality of communication is common in the Gothic. The main attraction between Gothic heroines and heroes is that they are perfectly sympathetic to each other, sharing the same tastes in music, art and literature and having the same views on philosophy and religion. Often from the same family, or from closely connected families, they frequently come from an equal footing of birth, education, age and sentiment; these similarities are all almost always present in the marriages that take place between the Gothic
protagonists. This is partially what makes even non-incestuous relationships feel incestuous. Brontë’s vision is radical, but for Gothic writers, it is far from uncommon. What makes Jane and Rochester distinct is Brontë’s articulation of their non-consanguineal union as kinship through their nuptial vows and mutual love; their freedom with each other creates a consanguineous conjugal family.

Brontë causes the role of the cousin to shift from one of implicit safety and respectability to one of potential danger, even from such a highly respectable and sexless man as St John. In this shift Brontë draws attention to the erosion of familial bonds and the perception of safety therein, revealing kin-based male–female relationships as no longer socially privileged or even respectable. At a time in England when cousin marriage, increasingly acceptable and popular, was nearing an all-time high, the role of the cousin became that of a potential mate rather than merely that of kin, and thus the respectability afforded by the consanguineal bond diminished. Jane tries to re-endow the cousin with respectability by offering to accompany him on his missions without benefit of marriage but succeeds only in making him question her morality. Brontë troubles the idea of consanguineal ties as equivalent to family, showing Rochester turn from lover to husband to family in a way Jane’s blood kin never could. Hoeveler suggests that we see the ‘incestuous suitor’ rejected again in Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights in the characters of St John Rivers and Heathcliff and that ‘moving out of the family kinship clan and into an exogamous alliance, based on the property of one’s own body rather than one’s blood, proved to be an enormously anxious and ambivalent activity for middle-class women and writers’. But as Perry has clearly demonstrated, the anxiety felt is at least partially due to a privileging of conjugal over consanguineal ties, not the notion of one’s body as property; hardly a new idea for women who, be it based on blood or body, were quite accustomed to being the object of exchange. Jane’s rejection of St John is a choice for life, vigour and virility that demonstrates the failure of St John’s attempt to establish a new ideology in favour of cousin marriage based on female reputation and Christian duty. Brontë’s depiction of these substitutes as inadequate establishes her text as truly radical in its privileging of individual choice and female sexual desires over respectability, familial obligation and heavenly duty.

The contested role of the cousin as legitimate marriage choice or not, kin or non-kin, lover or sibling, respectable or potentially dangerous, reflects the flexible nature of the cousin’s role and the relative ease with
which definitions of family could change.\textsuperscript{133} The complexity of the cousin’s situation allows for writers of the Gothic, so invested in subversions of patriarchal structures, readily to manipulate the bond in order to privilege individual rights and desires over duty and obligation. The Gothic, indebted to the philosophical and political discourses of the eighteenth century, took up the language of individual rights and social and familial obligation in its representations of cousin marriage. Participating in the prevailing discourses allowed writers to trouble the notion of female obligation to a patriarchal structure – such as the state or the family – that denied women individual rights. Representations of cousin marriage as an unfair familial demand and female obligation necessary to maintain ancestral estates and wealth demonstrate the hypocrisy of demanding obligation to a family structure that afforded women no rights within it and express anxieties regarding the underlying causes of this incestuous configuration’s social acceptability. The grounds on which cousin marriage was permitted were thus exposed as perpetuating the family structure at the expense of women’s rights, access to property and potential citizenship within the family and the state.\textsuperscript{134} Yet, rather than these grounds designating cousin marriage solely as a conservative option, such unions occupy a versatile position in the Gothic. The flexible nature of the kinship bond, its frequent depiction as akin to an egalitarian sibling bond, the influence of familial pressure and the desires of the cousins render such marriages capable of fulfilling an obligation to the family or rejecting entrapment within the family structure.\textsuperscript{135} How different Gothic novelists locate the figure of the cousin as kin or non-kin reveals radical, conservative or moderate views of the struggle between familial obligations and individual rights reinforced by the particular genre of Gothic (Radcliffian Gothic, anti-Gothic, sentimental Gothic). Enrenched within the kinship changes of eighteenth-century society regarding the importance of consanguineal, affinal and conjugal ties, locating the cousin in or removing him from the patriarchal structure reveals him as alternately rejected or desired by the heroine who refuses to participate in the dominant ideology of patrilineal inheritance, exchanges of women and demands of female obligation and duty.

\textbf{Notes}

1 Charlotte Smith, \textit{Emmeline, The Orphan of the Castle}, 4 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1788), I, p. 45. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

3 Shepher, p. 85; p. 88.


5 Patrick Bateson and Peter Gluckman, *Plasticity, Robustness, Development and Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 65. See Chapter 2 for a summary of Maurice Greenberg’s theories of genetic sexual attraction and Edward Westermarck’s hypothesis of reverse sexual imprinting that suggest individuals are attracted to kin with whom they are not raised. Bateson and Gluckman argue that cousin unions of the third or fourth degree provide the ‘optimal degree of relatedness’ (p. 65).

6 Shepher, pp. 98–104.


8 Bateson and Gluckman, pp. 66–70.


12 Perry, pp. 230–1.

13 Examples include Emmeline in Charlotte Smith’s eponymous novel, Hareton in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and St John in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847).

14 For example, Henry Fortescue in *The Sons of the Viscount and the Daughters of the Earl* (1813) refers to his affection for his cousin as akin to his affection for his sister, while in *Clermont* (1798) Madeline and de Sevignie never discuss their kinship status.

15 Perry, p. 121.


20 Pollak, p. 30.


22 Perry, p. 122.

23 Pollak, p. 165.

24 Pollak, p. 164.


26 Pollak, p. 44.


28 The historian Linda Colley notes this in Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), writing that ‘stripped by marriage of a separate identity and autonomous property, a woman could not by definition be a citizen and could never look to possess political rights’ (p. 243).

29 Colley, pp. 279–81.

30 Perry points to the political and economic changes of the day that emphasised individualism and individual rights but that for women ‘did not expand the sphere of their social or political power’ while often pitting their individual desires against ‘the interests of the family’ (p. 221).


34 Perry, p. 122.


37 Emmeline’s love for Delamere is presented by Smith as a sibling-like love, but given Emmeline’s upbringing – separate from Delamere – and that he has never behaved as a brother or cousin but only as a suitor, it seems unlikely that Emmeline finds Delamere an unacceptable choice because of the kinship bond, but rather because she simply is not in love with him.

38 Kuper, ‘Changing the subject’, 732.

39 Hoeveler, p. 45.

40 Cleere, 122.

41 Cleere, 129.

42 Cleere, 115.


45 Klekar, 269–70.

46 Klekar, 277.

47 Klekar, 285.

48 Smith’s views seem aligned with Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) and its rejection of Rousseau’s demands for female participation in a state (here: family) that would grant women no rights. Smith, like Wollstonecraft, asserts women must have the same individual rights as men and shows Emmeline reject the structure of family and its concomitant demands for her obligation and denial of her rights.

49 Hoeveler points to this disruption in familial definitions, arguing that Smith presents the patriarchy as comprising ‘a corrupt aristocracy and the old, kin-based order it implies and second the rising bourgeoisie characterized by its commitment to exogamous marriage’ (p. 47).


51 Kuper, Incest and Influence, p. 244.

52 Kuper, Incest and Influence, p. 247.
53 Perry, p. 369.

54 Regina Maria Roche, Clermont, 4 vols (London: The Minerva Press, 1798), I, pp. 30–1. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

55 A further cousin marriage is anticipated in a proposed union between de Sevignie and D'Alembert's daughter as a bribe to assure the silence of the servants who raised de Sevignie; a marriage between their foster-son and a member of the aristocracy would enrich and ennable them. D'Alembert's daughter is de Sevignie's second cousin (his father's first cousin).

56 Philippe, similar to Weimar in Eliza Parsons's The Castle of Wolfenbach (1793), sees his niece's marriage as a method of repayment. Although Philippe envisions Madeline's union to his son as reimbursement for a debt of sorrow, while Weimar desires his niece marry him as a repayment for the money he spent raising her, both see the exchanges of their nieces' bodies through marriage as transactions that will settle debts. See Chapter 3 for a further analysis of obligation, debt and exchange in uncle–niece relationships.


58 That Madeline is intended as a gift for Philippe's son and not for Philippe (particularly given his status as her uncle – almost always a role fraught with incestuous desires for the niece) is an inversion of what Anne K. Mellor describes as 'the perverse desire of the older generation to usurp the sexual rights of the younger generation' underlying the Male Gothic's deployment of father–daughter rape in her work; Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 197.

59 Perry, p. 121.

60 This type of cousin marriage – parallel cousins – is slightly less common than cross-cousin marriages. John Maynard Smith points to the prohibition of parallel cousin unions as a leftover from primitive societies in The Evolution of Sex (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 144. Lévi-Strauss describes women as being received (as wife) or given (as sister or daughter), arguing that parallel cousin marriages are less common as 'parallel cousins come from families in the same formal position, which is a position of static equilibrium' (Lévi-Strauss, p. 138).

61 As Philippe and Clermont are half-siblings who married full siblings, the parallel cousin bond is doubled and, with it, the risk of two brothers sharing one sister. Richard D. Alexander points to this as a paternal uncertainty factor that renders parallel cousin marriage less than desirable in certain societies such as polygynous ones, where parallel cousins may also be half-siblings. See Alexander, Darwinism and Human Affairs (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), pp. 177–88. The potential
then, is for Madeline and de Sevignie to be more than half, though less than full, siblings, a potential compounded by the charge of adultery leveled against Philippe.

62 Marcel Mauss in *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* [1925] trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990) examines the contractual nature of gift exchange (p. 4), while Luce Irigaray in *This Sex Which is Not One* [1977], trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985) describes how our social structure makes women “products” used and exchanged by men. Their status is that of merchandise, “commodities” (p. 84). Madeline is positioned by her uncle and father as a commodity Clermont is obliged to offer his nephew, while she subverts this through her initiative as the pursuer in her interactions with de Sevignie.

63 See David Livingstone Smith, ‘Beyond Westermarck: can shared mothering or maternal phenotype matching account for incest avoidance?’, *Evolutionary Psychology*, 5:1 (2007), 202–22 for an analysis of childhood co-rearing causing sibling-like bonds between non-kin (203). See also Chapter 2’s exploration of sibling incest, particularly in Eleanor Sleath’s *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798), in which the sibling bond and mutual love between the non-related Enrico and Laurette bears a marked resemblance to that of Percival and Ellen.

64 Perry’s exploration of the demands of family obligation and individual desires as increasingly difficult to negotiate in eighteenth-century literature (p. 221) is relevant here; she identifies a nostalgia for stronger consanguineal bonds in many texts of the period (p. 373). In an inversion of this, Ellen’s subsumption of her desires in fulfilment of family duty reveals the claustrophobic, unreasonable demands of kin.


66 This sense of a familial burden is supported by Ellen’s marriage to Lord Castle Howel to preserve her family’s home following family pressure, the representations of the Meredith children living at Code Gwyn who contribute little to its maintenance and Lord Howel’s burdensome sister and aunts who demand his financial support and duty.

67 Kuper, *Incest and Influence*, p. 17. Kuper focuses particularly on upper-middle-class families in nineteenth-century England to argue that the casual and unchaperoned environments in which cousins associated facilitated the development of romantic attachments, a point that applies equally to the environment in which Ellen and Percival are raised.

The representation of the mutual and natural development of Ellen and Percival’s love echoes Alethea Brereton Lewis’s *The Nuns of the Desert: or, The Woodland Witches*, 2 vols (London: The Minerva Press, 1805), which describes the love between two sets of half-cousins as follows: ‘Formed by Nature to constitute each other’s felicity … By pursuing their own wishes, each party gratified those of the other; so exactly consonant were their principles, their sentiments, and their dispositions. Nor was the union between Sophia Selwyn and Ferdinand less perfect’ (II, p. 122).

The Westermarck effect, which posits that children raised together (whether blood kin or not) tend to become non-viable mates as they view each other as kin, typically when they share parental figures and are brought up in the same household, is bypassed here and often is with cousins who do not share parental figures and/or households. See Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1903), pp. 320–30.

The Merediths’ carelessness in undercharging their tenants and Lord Howel’s inattention regarding the money he gives his sister are represented as acts of dangerous generosity. Inverting the typical Gothic trope of generosity being indicative of a moral and responsible character, in Bennett’s novel it has potentially devastating consequences.

Ellen is coerced into being a gift for Lord Howel; her liberty of individual choice is denied in favour of fulfilling obligation to the family. That she is forced into this position due, in large part, to her family’s overinflated sense of obligation to their tenants, reinforces the sense that traditional economies of gifts, exchanges, obligation and ownership have become onerous and incapable of proper management.

Code Gwyn is described as ‘a large gothic mansion, built at a time, when imperfect laws and civil discord obliged the chiefs of the country to consult safety, more than pleasure and convenience, in the construction and situation of their houses’ (I, p. 2).
sexual property of one man and one man only, they had to be trained to feel repugnance for physical relations with anyone else. The emphasis of woman's sexual allegiance to a mate, rather than her obedience to a father, also signaled the realignment of kinship along a conjugal rather than consanguineal axis’ (p. 254). Camilla’s representation negotiates sexual repugnance towards Ellesmere with sexual fidelity to her cousin/husband, blending fidelity and duty to both models of sexual allegiance and repugnance and obedience to family.

79 Perry, p. 124.

80 Camilla’s role within Sir Lusignan’s house is akin to that advocated for wives by Rousseau in Emile: ‘the obedience and the fidelity she owes to her husband and the tenderness and the care she owes to her children are consequences of her position so natural and easily sensed that she cannot without bad faith refuse her consent to the inner sentiment that guides her, nor fail to recognize her duty if her inclinations are still uncorroupted’ (p. 382).

81 This is quite different from Linton’s speech over Cathy’s possessions in Wuthering Heights, where the husband’s ownership of wifely possessions is shown to be a cruel tyranny.

82 The negotiation between parental authority and individual choice or affinal ties is a common one in the eighteenth-century novel, particularly the Gothic. In Lewis’s Nuns of the Desert the villain, Mr Selwyn, says to his daughters: ‘“you are already acquainted with your lot in future life; it being the result of both the wisdom and affection of those who have, as they ought to have, unlimited power over your destiny”’ (I, p. 120). The girls defy their father’s desire for them to become nuns, fleeing from the convent and renouncing his authority in favour of their own destinies (one sister marries her half-cousin, the other announces she will remain single) and the rebellion ends with both sisters happy.

83 Camilla exemplifies Rousseau’s understanding of the ideal wife: she remains entrenched in the private sphere and in marrying her cousin she submits to both conjugal and familial obligations. Rousseau asserts that ‘to please men, to be useful to them, to make herself loved and honored by them, to raise them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, to make their lives agreeable and sweet – these are the duties of women at all times’ (Emile, p. 365).

84 See Chapter 3 for an examination of the phallic knife wielded against women in the Gothic, particularly in scenes depicting uncles with incestuous desires for their nieces.

85 The dangers of foreign influence on British women is a convention of much literature written during and following the 1790s; Linda Colley examines the impact of the execution of Marie-Antoinette on British anxiety over the treatment of women during the French Revolution as it became clear that
domesticity was no longer safe for wives and mothers in France, arguing that ‘in Great Britain, woman was subordinate and confined. But at least she was also safe. The twin themes of the peculiar safety of British women and of their danger from the French were played on assiduously by loyalist propaganda during the wars’ (p. 262).

86 In Pathologies of the West: An Anthropology of Mental Illness in Europe and America (London: Continuum, 2002), Roland Littlewood examines the higher social stigma against cross-generational incest due to the sexualisation of power and the erosion of care-giving involved in such relationships (p. 145).

87 The illness may be what robs Sir Lusignan of his desire for extramarital affairs; Thomas draws on the Gothic tradition of wounded heroes but implies a lessening of sexual power not alluded to in earlier Gothic texts.

88 In a likely unintended consequence, Thomas acknowledges that notions of female obligation and duty will not result in liberation as Camilla never becomes a ‘citizen’ – she exists only as a dependant in Sir Lusignan’s home; Calantha, conversely, becomes liberated from the confines of gender ideologies through her unruly and socially unacceptable desire that defies the demands of duty and obligation.

89 Selina Davenport, The Sons of the Viscount and the Daughters of the Earl, 4 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1813), I, p. 42. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

90 In Incest and Influence Kuper argues that the 1858 Bemiss report that claimed both close kin unions and miscegenation caused birth defects due to bad blood was the impetus behind laws that banned biracial and cousin marriages in America (p. 249); Davenport’s language reveals such ideas regarding contaminated blood were part of earlier understandings of family bloodlines. That Davenport locates the sullied blood within non-kin who are like kin displays an ambiguity similar to the Bemiss report’s assertions regarding the danger of unions either too similar or too different.

91 Perry, pp. 230–1.

92 Perry, p. 230.

93 The cousin bond here demonstrates its flexibility, allowing cousins to relate to and identify one another as siblings and simultaneously feel attraction and desire for each other.

94 Irigaray’s point about the commodification of women within the structure of exchange is relevant here, as Davenport’s description of beauty demonstrates Elvira’s true value is as an object; Davenport similarly plays with the Gothic convention of incestuous uncles, underscoring the dangers of endogamic desires and the paternal power that seeks to confine Elvira within the familial structure.
Like Philippe, Lord De Courci wants to control the daughter of his older brother; both here and in Roche’s novel the uncle selects the beautiful niece for his son’s wife. In the novels examined in Chapter 3 the younger brothers who threatened their nieces with rape, violence and theft had no sons to use as sexual substitutes.

The sibling-like quality of their relationship that causes them to be compatible echoes the idealisation of such brother–sister relationships as that of Ferdinand and Julia in Ann Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance* (1790).

Like Bennett’s Ellen, Henry is obligated to undergo a first marriage due to familial pressures before the fortuitous death of the spouse enables the marriage based on individual choice.

Davenport’s depiction of familial obligation as largely incompatible with individual rights and choices is another example of a novel that struggles to conform to the overarching narrative of nostalgia for kinship identified in eighteenth-century literature as sentimentalising ‘the consanguineal basis for obligation’ (Perry, p. 8).

This is analogous to the analysis in Chapter 2 of Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance*, in which Julia hopes the handsome young Hippolitus is her brother.

Cathy’s attempt to buy her freedom from her cousin/husband is futile as he already owns her possessions. Brontë provides a parallel to the contemporary laws that denied citizenship without property ownership and shows the impossibility of female participation in the state. Colley’s point bears repeating: ‘stripped by marriage of a separate identity and autonomous property, a woman could not by definition be a citizen and could never look to possess
political rights’ (p. 254). Cathy cannot buy her freedom from her husband and women could not buy the individual rights guaranteed by citizenship as both family and state repress female rights through the law.

110 Perry, p. 123.

111 Heathcliff echoes Zillah’s sentiment that a union between Hareton and Cathy will end badly: ‘“if I see him listen to you, I’ll send him seeking his bread where he can get it! Your love will make him an outcast, and a beggar”’ (p. 321). Heathcliff means Hareton will be a beggar because he will cast him out with nothing, but also alludes to Catherine’s love that sent him from Wuthering Heights to return, too late, as a permanent outsider.

112 This is parallel to the relationship Cathy’s mother had with Heathcliff and is like that between Roche’s Madeline and de Sevignie.

113 Brontë, like Davenport, displays an understanding (and rejection of) the beliefs underlying the later American bans against cousin and interracial marriage that Kuper describes as grounded in the idea that ‘in the one case the “blood” was too similar, in the other too alien’ in Incest and Influence, p. 249.


117 DeLamotte, p. 217.

118 DeLamotte, pp. 224–5.

119 As in Wuthering Heights and the sibling relationships examined in Chapter 2, like and like are ideally united in marriage to create sympathetic and egalitarian unions.

120 As in Cathy’s voiced desire to have Linton as a brother, here the claims for a sibling bond are expressed rather than experienced. The desire for the bond is present, but the bond itself is not.

121 Maynard, p. 133.

122 DeLamotte, p. 222.

123 Hoeveler, pp. 221–2.

124 DeLamotte, p. 224.

125 Maynard argues regarding the maiming that: ‘Rochester has received a blow but is anything but sexually impotent when Jane sees him’ (p. 138).

126 Stevie Davies, ‘Notes’, Brontë, Jane Eyre, p. 577.


128 Maynard, p. 119.

129 Davies, p. 578.
More than just kissing

The institution of family thus comes to represent other forms of arbitrary power systems, such as the legal and political institutions.

Pinker describes marriages between cousins as unions that ‘enmesh them in a network of triangular relationships’ (34).