Master Thesis

Three Male Gothic Icons in their Cultural-Historical Context

Horace Walpole, William Beckford and Matthew G. Lewis

Name:	**Anouk IJlst**
Student number:	**3480631**
Date:	**25-06-2014**
Supervisor:	**Barnita Bagchi**
Master's Programme:	**Cultural History**
Word Count:	**24427**

Contents

Introduction 3
Chapter 1 – Eighteenth-Century Britain 9
  Politics 9
  Class 12
  Sexuality 15
  Literature 19
Chapter 2 – Horace Walpole 23
  Politics 23
  Class 26
  Sexuality 29
  Literature 34
Chapter 3 – William Beckford 39
  Politics 39
  Class 42
  Sexuality 46
  Literature 51
Chapter 4 – Matthew Lewis 55
  Politics 55
  Class 58
  Sexuality 61
  Literature 64
Conclusion 69
Bibliography 72

Introduction

"Sir, whoever you are, take pity on a wretched Princess, standing on the brink of destruction. Assist me to escape from this fatal castle, or in a few moments I may be made miserable for ever."[1]

Horace Walpole knew how to choose words that would captivate his audience. His novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, is often considered to form the vanguard of a new literary genre, the Gothic novel.[2] These Gothic novels share certain characteristics, which are all also found in *Otranto.* Robert D. Hume writes that these include a focus on the psychological, a use of horrible situations, a strong presence of the supernatural and a heavy reliance on atmosphere to draw in the reader.[3] Although Walpole is partly responsible for creating a genre with the accompanying characteristics, there is debate on whether or not the Gothic can be considered a genre at all. This is because the Gothic is very difficult to define. Jerrold Hogle writes that, when Walpole chose to attach the word Gothic to his novel, the word already had a multitude of meanings, both negative and positive.[4] In his overview-textbook on the Gothic, Fred Botting states; 'Changing features, emphases and meanings disclose Gothic writing as a mode that exceeds genre and categories, restricted neither to a literary school nor to a historical period.'[5] Still, the word must be of some use, since Botting chooses the simple 'Gothic' to title his book. Other authors, like Robert Miles and Michael Gamer, take a step further and reject describing the Gothic as a 'mode' in favor of describing it as an 'aesthetic'.[6]

The appearance of the Gothic roughly corresponds the Romantic era in cultural history. There is no consensus about their precise mutual relation, however. Hume notices similarities in time, contents and effects on readers, but where Romantic authors work with imagination, the Gothic works with fancy, and therefore answers the questions it raises differently- or not at all.[7] Michael Gamer, on the other hand, asserts that the Gothic was so different in the literal creation and spread of the novels – how and by whom were they written, printed and read- that it became defined by this and had to part with other Romantic novels.[8]

---

[1] H. Walpole, 'The Castle of Otranto', H. Morley (ed.) (version May 5, 2012) http://www.gutenberg.org/files/696/696-h/696-h.htm (downloaded January 10, 2014).

[2] J.E. Hogle,'"Gothic" Romance: Its origins and Cultural Functions', in: C. Saunders (ed.), *A Companion to Romance: from Classical to Contemporary* (Blackwell 2004) 216.

[3] R.D. Hume, 'Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel', *PMLA*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (1969) 283-284.

[4] Hogle, '"Gothic" Romance', 218.

[5] F. Botting, *Gothic* (London 1996), 14.

[6] M. Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation* (Cambridge 2000) 4.

[7] Hume, 'Gothic versus Romantic', 288-289.

Romanticism as a cultural movement of the eighteenth century has very unsure boundaries. Elements often associated with it include emotion, symbol and nature. However, when it took place and which characteristics are part of it, are debated topics. Most importantly, the term *Romanticism* itself came under discussion as early as 1924, when Arthur O. Lovejoy argued that it was better to use it in a plural form; *Romanticisms*.[9] He asserts that the plural is more suitable because Romanticism comprises a range of different elements and characteristics, both artistically and historically.[10] This acknowledgement of the variety in Romanticism has been refuted, among others, by Rene Wellek, who argues that it is possible to define one omnipresent movement.[11] Historians should be aware of both opinions, and be conscious of the possibility that Romanticism, and movements associated with it, like the Gothic, are perhaps not as clear-cut and demarcated as they seem. Romanticism and Gothic can possibly be rather fluid concepts.

It is important to keep in mind that the Gothic as a genre is contested and that the term is perhaps not a perfect fit. The word ‘Gothic’ was already used in the first century by Tacitus, and it was referring to a people living in the Balkan.[12] The Goths were mysterious and feared, but also thought of as pure and though, associations with ‘barbarity’.[13] After a period with an uneasy relationship, the Goths eventually attacked Rome in 410. The associations with Gothic architecture and style were created by art critic Giorgio Vasari, who in 1550 wrongly defined anything built between the Romans and the Renaissance as Gothic.[14] Even though the term is imperfect, it is a useful term to roughly outline a group of literature that had a large impact on cultural history, but is perhaps also a reflection of it. Before going into this topic any further, it is interesting to see what Gothic literature stirred up in the second half of the eighteenth century. Because the Gothic did not shy away from explicit content, described in an explicit way, critics feared for a negative effect on its readers, by stirring up to much emotions and passions.[15] If individuals became influenced by the barbarity, it could possibly endanger the modern social interaction.[16] Novels were supposed to have an educative value, but the Gothic novels, critics argued, did not.[17] One of the circulating names for the genre, *terrorist school of novel writing*, was probably not a compliment on the tastefulness of the genre.[18]

---

[8] Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic,* 66.

[9] A.O. Lovejoy, 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms’, *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* Vol. 39, Issue: 2 (1924).

[10] Lovejoy, 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms’, 232.

[11] R. Wellek, ‘The Concept of “Romanticism” in Literary History II: The Unity of European Romanticism’, *Comparative Literature* vol.1 no.2 (1949) 172.

[12] R. Sowerby, ‘The Goths in History and Pre-Gothic Gothic’, in: D. Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford 2012) 27/28.

[13] Sowerby, ‘The Goths in History and Pre-Gothic Gothic’, 28.

[14] Ibidem, 33.

[15] Botting, *Gothic,* 4.

The fact that the Gothic was this controversial in eighteenth-century Britain, calls for a connection to the cultural-historical context in which it was written. This is what this thesis aims to do. Placing the Gothic in a broader cultural-historical context has certainly been done before. Jerrold E. Hogle, for example, asserts that characteristics of the Gothic displays the cultural tensions in its time.[19] However, I hope to add to research on the Gothic by selecting a specific group of authors and a specific selection of developments in eighteenth-century cultural-history. By looking at these authors, I will both place them in their historical context, and hope to be a little more able to judge whether or not their cases justify seeing the Gothic as cohesive. The main question of this thesis is: *To what extent can male British authors of the Gothic in the second half of the eighteenth century be considered a cohesive group based on their social context in society, including their class and sexuality?*

Off course, it would be near impossible to consider *all* male Gothic authors. The authors considered in this thesis are Horace Walpole, William Beckford and Matthew G. Lewis. In order to pay equal attention to each author, they are all addressed in separate chapters. Each chapter will address a sub question which, taken together, will answer the main question. These sub questions are, *which major cultural-historical developments can be detected in Britain in the second half of eighteenth century concerning politics, class, sexuality and literature?*, how *can Horace Walpole be placed biographically in the cultural-historical developments of the second half of the eighteenth century concerning politics, class, sexuality and literature?*, *how can William Beckford be placed biographically in the cultural-historical developments of the second half of the eighteenth century concerning politics, class, sexuality and literature?* and *how can Matthew G. Lewis be placed biographically in the cultural-historical developments of the second half of the eighteenth century concerning politics, class, sexuality and literature?*

Because these authors are well known, they have been extensively researched both as individuals and as group. Robert Miles, for example, states '(…)As we have already seen, the dominant male Gothic writers were similarly cohesive in their quite different upper-class background.'[20] While realizing that a lot of research has been done, it does not mean that there is not a possibility that this thesis will reach more complete, other or oppositional answers. I have not come across an extensive historical cultural context for these three authors. The selected authors were chosen because they all appear to have similarities, while also differing quite a lot. All authors wrote mainly prose, which is what this thesis will focus on. They wrote their best-known works in different decades. As noted before, Walpole kick-started the Gothic in 1764. Beckford wrote *Vathek*, a classic Gothic novel, in 1786, while Lewis published *The Monk* on the edge of the century in 1796. This will make them more interesting to compare, as the cultural-historical context changes throughout these decades.

---

[16] Ibidem, 4.

[17] A. Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic, 1764–1820; The Import of Terror* (Cambridge 2013) 80-81.

[18] Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 3.

[19] Hogle, '"Gothic" Romance', 221.

All three authors came from high-standing families in society, and all three are associated with homosexual tendencies and references. It is important to note that the term *homosexual* is highly debated. This will be further explained in the following chapters. Their careers were very different, though, and their novels differ quite a lot as well in themes and settings. The focus on male authors does not mean female authors in this period were missing or uninteresting. There was a significant increase in female authors, who did not shy away from difficult topics.[21] Since gender is increasingly taken seriously in cultural studies and cultural history, it is equally legitimate to focus on masculinities.

The methodology used in this thesis approaches the topic from multiple angles. This thesis places itself between the research performed by a wide array of scholars on these topics. Men, in Gothic, are interesting because they wrote their novels in a genre that was often considered very feminine.[22] This, combined with their own sexual choices, led me to utilize Queer Theory in this thesis. This is interesting to apply because, as George Haggerty writes: 'In this sense, [Gothic fiction] offers an historical model of queer theory and politics: transgressive, sexually coded, and resistant to dominant ideology.'[23] Queer theory, as will be elaborated on further on, is a broad field that is not uniform. Several developments and concepts from it will be used to shed light on sexuality. The theme of sexuality is both influential and problematic for the men considered in this thesis. It is a topic that is easily defined anachronistically, or highly confined to certain concepts, such as the homosexual. Nuance and historical information on this topic are necessary, and queer theory can help supply these elements.

---

[20] R. Miles, 'Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis', in: D. Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford 2012) 97.

[21] G.E. Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later 18th Century* (Bloomington 1998) 1-2.

[22] Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections*, 7.

[23] G.E. Haggerty, 'Queer Gothic', in: P.R. Backscheider and C. Ingrassia (ed.), *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture* (Blackwell 2005) 384.

Because the historical figures in this thesis are mainly remembered because of their literary productions, it would be a shame not to read up on the things they wrote. The research in this thesis is therefore supplemented by the main novels of the considered authors as primary sources. This concerns mainly *The Castle of Otranto, (The History of the Caliph) Vathek* and *The Monk(: A Romance).* These novels are thrilling reads and highly useful as primary sources because they make comparisons between the books these men wrote possible. The novels show the Gothic elements and can hint towards the reasons for using these Gothic themes. The novels can help me understand how the literary works of these authors are connected with their cultural-historical circumstances. Through other literature, I also took notice of many other primary sources such as correspondence, for which mainly Walpole was famous, (political)pamphlets, diary entries and other literary works.

An important research technique I will be using is biographical research, based on literature on the lives of these authors. Biographical research can be useful to take on a helicopter view as a historian, and search for larger themes in the life of a certain author. This way, it is possible to keep an open mind while researching what defined and perhaps connected the authors, without assuming that was the Gothic, or only the Gothic. The title of this thesis refers to the status of these three authors as Gothic Icons, mainly because this is what they are known for. Much research is done on these authors within the context of Romanticism and literature research, but I am open to the possibility of other important factors in their life. To make the biographical research as balanced as possible, the work and views of several researchers will be used. As it turns out, some researchers profoundly differ in their views on certain events or themes in a biography, and this is important to represent the Gothic authors in their context as correctly as possible.

The second central research technique utilized in this thesis is the comparative method. Within the chapters, comparisons will be made between several sources on authors, and overarching the several chapters, this thesis is based on comparison between the three considered authors. To be able to conclude whether or not there are similarities and recognizable themes in their lives and cultural-historical context, they need to be compared. This comparison can most clearly be made by using four central themes; politics, class, sexuality and literature. Lives are endlessly complex and attempting to allocate events in a life to one of these four themes, could be criticized. However, these themes are helpful for several reasons.

The themes are of major influence for the social context of an individual in society, the topic this thesis aims to look into. The four themes are also areas where Britain in the eighteenth century was developing profoundly. This makes it interesting to place the authors within these developments. Finally, it is useful for the line of research and the communication of the results towards the reader to utilize four recognizable themes along which authors can be compared. This gives the thesis, dealing with a rather large field, the necessary structure to be able to draw and transfer conclusions.

The first chapter will shed light on these four themes in eighteenth-century British cultural history. In this way, it becomes clear which developments took place. This is useful for the later chapters, where the Gothic authors are placed within these larger developments. The subsequent chapters deal with the considered authors in chronological order of their birth, and return to the same four topics, applied to their personal cultural-historical situation. Hopefully, this will lead to a satisfying answer concerning the extent of their cohesiveness as a group.

Chapter 1 – Eighteenth-Century Britain

Eighteenth-century Britain displays a society on the brink of modernity. Politics, economics and the social structure of society were all changing. It is the context in which the Gothic novel came into existence and, within half a century, claimed a place in literary culture. This chapter will analyze several large strands of historical developments in the second half of the eighteenth century, and how the Gothic connects to it.

Politics

Since the Glorious Revolution at the end of the seventeenth century, England had a remarkably advanced political system. It was composed of the King and the Parliament, existing of the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Although the oligarchical elements remained strongly influential, it can still be considered a liberal government for its time.[1] King George III ascended the throne in 1760. During his reign, the House of Commons managed to acquire an increasing amount of power, but all parties kept influencing each other.[2] This all appears very modern, but a lot of elements of a modern political system were still in development. Suffrage was very limited, with only about 3 percent of all inhabitants of England having the right to vote.[3] It would therefore be too hopeful to state that the parliament truly represented all English people.

Historians have also doubted to what extent there were political parties in England at this time. However, it is convincing that many politicians could be classified as having a certain type of ideology, similar to that of the later appearing Tory and Whig party.[4] While the Tories can be defined as more conservative, the Whigs have been described as a permanent form of in-parliament opposition.[5] The main strand of debate between the two parties was the position of the King. The Whigs felt they should keep the power and actions of the King in check, and, as aristocrats, balance his power.[6] They believed they were the '(…)guardians of the constitution(…)'.[7] The Tories, on the other hand, can be considered as supporters of the

---

[1] E. Vincent Macleod, 'The Crisis of the French Revolution', in: H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Blackwell 2002) 112.

[2] S.M. Lee, 'Parliament, Parties and Elections (1760-1815)', in: H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Blackwell 2002) 69.

[3] Lee, 'Parliament, Parties and Elections', 70.

[4] Ibidem, 73.

[5] Vincent Macleod, 'The Crisis of the French Revolution', 113.

[6] Lee, 'Parliament, Parties and Elections', 75.

[7] Ibidem, 75.

King and his rights, and they continued to do this when a shocking event occurred across the sea at the end of the century: the French Revolution.[8]

The French Revolution in 1789 is an earthshattering event in history. Though causes like inequality, public discontent and debts went back many years, the Revolution itself started with the storming of the Bastille prison in 1789. It completely changed the French political system from an absolute monarchy into a republic. The republic then went on to execute the overthrown king and wage wars with other European states. The Revolution had many long-term political consequences. This chapter will turn to the effects it had on British politics, and how the Gothic took part in these politics.

Although Britain was very different from the absolute monarchy France had been until 1789, it does not seem odd that the government became a bit nervous after the events across the channel took place. One the one hand, there was a physical threat of invasion by France. More important and numerous, however, appear to be the mental threats of the revolution. The ideas of the Revolution could not only be an inspiration to anyone with a critical mind, but also gave them an example of how a revolution could be carried out.[9] Although initially, the British felt they had inspired the French with their Glorious Revolution, commentator Edmund Burke quickly rebutted this.[10] Edmund Burke was a member of the parliament and wrote several influential books, including *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790. He argued that the French Revolution was much more profound than the English one had been, and that the French went too far, attacking order and civilization itself.[11] The tensions now started to rise in Britain, creating a pro- and an anti-revolutionary group, fighting each other with pamphlets, political means and clubs.[12]

In this fear-ridden society, Gothic literature played an ambiguous part. Gothic heritage was used by the previously mentioned Edmund Burke to highlight France's barbarity.[13] As a Whig politician, Burke shared the Whiggish concept of a continuity since Gothic times, in which England was already a liberal nation in the eleventh century, until the French had invaded in 1066.[14] At the same time, curiously, Gothic functioned as a concept for the barbarity that England had left behind in the Glorious revolution.[15] Contemporary sources show how '(..)Gothic came to be used more heavily in 1790s Britain as a hostile symbol for all things French(…)'.[16] Angela Wright argues that in the late eighteenth century, and especially the final decade, the categories of the historical, political and literary in the Gothic slowly melted together.[17] Commentators feared that French fiction would infiltrate in Britain to spread dangerous politics.[18] It appears people were aware that literature could have an unwanted influence. After the French Revolution, the government feared that literature, spread by those who sided with the revolution, was causing unrest within the armed forces.[19]

---

[8] Lee, 'Parliament, Parties and Elections', 77.
[9] Vincent Macleod, 'The Crisis of the French Revolution', 114.
[10] Ibidem, 114.
[11] Ibidem, 114.
[12] Ibidem, 115-116.
[13] F. Botting, 'In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture', in: D. Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford 2012) 17.
[14] M. Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London 1995) 13.
[15] Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 13.

The often extreme and explicit content and themes of Gothic literature made it vulnerable to be connected to the equally extreme theme of revolution, and to be considered dangerous for politics.[20] The description of the Gothic as 'literature of terror' was not without reason.[21] These fears could be added to the fear that the Gothic in general was harmful for the social order, because it could cause the imagination of, especially young people, to run wild, causing problems outside that imaginary world.[22] At the same time there is a possibility that the influence was working in the opposite direction. In an article on the Romantic-era novel, including the Gothic, Amanda Gilroy and Wil Verhoeven argue that, after the French Revolution, there was a change in British society, causing a '(…)lack of ideological coherence or cultural hegemony(…)'.[23] This could indeed be argued, when looking at the struggles between the pro- and anti-revolutionaries and the pamphlet war, both described above. This ideological uncertainty, according to Gilroy and Verhoeven, actually caused the type and content of novels to become more diverse and extreme.[24]Another example is that the Gothic literature seems to agree with some of the remarks made by critics, for example in Gothic novels that are about the negative effects of reading.[25] Both examples point to the possibility that the Gothic not only influenced its audience and time, but was also itself influenced and molded by it.

One final connection that can be made between the Gothic and eighteenth-century politics, can be made through our, by now familiar, thinker Edmund Burke. Besides *Reflections on the Revolution in France* he also wrote another influential work, *Philosophical*

---

[16] Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic*, 69.
[17] Ibidem, 66.
[18] Ibidem, 65.
[19] Vincent Macleod, 'The Crisis of the French Revolution', 120.
[20] Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 31.
[21] Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic*, 65.
[22] Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 7.
[23] A. Gilroy & W. Verhoeven, 'The Romantic-era Novel: A Special Issue', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* Vol. 34, No. 2 (2001) 152.
[24] Gilroy & Verhoeven, 'The Romantic-era Novel', 152.
[25] Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 7.

Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. In ancient times, the sublime referred to elevated language, but in the eighteenth century it became a broader concept.[26] Burke used it to describe things that are fascinating and create pleasure, but that cannot be defined as *beautiful* because they are infused with terror.[27] Among things he considered sublime, are things that are also often associated with the Gothic, such as night, impressive nature and buildings, mystical beings and horrible occurrences.[28] Although Burke's sublime has been critiqued as being incomplete in its descriptions of terror, it is still often considered as being connected to Gothic literature.[29] At the same time, Burke also found the sublime in politics. In his critique on the French Revolution, he argues that their striving towards freedom and lack of hierarchy is senseless, because to function as a society, a power that stands above individuals is necessary.[30] Maggie Kilgour writes that this power is '(…)a power Burke earlier described as sublime(…)'.[31] This way, one could argue that the eighteenth-century politics and eighteenth-century Gothic are connected through, among other things, Burke's concept of the sublime.

Class

Eighteenth-century Britain is easily associated with changes in class structure, caused by the many economic and political changes in society. The structure of the social world was changing under the influence of commercialization and the urbanization that went with it.[32] Urbanization was a force to be reckoned with. It was made possible by improvements in agriculture, leading to not everyone having to work on the land, and increasing wages.[33] By 1800, London was one of the three largest cities in the world, inhabited by a million people.[34] By comparison, this is a number that the municipality of Amsterdam still has not reached in 2014. Besides London, commercialization and industry made towns to the North of it, such as Manchester and Birmingham, grow large as well.[35] Smaller towns and the rural society did not disappear, but the rise of urban centers did influence the social class system. Quite simply, because large towns attracted so many different people that did not know each other, it became harder to recognize what social status could be attributed to anyone.[36] This became even more difficult because people who were not of noble birth, now had increasing abilities to become quite rich.[37] In her article on class developments, Penelope Corfield traces three important developments. Beside the possibility to attract wealth and status from another source than being a landed noble, people felt the money and status were now spread among people in new patterns, and that the behavior of non-nobility peoples changed.[38] The most fundamental change, however, was the change in the concept of the arrangement of society. Before the eighteenth century, the social society was set in a certain hierarchy, that was thought of to have been put in place by God.[39] It was thought useless to complain because people just happened to have a certain role, like it should be.[40] With the developments in society, a new concept came in place, and along with it, a new term that pointed out some possibilities of social mobility: class.[41] Classes were divided differently by different social commentators, but it became commonplace to classify people by their social-economic status, like the middle class.[42] Similarly, towards the end of the century, those with lower social-economic status developed from being ‘laborious class’ to the, still widely used, ‘working class’.[43] These classes were not perfect however, since the differences between people in the same class could be quite large.[44] In general, their poverty decreased and they were increasingly buying food while working in another area of production.[45]

---

[26] Botting, 'In Gothic Darkly', 21.
[27] D.B. Morris, 'Gothic Sublimity', *New Literary History,* Vol. 16, No. 2 (1985) 300.
[28] Morris, 'Gothic Sublimity', 301.
[29] Ibidem, 300.
[30] Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel,* 26.
[31] Ibidem, 26.
[32] Vincent Macleod, 'The Crisis of the French Revolution', 13-14.
[33] G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago 1992) xx.
[34] P. Borsay, 'Urban life and Culture', in: H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Blackwell 2002) 197.
[35] Borsay, 'Urban life and Culture', 197.

The diffusion of class boundaries was noticeable in several areas of society. In politics, the amount of members of parliament who carried a hereditary title, remained a majority.[46] However, the percentage of members who didn’t stem from nobility, grew with 11% between 1761 and 1812.[47] Another political development in the second half of the eighteenth century was the increase of national identity and national consciousness in

---

[36] P.J. Corfield, ‘Class by name and number in eighteenth-century England’ (version 1987) http://www.penelopejcorfield.co.uk/PDF%27s/CorfieldPdf7_Class.pdf (April 15 2014) 5.
[37] Corfield, ‘Class by name and number’, 6.
[38] Ibidem, 6-7.
[39] Ibidem, 3.
[40] Ibidem, 3-4.
[41] Ibidem, 3.
[42] Ibidem, 14.
[43] Ibidem, 22.
[44] Ibidem, 23.
[45] Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, xxii-xxiii.
[46] Lee, ‘Parliament, Parties and Elections’, 69.
[47] Ibidem, 70.

Britain.[48] On this development, Linda Colley follows the surprising argument that it was not created and hardly fueled by the state.[49] Instead, she explains that this national sentiment was used by the new middle class to enforce and improve their own position in society by showing they were not inferior to what was now the upper class.[50] Perhaps they felt especially compelled to do this, because it seems there was still some friction between the different classes. For example, the elite did not trust the lower classes enough to encourage national sentiments, fearing events similar to those that took place in France.[51] In their turn, trust for the higher classes was also lacking, for example when Randolph Trumbach writes that contemporaries thought '(…)aristocracies were by their nature corrupt(…)'.[52] The middle classes really never had a shortage of anything, but were still considered to be more morally virtuous because they did not have everything in excess, like the upper class did.[53]

Another area of society where the blurring of classes is visible, is in print culture. In the third decade of the century, magazines appeared on the market, preceded by the *Gentleman's Magazine*.[54] Magazines like these contained topics that were interesting to all kinds of educated readers, and contributed to the closing of the gap between upper and middle class.[55] It is interesting in the context of the *Gentleman's Magazine* that the word 'gentleman' originally had only referred to those who were born in aristocratic families, but slowly lost this specific meaning and became a broader applicable term during the eighteenth century.[56] The rise of the library, explained more extensively later in this chapter, had a similar effect as the magazines. By offering all kinds of books in a somewhat random fashion, libraries helped to make the distinction between books considered to be of 'high' or 'low' cultural standard less clear.[57] This does not mean, however, that every book was now suddenly treated indiscriminately. In fact, the quality of the books someone chose to read now became influential to someone's social status.[58] But in doing this, reading certain books did offer the possibility of different classes moving closer together.[59] The novel in general is described to have a '(…)democratizing impact on British society', not only through the libraries, but also because it made middle class more aware of their power as consumers.[60]

---

[48] L. Colley, 'Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain 1750-1830', *Past&Present* no.113 (1986) 100.
[49] Colley, 'Whose Nation?', 105.
[50] Ibidem, 110.
[51] Ibidem, 108.
[52] R. Trumbach, 'London's sodomites: Homosexual behavior and western culture in the 18th century', *Journal of Social History* Vol. 11, No. 1 (1977) 23.
[53] Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, xx.
[54] B. Harris, 'Print Culture', in: H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Blackwell 2002) 287.
[55] Ibidem, 287.
[56] Corfield, 'Class by name and number', 6.
[57] Gilroy & Verhoeven, 'The Romantic-era Novel', 150.
[58] Harris, 'Print Culture', 293.

The new middle class has a connection with Gothic literature, because the middle class was thought to be the group that most often read the Gothic novels.[61] This has been contradicted however, by historical research into library records of the time, which show no specific excess of middle class readers.[62] If there isn't a consensus about class and Gothic readership, neither is there about class and Gothic content. It has been argued that the Gothic portrays and yearns for a past that can be put in opposition to the eighteenth-century middle class, or bourgeois, society.[63] Others have argued, however, that the Gothic does the opposite and lectures the reader on the pressing, unavoidable presence of middle-class values, and the terror located in this.[64] Perhaps these two readings of the Gothic in class context are not mutually exclusive, because they both evaluate the class developments and take a critical stance towards it.

Sexuality

Compared to topics like politics and class, sexuality may seem a topic of minor influence in a society. However, it is important to look at because it played a major part in the eighteenth century society, and also in Gothic literature. Randolph Trumbach also emphasizes the importance of this topic by stating that sexuality and the taboos associated with it '(…)may reveal social and symbolic structures more fundamental than those of class and class consciousness.'[65] In this context, both men and women are interesting, just like all the possible relationships between them. The eighteenth century is important, because it was the time when '(…)gender and sexuality were beginning to be codified for modern culture.'[66] When George Haggerty uses the word 'codify', it signifies that sexuality was subject to change and was perhaps instable and ambiguous. This does indeed appear to be the case.

Looking at women, first, there is a seemingly negative and restricting attitude of society towards them. Society felt they were most suited in a domestic context, that they were sexually passive, and that they were vulnerable to the content of the novels that were appearing in society.[67] This last element will be further examined later in this chapter. When women wrote these novels, which they were doing in increasing numbers, they lost part of their femininity.[68] Effeminate behavior typically associated with women, was looked down upon, but society put up with it because women were thought to be irrational creatures that couldn't help themselves.[69] This can be connected to a cultural development known as 'sensibility'. G.J. Barker-Benfield describes this phenomenon as a 'psychoperceptual scheme', which stated that through their nervous system, people could become more aware of things happening around them, which would in turn lead to better interpretation.[70] The word 'sensibility' quickly became associated with consciousness, feeling, emotion and sentimentalism, and ultimately with female literature.[71] Barker-Benfield explains how this phenomenon became gendered. Women supposedly had nerves that were extra susceptible to sensibility, and had less control over it.[72] The topic of domesticity, however, is not always viewed as a negative, restricting situation. Consumption became increasingly important in eighteenth-century Britain, and most of this consumption took place at home.[73] Women held the reins in these homes, and this gave them a certain kind of prestige and control.[74] Despite this domestic position, the concept of the women as an irrational being still disempowered them in society.

---

[59] Ibidem, 293.
[60] Gilroy & Verhoeven, 'The Romantic-era Novel', 151.
[61] Hogle, '"Gothic" Romance', 217.
[62] Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 39.
[63] Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 11.
[64] Haggerty, 'Queer Gothic', 387.
[65] Trumbach, 'London's sodomites', 1.
[66] Haggerty, 'Queer Gothic', 384.

Men had a less restricted position, but this could quickly change when their sexuality or gender deviated from the norm. The only sexuality that was truly accepted in eighteenth century Britain, was sexuality that led to the production of offspring.[75] All non-reproductive sexual activity was considered to be 'sodomy', in both men and women.[76] However, a more specific description of sodomy in a law of 1781 made men the focal point of this crime.[77] In an extensive article containing descriptions of societies across the world, Randolph Trumbach argues that European society was exceptionally hostile against deviant sexualities, and that nowhere else the taboo on sodomy was so strongly enforced.[78] The British capital punishment for sodomy was in place until late in the nineteenth century. Like the growth of print, addressed later in this chapter, the prosecution for sodomy appears to fluctuate with political events. In the final decade of the eighteenth century, in the tense times surrounding the French Revolution, the prosecution rose significantly.[79] This punishment was directed at sodomitical acts, because the concept of someone having an overarching sexual orientation was not yet in place.[80] There are several cultural-historical reasons why European, and with it British, society took such a disapproving stance. The most important causes are found in religion. Several bible texts condemn sodomy.[81] An important theologian and bishop, Augustine, added to the religious causes by judging sodomy to be unnatural.[82] At the same time, sodomy brought mankind too close to nature by it removing the boundaries between humans and animals.[83]

---

[67] Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic*, 78./Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections*, 6./ N. Sullivan, *A Critical introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburg 2003) 4.
[68] Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections*, 7.
[69] Trumbach, 'London's sodomites', 13.
[70] Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, xvii.
[71] Ibidem, xxvi.
[72] Ibidem, xviii.
[73] Ibidem, xxv.
[74] Ibidem, xxv.
[75] Trumbach, 'London's sodomites', 12.
[76] Sullivan, *Queer Theory*, 3.
[77] Ibidem, 3.

The fact that eighteenth century Britain objected to divergent sexualities, does not mean they did not exist. London had a sub-culture of homosexuals who met, among other places, in specific public houses.[84] Homosexuality, however, is just one of many divergent sexualities. It is not clear if all these were catered to by specific cub-cultures, but it seems that the Gothic literature appearing in these times provided at least a mental and literary location for these sexualities. George Haggerty writes that an element all Gothic fiction contains, is ‘transgressive social-sexual relations’.[85] These relations are very diverse, from sodomy to incest, pedophilia, masochism and the assigning of certain gender traits to the opposite gender.[86] Haggerty argues that in this way, the Gothic contributed to discussions of gender, and resisted dominant ideology.[87]

Perhaps because the Gothic concerned itself with sexuality to this extent, it became more difficult for commentators to pinpoint the sexuality of the Gothic authors. The Gothic was considered to be very feminine, but of course, there were many male authors active within the genre.[88] Instead of these men making the Gothic more masculine, in fact this genre could be said to make the men less masculine.[89] According to Michael Gamer, this mixing caused the gender of the Gothic author to be unstable.[90] Men acting in what was considered a non-masculine fashion was not appreciated, and also part of the critique against man who were guilty of sodomy.[91] Interestingly, men considered sodomites were both criticized for being effeminate, and for being misogynist.[92] This shows the confusion, caused in society, when the normal gender patterns were ignored.

---

[78] Trumbach, ‘London’s sodomites’, 2.
[79] Miles, ‘Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis’, 97.
[80] Sullivan, *Queer Theory*, 3.
[81] Trumbach, ‘London’s sodomites’, 11.
[82] Ibidem, 12.
[83] Ibidem, 12.
[84] Ibidem, 15-16.
[85] Haggerty, ‘Queer Gothic’, 384.
[86] Ibdem, 384.
[87] Ibidem, 384.
[88] Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 51.

The Gothic portrays a very complex sexuality.[93] This can be connected to a twentieth-century line of critical thinking within gender studies; Queer Theory. In her concise work on it, Nikki Sullivan explains that queer theory asserts that sexuality is constructed, culturally, and that the categories are not solid.[94] A similar argument appears when it is revealed how differently different societies cope with homosexuality, and it turns out different societies take differing stances.[95] Sullivan writes that many theorists on the 'Queer' think it does not just apply to the divide between homo- and heterosexual, but to anything that is in conflict with the dominant conception of 'normal' or heteronormativity.[96] In its choice of subjects, it can be asserted that the Gothic does not shy away from these deviations of the 'normal'.

Theorists of the Gothic have also made this connection to queer theory. George Haggerty writes that the Gothic is a '(…)historical model of queer theory(…) because of the sexual topics selected and how these defy the 'normal'.[97] He also writes that, in being able to do this, the Gothic is special among eighteenth-century literature.[98] Robert Miles also finds the connection between the Gothic and the queer. In an article on Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, he explains how Radcliffe made the distinction between 'terror' Gothic, which she herself wrote, and 'horror' Gothic, attributed to male authors like Lewis.[99] Terror brought the explicit content of the Gothic through tense situations and horrible possibilities, while horror was much more graphic and less suggestive, giving the reader no way of escaping the portrayed awfulness.[100] Although there were also male authors, like Horace Walpole, who could be placed in the first category, the divide still slowly has seemed to develop towards another divide- that of male and female gothic.[101] Miles finds that 'male gothic' authors are mostly occupied with identity, which he then connects, like Haggerty, to queer theory.[102] Doing this, he does feel like it is important to look at the personal, differing circumstances of the authors.[103] It is interesting that he involves the personal context of the authors, because that is also what this thesis aims for, even if it looks at other elements in that context. It is also a point of debate in queer theory, which increasingly sees that sexualities can also be influenced by, for example, political or economic situations and circumstances.[104]

---

[89] Ibidem, 51./ Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections*, 7.
[90] Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 35.
[91] Trumbach, 'London's sodomites', 12.
[92] Ibidem, 12.
[93] Haggerty, 'Queer Gothic', 395.
[94] Sullivan, *Queer Theory*, 1.
[95] Trumbach, 'London's sodomites'.
[96] Sullivan, *Queer Theory*, 43.
[97] Haggerty, 'Queer Gothic', 384.
[98] Ibidem, 385.
[99] Miles, 'Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis', 93.
[100] Hume, 'Gothic versus Romantic', 285.

Literature

When looking at the historical context of Gothic literature, it is interesting to sketch the print- and publishing market and developments surrounding it. It seems that before the eighteenth century, the development of a new genre like Gothic would not have been possible. This is because until 1695, all books had to face censorship, and there was a book-publishing monopoly in place.[105] This newfound freedom of the press was not without limits. For example, the law against libel remained in place and could be used for books.[106] Still, the role of books and other printed materials increased dramatically. Especially in the second half of the century, historians speak of (…)a burgeoning market publishing industry' or even a '(…)revolution in communications'.[107] Besides books and novels, the printed materials included magazines, newspapers, periodicals, town directories, maps and dictionaries.[108] The printing itself initially mostly took place in London, the growth of print outside the capital started to occur near the end of the century.[109] The amount of publications seems to fluctuate with political circumstances, being boasted by major events. When the Seven Years' War broke out in 1754, it resulted in a significant increase in the amount of newspapers that were sold.[110] Similarly, there was a huge growth in print between 1790-1800, which could have to do with increasing possibilities for communication, but was perhaps also fanned on by the French Revolution.[111]

---

[101] Ibidem, 285. / Miles, 'Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis', 97.
[102] Miles, 'Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis', 98.
[103] Ibidem, 97.
[104] Sullivan, *Queer Theory*, 49.
[105] Harris, 'Print Culture', 284.
[106] Ibidem, 284.
[107] Colley, 'Whose Nation?', 101./Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic,* 29.
[108] Colley, 'Whose Nation?', 101-102.
[109] Harris, 'Print Culture', 288-289.
[110] Colley, 'Whose Nation?', 101.
[111] Harris, 'Print Culture', 289.

Besides the end of censorship and the increasing commercialization, there are also other developments that could have contributed to the changes in print culture.[112] The population was growing very rapidly, which not only created a larger possible audience, but also a lot of young people who were perhaps more interested in new ideas.[113] It is also important to note that during this period, an increasing amount of the population could actually read.[114] This skill was not just reserved for men. By the seventeenth century, literacy rates among women were already rising quickly.[115] Another, perhaps unexpected cause for the change in communications was the improvement of transport through better roads and a better mail system, carrying information and print.[116]

An interesting development surrounding books in eighteenth century Britain, was the appearance of circulating libraries. These libraries, which often required subscription, enlarged the audience of print, which was sometimes too expensive for individuals to buy.[117] By 1800, there were almost 400 places in Britain that offered this service.[118] It is difficult to pinpoint what kind of people were members of these libraries. Although an increasing part of society was able to read and access books, historians warn not to overestimate this effect.[119] Libraries still cost money, and the members were usually middle- and upper class individuals, possessing a certain wealth.[120] Still, the libraries had an important social function in society. They not only spread print among a larger audience, but also gave readers a lot of power, because they could choose to read any book they liked.[121] The readers were not bound by a particular genre, and in fact, the library did not make a distinction between works of art and more ‘lowly’ entertainment books, therefore making the divide between these types of works smaller.[122] Interesting historical research shows that even people who could and did buy books, also attended libraries to borrow books they were not interested in buying.[123] These often-borrowed but seldom-bought books included fiction, and therefore the Gothic novels, which tense plots made them less suitable to read several times.[124] All this implies that the libraries played an important part in the popularity of the Gothic novel.[125]

---

[112] Ibidem, 283.
[113] Colley, ‘Whose Nation?’, 102-103.
[114] Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 32./ Harris, ‘Print Culture’, 290.
[115] Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, xviii.
[116] Colley, ‘Whose Nation?’, 102.
[117] Harris, ‘Print Culture’, 290.
[118] Ibidem, 290.
[119] Ibidem, 291.
[120] Ibidem, 291.
[121] Gilroy & Verhoeven, ‘The Romantic-era Novel’, 151.
[122] Ibidem, 151.
[123] Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 65.

As explained earlier in this chapter, the popularity of Gothic did not mean that it was undebated. Critics stated that the popularity of fiction and the increasing amount of novels produced, led to a decrease in literary quality.[126] Also, besides being politically threatening, there was a fear for morality, connected to the ideas about who was reading the Gothic novels. It is often, wrongly, thought that those reading Gothic were '(…)young, female, naïve, and easily manipulated.'[127] This was cause for concern by contemporary commentators, who wanted to protect the moral integrity of this reader.[128] Especially women were thought to be susceptible to the tempting fantasies in the novel, which could make them lose grip on reality.[129]

These fears of the Gothic, which were described before, tie into the literary culture in several ways. Firstly, it is odd that specifically women were portrayed as possible 'victims' of the novel, when such a large amount of the authors of these novels were, in fact, women.[130] Secondly, the developments in printing and distribution made the fears worse. The rise of the circulating library made it possible for impressionable minds to read these books, without anyone explaining to them the degree of quality of the concerning book.[131] Also, the fact that the press was now free caused no-one to have the power to stop the spreading of these novels.[132] The third and final way in which the fears of the Gothic are connected to the literary market developments, is found in the periodicals. These periodicals often published reviews, which were very highly regarded.[133] These reviews were often not complimentary on the Gothic, fearing that the Gothic was partly responsible for creating changes in the literary market they did not agree with.[134] Michael Gamer sums up these unwanted changes as (…)from quality to quantity; originality to mass-production; and the text-as-work to the text-as-commodity.'[135] All these developments make the eighteenth century a lively century with a lot of changes. This chapter shed light on historical context of politics, class, sexuality and the print and literary culture. In the following chapter these themes will be examined in the life of the iconic author of *Otranto*, Horace Walpole.

---

[124] Ibidem, 65.
[125] Ibidem, 65.
[126] Ibidem, 62.
[127] Ibidem, 38-39.
[128] Harris, 'Print Culture', 291.
[129] Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 54.
[130] Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections*, 1.
[131] Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 63.
[132] Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic*, 78.
[133] Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 67-68.
[134] Ibidem, 67.
[135] Ibidem, 67.

Chapter 2 – Horace Walpole

Living between 1717 and 1797, Horace Walpole got to experience a large part of the eighteenth century and its turbulent times. He was a man with an equally turbulent life and exercised a surprising amount of influence, in many parts of society. Historians and biographers interested in his life have been able to turn to the thousands of letters he left behind, and combine these with his literary works, pamphlets and *memoires*. However, these kinds of documents can be interpreted in many ways. To prevent a tunnel-vision, this chapter has based its research on two, in some ways conflicting, biographies by R.W. Ketton-Cremer from the nineteen-sixties and T. Mowl, written in the nineteen-nineties.

Politics

Horace Walpole was born into a land-owning family in Norfolk to a powerful father, Robert Walpole, who was on the path to become prime minister of Great Britain by the time Horace was five.[1] For a while, Robert's position seem to have been endangered by the death of King George I. However, after interference of Queen Caroline, Robert managed to be accepted by George II and even improve his power.[2] Horace's position towards politics was ambiguous. As a young man, he was not very interested in politics, but he ended up spending twenty-seven active years in parliament.[3] It is a similarity that Walpole, Lewis and Beckford all took part in parliament, and had politically active fathers. Certainly for Walpole, and perhaps also for Lewis, their position influenced their decision to publish their Gothic books anonymously first, as Ketton-Cremer explains; 'For a man of the world and a Member of Parliament, it really was a very wild performance(…)'.[4] This fits their time, since a role in parliament was of large influence on someone's position in society.[5] Although Walpole was not the most ambitious when it concerns parliament,[6] he probably played the most noticeable role in it of these three authors. Beckford and Lewis, in their own way, were both less interested in politics.

---

[1] R.W. Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole* (Northampton 1964) 26.
[2] Ibidem, 32.
[3] Ibidem, 45/20.
[4] Ibidem, 194.
[5] J. Watt, *Contesting the Gothic. Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* (Cambridge 1999) 22.
[6] Ibidem, 22.

Like his father, Horace connected with Whig politics. He is already expressing Whig-positions in a poem in 1739, and described himself as a ‘quiet republican’.[7] Connected with his Whig-position is the ambivalent political position of the Gothic, also described in chapter one. Gothic was seen both as a barbaric past that Britain’s civilized society had long since outgrown, and as a point of pure liberal origins they needed to return to.[8] Despite it being ambivalent, it would still be fitting for a Whig like Walpole to appreciate Gothic as a nod to the Saxons, and Gothic architecture as radiating liberty and democracy.[9] Although he remained skeptical about this connection to the past,[10] the heritage was perhaps still part of the attraction of the Gothic for all three authors considered in this thesis.

As stated in the previous chapter, a Whig position would entail a certain suspicion towards Royal advantage and royalty in general. Horace, however, was still able to be charmed by the young king George III when he ascended the throne.[11] He was also quite proud of his niece when she married the brother of the King, and tried his best to get into his good graces.[12] This friendly disposition towards royalty could point towards a mild version of Whig politics, or at least a very tolerant attitude in Walpole. This could also be asserted when looking at his correspondence. For years, Walpole exchanged letters with a friend he knew from back at Eton, William Cole. They corresponded enthusiastically for many years, despite the fact that on both matters of religion and politics, Cole and Walpole held fundamentally different opinions.[13] Some critics have indeed argued that Walpole’s Whig-position was not to be taken too seriously.[14] It shall become clear that the same ambivalence can be applied to Beckford and Lewis.

The above paragraph shows the moderate side of Walpole’s political position, but he could also be quite fierce. He felt compelled to act politically when the Whig-cherished liberty was threatened by the abuse of general warrants against a publication the government deemed undesirable.[15] On another occasion, he broke off a friendship with a correspondent of several years, William Mason, based on political disagreements.[16] He was also able of complicated political scheming and writing influential political pamphlets.[17] An interesting example of this can be found in the case of admiral Byng of the Royal Navy. Byng had been blamed for losing Minorca to the French, early in the Seven Years War. By the changed Articles of War, he was to be executed, despite several pleas for mercy. Apparently, the King wanted to make an example out of Byng, to make sure other officers would not give up fighting easily.[18] On hearing about this situation, Walpole pulls some remarkable political strings in an effort to prevent the execution, but eventually fails.[19] While Mowl and Ketton-Cremer both agree that Walpole felt justice was failing in this situation, Mowl sees a more political motivation as well.[20] Ketton-Cremer states, however, that '(…)it would be unjust to interpret his effort to save Byng as a political manoeuvre, or as an endeavour to embarrass certain ministers.'[21] Whether this was a political action or not, the pamphlet Walpole wrote after the affair, *A letter from Xo Ho, a Chinese philosopher at London to his friend Lien Chi, at Peking*, certainly was political. It was written from the supposed perspective of a foreigner, astonished by the Byng-situation, and was quite a risky attack towards the government.[22] Because the pamphlet was well-written and effective, it gave Walpole the reputation of a dangerous satirist, a position unique among the authors considered here.[23]

---

[7] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole,* 60/127.
[8] Watt, *Contesting the Gothic,* 14.
[9] T. Mowl, *Horace Walpole, The Great Outsider* (London 1996) 122.
[10] Ibidem, 122.
[11] Ibidem, 170.
[12] Ibidem, 227.
[13] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole,* 186.
[14] Watt, *Contesting the Gothic,* 24.
[15] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole,* 217.
[16] Ibidem, 289.
[17] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 172.

Another political pamphlet by Walpole, *An Account of the Giants lately discovered*, written in 1766, was again an elaborate metaphor of political circumstances, and creates an interesting connection to Matthew Lewis and William Beckford. The satire is mainly about the problems in America, but contains clear elements of what Mowl describes as (…)Horace's long-standing loathing of the slave trade.'[24] Probably, the slave trade was not compatible with his Whig ideals of liberty. In this he stands out from Lewis and Beckford, who both had connections with plantations in the Caribbean and drew considerable wealth from them. This topic will return in later chapters.

Despite all these signs of political success in the public eye, Walpole appears to have exerted the most political influence as a background figure, working through other politicians.[25] The politician most associated with this is Walpole's cousin Henry Seymour Conway, whose political career skyrocketed under the guidance of Walpole.[26] This technique of politics has made Mowl remark that they were driven by emotion, or 'All the scheming and political plotting of the last forty years, Horace now realized, had been motivated only by his love for Conway.'[27] This impression has been contradicted by James Watt, who noted Walpole as having much broader political interests than have been attributed to him.[28] Walpole does not seemed to have desired a higher function when Conway became Secretary of state, however.[29] He also retreated from politics the moment Conway did.[30] Nonetheless, all the political activity described in this paragraph makes Walpole stand out from Beckford and Lewis who, as we shall see, both had much less interests in politics.

---

[18] Ibidem, 158.

[19] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 203.

[20] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 157.

[21] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 203.

[22] Ibidem, 204.

[23] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 164.

[24] Ibidem, 210-211.

[25] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 244.

[26] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 193

Class

Describing the social position of Horace Walpole, Maggie Kilgour has written that he '(…)hovered on the class border between bourgeoisie and aristocracy.'[31] This status could, in different ways, also apply to both Beckford and Lewis. The Walpole family was rich, and Robert Walpole married the daughter of wealthy merchant.[32] When he left politics after a long career, Robert received the rank of Earl of Orford, a title which Horace would inherit late in his life.[33] Walpole, Lewis and Beckford have in common that they were all born to influential, powerful fathers. Despite his democratic Whig political position, Horace Walpole appears to have placed a lot of value on social position. Where Lewis was helped to a place in high society partly by writing *The Monk*, Walpole already seems to have claimed a comfortably high social status by the time he was in school. This school was Eton College, described as a '(…)nursery for the youth of the élite'.[34] At the school, Walpole formed a lot of friendships. Because of the position of his father and his wealthy family, Walpole had a social status that far exceeded most of the other boys at Eton.[35] This made him desirable as a friend, but he even managed to increase his social capital by achieving to meet the king, an event described by Mowl as a 'social coup'.[36] Walpole seems, from early on, to have been very socially intelligent. This talent remained with him past his school days, for example when Ketton-Cremer describes him as: 'He knew everyone, went everywhere, gradually became one of the best-known and most ubiquitous personalities of the day.'[37] He was the most social of the authors considered in this thesis.

---

[27] Ibidem, 18.
[28] Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 23.
[29] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 195-196.
[30] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 245.
[31] M. Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London 1995) 16.
[32] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 25.
[33] Ibidem, 82.
[34] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 10.
[35] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 35.
[36] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 9.

Eton, however, has been described as a democratic environment.[38] Outside of the college, class got a different meaning. From 1739 on, Walpole traveled through Europe with this school friend, Thomas Gray. Gray has been described as a 'natural bourgeoisie outsider'.[39] And in the 'real world', the difference in social position between Walpole and Gray seems to be at least partially to blame for the breakup of their friendship towards the end of the journey.[40]

Many clues about the influence of class in Walpole's life can be found in his residence, a small castle named Strawberry Hill. This castle was initially a small house, but with the help of others, mainly John Chute and Richard Bentley, he improved and extended Strawberry Hill towards his eclectic, Gothic taste. This included towers, a library and a chapel, all with a lot of stained glass and much decoration. The library had a ceiling, designed by Walpole, which displayed his family crest and all the crests with which the family was allied.[41] This is a clear marker of how proud Walpole was of his ancestry.[42] It needs to be noted how important this architectural undertaking was in Walpole's life. It was a major project, much larger than most of his literary projects, and came to define him for a large part. We will find very similar activity in the house of Beckford, while Lewis had little interest for his living quarters.

Walpole's house became a kind of tourist attraction, receiving many aristocratic and even royal sight seers.[43] Actually, middle-class visitors were not allowed until a few years later, by ticket admission.[44] This makes James Watt define the house '(…)within a context of aristocratic display and conspicuous consumption', which he connects to the dramatic eighteenth-century fashion used by people to communicate their status.[45] Strawberry Hill was not original, since other large Gothic houses had been built, but Mowl attributes its success to Walpole's clever advertising of the house.[46] Quite some years later, William Beckford would also build a house in Gothic style at Fonthill, that was much larger in size, and he referred to Strawberry Hill as ‘a Gothic mouse trap’.[47]

---

[37] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 157.
[38] Ibidem, 50.
[39] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 60.
[40] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 68.
[41] Ibidem, 145.
[42] Ibidem, 145.
[43] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 135.
[44] Ibidem, 186.
[45] Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 17.
[46] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 186.

In fact, when Walpole started building, the Gothic was so common already, that it was not even confined to the upper class anymore. It had been a fashion craze for quite some time, causing it to lose the prestige and be associated with a middle-class trying to show off their social position.[48] The Gothic was something interesting that the middle-classes could afford financially.[49] At the same time, this was not what Walpole was aiming for. Watt writes that Walpole was, in all areas of his life, trying to create an ‘aristocratic identity’, in which he claimed the Gothic as part of that class.[50] Watt asserts that Walpole was well aware of the Gothic fashion craze, and that he positioned ‘his’ Gothic against it as a more ancient, historically grounded type of Gothic.[51] That he included the crests of families he was associated with, is part of this historical attitude.[52] At the same time, Walpole was aware that he used a made-up historicity, contributing to the idea that he used Strawberry Hill for show, and was a ‘(…)proclamation of its owner’s elevated social position’.[53] Even for the interior, he enjoyed objects with ‘old world associations’, even when these did not have actual historical value.[54] It is again a token of the ambiguity of Walpole as a person.

Reputation and actions were probably just as important to a social status as birth. Mowl explains that when Walpole returned to Paris after building Strawberry Hill, he arrived ‘(…)at a high social level.’[55] Walpole is also aware of what was harmful to his reputation. In building his Gothic castle, for example, he did not want to be associated with the middle-class Betty Langley, who made design books, including Gothic designs.[56] Reputation was exactly what influenced the life of William Beckford so greatly when the scandal surrounding him and William Courtenay broke, an event which will be discussed in a later chapter. The same can be said of Lewis, who was known after his teenage production as ‘Monk’ Lewis for the rest of his life. Although their reputations formed when Walpole was of old age, he was probably no stranger to scandal. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why he was so distraught when, in a pamphlet, he was attacked on his sexuality by William Guthrie.[57] This event will be more closely examined later on in this chapter.

---

[47] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 137.
[48] Ibidem, 135.
[49] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 241.
[50] Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 13.
[51] Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 15.
[52] Ibidem, 15.
[53] Ibidem, 15/18.
[54] Ibidem, 16.
[55] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 201.
[56] Ibidem, 120-121.

In *Otranto*, class has an important role as well. All characters are of clear aristocratic birth. Manfred is a prince, his son is set on marrying a daughter of a Marquis and they live in a castle that portrays their status.[58] On the other hand, they have only been living in the castle for a couple of generations, giving them perhaps a type of *parvenu* position. Eventually it is revealed that Manfred, Prince of Otranto, was not the rightful owner to the castle and title, by the appearance of the forefather of the rightful heir as an enormous ghost.[59] Walpole's fascination with genealogy and lineage of aristocrats seems to be a definite theme in this book, just like the castle-setting background.

Sexuality

Unlike William Beckford but like Matthew Lewis, Horace Walpole never married or had any children, and there has been a lot of debate on his sexuality. The only thing biographers seem to agree on, is that Walpole was not promiscuous. During his lifetime, a friend described him as 'untossed by passion', with which an early Walpole-scholar, Wilmarth Lewis, agreed.[60] Walpole has later been judged to consciously detach himself from social relationships to be an onlooker in life.[61] Even the biography that most prominently displays Walpole as a homosexual, asserts that 'He appears never in his life to have been promiscuous.'[62] For this analysis to be balanced, the use of the term 'homosexual' needs to be addressed with the help of queer theory. It certainly was not in use during Walpole's days, since the term was first used in 1869.[63] But not only the history of the word is relevant, but also what it indicates. 'Homosexual' connects someone's sexuality with their identity, which is then different from a heterosexual. Nikki Sullivan writes that this is '(…)one example of humanist ontology' and that it has been extensively critiqued.[64] Part of this critique, first uttered by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, is that a category like 'homosexual' is extremely limiting, because it focusses solely on the gender of the partner one chooses, and ignores the hundreds of other factors that are part of sexuality.[65] This is also relevant for the later chapters, in which it is made clear that all three authors had very different types of sexualities.

---

[57] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 220.
[58] H. Walpole, 'The Castle of Otranto', H. Morley (ed.) (version May 5, 2012) http://www.gutenberg.org/files/696/696-h/696-h.htm (downloaded January 10, 2014).
[59] Ibidem.
[60] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 5.
[61] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 23.
[62] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 59.
[63] N. Sullivan, *A Critical introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburg 2003) 2.
[64] Ibidem, 51.

It is Walpole's sexual nature that his biographers Timothy Mowl and R.W. Ketton-Cremer most strongly disagree on. Ketton-Cremer seems to completely ignore even the possibility of Walpole's homosexuality. This is not because sexualities not matching the heteronormative pattern escape him, however, since he describes Anne Damer as '(…)Mrs. Damer, whose Sapphic inclinations were well-known to her contemporaries'.[66] Rather, he treats Walpole's sexuality as a characteristic by claiming that, although Walpole was attracted to certain women, love was just not for him.[67] He even states about Walpole that 'He was a natural celibate', and that the most important relationships in Walpole's life fell into this category.[68] The only exception was being the lover of a certain Marchese Elisabeth Grifoni, although the love was not strong from Walpole's side.[69] Among the celibate relationships was the one with Henry Conway. Ketton-Cremer acknowledges that '(…)Conway was his most intimate friend. He idolized his cousin(…)'.[70] This idolization did not go unnoticed by contemporaries either. When Conway met with political difficulties, Walpole was attacked in a pamphlet by William Guthrie. Walpole did not allow this to happen, and struck back with a *Counter-Address* filled with quite dramatic language.[71] A *Reply to the Counter-Address* by Guthrie followed, that attacked Walpole on his sexuality, mainly towards Conway.[72] This attack did not lead to a scandal in the way both Beckford and Lewis were subject to scandal. These scandals will be elaborated on in later chapters. It does show that men with a different sexuality are perhaps more vulnerable to scandal.

Returning to queer theory, there is no indication so far from Ketton-Cremer's biography that a 'homosexual' identity could be assigned to Walpole. A much broader, more flexible, but also less clear term is found by using 'queer', defined by David Halperin as 'Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant.'.[73] Perhaps in trying to define sexualities, it would therefore be more useful to look at it like this, and wonder which sexualities, and which circumstances in Walpole's life, are working against the heteronormative circumstances. This is again also relevant for Beckford and Lewis, because neither fits in a clear sexual frame. Coupling queer with an identity, however, leads to new problems because it could potentially be taken up by everyone.[74] Janet R. Jacobsen therefore introduces the idea of defining certain actions as 'queer', instead of pinpointing a queer identity or position.[75] Curiously, this seems to bring us back to the eighteenth-century idea of 'sodomitical acts' instead of the concept of someone having a 'sodomitical nature'.

---

[65] Ibidem, 38.
[66] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 313.
[67] Ibidem, 47.
[68] Ibidem, 47.
[69] Ibidem, 66.
[70] Ibidem, 91.
[71] Ibidem, 220.
[72] Ibidem, 220.
[73] Sullivan, *Queer Theory*, 43.

Mowl terms the Ketton-Cremer biography as 'flawed' because of its treatment of sexual topics. He thinks it is 'inescapable' that Walpole was a homosexual.[76] Mowl appears to be very conscious about the difficulties surrounding this claim. Two quotes are important in this context. First, he realizes that 'homosexual' as a word is very complex to use: 'But 'homosexual' in itself is a dangerously imprecise term. Homosexual love and hate take as many different forms and expressions, generosities and perversions, as heterosexual passions.'[77] This quote is very hopeful in the context of queer studies because it criticizes the earlier-mentioned over-simplified split between 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual'. This split is equally criticized by poststructuralist theory, since they are '(…)critical of dichotomous logic(…)'.[78] Poststructuralists oppose the acceptance of objective knowledge or truths because what we experience as 'natural' or 'truth', such as the existence of homosexuals and heterosexuals, is created historically and culturally through power in our society.[79] The main element to remember from this complex-sounding theory, is that concepts we now assume in society, could potentially change or are at least not universal truths.[80] This point is relevant for the entirety of this thesis. We can't simply place identities or sexual concepts on any of the authors.

Second, Mowl admits that '(…)it is as unhelpful to press one view of Horace's sex life as another; 1996 is as open to bias of one kind as 1936 was to its opposite.'[81] Again, this fits a context of queer theory and its poststructuralist branch, because any concept in the life of a historical figure needs to be researched with the greatest care when realizing that these concepts are potentially fluid. However, it seems that Mowl feels obliged to admit to both these apprehensions, so he can then shamelessly ignore them both. In his descriptions of Walpole's supposed sexuality he is anachronistic, uses crude wording and claims unfounded 'facts'. An example of this is found when he explains Walpole's famous love for small dogs:

---

[74] Ibidem, 50.
[75] Ibidem, 50.
[76] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 4.
[77] Ibidem, 6.
[78] Sullivan, *Queer Theory*, 42.
[79] Ibidem, 39.
[80] Ibidem, 39.
[81] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 18.

‘Like many frail old homosexuals, Horace preferred to lavish his affection upon dogs rather than on dangerous young men.’.[82] Not only does Mowl use the self-proclaimed ‘dangerously imprecise’ term of homosexual, he also pushes a certain view on Walpole’s sexuality, and manages to stereotype this sexuality without any background information.

A similar example is found when he describes Lord Lincoln, who he most suspects Walpole to be in love with: ‘Outstandingly beautiful men are always more likely to have a bisexual past or a bisexual potency simply because they attract the attentions of both sexes (…) The plain are usually reassuringly normal in their sexual proclivities.’[83] Again, Mowl claims unfounded knowledge about another imprecise sexual category of ‘bisexual’, while communicating that sexuality is somehow highly connected with looks and indicating that being bisexual is ‘abnormal’. This is an outdated stance, since the concept of there being abnormality in certain sexualities has already been opposed since the late nineteenth century by Magnus Hirschfeld.[84]

Anachronisms in this biography are barely hidden, as Mowl simply states how certain people would have been described in the twentieth century. ‘In modern homosexual circles Horace would be described as a ‘size queen’.’[85] A comment which is painfully anachronistic, unnecessary and unfounded. He equally seems to know things about John Chute that other historians have missed: ‘In the twentieth century he would have fought in the Stonewall riot by homosexuals against the police in New York and marched in Gay Pride weeks.’ It is a shame that comments like these weaken the believability of the biography in some points, because Mowl certainly seems to have a point that Walpole, like Beckford and Lewis, did not fit into the heteronormative gender pattern of his time.

This could have started back at Eton college, about which Walpole wrote that it was the first place where he felt love and passion, a piece of writing ignored by some historians.[86] At this all-boy school, Walpole was part of several groups of friends, carrying nicknames like *the Triumvirate* and *the Quadruple Alliance*, that he was quite close with.[87] Eton is also the place where he met Henry Fiennes-Clinton, also known as Lord Lincoln, to whom Walpole ‘(…)developed his strong and enduring homosexual attachment(…)’.[88] Mowl bases this on the intensity and content of the letters Walpole wrote to Lincoln.[89] But even more importantly, Walpole apparently felt so much love for Lincoln, that it influenced his life events on several occasions. Mowl suspects Walpole of postponing his university years for the opportunity of being closer to Lincoln.[90] More profoundly, the travel Gray and Walpole undertook, was, according to Mowl, a 'pursuit of love', mainly for Lincoln.[91] Mowl explains that through letters, Lincoln and Walpole agreed to meet in the Italian Reggio.[92] While this is just one interpretation of events, it is noticeable that it led to Lincoln and Walpole spending close to a month in Venice together, where they also had portraits made.[93] Ketton-Cremer curiously fast-forwards through this month, as he solely notes that '(…)Venice held no charms for him' and 'He left Venice for Genoa on July 12th, travelling with Lord Lincoln and Spence.'.[94] There is also no mention of the ironic letter Walpole makes Lincoln read in public, containing sentences like '(…)May thy days be as long as thy manhood(…)'.[95]

---

[82] Ibidem, 242.
[83] Ibidem, 54.
[84] Sullivan, *Queer Theory*, 12.
[85] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 92.
[86] Ibidem, 11.
[87] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 35.
[88] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 14.

On the pamphlets exchanged between Guthrie and Walpole on Conway, Mowl has some more to say as well. He refers to the event as an 'outing' of Walpole, containing sentences such as 'by disposition female', 'a weakness and an effeminacy' and 'this arrow came forth from a female quiver'.[96] Remarkably, Mowl does not think there was a physical element involved between Conway and Walpole.[97] About another noticeable part of Walpole's sexual life noted by Ketton-Cremer, the affair with Marchese Grofoni, Mowl writes that the affair and the keeping of her portrait was '(…)a certificate of sexual propriety' which some biographers apparently fell for.[98]

Whatever historians and readers of Walpole's letters make of his sexuality, some historians say that knowing the truth about it should not be overvalued. James Watt writes that Walpole has often been associated with 'camp' and 'queer'.[99] This is indeed the case in Mowl's biography, as he for example writes '(…)Strawberry Hill and *The Castle of Otranto* – were both instances of high-camp defiance of normal conventions.'.[100] However, Watt argues that this is hardly even relevant, since Walpole's social status, described earlier in this chapter, had a much more profound influence on his work that his 'probable sexual orientation'.[101] George Haggerty disagrees and asserts that sexuality was a major influence in- at least the fictional- work of Walpole, and also finds it in the other authors considered in this thesis: 'The novels of Walpole, Beckford and Lewis, as I hope to show, can be seen as an attempt to come to terms with the kinds of inner conflict that the emerging crisis of homosexuality made inevitable'.[102] Later chapters will show to what extent this thesis agrees with him in the cases of Beckford and Lewis. For now, Walpole is under discussion, and it is at least clear that sexuality is an important theme in *The Castle of Otranto*.

---

[89] Ibidem, 5/17.
[90] Ibidem, 17.
[91] Ibidem, 38.
[92] Ibidem, 72-78.
[93] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 78-79.
[94] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 76-77.
[95] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 92.
[96] Ibidem, 179.
[97] Ibidem, 18.
[98] Ibidem, 60.
[99] Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 21.
[100] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 116.

At first sight, it seems the sexualities in the book are fitting the heteronormative dominant pattern. Manfred's daughter Matilda falls in love with the rightful heir Theodore, for example, and Manfred is married to Hippolita.[103] It all becomes a bit darker when Manfred's son dies, and Manfred feels that he should marry his son's future bride Isabella himself. She does not want to, resulting in a fear-ridden description of a chase between the two. Manfred also decides that he will divorce his wife. In the end, Isabella marries Theodore because Manfred accidentally kills Matilda.[104] This sounds like a possible punishment or warning for what will happen when you sexually chase one you should not be with. George Haggerty detects a certain sexual confusion in *Otranto,* which he traces back to the inner world of Walpole.[105] Much like what happens in the novels of Beckford and Lewis, as we will see, is that 'Manfred attempts to challenge the limits of convention and is summarily destroyed.'[106] Part of this convention is possibly the heteronormative ideal, and this shows that the heteronormative pattern can be broken by many different sexualities, not just by homosexuality. This again proves the worth of queer-theory in looking beyond the binary opposition of hetero- and homosexual.

Literature

Horace Walpole took advantage of the eighteenth-century developments in print culture and was active in many literary fields. Note that the Gothic should not be overestimated as the main literary pursuit in his life. More notable are his letters and memoirs. He wrote thousands of letters in his lifetime, with a preconceived plan of being a chronicler about his times.[107] With his letters, Walpole wanted to achieve ‘literary immortality’.[108] Therefore Walpole could not take his letter-writing lightly. He profited from the improved roads and mail services to get his letters to his carefully selected friends.[109] He asked the recipients to return his letters now and then, so he could consciously build on his account of his life and time.[110] Part of this process was the ‘(…)editing, annotation, and (in many cases) alteration(…)’ of these letters.[111] Especially Walpole’s earlier letters have been altered, perhaps because he changed his mind on the content of some of them when he got older.[112] Although neither Lewis nor Beckford was this involved with letter-writing, it is interesting that they both also edited their own original work at several occasions. Mowl describes Walpole’s efforts in his letters as a ‘new art form’ or ‘life as a prolix-novel’.[113] The letters also appear to have a rather high literary quality and entertainment value. One letter is appreciatively described by Mowl as ‘(…)snobbish, theatrical in its aesthetic appreciation, unkind, malicious and alive’.[114]

---

[101] Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 21.

[102] G.E. Haggerty, 'Literature and Homosexuality in the late eighteenth century: Walpole, Beckford, and Lewis', *Studies in the Novel* vol. 18, No. 4 (1986) 343.

[103] Walpole, 'The Castle of Otranto'.

[104] Ibidem.

[105] Haggerty, 'Literature and Homosexuality', 344-345.

[106] Ibidem, 345.

Walpole also contributed to another up-and-coming literary form of the eighteenth century; the periodical. This periodical, titled *The World*, was aimed at the upper-class, publishing work of many aristocratic authors.[115] Walpole ended up contributing nine submissions to the periodical.[116] Just like his letters, Walpole had the skill to make his works a pleasure to read.[117] These qualities, including fun anecdotes, return in most things Walpole has written, perhaps partly explaining why his works were generally popular.[118]

Although the printing press was now ‘free’, as described in the previous chapter, there was still an important event surrounding a newspaper called the *North Briton*. The newspaper, and its editor John Wilkes, already had a wicked reputation when the much-debated issue 45 was published in 1763, critical of the ministers.[119] Forty nine people were arrested, including Wilkes, on the above-described law of ‘seditious libel’.[120] Though he was involved with more upper-class publications, Walpole was not one to look down on publications like *North*

---

[107] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 18.
[108] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 23.
[109] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 18.
[110] Ibidem, 18.
[111] Ibidem, 113.
[112] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 25.
[113] Ibidem, 257.
[114] Ibidem, 150.
[115] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 150.
[116] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 132./Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 150.
[117] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 150.
[118] Ibidem, 183.
[119] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 171.
[120] Ibidem, 172.

Briton, especially if he could use them for his own cause. A year earlier, Walpole had been able to ridicule his former friend and now political rival, Fox, by pointing Wilkes to an eulogy that Walpole once wrote on Fox, which formed the base of a highly critical article.[121] This shows that Walpole knew many ways of using the developments of print and print culture in his time. When Wilkes was arrested, the already present discontent in society against the ministry of Bute, and now Grenville, exploded.[122] The British, 'naturally conservative and disinclined to political idealism', showed that they wanted to stand up for their rights, among them the ability to publish things without being arrested on general warrants.[123] Another sign that the press was perhaps not as free as hoped, was when Walpole, over a decade earlier, tried to publish a pamphlet opposing the expansion of the power of the king, a truly Whig theme.[124] This pamphlet, titled *Delenda est Oxonio*, was never circulated in high numbers because it was seized and suppressed.[125]

Another way Walpole can be posited centrally in the literary developments, was his placing of a printing press. Although most of the printing took place in London, Walpole had the means and room to install a private press at Strawberry Hill in 1757.[126] Being the social person that he was, Walpole organized a gathering surrounding its opening, inviting printers and booksellers.[127] That he was able to select these people, might point to an increasingly cohesive group of people within the literary business. The products of the press included odes by Gray, the *Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors of England*, *An Account of Russia* and *Anecdotes of Painting,* both written by other authors, Walpole himself or born form collaborations.[128] Walpole seemed to really enjoy printing these works.[129] Perhaps he himself knew as well that the press was mostly a hobby. This is demonstrated by the fact that the press was not utilized upon completion of *The Castle of Otranto*, but that is was sent to a professional publisher.[130] Neither Beckford nor Lewis was this involved in the eighteenth-century developments in print or periodicals, but in their own ways, they were also certainly branching out beyond the Gothic they are often associated with.

---

[121] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 215.
[122] Ibidem, 215.
[123] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 172.
[124] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 129.
[125] Ibidem, 129.
[126] Ibidem, 167.
[127] Ibidem, 168.
[128] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 170-171-278.
[129] Ibidem, 149.
[130] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 143-44.

During this time, Walpole's interests in the Gothic were steadily growing. Burke's sublime, associated with Gothic, first seems to make an appearance when Walpole travels with Gray. In very romantic terms, he writes a friend about the mountains on his way to Geneva, referring to 'precipices' and 'rumblings' among other things.[131] He also became increasingly interested in the romantic pastime of genealogy and his visits to old buildings and ruins, the 'Gothic pilgrimages'.[132] Once Strawberry Hill started to take form, Walpole was constantly surrounded by Gothic influences. Ketton-Cremer writes on this: 'His fantasies found concrete form; the little house called Strawberry Hill was fast assuming the splendours of the Castle of Otranto.'[133] In the summer of 1764, Walpole then wrote *Otranto*, according to him based on a dream, without a preconceived plan within two months.[134] A noticeable similarity with *Vathek* by Beckford and *The Monk* by Lewis, is that these both claimed to have be written in a short period as well. We will see that the circumstances were quite different, however. Mowl at least, disagrees. He thinks the idea of a short writing-time adds to the romanticism of the book, but that there clearly is a preconceived plot.[135] He also asserts *Otranto* was not based on a dream, but on the emotional problems Walpole experienced surrounding the pamphlets he exchanged with Guthrie and Guthrie's allegations.[136] According to Mowl, Walpole tried to cover this up by claiming to have written the book earlier than he actually did.[137] Ketton-Cremer takes the opposite position, writing that *Otranto* '(…)had nothing to do with his personal relationships(…)'.[138] Ketton-Cremer even opposes Walpole to Beckford in this regard, stating that *Vathek* is exactly what *Otranto* is not: a reflection of the authors personal life.[139]

Apart from the meaning of the novel, Walpole was weary of the possible responses towards his rather extreme production, especially for an author who was also a Member of Parliament.[140] This caused him to publish the first version, not under his own name, but under a complexly hidden pseudonym of an author who had found a manuscript.[141] This is similar to what Matthew Lewis did when he published the first version of *The Monk* anonymously. Later on, both authors published a later version under their own name, but we will see that this action had quite different effects between the both of them. In Walpole's case, reception of the novel was quite positive, both before and after he disclosed his true identity as author.[142] People enjoyed reading the novel, and James Watt has commented that critics defined it '(…)for good or bad, as a frivolous diversion(…)'.[143] For Lewis, the reaction was much more extreme, perhaps caused by the turbulent times in which he published his *Monk.*

---

[131] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 53.
[132] Ibidem, 121-22.
[133] Ibidem, 180.
[134] Ibidem, 189.
[135] Mowl, *Horace Walpole*, 183.
[136] Ibidem, 185.
[137] Ibidem, 185.
[138] Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole*, 193.
[139] Ibidem, 193.
[140] Ibidem, 194.
[141] Ibidem, 194.

The effects and achievements of the novel are, like many topics in Walpole's life, topics that are open to much debate. Fred Botting asserts that the elements introduced by *Otranto* were crucial for the new Gothic genre.[144] Neil Cornwell agrees that Walpole's novel was the kick start of the Gothic craze.[145] At the same time, we have seen previously in this chapter, that the Gothic style has been fashionable for quite some time when Walpole even started building Strawberry, years before *Otranto*. Mowl is also skeptical, explaining that both Strawberry Hill and *Otranto*, Walpole's most original creations, had many Gothic predecessors in architecture and literature.[146] He attributes the feeling of originality for the works of Walpole to him being intelligent in promoting his works and passing them down to posterity in a clever way.[147] Perhaps the largest difference between Walpole and his Gothic successors, Lewis and Beckford, is exactly that they are termed his successors and that claims of originality in their novels have much less value. This is among the many topics that will appear in the following chapters.

---

[142] Ibidem, 195.

[143] Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 25.

[144] F. Botting, 'In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture', in: D. Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford 2012) 14.

[145] N. Cornwell, 'European Gothic', in: D. Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford 2012) 64.

[146] Mowl, *Horace Walpole,* 186-187.

[147] Ibidem, 186.

Chapter 3 – William Beckford

A biographer of Horace Walpole, subject of the previous chapter, remarked on William Beckford: 'Beckford was to relive Horace's life but angrily, more openly, in a more defiantly flamboyant register.'[1] Much can be said for this statement. William Beckford was born in 1760, when Walpole was 45 and Matthew Lewis was not to be born for another 15 years. The cultural-historical differences and similarities are highly interesting to observe.

Politics

Beckford's father was a man of substantial political influence, as were the fathers of both Walpole and Lewis. Beckford's father was referred to as 'Alderman', was Lord Mayor of London and a well-known politician.[2] He was partly a contemporary of Horace Walpole, who wrote on him: 'Vainglory seemed to be the real motive of all his actions.'[3] Like Walpole, Alderman was a Whig politician and a populist. He became rich through Jamaican sugar, making him of a very different background than his aristocratic wife.[4] The backgrounds of his parents combined in Beckford, and could have made him a truly successful politician.

Beckford did not live up to this political potential. This is a notable similarity with the other two authors considered. Walpole was an active politician behind the scenes, but did not match the power and influence of his father. The same goes for Lewis, who would also fail in the career intended for him. Beckford's education was aimed at him becoming a politician and discouraged certain of his less-suitable interests.[5] Some historians attribute the failure of Beckford as a politician to the fact that he wanted to contrast himself against the overpowering image of his father.[6] Others have argued that it was simply in his nature; 'But Beckford's temperament was fundamentally that of an artist and not of a politician(…)'.[7] His family did not agree with this. When Beckford wanted to publish his *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, a very romantic and sensitive travel diary, his mother feared it would hurt his reputation as a Whig.[8] In either case, education towards a political career would have had little effect. Perhaps his education even fanned on his artistic side. His education was awkward because he was in very little contact with other children, which perhaps stimulated the creativity of his imagination and interests.[9] From a very young age, he was supplied tutors on a broad number of subjects.[10] After his father died, however, it was decided that he would remain homeschooled.[11] This deprived him of, for example, the social experiences and formative experiences that Walpole had at Eton.

---

[1] T. Mowl, *Horace Walpole, The Great Outsider* (London 1996) 253.
[2] M. Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories: A William Beckford Reader* (London 1993) ix.
[3] B. Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill* (London 1979) 33.
[4] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, ix.
[5] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 41.
[6] A. Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The prehistory of a homosexual Role* (New York 1999) 43-44.
[7] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 224.
[8] Ibidem, 147.

When Beckford was approaching adulthood, he remained indifferent towards politics.[12] Biographer Brian Fothergill quotes him as writing: ‘The news of the World affects me not half so much as the chirping of a sparrow, or the rustling of withered leaves(…)ambition at present lies dormant in my breast(…).’[13] This makes him the least politically interested individual of the authors appearing in this thesis. This attitude does not appear to have changed much later in life. In international politics, the terror surrounding the French Revolution disturbed him little.[14] He was excited about the freedom, but appears to have been even more excited about the lowered price of collectibles, resulting from the political problems.[15] This seems to be typical Beckford, who really only concerned himself with politics if he could personally gain from it. Even his apparent enthusiasm about the *liberté* of the French Revolution was partly to make a statement towards politicians he had a personal problem with.[16] An interesting reference to the events in France is made when he wrote ‘the reign of grim Gothic prejudices is nearly over’.[17] This shows that he did not adhere to the Burkean Whig concept of history in which the Gothic was already a time of liberty.[18] This refers again to the ambiguity of the Gothic as both a time of barbarism and freedom at the same time. Perhaps Beckford simply felt that the Gothic times in France were different than the Gothic times in Britain. Beckford later expressed his support for the monarchy of Portugal, which is barely compatible with the ideals of the French Revolution he previously claimed to support, suggesting that he cleverly adjusted his political stance to his current environment.[19] The same ambiguity has already been noted on Walpole.

---

[9] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 25.
[10] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, x.
[11] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 36.
[12] Ibidem, 65.
[13] Ibidem, 77.
[14] Ibidem, 213.
[15] Ibidem, 208.
[16] Ibidem, 224.
[17] Ibidem, 214.
[18] M. Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London 1995) 13.
[19] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 248.

It is remarkable that Beckford eventually did take a seat in the parliament. Because of his social position, he was quite secure of a place in it.[20] He really had only one interest, and that was obtaining a peerage, an inheritable aristocratic title.[21] His influential Whig ancestry and wealth were characteristics that spoke in his favor, and he was put on a list to be made a baron.[22] Before this could happen, however, Beckford became involved in a huge scandal and his chance at a peerage was lost.[23] He had no significant part in politics before or after this scandal, and withdrew from parliament in 1794.[24] He took up a seat for another borough in 1806, but remained of little influence.[25]

After the scandal, he traveled a lot and became very familiar with several European countries. Lewis and Walpole undertook similar journeys. It put Beckford in a good position to try and take up a certain diplomatic role, which he first suggested to fulfill between England and Portugal and later between England and Britain.[26] Sadly, prime minister William Pitt the Younger blocked his ambitions, seemingly out of personal dislike of Beckford.[27] There was some history between them, since Beckford and Pitt had been friends in their childhood.[28] This friendship cooled, according to Jack because Pitt saw an '(…)effete and outcast' in Beckford.[29] This inspired Beckford to the two most politically influenced writings of his life, *Modern Novel Writing: Or The Elegant Enthusiast* and *Azemia*. Although Beckford attacks broader societal elements in these satirical books, he still mainly focuses on attacking Pitt and things surrounding Pitt, things that concern him personally.[30] This is different from for example Walpole, who wrote venomously on the execution of Byng, which did not necessarily concern him.

A final political topic relevant to Beckford's life, was slavery, especially in the West-Indies. It is interesting that in *Azemia*, Malcolm Jack notices that '(…)Pitt is satirized as a trickster who had led his people into a condition not much above slavery', while Beckford himself depended on slavery concerning his income.[31] Horace Walpole had already been described as disagreeing with this practice, expressed in his pamphlet *An Account of the*

---

[20] Ibidem, 48.
[21] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 163.
[22] Ibidem, 164/169.
[23] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xiv.
[24] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 234.
[25] Ibidem, 278.
[26] Ibidem, 239-241.
[27] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xvi.
[28] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 163.
[29] Jack, xvi.
[30] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xxv-xxvi.
[31] Ibidem, xvi.

Giants lately discovered. We will also see that Matthew Lewis was considerably morally affected, and wrestled with the practice. Beckford, however, does not seem to have worried about it much, even though he is considered a Whig-politician and all his wealth came from slave plantations in Jamaica. He seems to have been aware of it, however. In his most famous work, *Vathek*, Andrew Elfenbein notices references to slavery in the shape of the Giaour, a character in the novel.[32] The Giaour is dark-skinned, '(…)blacker than ebony(…)', and possesses all kinds of valuables that seem to appear out of nowhere. Elfenbein connects this to English luxury that does not take notice of how it was produced, and therefore as a sign that Beckford is conscious of the origin of his wealth.[33] This does not necessarily mean Beckford was morally troubled by slavery, however, seeing as the Giaour is later revealed to be an associate of the Devil.[34] Sacheverell Sitwell also remarked about Beckford that the slave-like, pliable mentality of the Portuguese population, who were '(…)little better than slaves(…) was one of the things Beckford found most attractive in Portugal.[35] Unlike Matthew Lewis, Beckford also never visited his plantations in Jamaica. When it was suggested that he should, he mainly feared for the climate in Jamaica, his safety at sea, and eventually didn't make it any further than Portugal.[36] Perhaps he was not being overdramatic, however, as we will see a similar journey undertaken by Matthew Lewis had rather lethal consequences.

Class

Beckford was highly conscious about his social status and reputation. Comparable to Walpole, he had a room in his house where he displayed the arms of influential houses connected to his family. Unlike Walpole, however, some of these were lies: 'He claimed, among other things, that he was descended not from one, but from all, of the barons who signed Magna Carta(…)'.[37] All three authors tried to improve and emphasize their social status in their own ways. Beckford tried to enhance his social status by bragging, for example about his close relation with and music lessons by Mozart, which were almost certainly highly exaggerated.[38] He was highly conscious of the influential position of his parents and felt pride in ancestry.[39] He showed off his wealth in such a way that he was once thought to be the

---

[32] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 54.
[33] Ibidem, 54.
[34] Ibidem, 54.
[35] S. Sitwell, *Beckford and Beckfordism, An Essay* (London 1974) 13.
[36] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 189-191.
[37] Ibidem, 267.
[38] Ibidem, 26.
[39] Ibidem, 13/26.

Emperor of Austria while traveling.[40] While traveling, he appreciated Portugal not only for the character of the people living in it, but also for the rich aristocracy, which he valued.[41] In his work *Italy; with sketches of Spain and Portugal* he underscores the magnificence of the social circumstances in Portugal, and tries to represent himself favorably in it.[42]

All this makes it seem like Beckford was of a very high social status. In many ways however, he was not, or at least not as much as he wanted to be. As mentioned before, Beckford's father became wealthy by Jamaican sugar estates, and came from a very simple ancestry of a cloth working great-grandfather whose son became a planter.[43] The Alderman was certainly not ashamed of this past, but did manage to climb the social ladder quite significantly.[44] The Alderman's main success was marrying a woman who descended from an Earl, and further back even from English and Scottish royals.[45] Although a successful marriage for the Alderman, Beckford's mother seems to have been aware that she married below her social class.[46] Brian Fothergill asserts that this made both her and her son rather snobbish.[47] Beckford could, in these circumstances, neither claim to be an aristocrat nor a middle-class individual. Sitwell described Beckford's social status as a '(…)semi-plebeian origin(…)'.[48] This is remarkably similar to the description of Walpole's class, and would also match Lewis, who had wealth and influential friends, but no aristocracy to his name. The entire Beckford-family was considered 'parvenu', and not especially welcomed in aristocratic circles.[49] Being wealthy did not necessarily mean admittance to the aristocratic class. Elfenbein explains that the contemporary opinion was not in favor of those with an excessive amount of money for consumption, because it enabled people to pretend to be aristocratic, and therefore be harmful to the social hierarchy.[50] As Elfenbein writes: 'They liked to mock members of the lower classes who eagerly aped their betters.'[51]

An example of this is that Alderman was rich enough to build a house, named 'Fonthill Splendens', in the fashionable and impressive Palladian style, very luxurious inside and out.[52] According to Elfenbein, this is exactly the behavior critics feared of the *nouveaux riche.*[53] Beckford later adjusted this house severely. In collaboration with architect James Wyatt, Beckford wanted to express his many fantasies in a building for entertainment, an abbey-like construction in a Gothic style.[54] It is not entirely clear what inspired him to this building. Sitwell writes that when Beckford visited Portugal, the medieval abbeys of Alcobaca and Batalha influenced his appreciation of the Gothic.[55] From the enthusiastic way Beckford wrote about these places, Sitwell asserts that their architecture directly resulted in Fonthill Abbey, as the adjusted version of Fonthill Splendens came to be called.[56] Fothergill, on the other hand, doubts this influence and specifically mentions a villa at Monseratte near Sintra which Beckford later visited.[57] It shares many similarities with Fonthill Abbey in its architectural structure and gardens.[58] Eventually Beckford went to live in the Abbey, and the original Fonthill Splendens was torn down.[59] Especially when the Abbey became a much-discussed building, Fothergill is right to connect it to Walpole's seemingly equal creation of Strawberry Hill.[60] He explains however, that Beckford felt that this was an unjust comparison. Walpole seems to have been more committed to the Gothic style, where Beckford argued that the style was a good fit for displaying his family's arms.[61] Although it previously seemed that Beckford cared little about the Gothic heritage, this pride in ancestry could prove otherwise. The connection professed by Burke between tradition and freedom before the French invasion, could still have influenced Beckford in his Whig-family.[62] Once he had to move out of Fonthill Abbey and occupied a new house in Bath, he didn't try to use the Gothic style any longer.[63] Although the Fonthill houses portrayed the enormous wealth in the family, Sitwell warns not to think the Beckford family was unique in this respect, as there were multiple extravagant houses like it across England.[64]

---

[40] Ibidem, 135.
[41] Sitwell, *Beckford and Beckfordism*, 14.
[42] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xxx.
[43] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 14-15.
[44] Ibidem, 14.
[45] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, ix.
[46] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 20.
[47] Ibidem, 20.
[48] Sitwell, *Beckford and Beckfordism*, 14.
[49] Ibidem, 35.
[50] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 41.
[51] Ibidem, 41.

Instead of simply accepting the fact that he, like the other two authors, hovered between social classes, Beckford strove to present himself, and eventually become, aristocratic. It has already been made clear how much he valued this, and how he tried to secure a peerage, and failed.[65] He managed to marry a very suitable woman in this respect, as his wife Margaret Gordon came from an aristocratic family, and was the daughter of the Earl of Aboyne.[66] But this did not remove his parvenu reputation. The consumption of the parvenu, which Elfenbein explained was feared by critics, seems to have been present in Beckford.

---

[52] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 19.
[53] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 43.
[54] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 226-227.
[55] Sitwell, *Beckford and Beckfordism*, 21.
[56] Ibidem, 26.
[57] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 233.
[58] Ibidem, 234.
[59] Ibidem, 20.
[60] Ibidem, 266.
[61] Ibidem, 267.
[62] Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 13.
[63] Ibidem, 323.
[64] Sitwell, *Beckford and Beckfordism*, 29.

Sitwell points to his ‘ostentation’, the pressure to show off his wealth, as Beckford had no shining pedigree to show off.[67] The famous eighteenth-century economist Adam Smith wrote that it was preferable to place wealth in the adornment or erecting of buildings.[68] This was exactly what Beckford was doing. At the same time, he was an nearly obsessive collector, from about 1782 onwards.[69] This is a passionate interest that is often not given the attention it deserves, because it is overshadowed by the Gothic writing. Just like in building his impressive house, Beckford was not the only one to do this, as a trend can be seen. Families who had enough wealth, not only spent it on their living quarters, but also on collecting valuables, often art.[70] Elfenbein even comes up with the term of ‘Beckfordian consumers’ to explain how people tried to climb by collecting and consuming.[71] Although Beckford tried to rise above the bourgeoisie, his type of consumption had been connected to the bourgeois lifestyle, which values objects that are rare or exclusive.[72] Mainly because of legal troubles and problems in the sugar trade, his financial status deteriorated severely in the nineteenth century.[73] It is a clear sign of his commitment to collecting, however, that he continued to buy items while he was in Paris.[74] This is a sign of the importance collecting represented for Beckford personally throughout his life, certainly not inferior to the importance of his literary undertakings.

But no matter how Beckford tried to rise in social status, a scandal in 1784, which will be discussed more in depth later on, ruined his social status permanently.[75] After it took place, he traveled a lot. Through the support of royal courts in other countries, he hoped to improve his social standing at home.[76] He constantly seemed more at ease in foreign countries, for example in Spanish society.[77] He always hoped that he could improve his social standing, for example by proposing to act as a diplomat.[78] It took him a couple years into the nineteenth century to realize that he was forever shunned in his home country.[79] He became almost completely socially isolated.[80] Perhaps his biggest social success came towards the end of his life, in the form of his progeny. Despite the social situation of her father, Beckford's youngest daughter Susan managed to marry the son of a Duke, and became a Duchess in 1819. Biographer Fothergill writes about this event that it '(…)in some measure compensated him for his continued ostracism by the rest of society.'[81]

---

[65] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 173.
[66] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xiii.
[67] Sitwell, *Beckford and Beckfordism*, 30-31.
[68] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 41.
[69] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 140.
[70] Sitwell, *Beckford and Beckfordism*, 30.
[71] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 43.
[72] Ibidem, 43.
[73] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 310.
[74] Ibidem, 309.
[75] Ibidem, 173.
[76] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xiv.

Sexuality

When it concerns William Beckford, sexuality is a complicated topic. It has previously been explained how difficult it is, according to queer theory, to define the sexuality of an individual, especially when sexuality was defined differently in their contemporary times. To this knowledge, another strain of queer theory forms interesting background information. This is the connection Andrew Elfenbein makes between the eighteenth century genius and sodomy. The term 'genius', in the eighteenth century, came to represent someone who had exceptional talents, mostly in a certain type of creative outlet, such as writing.[82] Elfenbein acknowledges that the term is rather vague, but that two elements are often associated with it: originality and sublimity.[83] Both these elements can in some way be associated with Beckford's literary work. His travel diaries, for example, have been described by Fothergill as '(…)an unusual book and very much ahead of its time.'[84] The originality was fueled by the individual who wrote it, and it is therefore important that Beckford, unlike Walpole and Lewis, did not want to publish his most famous novel anonymously.[85] Originality was also associated to be more pure in earlier and more barbaric times, including the eastern and medieval, or Gothic, times that Beckford both liked to emerge himself in.[86]

The second characteristic of genius, sublimity, can also be attributed to Beckford's work. The sublime can naturally be found in the elements Burke ascribes to it in his well-known essay, summarized earlier.[87] These elements can certainly be found in *Vathek*, for example when Nouronihar follows a mysterious light 'The light, which was now gradually enlarging, appeared above her on the summit of the mountain, and as if proceeding from a cavern.(…)She continued ascending, and discovered large wax torches in full blaze, planted here and there in the fissures of the rock.'[88] But Vathek is also sublime in the way other eighteenth century commentators defined it, as in ignoring conventions.[89]

---

[77] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 203.
[78] Ibidem, 240.
[79] Ibidem, 309.
[80] Ibidem, 250.
[81] Ibidem, 280.
[82] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 27.
[83] Ibidem, 28.
[84] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 147.
[85] Ibidem, 188.
[86] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 29.

If this proves that Beckford can be associated with genius, the question remains what connects this to sodomy. The answer lies there, that the eighteenth century connected genius and sublimity both to excess.[90] And excess was connected to femininity, stemming from the Aristotelean concept of the woman as an imperfect version of the man, where the woman represented excess as opposed to the man's self-control.[91] From this association with femininity followed an idea of the genius as being a person unfit for marriage, with feminine characteristics and preferring the company of men.[92] Elfenbein explains that this concept became remarkably close to the characteristics associated with a sodomite.[93] In a way, the genius was the eighteenth-century edition of the homosexual.[94] This is important, because it shows again that we should not be too eager to adopt the term and concept of *homosexual*, but that we should look at sexualities from an eighteenth-century point of view.

Citations in Beckford's biography show that he was certainly aware of the concept of genius. On Voltaire, he wrote '(…)All we shall even see of him more at Geneva is the light of his Genius reflected from his Works'[95], and on Goethe '(…)and tell me if every line is not resplendent with Genius'.[96] That Beckford was aware of the concept is relevant, because Elfenbein asserts that authors sometimes used this concept to their advantage, their genius giving them a valid reason to publish.[97] This was especially effective for authors who were not validated to write, based on their social status, or being 'outsiders'.[98] He explains that outsiders sometimes deliberately experimented with sexuality to make sure their work was impressive enough to be considered genius.[99] It makes one wonder to what extent this has influenced both Walpole and Lewis. Elfenbein classifies Beckford as one of these outsiders, and he is probably right to do so. Not only did society reject Beckford because of a sexual scandal, he was also ignored by the aristocrats he aspired to belong to, both because he was *nouveau riche* and an author.[100]

---

[87] D.B. Morris, 'Gothic Sublimity', *New Literary History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1985) 299-319.
[88] W. Beckford, 'The history of the Caliph Vathek', in: M. Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories: A William Beckford Reader* (London 1993).
[89] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 30.
[90] Ibidem, 30.
[91] Ibidem, 20/30.
[92] Ibidem, 34.
[93] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 34.
[94] Ibidem, 34.
[95] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 53.
[96] Ibidem, 72.
[97] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 37.
[98] Ibidem, 35.

At this point it is useful to address the previously mentioned scandal surrounding Beckford. In 1779 he went on a tour around England, and visited his Courtenay relatives at Powderham Castle.[101] Upon arriving there, nineteen year-old Beckford fell in love with the family's eleven-year-old son, William Courtenay.[102] Beckford was somehow charmed by this young boy, and it is likely that the fact that the boy was a child played a large part in this.[103] Beckford can probably be associated with *pederasty*, a form of sexual behavior including a relationship between an adult and an adolescent young man. However, *pederast* is probably as inadequate a term as *homosexual*, and is hard to attribute to Beckford. Beckford was easily lost in fantasies, and he feared the prospect of being an adult with responsibilities.[104] This could have deepened his love for the state of being a child. Children also connected to his enthusiasm for collecting, 'For Beckford, lovely youths were the ultimate rare objects to be collected.'[105] Again a sign of the importance of collecting for Beckford personally. If he really saw boys as collectables, he would have preferred a very stoic, permanent and unchangeable version of a boy.[106] Perhaps this is why he fell especially in love with this Courtenay boy, who has been described as having a '(…)strange lack of personality(…)'.[107]

Although several authors assert that the love most likely did not have a physical side, his love was quite dramatically expressed.[108] One letter he wrote to William reads '(…)It is needless for me to repeat that I am miserable without you(…)At any time I would sacrifice every drop of blood in my veins to do you good, or spare you a moment's misery(…)'.[109] It is telling for the base of Beckford's affection that he became less interested in Courtenay when Courtenay was no longer a child.[110] The situation ended in the worst possible way for

---

[99] Ibidem, 38.
[100] Sitwell, *Beckford and Beckfordism*, 35.
[101] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 69.
[102] Ibidem, 70.
[103] Ibidem, 70.
[104] Ibidem, 97.
[105] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 46.
[106] Ibidem, 46.
[107] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 70.
[108] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 46./Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 70.
[109] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 135.
[110] Ibidem, 165.

Beckford. In 1784 a political rival and the husband of Courtenay's aunt, Lord Loughborough, accused Beckford of having been in an inappropriate situation with Courtenay while he visited the family that year.[111] With the letters as possible ammunition for Loughborough, the episode was taken up by the press and exploded into the 'Powderham Scandal'.[112] Although there was no trial for sodomy, it can be claimed that Beckford's reputation was ruined for good.

These accusations were not unlike those in the Guthrie pamphlet directed against Horace Walpole. Perhaps it was because it concerned an adult, or because it occurred inside of a political debate, but Walpole never had to suffer a similar scandal. This is odd, because if anything, Beckford had a better shield against accusations of non-heteronormative behavior. This was his wife, Margaret Gordon. Rich as he was, Beckford was a catch on the marriage market.[113] He and Margaret were married from 1783 to 1786, when Margaret sadly died after giving birth to their second daughter. They seemed to have had a good marriage and Malcolm Jack asserts that Beckford was 'deeply in love' with his wife.[114] Fothergill appears to dispute this when he writes that Beckford had an egotistical strain and mostly shallow feelings for people.[115] This did not stop others from growing attached to Beckford, however. He was very charming and attracted attention from both sexes, leading to him being defined as a bisexual.[116] He did in fact have close relationships with both men and women. Noticeable is Louisa, the wife of his cousin Peter, who was very unhappy in her life and seemed to constantly be more in love with Beckford than he was with her.[117] Another important relationship was with Gregorio Franchi, a musically talented boy he met in Lisbon.[118] Fothergill argues that when he got older, Beckford increasingly moved towards homosexuality over bisexuality.[119] Queer theory points out that these terms are undesirable and limiting when describing someone's sexuality, but it can be concluded that Beckford, like Walpole and Lewis but in a different way, did not match the heteronormative pattern.

In contrast to Matthew Lewis, both Walpole and Beckford portray, on first sight, heteronormative sexualities in their novels. Beckford immediately introduced his main character Caliph Vathek as ‘Being much addicted to women(…)’.[120] Under the influence of his mother Carathis, a mysterious stranger known as the Giaour and his own vices, Vathek eventually ends up in Beckford’s version of hell, Eblis. Along the way, however, he falls in love with a girl named Nouronihar, who in her turn is engaged to a boy named Gulchenrouz.[121] So far, *Vathek* does not seem to answer to the genius novel portraying divergent sexualities.[122] This is a sign that we have to take a closer look, especially as Elfenbein signals that Beckford was one of the authors who did not only use divergent sexuality as a tool for validation, but was also actually writing about his own experiences.[123] Elfenbein detects a homoerotic current in *Vathek* from the Giaour, who possesses many valuables to lure in the Caliph, which reflects the homoeroticism of market relations.[124] He argues how this is reflected in ‘(…)a proto-Freudian connection between anal eroticism(…)and relations of consumer exchange(…)’, for example in the references to ‘an immense gulph’ or ‘a portal of ebony’. [125]

---

[111] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xiii.
[112] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 172.
[113] Ibidem, 116.
[114] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xiv.
[115] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 332.
[116] Ibidem, 53/293.
[117] Ibidem, 73.
[118] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xv.
[119] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 293.

Perhaps the sexuality in *Vathek* is not as significant as it seems. A theme that, in my opinion, can be sensed a lot stronger, is the theme of damnation. Once his father had died, Beckford grew up under the influence of his very religious mother who strongly expressed a faith in hell and damnation.[126] He combined this with his intense interest in everything Eastern, oriental and magical, including the oriental version of damnation, *Kismet*.[127] These themes take up a more central place than sexuality in a story that leads to hell, especially if the cause of reaching this hell does not appear to be sexuality. *Vathek* is certainly considered to be ‘(…)autobiographical like all his writings(…)’,[128] but it is still important to remain critical. The fact that Beckford probably did not answer to the heteronormative image of sexuality, does not necessarily mean that everything he touched or created became infused with this part of him. A more subtle analysis of sexuality in *Vathek* has been written by George Haggerty, who points to the ‘(…)open sensuality and perverse pleasures(…)’ in the story, and how it portrays the dangers of a desire not fitting into the standards of society or fighting them, probably including the heteronormative norm.[129]

---

[120] Beckford, *The history of the Caliph Vathek*.
[121] Ibidem.
[122] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 18.
[123] Ibidem, 18.
[124] Ibidem, 53.
[125] Ibidem, 54.
[126] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 21.
[127] Ibidem, 110/38.
[128] Ibidem, 41.
[129] G.E. Haggerty, ‘Literature and Homosexuality in the late eighteenth century: Walpole, Beckford, and Lewis’, *Studies in the Novel* vol. 18, No. 4 (1986) 346-347.

Literature

The comparison between *The Castle of Otranto* and *Vathek* is made by James Watt when he writes: ‘The work that seems most to resemble *Otranto* in this period, indeed, William Beckford’s *Vathek*(…)is rarely considered to be ‘Gothic’ at all(…)*Vathek* has proved to be resistant to literary-historical classification.[130] At the same time, Haggerty referred to Beckford as ‘(…)Walpole’s successor as Gothic novelist(…)’.[131] Beckford wrote the novel in 1782 when he was 22 years old. Both he and Matthew Lewis were remarkably young when they wrote their most famous works. It took four more years before *Vathek* was published, and this did not happen in an ideal situation. To escape from the storms of the Powderham Scandal, Beckford was abroad in Switzerland. Samuel Henley, to whom Beckford had entrusted the manuscript, then published the English version while Beckford had specifically requested him not to.[132] Beckford wanted to publish a French version first, but Henley probably felt he could start making money allready.

Beckford had wanted to publish a French version of the text, which he managed to do within months after the English version.[133] Besides the language there was another important difference between the two versions: the French version carried Beckford’s name, since Beckford had never intended to hide his authorship. Perhaps out of shame for Beckford’s reputation after the Powderham Scandal, Henley had hid the fact that *Vathek* was written by Beckford, and instead pretended that it was a manuscript from the East.[134] This led to the curious situation that all three famous novels of Walpole, Lewis and Beckford were initially published anonymously. The story sounds especially similar to Walpole’s scheme of pretending to have translated an old text. Still, not too much meaning needs to be attached to this coincidence, because it was not Beckford’s intention to publish his novel anonymously, while it was deliberate in the other cases.

After reading the doubts of Watt on the extent of the ‘Gothicness’ of *Vathek*, it is interesting to return to Hume’s classical article on Gothic characteristics. In the introduction, I summarized that these included: a focus on the psychological, a use of horrible situations, a strong presence of the supernatural and a heavy reliance on atmosphere to draw in the reader.[135] All these elements, and therefore the Gothic, are clearly present in *Vathek*. The entire novel is focused on the inner world of the Caliph and the disastrous decisions he makes, which leads to a horrible version of hell in which everyone’s heart is eternally on fire.[136] Between a servant of the Devil, a trip to hell, a mysterious unquenchable thirst, ravines that disappear and food that appears after dark rites, the supernatural is also richly represented.[137]

---

[130] J. Watt, *Contesting the Gothic. Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* (Cambridge 1999) 39.
[131] Haggerty, ‘Literature and Homosexuality’, 345.
[132] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xiv.
[133] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 188.
[134] Ibidem, 187.

The creation of *Vathek* was influenced by several circumstances. It is generally assumed to be a representation of his own relationships and experiences.[138] Jack argued that although it contains a certain autobiographical charge, there is more to the work.[139] Elements that were of interest to Beckford, such as the oriental, damnation and Gothic, all return.[140] His thorough education is reflected in the amount of scholarship on the East he used in this work, while it still came across as a fairy tale.[141] The direct inspiration of the novel supposedly came from an exclusive Christmas party Beckford had hosted, and which had supposedly shown him what Eblis would look like.[142] This included the interesting lighting in the mysterious Egyptian hall.[143] In this context, an article on the sublime by David Morris is highly interesting. Morris writes that the sublime as defined by Burke, as a force split from the beautiful and influenced by terror, should be complicated by a less simplified concept of terror in order to fit the Gothic.[144] According to Morris, the sublime in the Gothic is connected to things that are suppressed, and it is therefore suitable to connect it to Freud´s concept of the *Uncanny*.[145] Freud describes a type of terror that stems from ´(…)something strangely familiar which defeats our efforts to separate ourselves from it.’[146] Freud refers to the fear of things that seem familiar because we know them, but they are suppressed in our heads because we deny it exists.[147] This theory is highly applicable to sexuality in Gothic, because it is something Gothic authors might have suppressed, leading to types of terror in their works. At the same time, it is interesting that the original German word for the Uncanny, Unheimlich, directly refers to a not-house. Beckford and Walpole both got the inspiration for their novels in their own houses, causing them to use their house, or their *heim*, but in a disfigured way; *unheimlich*.

---

[135] R.D. Hume, 'Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel', *PMLA*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (1969) 283-284.
[136] Beckford, *The history of the Caliph Vathek*.
[137] Ibidem.
[138] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 128/94.
[139] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xxi.
[140] Ibidem, xxi.
[141] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories,* xxiv.
[142] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 129.
[143] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xx.
[144] Morris, ‘Gothic Sublimity’, 300/301.
[145] Ibidem, 306.
[146] Ibidem, 307.
[147] Ibidem, 307.

All three authors claimed to have written their story in a short time. Fothergill thinks Beckford was lying when he claimed to have written *Vathek* in three days.[148] Jack agrees and also doubts the extent of the influence of the Christmas party.[149] Beckford seems to have wanted to create an interesting background story in which the book came to be. In this case it is interesting to return to Elfenbein's theory on the genius. Elfenbein explains that it was Beckford who claimed the work could only be genius, since he had been able to produce it in such a short amount of time.[150] The book was quite favorably received, and indeed seen as a work of genius.[151] One of the demands for a work to be a production of genius, the originality, has definitely been ascribed to *Vathek* by many commentators.[152] Sitwell nuances this success by stating that it was mainly the mystery and the person of the author that drew in readers.[153] Fothergill makes similar claims.[154] It is interesting that in centralizing the author in the book's success, they connect it to another characteristic of genius; that it was to a high degree dependent on the persona of the author.[155]

Sitwell is generally more impressed with another literary work by Beckford, his work on his travels, which is atmospheric and valuable in its recollections of a society.[156] Jack agrees by warning not to focus exclusively on *Vathek* when judging Beckford's literary legacy.[157] There is again a risk that an unwarranted emphasis is placed on his Gothic work. Other literary works include his highly-appreciated *Recollections* on his inspiring travels to Batalha and Alcobaca, and his political satires *Azemia* and *Modern Novel Writing*.[158] His work *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, which was initially suppressed by pressure of his family, was published ten years before his death as *Italy, with Sketches of Spain and Portugal*.[159] In an almost Walpolean effort, Beckford edited and shortened the originals to present himself in the way he desired to be perceived.[160] It really goes for all authors considered here, that they were active in a lot more fields than just Gothic writing. It is important as a historian to keep an open mind and notice how these men filled their productive lives.

---

[148] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 129.
[149] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xx.
[150] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 39.
[151] Ibidem, 40.
[152] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 128.
[153] Sitwell, *Beckford and Beckfordism*, 21.
[154] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 128.
[155] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 28.
[156] Sitwell, *Beckford and Beckfordism*, 21-17.
[157] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xxxii.
[158] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 230/244.
[159] Ibidem, 335.
[160] Ibidem, 334-335.

Because just like Walpole and Lewis, Beckford had other interests besides writing. He seems to be most involved in these however, especially in collecting. In fact, Elfenbein writes that '(…)he had devoted far more of his life to collecting than to writing.'[161] At the end of the eighteenth century he became increasingly interested in collecting both books and art objects.[162] He was so involved with his collection, that the Abbey that Beckford was building for leisure, increasingly became a place to showcase his collection, as a '(…)cathedral dedicated to the arts(…)'.[163] Among the things in Beckford's collection were paintings by Rembrandt van Rijn, Salvator Rosa, Peter Paul Rubens and Giovanni Bellini.[164] He also collected objects that weren't paintings, such as priceless furniture.[165] The Abbey connected to another one of his passions; building. He got so caught up in building, that during the twenty years that he was working on it, he produced nothing in the literary field.[166] Perhaps this focus was caused by the personal meaning of the building for him, which supposedly reflected a lot of his personality.[167]

In comparison to the previous chapter, Beckford gives an impression of being a less gentle person than Walpole, but also leading a less gentle life. If comparisons can be made in his social status, aberrant sexuality, building enthusiasm and type of literature, an equal amount of differences can be detected in scandal, type of sexuality, social character, political attitude and childhood. It will be interesting to view both authors in the context of the figure central in the final chapter, Matthew Lewis.

---

[161] Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 59.
[162] Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories*, xvi.
[163] Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 257.
[164] Ibidem, 284.
[165] Ibidem, 286.
[166] Ibidem, 251.
[167] Ibidem, 251.

Chapter 4 – Matthew Lewis

The previous chapter began with a quote connecting Beckford and Walpole. It is fitting to connect Lewis to them in a similar way. André Parreaux writes: 'Indeed there is more than one parallel between Beckford and Lewis: their Jamaican connection and property, their abnormal sexual life(…)their mute and irregular attendance at the sittings, and then all prospects of a political career cut short by an early scandal(…)'.[1] Following Parreaux's logic, it does indeed seem like these men were bizarrely similar, just like Timothy Mowl earlier concluded about Walpole and Beckford. Perhaps this points in the direction of cohesiveness between them. A lot more nuance can be applied here, however. The first differences are to be found right at Lewis' birth.

Politics

Of the three authors, Lewis was the last to be born, in 1775, close to a politically restless time. Fourteen years later, the French Revolution broke out. Lewis does not seem to have cared much about this event initially, even when traveling to Paris in 1791 '(…)Lewis seems to have been less interested in politics than in going to the theater(…)'.[2] This is interesting, because theater and the writing of plays were an important interests in Lewis' life, which perhaps deserves more attention than scholars have given. The political upheaval of the Revolution could however have influenced Lewis' writing career and the reception of his most famous novel, *The Monk*. There is quite some debate on this topic. Maggie Kilgour asserts that the Gothic as a genre would most likely have ceased to exist after Walpole, '(…)if the terrifying events of the 1790s had not made it an appropriate vehicle for embodying relevant political and aesthetic questions.'[3] This is an odd statement, because Beckford was writing Gothic between Walpole and the French Revolution. However, the point that the French Revolution was important for the development of the Gothic genre, is also taken up by the Marquis de Sade who defined Gothic as an 'inevitable product' of the political upheaval.[4]

There are also authors who doubt this link. Historians have asserted that contemporary critics in the late eighteenth century did not see the link between the French Revolution and the Gothic, and that it is therefore not necessarily useful to read the Gothic politically.[5] It is important to remember that, if the Revolution did have certain effects on the reception of *The Monk,* it would be safe to assume that these effects were not in place when Beckford or Walpole wrote their most famous novels.

---

[1] A. Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk: A literary event 1796-1798* (Paris 1960) 142.
[2] D.L. Macdonald, *Monk Lewis, A Critical Biography* (Toronto 2000) 101.
[3] M. Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London 1995) 23.
[4] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 111.

Lewis' attitude towards the Revolution was a little more negative than Beckford's. The interest he did develop in the French revolution, was anti-Revolutionary, and he feared the unrest in France while he was staying in The Hague.[6] Lewis was in The Hague because his father had arranged a diplomatic position for him there in 1794.[7] Lewis' parents, like Beckford's, had planned a certain future for him, in his case a diplomatic one, which included several travels abroad at a young age.[8] Just like Beckford in his planned career, Lewis was not cut out to be a diplomat, since he was apparently rather bored with his position in The Hague.[9] When tensions arose on the continent Lewis returned to England and, with the help of his father, got a seat in parliament for the borough of Hindon.[10] Again like Beckford, Lewis contributed little to parliament. His biographer quotes him as writing the non-enthusiastic 'I am obliged to go to the House of Commons', which he defines as an unusual occurrence.[11] Unlike Walpole and Beckford, who were both clearly associated with Whig-politics, Lewis' political preferences are more ambiguous. Parreaux states that 'Mat Lewis, of course, was not a democrat(…)', but points out that Lewis had close friendships with Whig politicians like Fox, who in fact specifically welcomed him to parliament.[12] Lewis also corresponded with Fox for a while.[13] Macdonald makes a similar point that Lewis' social circle contained a lot of Whig politicians, but when Lewis took the trouble of voting, he often voted Tory.[14] Mrs. Baron-Wilson, a contemporary biographer of Lewis, states that he never spoke in the house.[15] A parliamentary historian asserts, however, that Lewis spoke at least once, on a bill about debtors in prison, and was also active in parliamentary committees.[16] Despite his father's efforts, Lewis left parliament in the election year of 1802.[17]

---

[5] M. Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation* (Cambridge 2000) 30.
[6] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis,* 107/102.
[7] Ibidem, 35.
[8] Ibidem, 100.
[9] Ibidem, 106.
[10] Ibidem, 129.
[11] Ibidem, 152.
[12] Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk*, 136-37.
[13] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis,* 144.
[14] Ibidem, 157.
[15] Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk*, 137.
[16] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 157/227.
[17] Ibidem, 157.

Lewis' father was able to help him get political positions, because he was an influential politician himself, much like the fathers of Beckford and Walpole. Lewis' father was deputy-secretary at War, and received an ample salary for it, especially during the war with France.[18] At this point Lewis' father was already very rich. Like the family of Beckford, the Lewis family owned slavery-driven sugar estates in Jamaica.[19] There were over six hundred slaves active on the estates.[20] Politically, Lewis' lifetime was very interesting where it concerns slavery. Two major, but separate events occurred. The first was the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. The end of trade did not lead to the end of slavery, however. This was called the emancipation, and was a separate development, which did not take place until 1833. Macdonald refers to the years in between as an 'uneasy period'.[21] Although Lewis had already left parliament in 1807, it is still interesting to see what his attitude towards these developments was.

As early as 1788, there was a campaign in parliament for abolition, which Lewis' father refused to support, since he was both against emancipation and against abolition.[22] Where Walpole, as a Whig, supported all freedom and also freedom from slavery, Lewis' position on slavery was as ambiguous as his political views. He did support abolition of slave trade, but he didn't support emancipation.[23] His biographer asserts that there was an honest humanitarianism behind his support of abolition.[24] Lewis felt emancipation was not necessary because, once the slave trade ended, slavery simply became a type of labor.[25] Lewis even asserted that slaves were in a better position than English laborers.[26] In 1815, Lewis undertook the journey to Jamaica that Beckford was not able to. During this trip, Lewis kept a journal, the *Journal of a West India Proprietor*. He wrote about the humane reforms he carried though,[27] but it also shows a darker side. In an article on the Journal, Lisa Nevarez focusses on an poem that is inserted in it. This much-discussed poem, *Isle of Devils*, is interestingly claimed by Lewis to be taken from an old Portuguese book.[28] This sounds remarkably similar to the story initially taken up by Walpole on *Otranto*, and by the first publisher of *Vathek*. Perhaps this has to do with Lewis not wanting to be attacked on the contents of the poem. Despite the fact that the *Journal* was published after his death, Lewis still tried to get it published during his lifetime.[29] The poem is about a white woman who ends up on an island, and gives birth to two children after being raped by an indigenous black man. Nevarez makes important remarks about the poem. The theme could be connected with Lewis' dislike of miscegenation, which also appears in other parts of his *Journal*.[30] This could mean he did not see the slaves as equal. Macdonald agrees that Lewis is influenced by '(…)religious racism that sees in blackness a sign of the curse of Canaan(…), and of the diabolical.'[31] Nevarez also remarks that 'This poem complicates the reader's empathy(…)', because neither the white woman nor the black man are completely wicked or good.[32] This potentially reflects Lewis' ambiguous political and moral position on the topic of slavery and colonialism.[33] Looking at the three authors, Lewis takes a middle ground. Walpole takes a strong position against slavery, Beckford did not seem to care at all, and Lewis seems conflicted.

---

[18] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 33-34.
[19] Ibidem, 3.
[20] Ibidem, 47.
[21] Ibidem, 200.
[22] Ibidem, 48.
[23] Ibidem, 49.
[24] Ibidem, 50.
[25] Ibidem, 26.
[26] Ibidem, 201.
[27] Ibidem, 27.
[28] L. Nevárez, 'Monk' Lewis' "The Isle of Devils" and the Perils of Colonialism.' *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* No. 50 (2008).

Class

Lewis can be considered '(…)a member of the colonial *nouveau riche*(…)', which he has in common with Beckford.[34] Unlike Beckford, neither of Lewis' parents were of aristocratic decent. Both families, Lewis on his father's side, and Sewell on his mother's, possessed estates in Jamaica, and his parents did not marry for love.[35] The family appreciated rank and aristocracy, even though they weren't part of it. They socially mingled with aristocrats, Lewis' father took pride in his political position and he has said to disapprove of his wife mingling with 'improper' people.[36] This last opinion could have been influenced by the fact that one of these 'improper' persons was his wife's lover, and Lewis' parents eventually separated.[37] This is an indication of the wealth of the family, as achieving a divorce in those times was very expensive.[38]

---

[29] Nevárez, 'Monk' Lewis'.
[30] Ibidem.
[31] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 203.
[32] Nevárez, 'Monk' Lewis'.
[33] Ibidem.
[34] Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 166.
[35] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 3.
[36] Ibidem, 4.
[37] Ibidem, 4.
[38] Ibidem, 8.

Lewis got a good education at Westminster School and Christ Church College, and mingled with aristocrats and people who valued rank.[39] In order to be well prepared for his intended diplomatic career, he traveled abroad, amongst other trips to Weimar in Germany. Here, his biographer writes, he '(…)developed a pronounced taste for aristocratic society(…)', even when the people were not always agreeable.[40] He visited many aristocratic country estates throughout his life.[41] Even though Lewis was not aristocratic, it seems the middle-class had little to offer him.[42] Beckford and Walpole both used their houses as expression of their pursued aristocratic identity. The country estates Lewis visited, do not seem to have inspired him to do the same. In 1801, he leased Hermitage Cottage in Barnes, and in 1809, he bought an apartment in Piccadilly.[43] He lived in nice areas, but he does not seem to have altered much about these houses or occupied himself with architecture in any way.

Lewis has been judged as trying to '(…)ally himself with those of aristocratic birth'.[44] His biographer sneered that Lewis was '(…)moving in circles that were above him(…)'.[45] From accounts like this, it can be concluded that Lewis was a social climber, in the same difficult in-between social position both Beckford and Walpole occupied. He is also blamed for being '(…)a snob for the rest of his life'.[46] This point needs to be nuanced, since Lewis' social climbing could have been influenced by the social developments of his time. Society was adjusting to the newly formed middle-class and working-class, and concerns developed about the new behaviors associated with these classes, especially the supposed bad behavior of the poorest peoples.[47] The idea that this behavior needed to be addressed was not new, but towards the end of the century, it was new that a certain middle-class driven *Society for Carrying into Effect His Majesty's Proclamation against Vice and Immorality* felt that the higher classes had a huge role in this.[48] The better-off classes, including the aristocracy, needed to lead by example, so that the lower classes would become less corrupt.[49] This almost seems like a reversal of the attitude adopted earlier in the century, as described in the chapter on Beckford, where the ‘imitating’ of the aristocracy was feared.[50] This mimicking behavior by the lower classes could now be used for their benefit.

---

[39] Ibidem, 100.
[40] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 102.
[41] Ibidem, 106.
[42] Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk*, 160.
[43] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 153/175.
[44] Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 166.
[45] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 150.
[46] Ibidem, 103.
[47] Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk*, 83.
[48] Ibidem, 84.
[49] Ibidem, 84.

Gothic literature was *not* considered to be a good example. By Lewis’ time, Gothic was seen as formulaic pulp.[51] Gamer points to the ‘(…)vilification of Gothic in the late 1790s(…)’.[52] This hatred of the Gothic was mostly associated with the elite, including the reviewers, since audiences generally enjoyed the genre.[53] This effect can even be seen in the theater-version of the Gothic. These plays were popular, but the elite feared it was dangerous for both politics and the status of drama.[54] The Proclamation Society did not think the Gothic was suitable for inspiring the lower classes to good behavior, and should therefore not be written by a upper-class member of society.[55]

However, this was exactly what Lewis did. His most famous Gothic work, *The Monk*, covered quite extreme themes, like incest, rape and murder. The first edition was published anonymously, but once the second edition was published under his own name, a debate suddenly erupted on the immorality of the book.[56] Parreaux writes: ‘Here was one of those dissolute members of the upper classes who corrupted the poor by their wickedness(…)’.[57] Although Lewis was not aristocratic, his social status was high enough to be considered a upper-class member with bad morals. The years in which *The Monk* was published, with the new view on morality of the poor, can partly explain why the reactions on *The Monk* erupted into such a debate, while *The Castle of Otranto* and *Vathek* were not criticized in this way.

The idea that the upper-class needed to give a good example, came from the middle-classes, ‘(…)revolting as this idea must have seems to the members of the aristocracy.’[58] This could have caused Lewis to be more at ease when mingling with the aristocracy, who did not blame him so severely for his supposedly immoral work, and functioned in a more tolerant atmosphere.[59] Perhaps Macdonalds claim of Lewis’ snobbishness is too short-sighted.[60]

The development of Lewis’ social status in the rest of his life is rather ambiguous. Despite the scandal surrounding *The Monk*, Lewis became a literary star to the point that future literary masters like Thomas Moore and Walter Scott thought him to be an impressive example.[61] Sixteen years after this rise to fame, Lewis' father died and left him a large inheritance. This made Lewis a landowner, which could have enhanced his social status, which at least Lewis himself thought appropriate.[62] Around this time, Lewis also became rather close friends with Princess Caroline.[63] Although all these things point towards a rise in social status, Lewis seems to have negated this progress by being an unpleasant person. His acquaintances actually disliked his behavior.[64] Like Beckford, Lewis also had the tendency to close himself off from society for times in his house, decreasing the ties with his aristocratic circles.[65] Perhaps in this case, it is Parreaux who is a little short-sighted when he claims that despite societal pressure, Lewis '(…)remained the same gentle and kind-hearted creature to the end.'[66]

---

[50] A. Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The prehistory of a homosexual Role* (New York 1999) 41.
[51] Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 9.
[52] Ibidem, 13.
[53] Ibidem, 12.
[54] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 181.
[55] Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk*, 85.
[56] Ibidem, 87.
[57] Ibidem, 88.
[58] Ibidem, 84.
[59] Ibidem, 159.
[60] Ibidem, 159

Sexuality

Out of the three authors considered in this thesis, the clues on the sexuality of Lewis are the least clear. His biographer classifies Lewis' homosexuality as a 'near-certainty'.[67] This brings us back to queer-theory, and the careless use of *homosexual*, or in this specific case, *gay*. Macdonald becomes more nuanced later on, by realizing that the usage and discussion of Lewis' homosexuality might be anachronistic, but still useful.[68] Earlier in this thesis it was explained that the concept on a homosexual orientation was not yet in place.[69] Macdonald problematizes this, basing himself on research by Trumbach, arguing that the eighteenth century did know a homosexual identity and stereotype, even if that was a different one than is in place in the twenty-first century.[70] The explanation necessary here is that, even if there was a homosexual identity, it was not punishable by law, because only the acts were punishable. Also, Macdonald is right to assert that the stereotype or identity was probably different in Lewis' time, if we connect it to poststructuralist queer theory that absents from truths and states concepts like these are culturally constructed.[71]

Macdonald points to several people and occurrences in Lewis' life from which he draws proof of homosexuality, or, a sexuality that didn't fit in the heteronormative pattern of the late eighteenth century. He highlights a poem Lewis wrote on Charles William Stewart, who was leaving for a while on army duties.[72] The poem contains sentences like ‘Veil with assumed content your keen affliction, Nor wish his heart to feel a pang like yours’, in which repression of feelings is a major theme.[73] Lewis wrote another poem about William Lamb, with whom he had a romantic friendship, and who he tried to convince to cross-dressing on one occasion.[74] Although these are elements that point to behavior outside of the heteronormative pattern, it is dangerous to simply assume Lewis was a homosexual based on these. The content of this term is subject to change, and the term queer is again more suitable to reflect on all types of ‘aberrant’ sexualities.[75]

---

[61] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 153.
[62] Ibidem, 186.
[63] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 175.
[64] Ibidem, 186.
[65] Ibidem, 189.
[66] Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk*, 153.
[67] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, viii.
[68] Ibidem, 64.
[69] N. Sullivan, *A Critical introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburg 2003) 97.
[70] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 64.
[71] Sullivan, *Queer Theory*, 39.

Biographical clues can also be interpreted in many different ways. Macdonald criticizes Montague Summers’ explanation of the sexuality in Lewis’ relationship with William Kelly, who was patronized by Lewis.[76] According to Macdonald, there was no sexuality involved in this relationship.[77] He also rejects Haggerty for portraying Lewis’ sexuality as sickly in his article *Literature and Homosexuality in the late eighteenth Century*.[78] In the same article, Haggerty also addresses the debate on William Kelly, but in a rather careless manner: ‘Whether or not we accept the implications of Lewis’s extravagant and long-term financial and emotional commitment to the young William Kelly as a sign of sexual attachment(…)’.[79] Haggerty then focusses on a remark made by Byron, on the looking-glass panels on Lewis’s bookcases, as a sign of the ‘nature of Lewis’s taste’.[80] After this remark, Lewis drops the topic and therefore seems to think Byron was right in associating vanity with homosexuality. If Byron really aimed at this, the remark does prove that there was a certain stereotype for homosexuals in place in the eighteenth century. Macdonald addresses the same remark by defining Byron as a homophobe who ‘(…)associated homosexuality with narcissism.’[81] All this proves that we should remain critical and skeptical when drawing any conclusions on the sexuality of all authors, but especially Lewis, since any evidence on his sexuality seems to be flimsy.

---

[72] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 67.
[73] Ibidem, 67.
[74] Ibidem, 68-69.
[75] Sullivan, *Queer Theory*, 43.
[76] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 60.
[77] Ibidem, 60.
[78] Ibidem, 59.
[79] G.E. Haggerty, ‘Literature and Homosexuality in the late eighteenth century: Walpole, Beckford, and Lewis’, *Studies in the Novel* vol. 18, No. 4 (1986) 348.
[80] Haggerty, ‘Literature and Homosexuality’, 348.
[81] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 60.

If we assume there was a homosexual identity and stereotype already in place in the eighteenth century, perhaps it came close to the concept of the *genius*, discussed in the previous chapter. We have already seen in which way Beckford fitted into this concept, but it can perhaps also be applied to Lewis. As explained earlier, Elfenbein noted that the characteristics of the genius, like being feminine, unfit for marriage and mostly associating with men, was an eighteenth-century variation of the homosexual.[82] Lewis certainly fit some of these characteristics. His femininity was assumed for example by critics, such as the *Critical Review* who, according to Macdonald, '(…)thought of him as half-woman.'[83] Although it is not clear what his contemporaries thought about Lewis and marriage, it is clear that he never married. This could have contributed to his status as genius. Like both Beckford and Walpole, Lewis came from parents with an unstable marriage. Out of the three, his parents were the only ones who tried to achieve an official divorce.[84] The troubles caused by his parents' separation influenced Lewis deeply, to the point where he drew comparisons between marriage and slavery.[85]

Besides possessing some characteristics attributed to a genius, Lewis was also considered to be a genius by his contemporaries. His friend, Lord Holland, for example described him at some point as having '(…)the peculiarities and egotism which had been in some degree pardoned to his genius and youth(…)'.[86] This comment not only shows that genius was associated with Lewis, but also that being a genius could indeed be a reason for a lenient attitude towards someone. Another example of genius being associated with Lewis, is found after *The Monk* received serious criticism from Coleridge in the *Critical Review* on account of Lewis's assumed blasphemy. There appeared an answer to Coleridge and a defense of Lewis in the *Monthly Mirror*, in which the author called himself 'A Friend to Genius'.[87] That Lewis was perceived this way, could have contributed to the image of him as someone not answering to the heteronormative pattern. Lewis does deviate from fellow-genius Beckford because he is not considered to have been pederastic, and it is highly unlikely that he was attracted to younger men.[88]

This does not mean that Lewis was open about his sexuality. It has already become clear that clues about this part of his life are cloudy. Macdonald asserts that nothing points to sexual activity, so Lewis would not have been punishable by law for sodomy.[89] Perhaps he was aware of the scandal surrounding Beckford, but unlike him, Lewis was highly discreet about his sexuality.[90] This was not without reason, for besides possible scandal, we have also seen that the persecutions for sodomy increased significantly in the restless years surrounding the French Revolution.[91] A place where Lewis could express his sexuality, was possibly in *The Monk*. Haggerty asserts that in this book, 'Lewis too must be playing out the drama of his worst fears about himself and his place in society.'[92] Haggerty writes that *Vathek* had a similar function for Beckford, and that books like these are liberating for being able to address such, socially aberrant, topics.[93] An interesting angle is added by Robert Miles, who explains that *The Monk* subtly covers difficult sexual topics, but even more interestingly, that *The Monk* has a '(…)subliminal message, which is that identity is performative, something which changes with the words, or parts, that constitute it.'[94] This is highly interesting within the poststructuralist view on sexuality, and how that is culturally formed. Sexuality is a major theme in *The Monk,* to the extent that Macdonald asserts that all other elements of the novel are dressed up in eroticism.[95] Unlike the novels by Walpole and Beckford, it is also immediately clear that these sexualities are aberrant. Cases of incest, rape and gender confusion are not hidden by complicated metaphors, but highly visible.[96] Haggerty asserts that Lewis is deliberately trying to portray sexuality as extreme and aberrant as possible, because *The Monk* is partly a political act trying to fight societal restrictions on desire.[97] Even if Lewis was not sexually active, he complained about the status quo of the heteronormative pattern in his society the most vocally of all authors considered in this thesis.

---

[82] A. Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The prehistory of a homosexual Role* (New York 1999) 34.
[83] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 165.
[84] Ibidem, 3.
[85] Ibidem, 9/13.
[86] Ibidem, 186.
[87] Ibidem, 130.
[88] Ibidem, 90.

Literature

Besides the liberating nature of Gothic novels, as described by Haggerty, Beckford and Walpole both drew Gothic inspiration from their surroundings, such as their houses, and their interests, such as Gothic buildings and Oriental literature. Lewis, although he also wrote

---

[89] Ibidem, 64.

[90] Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk*, 160.

[91] R. Miles, 'Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis', in: D. Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothi*c (Oxford 2012) 97.

[92] Haggerty, 'Literature and Homosexuality', 349.

[93] Ibidem, 350.

[94] Miles, 'Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis', 106.

[95] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 125.

[96] M.G. Lewis, 'The Monk', in: L.F. Peck, *The Monk, Original text, variant readings, and a 'Note on the Text'* (New York 1952).

[97] G.E. Haggerty, 'Queer Gothic', in: P.R. Backscheider and C. Ingrassia (ed.), A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture (Blackwell 2005) 387-389.

Gothic, only partly matches these sources of inspiration. *The Monk* was only to a small extent inspired by architecture, in the form of the mansion of his mother's family, Stanstead Hall.[98] More important, however, was the trip Lewis undertook to Weimar at a young age, in the context of a planned diplomatic career. Lewis learned quickly and started to translate German, besides coming into contact with literary figures like Goethe.[99] The German language and style continued to influence him.[100] Lewis was unique in using German influences, and it partly accounted for his popularity as an author.[101] This can be connected to the already existing popularity of German novels that were recently published in English, among them *Lenore* by Bürger and novels by Grosse.[102] Lewis was already occupied with writing a romantic novel when he went to Weimar, but his interest seems to have been fanned on by the novels of the *Sturm- und Drang* school.[103] This interest was not visibly present with either Walpole or Beckford. Other sources of inspiration for Lewis' writings are found in his own life, such as the abolition of slavery and marital problems, themes often returning in his works.[104] These personal themes also include his sexuality. Although it has already been more extensively discussed, it is interesting to remark that Robert Miles summarizes two major works of Lewis by stating that they '(…)obsessively dwell on illicit passion.'[105]

The Monk was published in 1796, when Lewis was about twenty years old, which made Maggie Kilgour refer to him as a 'child prodigy'.[106] The book sold very well.[107] It has been said that Lewis became 'famous overnight', and that this fame even contributed to the popularity of German-style Gothic literature.[108] It is remarkable that, just like Walpole and Beckford, Lewis falsely claimed to have written the book in a very short amount of time, in his case ten weeks.[109] Perhaps he hoped it would create an air of genius. In many other ways, *The Monk* is very different from *Otranto* and *Vathek*. First of all, it has a much more complex storyline than the other two novels, with a double plot. The main plot revolves around the monk Ambrosio, who starts off a good man, but is increasingly tempted into bad behavior.[110]

---

[98] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 29.
[99] Ibidem, 103.
[100] Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk,* 26.
[101] Ibidem, 26.
[102] Ibidem, 27-28.
[103] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 105.
[104] Ibidem, 50/9.
[105] Miles, 'Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis', 104.
[106] Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel,* 33.
[107] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 134.
[108] Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk,* 25.
[109] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 110.
[110] Lewis, 'The Monk'.

This theme makes Macdonald described the plot as '(…)a sinner's progress(…)'.[111] The extensive subplot surrounds the tragic love of Raymond and Agnes. These plots lead to a rather high word count compared to the other novels considered here. This perhaps inspired the many chap-book versions that appeared, containing only the most intense parts of the book.[112]

These intense parts are the second major difference with *Otranto* and *Vathek*, since *The Monk* portrays events in the most extreme way. This is typical of the horror-gothic, the type of Gothic which Ann Radcliffe once separated from the more subtle terror-gothic.[113] The disturbing events are told without shame, and according to Robert Hume, 'Lewis set out, quite deliberately, to overgo Mrs. Radcliffe'.[114] Lewis was certainly aware of Radcliffe's novels, as her novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* apparently was one of the factors that nudged Lewis into working on his own novel.[115] Robert Hume places Beckford in the horror-category as well, but his *Vathek* takes on a very different tone. One of the most horrific moments in *Vathek* is the damnation of Carathis, Vathek's mother. Beckford describes: 'In this delirium, forgetting all ambitious projects, and her thirst for that knowledge which should ever be hidden from mortals, she overturned the offerings of the genii; and, having execrated the hour she was begotten and the womb that had borne her, glanced off in a rapid whirl that rendered her invisible, and continued to revolve without intermission.'[116] The ending of *The Monk*, with the damnation of Ambrosio, however, reaches another level of horror: 'Headlong fell the monk through the airy waste; the sharp point of a rock received him; and he rolled from precipice to precipice, till bruised and mangled, he rested on the river's banks.(…)Blind, maimed, helpless, and despairing, venting his rage in blasphemy and curses, execrating his existence, yet dreading the arrival of death destined to yield him up to greater torments, six miserable days did the villain languish.'[117] The setting of these horrible occurrences in a faraway place and time, is considered to be a specifically Gothic characteristic.[118] This distancing is indeed something *The Monk* had in common with the other novels, even when these present the events in a more veiled manner.

---

[111] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 117.

[112] Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk*, 69.

[113] R.D. Hume, 'Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel', *PMLA*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (1969) 285.

[114] Hume, 'Gothic versus Romantic', 285.

[115] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 109.

[116] W. Beckford, 'The history of the Caliph Vathek', in: M. Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories: A William Beckford Reader* (London 1993).

[117] Lewis, 'The Monk'.

[118] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 80.

A third factor which distinguishes *The Monk* from its Gothic predecessors considered in this thesis, is the use of poetry in it. Lewis is unique in weaving poetry through the story, which he sets his characters up to read. For example: 'The small collection of books was arranged upon several shelves in order(…)She took down the book, and seated herself to peruse it with ease(…)and then read the following ballad', after which Lewis introduced *Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine*.[119] In this way, Lewis portrayed his versatility, and the poetry was in fact highly appraised, even by critics who were very stern towards the prose.[120] These poems were often published separately of the rest of the text, for example in newspapers.[121]

Finally, something that makes *The Monk* unique among the novels considered, is the scandal it caused. Besides the previously described scandal about Lewis giving a bad example, there soon developed a large scandal about a rather small part of the book. An otherwise unremarkable periodical, *The Flapper,* cynically criticized a paragraph in the book in which Antonia reads a censured edition of the Bible.[122] This critique was then taken increasingly seriously, to the point where it was defined as *blasphemy*.[123] After this, Coleridge was the one who wrote the famous 'Yes! The author of the Monk signs himself a LEGISLATOR! – We stare and tremble'.[124] When pressures by critics on this topic were rising, there was a threat of criminal prosecution and a suppression of *The Monk.*[125] Remarkable in this is a man who also played a considerable part in Beckford's life, Lord Loughborough. He had spread the rumor about Beckford and Courtenay, permanently ruining Beckford's social status. In the end, Loughborough was not able to persecute either Beckford or Lewis, but as a Lord Chancellor, he was notorious for his part in an enormous amount of treason- and libel trials.[126] The scandal did not destroy Lewis socially, like the scandal in Beckford's life had done. Lewis was not shunned or forced to withdraw from society. Lewis got scared enough, however, to edit his novel into a censured version for following editions.[127] This did not end the controversy however, because everything Lewis ever wrote after *The Monk*, was immediately judged on morality.[128]

---

[119] Lewis, 'The Monk'.
[120] Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk*, 49.
[121] Ibidem, 52.
[122] Ibidem, 93.
[123] Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk*, 94.
[124] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 130.
[125] Ibidem, 134.
[126] Parreaux, *The Publication of the Monk,* 118-119.
[127] Ibidem, 120.
[128] Macdonald, *Monk Lewis*, 147.

Lewis wrote quite a lot after *The Monk*. He stands out from Beckford and Walpole because he wrote a lot of plays and theater. Where Beckford found a hobby in collecting, and Walpole in architecture, Lewis became involved with theater at a young age, while he was still at Westminster.[129] Again a warning should be issued to not overestimate the importance of his Gothic novel in comparison to the many other things Lewis produced. Theater kept his interest throughout his life, for example when he takes part in amateur theater with friends at the estate of a befriended Duke.[130] He wrote many plays, which made him extremely productive for his short lifespan. His plays include *The Castle Spectre*, *The Captive*, *Adelgitha* and *The Wood Deamon*, and many were successful on stage.[131] Finally, attention needs to be paid to *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, which Macdonald deems '(…)by far his best book since *The Monk*(…)'.[132] It records Lewis' experiences in Jamaica and is, again, intertwined with poetry. Donna Heiland makes an interesting point that this work is a Gothic work because of the previously explained type of Gothic terror, the uncanny or *unheimlich.* She explains that the colonies, such as Jamaica, were familiar and different at the same time, and therefore symbolized a type of uncanniness that '(…)is by definition gothic.'[133] The same can be found in the previously discussed poem *Isle of Devils*. The children in it, of mixed race, equally portray a familiar and an unfamiliar side that is suppressed because one takes after the mother and the other after the father, making them truly uncanny.[134] It was to be his last work, because Lewis died at sea while returning from his second trip to Jamaica in 1818.

---

[129] Ibidem, 97.

[130] Ibidem, 139.

[131] Ibidem, 160-167.

[132] Ibidem, 74.

[133] D. Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Hoboken 2004) 130.

[134] Heiland, *Gothic and Gender*, 154-155.

Conclusion

The lives of Horace Walpole, William Beckford and Matthew Lewis have both differences and similarities, which can be interpreted in many ways. Most noticeably, they all lived in eighteenth-century Britain, and each of them wrote a famous Gothic novel. There was more to them, however. The aim of this thesis was to consider them from different cultural-historical angles based on several sources of research, to conclude whether or not these men can be considered a cohesive, Gothic unity.

The first topic considered in each chapter, was politics. All three authors grew up in a Whig-oriented family that was politically active. This gave all three potential access to a political career, a noticeable similarity. Equally noticeable is that none of them lived up to their potential. This waste of opportunity took different forms for each of them. They all took part in parliament, but Lewis and Beckford failed to exert any political influence, while Walpole's influence was mostly indirect. Walpole took a stand for freedom a couple of times, which put him in opposition to the other two, who became rich by slavery. Lewis was against the slave trade, but also against complete abolition of slavery, while Beckford seems to have had little political opinion at all. Their limited participation in politics could be a sign that they all deliberately chose another path in life, closer to their interests. It also shows that none of them was dependent financially on a political career, since they all had sufficient riches to live a comfortable life without an obvious career.

These riches bring us to the factor of class. Lewis, Beckford and Walpole were all born in well-off families that were not aristocratic. This is again an interesting similarity, and makes one wonder to what extent this social class influenced their lives. It made them strive to emphasize their wealth and to improve their social status. Any aristocratic connections were placed in a spotlight. It might have influenced the attraction of the Gothic, with its heritage of an ancient, free Britain and the often castle-like environments. It also puts these authors in a certain grey area between aristocracy and middle-class, and therefore in the eye of the class-storm that took place in the eighteenth century.

A third topic of interest was the sexuality of the authors. With the help of queer theory, this thesis strove towards a nuanced representation of each individuals sexuality. It has become clear that sexuality preferably should not be confined to a single denominator like *homosexual* or *pederast*, simply because the content and meaning of these terms are subject to change and they are often too limiting to describe the complex sexuality of any individual. Where *queer* could potentially be a term that is too broad and flexible, it at least acknowledges that there are many types and forms of sexuality that do not answer to the normative type of sexuality that is present in any society at any point in time. The sexuality of the three authors differ profoundly form each other when one looks at the details. Still, when aware of queer-theory, the statement can be made that none of the authors considered fit into the heteronormative sexual pattern of eighteenth-century Britain.

The final factor considered is the one which made these men famous, their literary work. What draws attention right away, is that their Gothic literary work does not take central stage in their lives. Walpole was only inspired to his Gothic work by the building of his home, Strawberry Hill, which took a much larger place in his life than Gothic writings ever did. He also put a lot of energy into his letter writing, aiming to be a chronicler of his time. Beckford wrote, but was at least equally captivated by collecting valuables and special objects, to an extent that he risked his safety in revolutionary France to acquire certain objects. Like Walpole, he also put a lot of energy into his house, Fonthill Abbey. Lewis was not this captivated by architecture, but took an interest in theater and wrote a lot more plays than any other work. All three men seem to have in common that they are excessively linked, in later reception, to their Gothic productions, which appear in all cases to be exceptions in their productive lives.

The answer to my main question is that the authors of the Gothic can to a large extent be seen as a cohesive group based on their social context in society. In fact, their social context seems to be a more binding factor that their Gothic work. They were all born in families with a similar social status and political background, they all experienced similar issues with their sexuality and they were all creative men that strove after their personal interests. This does not mean that the Gothic was unimportant. They were all inspired to it one way or another, and their Gothic works all had a lot of influence in their lives. The point this conclusion aims for, however, is that it was not the only factor of importance. Even if they had not written these Gothic books, the other factors would still have connected them to an extent that they can be considered a cohesive group of examples for an eighteenth-century British gentleman with a complicated social situation.

In this context I would like to return to the fluidity of Romanticism. In the introduction I explained that Romanticism in the singular has become an almost outdated term, substituted by the plural Romanticisms because elements in it are not as determined and homogenous as they seem. In a way, this thesis returns to a homogenous outlook on the

Gothic author, by looking for their similarities. This shows that an outlined concept can still be useful, but should not be assumed as truth. A lot more detail could have been applied in the interesting lives of these individuals, and future research is definitely necessary to see whether the claim of cohesiveness will then still be able to stand.

Bibliography

Barker-Benfield, G.J., *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago 1992).

Beckford, W., ‘The history of the Caliph Vathek’, in: M. Jack, *Vathek and Other Stories: A William Beckford Reader* (London 1993).

Borsay, P., ‘Urban life and Culture’, in: H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Blackwell 2002).

Botting, F., *Gothic* (London 1996).

Botting, F., ‘In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture’, in: D. Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford 2012).

Brooks, P., ‘Virtue and Terror: The Monk’, *ELH* 40.2 (1973) 249-263.

Colley, L., ‘Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain 1750-1830’, *Past&Present* No.113 (1986) 97-117.

Corfield, P.J.,‘Class by name and number in eighteenth-century England’ (version 1987) http://www.penelopejcorfield.co.uk/PDF%27s/CorfieldPdf7_Class.pdf (April 15 2014).

Cornwell, N., ‘European Gothic’, in: D. Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford 2012)

Elfenbein, A., *Romantic Genius: The prehistory of a homosexual Role* (New York 1999).

Fothergill, B., *Beckford of Fonthill* (London 1979).

Gamer, M., *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation* (Cambridge 2000).

Gilroy, A. & W. Verhoeven, ‘The Romantic-era Novel: A Special Issue’, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* Vol. 34, No. 2 (2001) 147-162.

Haggerty, G.E., 'Fact and Fancy in the Gothic Novel', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (1985)

Haggerty, G.E., ‘Literature and Homosexuality in the late eighteenth century: Walpole, Beckford, and Lewis’, *Studies in the Novel* vol. 18, No. 4 (1986) 341-351.

Haggerty, G.E., ‘Queer Gothic’, in: P.R.Backscheider and C. Ingrassia (ed.), *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture* (Blackwell 2005).

Haggerty, G.E., *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later 18th Century* (Bloomington 1998).

Harris, B., ‘Print Culture’, in: H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Blackwell 2002).

Heiland, D., *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Hoboken 2004).

Hogle, J.E., ‘ “Gothic” Romance: Its origins and Cultural Functions’, in: C. Saunders (ed.), *A Companion to Romance: from Classical to Contemporary* (Blackwell 2004).

Hume, R.D., 'Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel', *PMLA*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (1969) 282-290.

Jack, M., *Vathek and Other Stories: A William Beckford Reader* (London 1993).

Ketton-Cremer, R.W., *Horace Walpole* (Northampton 1964).

Kilgour, M., *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London 1995).

Lee, S.M., ‘Parliament, Parties and Elections (1760-1815)’, in: H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Blackwell 2002).

Lewis, M.G., ‘The Monk’, in: L.F. Peck, *The Monk, Original text, variant readings, and a ‘Note on the Text’* (New York 1952).

Lovejoy, A.O., 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms’, *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* Vol. 39, Issue: 2 (1924).

Miles, R., ‘Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis’, in: D. Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothi*c (Oxford 2012).

Morris, D.B., ‘Gothic Sublimity’, *New Literary History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1985) 299-319.

Mowl, T., *Horace Walpole, The Great Outsider* (London 1996).

Nevárez, L., ‘Monk’ Lewis’ “The Isle of Devils” and the Perils of Colonialism.’ *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* No. 50 (2008).

Parreaux, A., *The Publication of the Monk: A literary event 1796-1798* (Paris 1960).

Sitwell, S., *Beckford and Beckfordism, An Essay* (London 1974).

Sowerby, R., ‘The Goths in History and Pre-Gothic Gothic’, in: D. Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford 2012).

Sullivan, N., *A Critical introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburg 2003).

Trumbach, R., ‘London’s sodomites: Homosexual behavior and western culture in the 18th century’, *Journal of Social History* Vol. 11, No. 1 (1977) 1-33.

Vincent Macleod, E., ‘The Crisis of the French Revolution’, in: H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Blackwell 2002).

Walpole, H., ‘The Castle of Otranto’, H. Morley (ed.) (version May 5, 2012) http://www.gutenberg.org/files/696/696-h/696-h.htm (downloaded January 10, 2014).

Watt, J., *Contesting the Gothic. Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* (Cambridge 1999).

Wellek, R., ‘The Concept of “Romanticism” in Literary History II: The Unity of European Romanticism’, *Comparative Literature* vol.1 no.2 (1949).

Wright, A., *Britain, France and the Gothic, 1764–1820; The Import of Terror* (Cambridge 2013).