The Castle of Otranto

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HORACE WALPOLE

Horace Walpole was the fourth earl of Orford and the youngest son of Robert Walpole, the first prime minister of England. As a child, Walpole attended Eton College, where he met figures such as Thomas Ashton, Thomas Gray, and Richard West. The four boys formed a friendship and called themselves the "Quadruple Alliance." After Eton, Walpole continued his studies at Cambridge. In 1737, Walpole's mother Catherine, with whom he was very close, died, and he left Cambridge without a degree the following year. As young, well-to-do European men often did, Walpole then embarked on the Grand Tour, exploring Italy and France with his friend Thomas Gray. In 1741, Walpole returned to England, expecting a seat in parliament, only to find that his father's influence and power had greatly diminished; consequently, he sat at Parliament intermittently and occasionally worked as a pamphleteer. Though he never married, he was a social man, known to be amiable, clever, whimsical, and fixated on the quality of "singularity" or uniqueness in both his writing and his collection of antiquities. He also became known for his remarkable library and art collection as well as his contribution to architecture. As an amateur enthusiast in architecture, he built a medieval-inspired castle in Twickenham from 1749 to 1753, drawing upon whatever Gothic styles suited his imagination. The creation of his home, Strawberry Hill, has been credited for reviving interest in Gothic architecture. Previously, "Gothic" had been associated with barbarism and unrefinement. In 1757, Walpole built a printing press in his home, the Strawberry Hill Press, whose first publication was Thomas Gray's *Odes by Mr. Gray*. Though Strawberry Hill was the inspiration for and arguably the setting of *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole did not print the novel at his own press, but rather submitted it anonymously for publication to another London publisher. It was met with great popularity, and later editions featured Walpole's own name. Though *The Castle of Otranto* remains Walpole's best known work, he was a prolific writer and wrote a wide array of works, from poems to romances, to histories and catalogues. Throughout his lifetime, he also wrote thousands of letters to friends in France and England, letters that are recognized for their wit and elegance and that were published a year after Walpole's death in 1797. Horace Walpole died in London at the age of 79.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Castle of Otranto was set somewhere between the 11th and 13th centuries. Two of the novel's characters, Frederic and Alfonso, fought in the Crusades, religious wars that the Catholic church waged against the Muslim "infidels," as Frederic calls them, in order to conquer Jerusalem and the Holy Land for Christianity. The first Crusade began in 1095, as Walpole states in the preface, and was followed by a number of other largely unsuccessful and destructive crusades through the 13th century.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Though *The Castle of Otranto* is often said to be the first Gothic novel, earlier works such as Tobias Smollet's *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753) and Thomas Leland's *Longsword* (1762) also contained elements of terror and the supernatural. However, Walpole's use of literary devices such as secret passageways, prophecies, and haunted castle became archetypal features of Gothic novels and stories by writers such as Anne Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, Bram Stoker (author of *Dracula*), and Edgar Allan Poe.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** (first edition) The Castle of Otranto: A Story. Translated by William Marshall, Gent. From the Original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto, Canon of the Church of St. Nicholas at Otranto; (second edition) The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story
- **When Written:** 1764
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** 1764
- **Literary Period:** Romanticism
- **Genre:** Gothic
- **Setting:** The castle of Otranto (somewhere near Naples, Italy), and the nearby church of St. Nicholas
- **Climax:** Matilda dies, part of the castle falls down, and a giant image of Alfonso declares Theodore his true heir.
- **Antagonist:** Manfred
- **Point of View:** Third-person subjective, occasionally with free indirect discourse

EXTRA CREDIT

Double pseudo. In the first edition of *Otranto*, Walpole wrote under not one but two pseudonyms, claiming in the preface that the story dated back to the Crusades; that the manuscript was written in Italian by "Onuphrio Muralto," a Catholic priest from the church that appears in the narrative; and that he, "William Marshal, Gent." found the manuscript in the library of an ancient Catholic family.

Non-political press. After Walpole built Strawberry Hill Press, he decided never to use the press for political means and established a practice of publishing his own political pamphlets elsewhere.

PLOT SUMMARY

Manfred, the ruler of Otranto, is impatiently waiting for the marriage between his son Conrad and the princess Isabella, the daughter of Frederic the Marquis of Vincenza. Rumors fly about Manfred's impatience for the wedding, and the people believe that the marriage is in some way related to an ancient prophecy: "that the **castle** and lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it." However, on the day of the wedding, Conrad is mysteriously crushed to death by a **giant helmet** falling from the sky. Realizing his only heir is dead and unable to produce more sons with his own wife, Hippolita, Manfred decides to continue his line by marrying his son's fiancé Isabella.

Intending to divorce or kill Hippolita, Manfred approaches Isabella alone, proclaiming his intention to produce several sons with her. Despite her horrified protests, he grabs her, intending to rape her, but Isabella escapes, as Manfred is distracted first by the swaying feathers of the giant helmet, then by the moving portrait of his grandfather, then by his servants' reports of the appearance of a **giant leg in armor**. With the help of Theodore, a peasant, Isabella escapes the castle through a secret underground passageway to seek sanctuary at the church of St. Nicholas, where she is under the protection of Father Jerome.

Matilda, Manfred's daughter, is talking with her servant Bianca about the disappearance of Isabella when a servant informs them that Isabella has taken sanctuary. Meanwhile, Father Jerome is telling Hippolita and Manfred the same thing, with Jerome insinuating but not fully disclosing Manfred's crimes. However, after Hippolita dismisses herself from the conversation, Father Jerome more frankly accuses Manfred of his crimes and urges him to repent and turn to the church. Manfred, however, repeatedly refuses, and tries to convince Jerome to grant him a divorce. Fearful of the consequences of saying no, Jerome plays along. However, much to Jerome's dismay, his granting of the divorce inadvertently results in Manfred declaring a death sentence on Theodore, whom Jerome recognizes in that moment is his long-lost son.

Manfred promises Jerome his son's life only in return for Isabella, and Jerome is caught in a moral quandary. However, before he can make a decision, they are interrupted by a host of knights who carry a **giant sword** and who seek in the name of Frederic (Isabella's father, and the closest known relative of Alonso, the former lord of Otranto before Manfred's grandfather took power), both Isabella and rulership of Otranto. Manfred ineptly attempts to win them over, but the knights discover that Isabella is missing and race against Manfred's men to find her.

Having recognized Theodore's resemblance to Otranto's past hero and ruler Alfonso, Matilda frees Theodore from her father's imprisonment, and they fall in love. In order to escape Manfred's wrath and to search for adventure, Theodore decides to protect Isabella and finds her in a cave, where he defends her from a knight. Yet the knight, whom Theodore wounds, turns out to be Isabella's father Frederic.

Theodore, Frederic, and Isabella return to the castle, where Frederic recovers and falls in love with Matilda. Frederic explains how he came to be in Otranto: after being captured by infidels in the Crusades, he had a vision warning him that his daughter was in danger. The vision led him to a forest in Joppa, where he met a hermit who led him to a giant sword buried in the earth. Inscribed onto the sword is a prophecy stating that Isabella can be saved only by Alfonso's blood where the giant sabre's matching helmet is found.

After Frederic finishes his story, Manfred arrives and suddenly notices the remarkable resemblance between Theodore and Alfonso. After questioning Theodore's origins, Theodore reveals how he too came to be in Otranto: at a young age, he was kidnapped and enslaved by pirates, left only with a document from his mother proving that Jerome, the Count of Falconara, is his father. After being freed by Christians two years earlier, he searched unsuccessfully for his father and wandered into Otranto, where he worked as a farmhand.

The next day, Manfred tries to secure Isabella's hand in marriage by leveraging Frederic's attraction to Matilda. He proposes a double marriage, in which Frederic and Manfred will marry each other's daughters. Frederic is greatly tempted both by the possibility of having Matilda *and* Otranto, and the only obstacle is securing Hippolita's consent to divorce, which Manfred easily obtains. However, when the ghost of the hermit haunts Frederic for forgetting his mission and for choosing lust over heavenly will, Frederic, though still sorely tempted, decides not to go through with the double marriage.

Manfred, enraged at Frederic's change of heart, becomes even angrier when one of his spies informs him that Theodore is meeting a lady in Alfonso's tomb. Believing that Isabella is having an affair with Theodore, Manfred sneaks into the tomb and stabs her, only to discover that it is Matilda, his daughter, whom he has fatally wounded. Despite her impending death, Matilda is deeply devoted to both her mother and father until the end.

Parts of the castle walls fall down behind Manfred, and a great image of Alfonso appears, declaring that Theodore is his true heir. Manfred, struck with sorrow and remorse, reveals that his grandfather had usurped the throne from Alfonso, and Jerome

reveals that Theodore is Alfonso's grandson. After Manfred abdicates, he and Hippolita retire to become a monk and a nun in nearby convents. Frederic renounces his claim to Otranto and offers Isabella's hand in marriage to Theodore.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Manfred – The story's antagonist, Manfred is the ruler of Otranto, the grandson of the man who usurped Otranto from its former rulers. He is husband to Hippolita, and father to Matilda and Conrad. Quick to anger, clumsily manipulative, and at times illogical, he constantly prioritizes his lust for both power and Isabella over any faith or morals he may have. The story presents his overwhelming desire for power as indicative of both his, and his entire familial line's, unsuitability for rulership. Fearing an ancient prophecy about the end of his reign, seeks first to secure his family's rulership of Otranto by marrying his son Conrad to his ward Isabella, who through her father has a rightful claim. After Conrad dies, Manfred hunts for Isabella throughout the **castle** in order to produce a new heir who would have a rightful claim to rule. Despite his existing marriage to Hippolita, the fact that Isabella is his own ward, and Father Jerome's admonitions, he seeks a divorce and almost manages to secure Isabella's hand in marriage from her father Frederic. When his plans fail and he attempts to murder Isabella, he accidentally kills his own daughter. In shock at having murdered Matilda, he undergoes a drastic personal change: he repents, reveals that he is not the rightful ruler of Otranto, and retires to a convent as a monk.

Theodore – The hero of the story, Theodore is first presented as the peasant whom Manfred wrongfully imprisons for an offhand observation. Well-spoken, noble, and brave, he bears a striking resemblance to the statue of Alfonso the Good. After he helps Isabella escape, he is again imprisoned and sentenced to death until Matilda, with whom he falls in love, helps him escape. Near the end of the novel, Theodore reveals his backstory — that he was enslaved by pirates, only to be freed by Christians many years later, and has been working as a farmer in Otranto for the past two years. Father Jerome reveals that Theodore is not only his son but also a direct descendant of Alfonso and the rightful ruler of Otranto. After Matilda's death, Theodore takes over Otranto and marries Isabella as its rightful ruler – the *rightness* of his rulership is supported both by his bloodline and by his always-noble behavior.

Isabella – A princess and the daughter of Frederic, the Marquis of Vincenza, at the beginning of the novel Isabella is Conrad's fiancé and the ward and de facto daughter of Hippolita and Manfred. Like Matilda, Isabella is beautiful, pious, and a model of filial devotion. Despite her personal reluctance, she agrees to marriage with Conrad because she believes it to be arranged by her long-lost father (later the narrator reveals that Manfred actually bribed her guardians). When Manfred attempts to rape her, Isabella protects her virtue by fleeing the castle with the help of Theodore and escapes to a cave where she meets Frederic, her long-lost father. After Manfred's failed attempt to kill her, Isabella mourns the loss of Matilda with Theodore and eventually marries him.

Father Jerome – Father Jerome is a devout, intelligent, and kind-hearted friar in one of Otranto's two convents. As Manfred's foil, he constantly urges the prince to renounce his thirst for worldly power and to take up faith. Jerome sees through Manfred's attempts to manipulate him and attempts to deceive Manfred to protect Isabella. When this results in Theodore's death sentence, it sets in a motion a series of events in which Jerome sees a mark on Theodore's shoulder, realizes that Theodore is his long lost son, and reveals his own past identity as the Count of Falconara. After Manfred kills Matilda, Jerome reveals that Theodore has a stronger claim to the throne than Frederic, because Jerome's wife (Theodore's mother) was Alfonso's daughter. Throughout the story, Jerome acts as a true man of faith and goodness, working to protect others and counseling against greed and lust.

Frederic – Frederic is the Marquis of Vincenza and Isabella's father. Throughout most of the novel, he is known as the closest male blood relative to Alfonso with the strongest claim to ruling Otranto, but has been missing for years. After his wife died in childbirth, Frederic joins the Crusades and is captured by infidels. After a vision shows him Isabella is in danger, he meets a hermit who instructs him to dig up a **giant sword** upon which is a mysterious prophecy. Seeking to free Isabella and to become ruler of Otranto, he brings the sword and a host of men to Otranto, where he falls in love with Matilda and almost trades daughters with Manfred until the ghost of the hermit reminds him of his quest. Upon learning of Theodore's true identity, he relinquishes his claim to Otranto and offers Isabella's hand in marriage to Theodore. Frederic is an interesting character, and a kind of middle-ground between Manfred and Theodore: never as power- or lust-hungry as Manfred, but more susceptible to corruption than Theodore.

Matilda – Matilda is the beautiful 18-year-old daughter of Manfred and Hippolita, and Conrad's sister. Matilda is intelligent, pious, and completely devoted to her mother. Though she originally intended to become a nun rather than marry, she falls in love with Theodore and helps him escape her father. Seeing her in a church with Theodore, Manfred thinks she is Isabella and accidentally kills her. She dies as an innocent, and her death transforms her father who immediately repents of all of his actions.

Hippolita – The princess of Otranto and Manfred's wife, Hippolita is the mother of Matilda and Conrad. Though she is pious and kind, her complete devotion and submission to her

husband make her his key enabler. Despite her own wishes, her belief that divorce goes against her Christian faith, and her knowledge that Isabella will be forced into an unwanted marriage, she passively agrees to a divorce from Manfred when he seeks to solidify his power by marrying Isabella. After Manfred abdicates, Hippolita becomes a nun at one of the nearby convents.

Alfonso – Also known as Alfonso the Good, Alfonso is the heroic past ruler of Otranto and Theodore's grandfather. Though the story's characters presume that he has no heirs, it is later revealed that he had met and married a woman in Sicily, Victoria, on his way to join the Crusades. Meaning to return to her and their unborn child, Alfonso sailed for the Holy Land, only to be poisoned by his chamberlain Ricardo, Manfred's grandfather, who usurped the throne. Alfonso's daughter later married Jerome and gave birth to Theodore. When giant pieces of armor mysteriously appear around the castle, Alfonso's statue in Otranto's church are said to be missing those same pieces of armor, suggesting that Alfonso's ghost is not yet at rest and fulfilling the prophecy made by St. Nicholas — that when the rightful ruler grows too large for the castle (just as the armor is too large for any mortal), Ricardo's line will end.

Hermit – The hermit, who lives in the woods near Joppa, uses his lasts breaths to tell Frederic a secret from St. Nicholas about where to dig up a **giant sword** upon which is written a prophecy. Later, when Frederic is close to betraying his quest to follow the prophecy in his desire to marry Matilda, the hermit's ghost appears to him in Hippolita's oratory, reminding him to reject his passion and to follow heaven's command.

Ricardo – Alfonso's chamberlain, usurper of Otranto, father of Manuel, grandfather of Manfred, and great-grandfather of Matilda and Conrad. In the Holy Land during the Crusades, Ricardo poisons his lord Alfonso and forges a will saying that he, Ricardo, should inherit Otranto. On his way back to Otranto, Ricardo was shipwrecked and made a deal with St. Nicholas in order to survive. He would build a church and two convents in Otranto in return for rulership of Otranto "until the rightful owner should be grown too large to inhabit the **castle**, and as long as issue male from Ricardo's loins should remain to enjoy it." The punishment for Ricardo's sin, then, is only delayed, and is eventually visited upon Manfred. Ricardo's own portrait on the wall of Otranto seems to symbolize this, as when Manfred first searches for Isabella after her escape, Ricardo's image leaves his portrait and leads Manfred down a path that dead ends when a door slams in front of him.

Bianca – A servant and confidante of Hippolita, Matilda, and Isabella. Silly, nosy, and superstitious, Bianca often gossips and shows that she is willing to be deceitful when she tries to pry into Theodore's life and when she agrees to be Manfred's spy. On her way to spy on Isabella, Bianca witnesses a **giant hand in armor** that scares her and causes her to inadvertently reveal Manfred's bribe to Frederic. She often provides comic relief in an otherwise melodramatic story.

St. Nicholas – The saint to whom Otranto's church is dedicated and to whom all of Otranto pray. After Ricardo was shipwrecked and prayed to St. Nicholas for his survival in return for a church and two convents, St. Nicholas agreed, provided that Nicholas's family's reign end when the rightful ruler grew too large for the **castle** and when Ricardo no longer had any male heirs. St. Nicholas also shows the hermit where to find the **giant sword** and tells him to reveal the secret only on his deathbed.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Conrad – Conrad is the only son of Manfred and Hippolita, and Matilda's younger brother. Fifteen years old, sickly, and unaccomplished, Conrad is Manfred's favorite child and only heir. He is engaged to Isabella until he is crushed to death by a **giant helmet** at the beginning of the story.

Diego – One of Manfred's servants. After Isabella escapes the **castle** and the servants are instructed to find her, Diego is shocked to find a **giant foot and leg in armor** in the gallery.

Jaquez – Another of Manfred's servants searching for Isabella throughout the **castle**. Though he did not see the **giant leg in armor** himself, he was with Diego when the latter encountered it and recounts the tale to Manfred.

Victoria – Alfonso's wife from Sicily, mother to Jerome's wife, and Theodore's grandmother.

Manuel – Ricardo's son, Manfred's father, and Matilda's and Conrad's grandfather. Usurping ruler of Otranto.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

HUMOR, THE GOTHIC, AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Much of what characterizes Gothic literature has to do with setting. As what might be described as the "grandfather" of Gothic literature, Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* displays many of the features that would become stereotypically Gothic. For example, the story takes place in a foreign country, in a medieval castle with towers and secret passageways. The castle is eerie and ominous, plagued by creaking hinges, trap doors clanging shut, the wailing of the wind, and the life-like quality of people in paintings.

Supernatural elements like ghosts, visions, mysterious suits of

armor, and prophecies run through the novel. Though Walpole is often credited as the first Gothic novelist, such fanciful elements were in fact drawn from medieval romance, heroic tales in which knights often encountered marvels or supernatural phenomena on their adventures. Though the Gothic novel was always considered lowbrow literature even during the height of its popularity, before Walpole, "gothic" was looked down upon even more, and associated with barbarism. Walpole's novel helped to change that, and his unfettered enthusiasm for the Middle Ages was extraordinary. One of many accomplishments he is well known for is Strawberry Hill, a faux-medieval castle Walpole built for himself and on which he based *The Castle of Otranto*.

Though many of the literary devices found in *Otranto* are now recognized as archetypically "Gothic," Walpole's novel indulged in humor in a way that later Gothic works such as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* did not. Part of this is achieved merely by his presentation of Gothic and supernatural elements. For example, Conrad's death by giant helmet, while tragic to the story's characters, is completely absurd. The setting itself, often merely eerie in later Gothic works, is also occasionally humorous. The castle's "deep and hollow groan" is "the effect of pent-up vapours" — in other words, the castle is farting.

Another aspect of Walpole's humor is the way he claims that the story, in fact, was written by a 16th century Catholic priest and then was translated by a man named "William Marshal, Gent." This claim about the origin of the text is fairly obviously false, and funny in its own right. At the same time, it allows Walpole in his first preface to the novel to masquerade self-praise as self-deprecation, and includes tongue-in-cheek hints at the novel's true authorship. More generally, Walpole seems to revel in the story's "Gothicness" while also poking fun at it in the first preface. In the first preface, Walpole claims the novel is merely entertainment while in his preface to the second edition, he claims that it was "an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern," that is, to find a happy medium between the fanciful character of medieval romance and the realism of the modern novel. The apparently contradictory aims professed by Walpole have made readers question to what extend the book should be interpreted at face value or as a spoof of medieval literature.

THE DIVINE VS. THE MUNDANE

The balance between spiritual belief and worldly desires is a struggle many of the novel's characters face. Manfred, the usurping prince of Otranto, is the most extreme example of this, as he succumbs to worldly temptation both politically and romantically. For example, after the death of his only male heir, Manfred attempts to preserve his lineage and political rule by committing various sins: seeking a divorce from his wife Hippolita; nearly murdering Hippolita; attempting to rape and marry his would-be daughter-in-law Isabella; and wrongfully imprisoning and sentencing a man to death. Despite Father Jerome's many rebukes and warnings against such misdeeds, Manfred repeatedly refuses to recognize any authority that Heaven, Hell, or the likes of a friar might claim over him. Though Manfred's pursuit of Isabella is largely motivated by his hunger for power, it also demonstrates the failure of the little piety he has to overcome his passion. Passion, in the sense of both lust and rage often overpower Manfred's ability to reason and to choose right over wrong. For example, when he makes sexual advances on Isabella, both his lust for her and his anger over her escape motivate him to hunt for her throughout the castle. When Theodore remarks on the similarity between the helmet that kills Conrad and that of Alfonso's statue, Manfred charges him with treason, unaware that his accusation is unreasonable and illogical. Only at the end of the novel, after Manfred mistakes Matilda for Isabella and kills his own daughter, does he repent his sins and commit himself to faith by becoming a monk.

Like Manfred, the other characters of the novel struggle to place their faith above their worldly desires. Despite Father Jerome's warnings about Manfred's cursed lineage, Theodore is unable to forget Matilda, with whom he has fallen in love, even after he marries Isabella. Matilda, who had long ago committed herself to piety, forgets her former desire to become a nun in favor of her newfound love, Theodore. By the end of the novel, however, she reverts to her former state of absolute filial piety, ignoring Theodore's pleas to marry her and focusing entirely on her parents. Frederic, Isabella's long-lost father, travels to Otranto to free his daughter but is tempted both by Manfred's offer of Matilda and by the thought of controlling Otranto. Only when he is visited by the ghost of a hermit and when the ghost of Alfonso appears does he suppress his passion for Matilda and renounce his desire to rule Otranto. Hippolita, Manfred's devoted wife, finds herself agreeing to divorce in order to fulfill Manfred's wishes, despite Father Jerome's insistence that to do so would be against heaven. Ultimately, however, Hippolita is not forced to divorce Manfred, but her devotion to him, which she once privileged over her piety, is finally overcome when she becomes a nun in a local convent. In each of these instances, Walpole sets up a binary between spiritual and worldly desires. That every character's worldly desire is in some way thwarted by forces attributed to heaven, points to the sense in the novel that the divine should hold sway over the mundane and the human.

LINEAGE AND LEADERSHIP

The Castle of Otranto is deeply concerned with paternity and its relation to political rule. The novel presents three major revelations about lineage, the consequences of which drive the plot forward. The first revelation is that of Theodore's paternity. Shortly before Theodore is to be executed, Jerome recognizes him as his son

and thus as a member of the noble house of Falconara. Not only does this new information determine many of Jerome's decisions regarding Isabella and Manfred but it also legitimizes the noble qualities of speech, piety, bravery, and heroism that Theodore possesses. Frederic, who has been posing as a knight, reveals himself as Isabella's father and the only known blood relative (and thus, legitimate heir) of Alfonso the Good. It is Isabella's connection to Alfonso, and thus her claim over Otranto, that first motivates Manfred to arrange a marriage between Isabella and Conrad, and it is Frederic's distant relation to Alfonso and attraction to Matilda that almost precipitates a marriage between Manfred and Isabella. At the end of the novel, it is Jerome's revelation that Theodore's grandfather *is* Alfonso that causes Otranto to be passed into the hands of its rightful ruler.

In the preface to the first edition of the novel, Walpole comments upon the relative uselessness of the story's supposed moral: a quote from the Bible that claims "the sins of fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation." This moral proves literally true for Manfred's family: Though Ricardo's sin of poisoning Alfonso for power does not result in the punishment of either Ricardo or his son Manuel, the third and fourth generations of Ricardo's line meet disaster: Manfred kills his daughter and is himself forced to abdicate, Conrad is crushed to death by a **giant helmet**, and Matilda is murdered by her father.

In fact, Walpole's criticism that the story does *not* have a "more useful" moral may actually be an ironic hint that it *does* have a more useful moral, one concerned with bloodlines and rulership. The novel's intense occupation with the will of heaven, in conjunction with its concern with lineage, emphasize the importance of "rightful" rulership — rulership determined by blood and endorsed by heaven. Though Theodore was for most of his life a slave and a peasant, his noble lineage renders him fit to reign in the eyes of God, or in the novel's case, St. Nicholas. This privileging of certain bloodlines both suggests class distinctions between nobility and peasantry, and recalls a justification rulers traditionally used to defend their power, that of the divine right of kings, a political doctrine in which monarchs claimed that their rule was ordained by God. However, as Horace Walpole was a Whig, and as Whigs generally did not support absolute monarchy or the divine right of kings, the story's endorsement of these ideas likely belong to Walpole's fictional Catholic priest, Onuphrio Muralto. Walpole's speculation about Muralto's agenda in the first preface is perhaps a veiled criticism of Muralto's belief in the divine right of kings.

CLASS, COMEDY, AND TRAGEDY

In the second preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole acknowledges his authorship of the work and defends his use of both comedy and tragedy, elements that are tied to the story's two classes of people. Modeling his mixture of comedy and tragedy on that of Shakespeare's plays, the lower class characters are associated with comedy and the upper class characters with tragedy.

The peasants, such as Bianca and Diego, are often portrayed as naïve, inarticulate, morally inferior, and prone to superstition, while the nobles, such as Hippolita and Frederic, are portrayed as dignified, articulate, intelligent, moral, and level-headed. One example of this behavioral distinction occurs when Manfred charges Theodore with treason and accuses him of witchcraft, after Theodore notices a similarity between the **giant helmet** that kills Conrad and the helmet formerly on Alfonso's statue. While Manfred's friends (i.e. the nobles) urge him against such an unfounded punishment, the peasants form a mob and wholeheartedly cheer his accusations, believing that Manfred's decision is just.

The roles and behaviors of Theodore and Manfred suggest a blood distinction between the nobility and the peasantry. Though Theodore is originally presented as a peasant, his remarkable bravery, articulation, and conviction to do good distinguish him as a noble, a fact that is later confirmed when Jerome reveals his true parentage. Similarly, though Manfred is originally presented as a noble, his rage, evil machinations, and frequently inarticulate speech betray his claim to nobility, in particular his claim that he is the rightful ruler of Otranto (and in fact, of course, Manfred is the grandson of a non-noble man who rose to the throne only through murder and treachery).

Ironically, the peasants often stumble upon truths often dismissed by the novel's noblemen and noblewomen. For example, when Bianca gossips to Matilda about the young peasant Theodore, she guesses (correctly) that he is a prince in disguise, while Matilda scorns the silliness of Bianca's imagination. Similarly, all the servants believe (correctly) that Manfred's desire to see Conrad married is motivated by his fear of a prophecy, while the nobles believe he is anxious for his son's health. However, it is worth remembering Walpole's, or rather "William Marshal's" sly suggestion that the story was written by an "artful" priest looking to "confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstitions." Though the fictional translator's commentary on the ideological-motivation of the fictional author Muralto might undermine a worldview of class distinctions, Walpole's second preface also reinforces this class distinction, as he perhaps exploits the peasants' comic quality to make the nobles' storylines and characters all the more attractive and engaging.

GENDER AND MARRIAGE

A recurring element in *The Castle of Otranto* is the female characters' absolute devotion to their husbands and fathers. For example, despite her husband's temper and repeated rejections of her, Hippolita is entirely devoted to Manfred. Even when presented with

Manfred's sins, betrayals, and intention to marry their ward and former daughter-in-law-to-be Isabella, Hippolita passively agrees to Manfred's demand for a divorce and refuses to acknowledge Manfred's wrongdoing. Both Matilda and Isabella are instilled with a "dreadful obedience" to her parents. Though she is in love with Theodore, Matilda is nearly forced into a marriage with Isabella's father, while Isabella unhappily agrees to a marriage with Conrad because she believes her father arranged the engagement. However, when Isabella begins to pray to heaven to avoid marriage with Manfred, Hippolita stops her, claiming that her father should have the final say. By doing so, Hippolita, though extremely pious, implicitly assumes that a woman's prayers to divinity are not or should not be as important as the commands of one's father or husband. Hippolita even goes so far as to claim, "It is not ours to make election for ourselves: heaven, our fathers, and our husbands, must decide for us." Hippolita's belief in such a male-dominated worldview suggests that women have no agency of their own; all of their decisions must be decided by men or God. That Hippolita groups "fathers" and "husbands" with "heaven" suggests that men have a claim to female obedience equal to that of God. Further, this patriarchal viewpoint oppresses women even more profoundly than is at first evident, as it also implies that women are unable to become as close to God as men.

While the women of the novel adore, respect, and obey the men in their lives, the men view the women as little more than objects that will unquestioningly fulfill their desires. For example, once Hippolita is unable to produce another male heir, Manfred decides to discard her and nearly murders her, as she is no longer useful to him as a reproductive tool. Matilda is objectified both by her father and by her potential suitor. Despite her original intention to become a nun, Manfred decides to marry her off to Frederic without consulting her in order to maintain his control over Otranto. Frederic, too, objectifies Matilda by discussing the engagement without her consent and by using his own daughter as currency to obtain Matilda.

In the time in which the story is set and in which Walpole wrote, this objectification of women was also economic. Women were regarded as property, and their key selling point was their marriageability — that is, their virginity and their ability to reproduce. Consequently, noblewomen's bodies were often pawns used by their families to forge alliances and gain property and power.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

CASTLE OF OTRANTO

Castles are a staple of Gothic literature, their formidable and intricate structure representative of gothic themes. In *The Castle of Otranto*, a story centered around a particular castle, the castle represents evil in the form of sexual deviancy and the corruption of power. It is in the castle's eerie rooms and dark passageways that Manfred pursues Isabella, intending to rape her. This sexual violence is also incestuous — Isabella is not only Manfred's de facto daughter but also his contracted daughter-in-law, engaged to his son. Further, as Manfred's and Hippolita's home, the castle represents another dimension of incest through Manfred's claim that his marriage to Hippolita is itself incestuous.

The castle also serves as the locus for wealth and power, and the corruption that often accompanies power. The very walls of the castle represent how rulership of Otranto has been usurped by Manfred's family, as the castle is haunted by the restless ghosts of Alfonso and Ricardo. And when Manfred himself falls from power, so too do the walls of the castle.

THE GIANT SUIT OF ARMOR

The giant suit of armor that appears in pieces throughout the story serves to fulfill the prophecy given to Manfred's grandfather by St. Nicholas: "the Castle and Lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it." The armor that used to belong to Alfonso's statue literally becomes too big for the **castle**, making it a very literal symbol of Nicholas's prophecy and suggesting that Manfred's rule will soon end. As the herald of Manfred's downfall, each appearance by the giant suit of armor in some way thwarts Manfred's plans: the giant casque or helmet crushes Conrad to death shortly before the wedding that will cement his family's power; the giant foot and leg in armor interrupts Diego and Jaquez's search for Isabella, allowing her more time to escape from Manfred; the giant hand and arm in armor stops Bianca from spying on Isabella at Manfred's behest; and the giant sabre or sword contains a prophecy that leads to Frederic's arrival, which interrupts Manfred from executing Theodore, the true heir to Otranto.

The armor, as a kind of embodiment of St. Nicholas's prophecy, also represents the hand of God in determining the fates of the characters and (in an example of Walpole's tongue-in-cheek humor) literally includes a giant hand that helps influence the course of events in the narrative. The way the armor thwarts Manfred thus further emphasize Manfred's descent into evil, and, conversely, Alfonso's link to heaven.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *The Castle of Otranto* published in 2004.

The First Edition Preface Quotes

Letters were then in their most flourishing state in Italy, and contributed to dispel the empire of superstition, at that time so forcibly attacked by the reformers. It is not unlikely, that an artful priest might endeavor to turn their own arms on the innovators; and might avail himself of his abilities as an author to confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstitions.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

In the first preface to the novel, Walpole, writing as the fictional translator William Marshall, Gent., has just dated the story to the Crusades and is now discussing the historical period of the fictional Italian author of the "original" story, Onuphrio Muralto. Gent speculates that Muralto, a Catholic priest writing during the Renaissance and after the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, may have been using his writing talents to reinforce Catholic beliefs among the general population and to combat Protestant skepticism of "superstitions." Walpole's first preface serves to undermine the story's class distinctions, its implicit advocation of the divine right of kings, and the Catholic church's conflicting moral messages.

The Second Edition Preface Quotes

The simplicity of their behaviour, almost tending to excite smiles, which, at first, seems not consonant to the serious cast of the work, appeared to me not only not improper, but was marked designedly in that manner. My rule was nature. However grave, important, or even melancholy, the sensations of princes and heroes may be, they do not stamp the same affections on their domestics: at least the latter do not, or should not be made to, express their passions in the same dignified tone. In my humble opinion, the contrast between the sublime of the one and the naïveté of the other, sets the pathetic of the former in a stronger light.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

Defending his presentation of the servants as simple and comical in a work of tragedy, Walpole argues that this authorial decision is justified by the natures of nobles and peasants, and by the utility of simple characters in making the story's noble characters more moving. By assigning specific behavioral traits to nobles and peasants, Walpole reinforces distinctions in class as well as genre. Walpole's assumption that the lives and minds of peasants must be merry rather than melancholy complements a literary tradition of restricting tragedy to noble characters and comedies to peasant characters. That the peasant characters exist in Walpole's novel largely to heighten by comparison the dramatic lives of the nobles indicates that their characters are written not as full human beings but as plot devices.

Chapter 1 Quotes

The Castle and Lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it.

Related Characters: Theodore, Alfonso, Manfred

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

These words are a prophecy about rulership of Otranto. At the beginning of the novel, Manfred is rushing his son Conrad's wedding in order to avoid the prophecy, which foretells the end of Manfred's reign. It is this prophecy that drives the entirety of the plot, from Manfred's arrangement of Conrad's wedding to his own pursuit of Isabella, to the gigantic pieces of armor that mysteriously appear around the castle. By the end of the novel, it is revealed that these pieces of oversized armor belong to Alfonso, the last true ruler of Otranto. Though Manfred spends almost the entirety of the novel committing sins to fight against this prophecy, which was originally delivered by St. Nicholas to Manfred's grandfather, Manfred allows the prophecy to pass after he accidentally kills his daughter, finally repenting and seeking atonement as a monk.

> In vain did Manfred's friends endeavour to divert him from this savage and ill-grounded resolution. The generality were charmed with their lord's decision, which, to their apprehensions, carried great appearance of justice; as the magician was to be punished by the very instrument with which he had offended: nor were they struck with the least compunction at the probability of the youth being starved; for they firmly believed, that, by his diabolical skill, he could easily supply himself with nutriment.

Related Characters: Alfonso, Theodore

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Manfred has just sentenced Theodore to be trapped under the giant helmet that killed Manfred's son Conrad. The characters' differing reactions to such an unjust punishment reveals the easily swayed, and bloodthirsty minds of the peasants, as well as the kinder, more moral minds of the nobles. While the nobles are able to understand that Manfred's punishment of Theodore is completely unwarranted, the peasants illogically and with no evidence agree with Manfred's hasty and angry punishment. The peasants' belief that Theodore is a sorcerer points to the superstitious natures that Walpole has painted for them. That the passage aligns Manfred's own behavior with that of the peasants and against the inclinations of the nobles is a hint that Manfred himself is not in fact from a noble line despite the fact that he is the ruler of Otranto.

> She was, however, just going to beg admittance, when Manfred suddenly opened the door; and, as it was now twilight, concurring with the disorder of his mind, he did not distinguish the person, but asked angrily, who it was? Matilda replied, trembling, "My dearest father, it is I, your daughter." Manfred, stepping back hastily, cried, "Begone! I do not want a daughter"; and flinging back abruptly, clapped the door against the terrified Matilda.

Related Characters: Manfred, Matilda (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Book Page 32

Explanation and Analysis

After Hippolita orders her daughter Matilda to check on her father, Matilda, the dutiful daughter, obeys. However, when she reaches the door, Manfred does not recognize her and orders her to leave. Manfred's inability to recognize Matilda here echoes his more general inability to recognize Isabella as his daughter – whether as his daughter-in-law, or as his de facto daughter from having been his ward – that is inherent in his desire to force Isabella to marry him and give birth to his heir.

Manfred's declaration, "I do not want a daughter," points both to his desire for a son, a new male heir, and to his desire to have Isabella as a wife rather than a daughter. This passage also suggests perhaps that Isabella is a *proxy* for Matilda, making Manfred's desire for Isabella all the more incestuous.

> Manfred rose to pursue her; when the moon, which was now up, and gleamed in at the opposite casement, presented to his sight the plumes of the fatal helmet, which rose to the height of the windows, waving backwards and forwards in a tempestuous manner, and accompanied with a hollow and rustling sound.... "Heaven nor hell shall impede my designed!" said Manfred, advancing again to seize the princess. At that instant, the portrait of his grandfather, which hung over the bench where they had been sitting, uttered a deep sigh, and heaved its breast.

Related Characters: Manfred (speaker), Ricardo, Isabella

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

Manfred, having had the light taken away by his servant, has just cornered Isabella in the dark gallery of the castle and declared his intention to rape and marry her. Now, Isabella has just begun to run away, and though Manfred tries to follow her, he is stopped by the light of the moon, a symbol of goodness and chastity, and by the movement of the giant helmet's feathers, which wave from side to side as if shaking their heads.

Manfred is thwarted time and again by manifestations of divine will. When he declares that neither heaven nor hell will stop him, he is immediately distracted by his

grandfather's moving portrait, which leads him only to a slammed door. The implication seems to be both that heaven stands against Manfred's plans, and that the legacy passed down to him by his grandfather – the rulership of Otranto – leads to a dead end. Yet instead of taking these hints and ceasing his efforts, Manfred instead refuses to stand down. He is working against heaven and fate.

> That excellent lady, who no more than Manfred doubted the reality of the vision, yet affected to treat it as a delirium of the servant. Willing, however, to save her lord from any additional shock, and prepared by a series of grief not to tremble at any accession to it, she determined to make herself the first sacrifice, if fate had marked the present hour for their destruction.

Related Characters: Diego, Manfred, Hippolita

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Though both are sure of its reality, Hippolita and Manfred dismiss the servants' report of a giant leg in armor as superstition. However, as they will soon learn, they are wrong to do so, as the armor represents the end of Manfred's rule. Hippolita's decision to offer herself up as a sacrifice leads her to anticipate disaster throughout the novel, and as a result, she is all too ready to consent to a divorce from Manfred when he asks her to do so. Constantly putting Manfred's needs before her own, Hippolita's willingness to sacrifice herself for her husband's sake is a sign of her selflessness and wifely submission, but at the same time it involves placing her husband's authority above the authority of God, which is a sin.

> Ashamed, too, of his inhuman treatment of a princess, who returned every injury with new marks of tenderness and duty; he felt returning love forcing itself into his eyes—but not less ashamed of feeling remorse towards one, against whom he was inwardly meditating a yet more bitter outrage, he curbed the yearnings of his heart, and did not dare to lean even towards pity. The next transition of his soul was to exquisite villainy. Presuming on the unshaken submission of Hippolita, he flattered himself that she would not only acquiesce with patience to a divorce, but would obey, if it was his pleasure, in endeavouring to persuade Isabella to give him her hand.

Related Characters: Isabella, Hippolita, Manfred

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

After his initial feverish search for Isabella failed, Manfred has calmed down at the reassurance of his wife and begins to feel remorse for his treatment of both Hippolita and Isabella. However, though he is beginning to feel shame, he simultaneously feels "a yet more bitter outrage" against Isabella and his fickle emotions soon bring him back to "exquisite villainy," as his anger and pride overcomes his conscience.

Both highly patriarchal and unreasonably proud of his ability to persuade others, Manfred deludes himself into believing that his wife will be so obedient that she would readily betray her morals for him. Though Hippolita does in fact agree to a divorce, she does so only passively and without enthusiasm. The passage also captures the way that female submission, while seen at the time as a virtue, leads to men requiring and demanding even *more* submission, even to the point of demanding submission to sinful behavior.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"O that dear mother! yes, Bianca, 'tis there I feel the rugged temper of Manfred. I can support his harshness to me with patience; but it wounds my soul when I am witness to his causeless severity towards her." "Oh! madam," said Bianca, "all men use their wives so, when they are weary of them." "And yet your congratulated me but now," said Matilda, "when you fancied my father intended to dispose of me!" "I would have you a great lady," replied Bianca, "come what will. I do not wish to see you moped in a convent, as you would be if you had your will, and if my lady, your mother, who knows that a bad husband is better than no husband at all, did not hinder you—"

Related Characters: Bianca, Matilda (speaker), Hippolita, Manfred

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of Chapter 2, shortly after Isabella's disappearance, Matilda is in her room, ruminating over the day's events in the company of her servant Bianca. Ever the dutiful daughter, Matilda is used to her father's indifference but cannot stand his poor treatment of her mother. Bianca's explanation for Manfred's behavior, that all men "use" their wives, and her belief that women should be married, suggest that in her view, women are meant to be married and to be "used" – that women are objects that exist for men.

In contrast, Matilda's desire to become a nun is thus a desire to remain independent of a male-dominated society in which women are oppressed.

"Father," interrupted Manfred, "I pay due reverence to your holy profession; but I am sovereign here, and will allow no meddling priest to interfere in the affairs of my domestic. If you have aught to say, attend me to my chamber—I do not use to let my wife be acquainted with the secret affairs of my state; they are not within a woman's province."

Related Characters: Manfred (speaker), Hippolita, Father Jerome

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

Interrupting Jerome from telling Hippolita of his wrongdoings, Manfred asserts that priests and woman have no place in the political sphere, and asks to speak to Jerome alone. As he will do again and again in his conversations with Jerome throughout the novel, Manfred insists on a separation between church and state, a separation which, in the world of the novel, is shown to be against divine will. Just as he declares that his wife should have no say in his rule, Manfred argues that a mere priest has no authority over him. However, unlike Hippolita who submits easily to Manfred's wishes, Jerome is less tractable in his convictions and becomes Manfred's main adversary and foil.

Further, the implications of Manfred's argument that Jerome has no authority over the realm of politics is that God has no authority over politics, and is therefore a resistance to the idea of God's ultimate authority. In the world of the novel – and religious thought at the time the novel was written – that is a sinful position.

"Holy father," said Hippolita, "it is your office to be no respecter of persons: you must speak as your duty prescribes—but it is my duty to hear nothing that it pleases not my lord I should hear."

Related Characters: Hippolita (speaker), Father Jerome, Manfred

Related Themes:

Page Number: 53-43

Explanation and Analysis

After Manfred declares that it is not Hippolita's place as a woman to listen to what he does not wish her to hear, Hippolita folds easily, submitting to her husband's desires. However, like Manfred, she makes the mistake of implicitly supporting a separation between church and state, or in her case, church and everyday life. By speaking of Jerome's obligations to God and her own duties to her husband as if they are comparable, Hippolita implies that her worldly duties as a wife, rather than her moral obligations as a Christian, are of the utmost importance to her. Only at the end of the novel is Hippolita able to put her priorities in their "proper" order by becoming a nun in the local convent.

I fear no man's displeasure when a woman in distress puts herself under my protection.

Related Characters: Theodore (speaker), Manfred, Isabella

Related Themes: ⚥

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Believing that Theodore and Isabella are in love, Manfred is interrogating the peasant about his relationship to Isabella. In response, Theodore declares here that Isabella is under his protection.

Theodore's brave, though perhaps impetuous, declaration allows him to take on the roles of hero and knight. That Isabella is "a woman in distress…under [his] protection" emphasizes that even narratives of chivalry, where women are to be protected, are patriarchal constructs in which women must simultaneously be protected from men and are dependent on men for their safety. Women in chivalric tales provide much the same roles as Walpole's servant characters; just as the servants make the nobles appear grander, so too do damsels in distress make knights appear all the more heroic.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ Know then, that I have long been troubled in mind on my union with the princess Hippolita…for we are related within the forbidden degrees. My only difficulty was to fix on a successor, who would be tender of my people, and to dispose of the Lady Isabella, who is dear to me as my own blood. I was willing to restore the line of Alfonso, even in his most distant kindred…. I would submit to anything for the good of my people—were it not the best, the only way to extinguish the feuds between our families, if I was to take the Lady Isabella to wife—you start—but, though Hippolita's virtues will ever be dear to me, a prince must not consider himself; he is born for his people.

Related Characters: Manfred (speaker), Alfonso, Isabella, Hippolita

Related Themes: ⛨ ✊ 🎭 ⚥

Page Number: 69-70

Explanation and Analysis

After inviting Frederic's men into the castle, Manfred is determined to appease them in order to maintain his rule, and so he recycles for the knights the same story that he believes worked on Jerome. Claiming that he wishes to avoid incest by divorcing his wife, Manfred proposes that the best solution for him and his people is to marry Isabella, who is "dear to [him] as [his] own blood." Manfred does not seem to realize that such a marriage would also be incestuous and that his proposed solution – to avoid incest with his wife by marrying his ward and almost-daughter-in-law – is illogical.

The gaping lies in Manfred's speech, meant to prove his suitability as a ruler, ironically prove that he is not suitable to be prince. Though he claims that marrying Isabella would be "the best, the only way to extinguish the feuds" between himself and Frederic's men, a far easier solution to end the feud and to avoid the supposed incest with Hippolita, would be to renounce his claim over Otranto and retire to the convent, just as he does at the end of the novel. The double meaning of Manfred's insistence that he is "*born* for his people" is ironic, as Manfred, the grandson of a chamberlain, was never meant to be born into rulership at all, and as he could have easily given Otranto over to Frederic to provide his people with a successor.

❝ Matilda disengaged herself from her women, stole up to the black tower, and unbolting the door, presented herself to the astonished Theodore. "Young man," said she, "though filial duty and womanly modesty condemn the step I am taking, yet holy charity, surmounting all other ties, justifies this act. Fly, the doors of thy prison are open: my father and his domestics are absent, but they may soon return."

Related Characters: Matilda (speaker), Manfred, Theodore

Related Themes: ⚥

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

While all of Manfred's men are racing Frederic's knights to find Isabella, Theodore is locked in a prison that is now unguarded. By freeing Theodore from prison, Matilda reverses traditional gender roles of knight and damsel in distress. It is not the princess who is freed from the locked tower by a knight, as would normally be expected of heroic tales, but rather the knight who is freed by the princess.

Playing a "masculine" role, Matilda is aware that her actions go against both her father's wishes and against "womanly modesty." However, her violation of both worldly norms is justified by "holy charity," which "surmount[s] all other ties." Unlike her mother, whose Christian morals often yield to her husband's wishes, Matilda's freeing of an unjustly

imprisoned man confirms that spiritual values must be placed above all else.

> Arriving there, he sought the gloomiest shades, as best suited to the pleasing melancholy that reigned in his mind. In this mood he roved insensibly to the caves which had formerly served as a retreat to hermits, and were now reported round the country to be haunted by evil spirits. He recollected to have heard this tradition; and being of a brave and adventurous disposition, he willingly indulged his curiosity in exploring the secret recesses of this labyrinth…He thought the place more likely to be infested by robbers than by those infernal agents who are reported to molest and bewilder travelers.

Related Characters: Theodore

Related Themes:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

After being freed by Matilda and set on a path towards a labyrinth of hidden caves, Theodore is searching for Isabella, eager to prove himself. Now with his set of armor from Matilda, Theodore's bravery and desire for "adventure" make him the typical heroic knight, situating the reader firmly in a story of medieval romance. Theodore's "insensible" roving is not unlike the tendency of knights in chivalric tales to wander aimlessly through forests or the countryside, only to stumble upon adventure.

Despite reports of evil spirits haunting the caves, Theodore pushes onward, believing that the stories are untrue. Like Matilda and other nobles in the story, Theodore dismisses such reports as superstition, further distinguishing himself as a noble (as opposed to a superstitious peasant).

Chapter 4 Quotes

> Where'er a casque that suits this sword is found,
> With perils is thy daughter compass'ed round;
> Alfonso's blood alone can save the maid,
> And quiet a long restless prince's shade.

Related Characters: Frederic (speaker), Alfonso, Theodore, Isabella

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of Chapter 4, after Theodore mistakenly injures Frederic and brings him to the castle with Isabella, Frederic reveals a prophecy inscribed on a giant sword led him to Otranto. This is the second prophecy of the novel, and it claims that near the helmet matching the sword, Frederic's daughter Isabella will be in danger, and that only "Alfonso's blood," can save her and free Alfonso's ghost.

That Isabella is the "maid" to be "saved" reinforces gender stereotypes of women as damsels in distress, especially if "Alfonso's blood" is Theodore, her future husband, or Frederic, her father. In both cases, the prophecy would affirm the idea that women must always be under their fathers' or husbands' authority and protection. This is similar to the legal doctrine known as *coverture*, which originated in the Middle Ages and which decreed that married women had no legal rights, as their legal status was "covered" under that of their husbands. However, one possible positive feminist reading of the prophecy is that Isabella, who is also related to Alfonso, saves herself by escaping Manfred's clutches.

Just as the first prophecy (that the current ruler of Otranto shall be supplanted when "the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it") motivates many of Manfred's decisions and actions, the second prophecy also plays an important role in the story's plot. The second prophecy provides Frederic with a mission, leading to his arrival at Otranto and his search for Isabella, both of which hinder Manfred's plans to execute Theodore, who becomes the ruler of Otranto.

> And jealousy, that, for a moment, had raised a coolness between these amiable maidens, soon gave way to the natural sincerity and candour of their souls. Each confessed to the other the impression that Theodore had made on her; and this confidence was followed by a struggle of generosity, each insisting on yielding her claim to her friend.

Related Characters: Theodore, Isabella, Matilda

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

Now that Isabella has returned to the castle with Theodore, Matilda suspects that the two are in love with each other, while Isabella, in love with Theodore herself, perceives that he is actually loves Matilda. After a tense conversation in which both women are reluctant to declare their love, the two princesses talk more sincerely, each willing to give up their romantic claims for the sake of her friend.

That romantic love gets in the way of Matilda and Isabella's friendship suggests that romantic love is a corrupting force. Just as Manfred's desire for Isabella causes him to become irrationally jealous and manipulative, the women's love for Theodore evokes jealousy and insincerity in them both. However, unlike Manfred, who gives himself completely to his lust for power and Isabella, the princesses are able to revert to their better natures by renouncing their romantic desires.

"Thou art as much too good for this world," said Isabella, "as Manfred is execrable—but think not, lady, that thy weakness shall determine for me. I swear, hear me all ye angels" — Stop, I adjure thee," cried Hippolita; "remember thou dost not depend on thyself; thou hast a father."

Related Characters: Hippolita, Isabella (speaker), Frederic, Manfred

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

After Matilda and Isabella reconcile, Hippolita arrives to announce that she has proposed a marriage between Matilda and Frederic. Isabella, knowing that this will make Manfred's plans to marry her easier, begins to pray. However, Hippolita stops her, telling Isabella that she must listen to her father (Frederic) first.

Hippolita's interruption of Isabella's prayer shows once again that Hippolita's priorities are not in order. By claiming that Isabella's fate depends on her father, Hippolita is implying that Frederic's authority as a father is greater than the divine authority of the angels. Just as she does with her own husband, Hippolita privileges female obedience to worldly, masculine authority above Christian obligations to divine will.

It is not ours to make election for ourselves: heaven, our fathers, and our husbands, must decide for us. Have patience until you hear what Manfred and Frederic have determined. If the marquis accepts Matilda's hand, I know she will readily obey. Heaven may interpose and prevent the rest.

Related Characters: Hippolita (speaker), Isabella, Matilda, Frederic, Manfred

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

Advising Isabella to listen to her father first, Hippolita declares that it is not the place of a woman to make any choices for herself and that such choices must be made by "heaven, our fathers, and our husbands." Without distinguishing between the level of authority that heaven, fathers, and husbands each have over women, Hippolita implies that fathers and husbands have at least equal authority over women compared to heaven. Just as she assumed in Chapter 2 that Jerome's obligations to the divine were comparable to her obligations to her husband, Hippolita mistakenly implies that men's authority over women is as important as divine authority.

Though Hippolita is a pious woman, her approach to adhering to Christian principles is passive at best. Though Father Jerome is a spiritual authority, she turns to him to explain the moral ramifications of Frederic's marriage to Matilda only after she has already proposed the marriage idea to Manfred. Leaving the decision up to Manfred and Frederic as the male authorities, Hippolita does not actively try to shape or prevent a certain outcome but rather leaves it to heaven to prevent an immoral situation.

"Come, come," resumed the friar, "inconsiderate youth, this must not be; eradicate this guilty passion from thy breast."—"Guilty passion!" cried Theodore, "Can guilt dwell with innocent beauty and virtuous modesty?"—"It is sinful," replied the friar, "to cherish those whom heaven has doomed to destruction. A tyrant's race must be swept from the earth to the third and fourth generation."

Related Characters: Father Jerome, Theodore (speaker), Matilda, Manfred

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89-90

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly before Hippolita seeks Jerome's advice about a marriage between Frederic and Matilda, Jerome is advising his son to relinquish his love for Matilda. Jerome's warning against "guilty passion" reinforces the novel's previous implications that romantic love is a corrupting force.

Jerome's declaration that it is sinful to love a "a tyrant's race," which is doomed for destruction, originates from the Bible. In his first preface to *Otranto*, Walpole, posing as the story's fictional translator, criticizes the fictional Italian "author" of story, Onuphrio Muralto, for using this Bible quote on the grounds that it as an ineffective moral for the story because tyrants rarely care about the consequences of their actions if those consequences are delayed to the third and fourth generations. Walpole (still posing as the translator rather than the actual narrator of the story) further adds that this message of unavoidable doom is undermined by Muralto's conflicting message that prayer will save them. Though Matilda and Conrad (the fourth generation following Richard, the original tyrant) both die, Manfred (the third generation) avoids death by repenting and retiring to the convent. Walpole, a Protestant, purposefully calls attention to his construction of these conflicting religious lessons, perhaps to highlight the often contradictory messages posed by Catholic doctrine.

❝ Manfred, in the mean time, had broken his purpose to Frederic, and proposed the double marriage. That weak prince, who had been struck with the charms of Matilda, listened but too eagerly to the offer. He forgot his enmity to Manfred, whom he saw but little hope of dispossessing by force; and flattering himself that no issue might succeed from the union of his daughter with the tyrant, he looked upon his own succession to the principality as facilitated by wedding Matilda.

Related Characters: Isabella, Matilda, Frederic, Manfred

Related Themes:

Page Number: Book Page 91

Explanation and Analysis

While Jerome is urging Hippolita not to consent to divorce, Manfred is proposing that he and Frederic marry each other's daughters. Frederic, forgetting his mission to save Isabella from Manfred, is deeply tempted by the thought of marrying Matilda, and places his romantic desires and desire to control Otranto above his divinely sanctioned mission.

Though Manfred's marriage to Isabella would already be sinful, as she is his de facto daughter and was meant to be his daughter-in-law, the double marriage between the two men and each other's daughters would be even more incestuous because of the complicated in-law relationships resulting from the marriages. At the times that both Walpole and his persona Muralto were writing, marriages between in-laws were still considered incestuous. For example, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which Walpole claims to emulate, the marriage between Gertrude and Claudius is considered incestuous because Claudius is both Gertrude's brother-in-law and her husband. The double marriage that Manfred proposes would result in even more confusing relationships, as both fathers would also be their daughters' sons-in-law and as both daughters would be each other's stepmothers.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ That prince had discovered so much passion for Matilda, that Manfred hoped to obtain all he wished by holding out or withdrawing his daughter's charms, according as the marquis should appear more or less disposed to co-operate in his views.

Related Characters: Matilda, Frederic, Manfred

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

Delighted at the extent of Frederic's temptation for Matilda, Manfred decides to use his daughter to manipulate Frederic into yielding to Manfred's plans. Having forgotten the reason for his arrival at Otranto, Frederic's "passion" for Matilda renders him more easily manipulated and thus corruptible.

Manfred's ability to use Matilda as a carrot to wave in front of Frederic stems from a patriarchal system that objectifies women and exploits female bodies. As Matilda's father, Manfred is able to dispose of her as he wishes. As a woman's marriageability was often tied to her physical appearance and virginity, the female body became a form of currency exchanged by wealthy and noble fathers for land, wealth, or power.

> The moment Theodore appeared, the walls of the castle behind Manfred were thrown down with a mighty force, and the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude, appeared in the centre of the ruins. "Behold in Theodore the true heir of Alfonso!" said the vision: and having pronounced these words, accompanied by a clap of thunder, it ascended solemnly towards Heaven, where, the clouds parting asunder, the form of St. Nicholas was seen, and receiving Alfonso's shade, they were soon wrapt from mortal eyes in a blaze of glory.

Related Characters: Alfonso (speaker), Manfred, Theodore

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

After Manfred kills Matilda's (thinking she was Isabella), the castle is beset by an earthquake that drives out its inhabitants. As soon as Theodore goes out into the court, the walls behind Manfred come crashing down, indicating that Manfred's power, residing in the castle walls, is now destroyed.

In the ruins' place appears the giant ghost of Alfonso, fulfilling the ancient prophecy Manfred feared. Alfonso's likeness to Theodore bolsters the ghost's message that Theodore is the rightful ruler of Otranto. Though the other supernatural phenomena in the story are hinted or speculated by the characters to be of divine will, the appearance of Alfonso's ghost, the story's last supernatural phenomenon, is clearly divinely ordained, as the ghost rises to heaven and as St. Nicholas appears "in a blaze of glory." This final divine intervention pushes Manfred, Hippolita, and Frederic to suppress their worldly desires for the sake of their faith, and establishes that with the rise of Theodore to the rulership of Otranto that the order of things ordained by heaven has been set right.

> "Thou guiltless, but unhappy woman! unhappy by my crimes!" replied Manfred, "my heart, at last, is open to thy devout admonitions. Oh! could—but it cannot be—ye are lost in wonder—let me at last do justice on myself! To heap shame on my own head is all the satisfaction I have left to offer to offended Heaven. My story has drawn down these judgements: let my confession atone—but ah! what can atone for usurpation, and a murdered child! a child murdered in a consecrated place!—List, sirs, and may this bloody record be a warning to future tyrants!

Related Characters: Manfred (speaker), Matilda, Hippolita

Related Themes:

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

Repentant for killing his daughter and awed by the appearance of Alfonso's ghost, Manfred is finally ready to atone for his sins and to listen to Hippolita, marking a drastic change from his previous refusal to listen to anything a priest or woman had to say. Confessing his murder of Matilda and the story of how his grandfather usurped the throne, Manfred presents his story as a "warning to future tyrants."

However, one could argue that, because Walpole dismissed the effectiveness of Muralto's "message" in his first preface, Manfred's transformation from a lustful, power-hungry tyrant to a repentant monk seems less a warning against would-be tyrants than a warning against the Catholic religious agenda of an "artful priest." That said, it is never entirely clear just how seriously Walpole takes any of these various layers of the story (the fictional translator interpreting an Italian story by a fictional author who was a Catholic priest), and to what degree he created all of these layers mainly to add mystery and excitement to his effort to write a rollicking good story.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE FIRST EDITION PREFACE

The author of the preface, "William Marshal, Gent.," claims that he found a 1529 copy of *The Castle of Otranto* in its original Italian in the library of an ancient Catholic family in northern England. Marshal claims that the manuscript takes place "in the darkest ages of Christianity" but that the story's language is far from barbaric.

Writing as "William Marshal, Gent.," Horace Walpole poses as the work's translator and discoverer. In this first preface, Walpole begins to set up the novel's "Gothicness" through setting – namely that the story's events occur long ago in a far away country (medieval Italy, to Walpole's British readers).

He dates the story's origins between the first and last crusades (1095-1243) and narrows this down further, proposing that the story takes place before Aragon kings took power in Naples, based on the Spanish names of the story's servants and on "the beauty of the diction, and the zeal of the author (moderated, however, by singular judgment."

Walpole's framing of the story as an ancient tale both lends it credibility and allows him to treat it as a spoof. Part of Walpole's humor is derived from his hyperbolic self-praise. Pretending to be the "translator," Walpole uses his historical knowledge as an antiquarian to make the claim that the author (himself) possesses literary "beauty" and "singular judgment" all the more convincing.

Marshal notes that letters and literature flourished in Italy and speculates that "an artful priest" may have taken advantage of his command of language to "confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstitions," resulting in a work that "would enslave a hundred vulgar minds," more so than any of the books from Luther's time to the time that Marshal is writing (the 18th century).

Indulging in self-praise, Walpole hyperbolically asserts that his language is so powerful that it could "enslave" hundreds of people. At the same time, Walpole (still pretending to be the translator of the text) attributes the effort to "enslave" to the religious agenda of a Catholic priest, an indictment of Catholicism that the Protestants of England would be likely to agree with (and enjoy). The translator's claim that this "artful priest's" writing is more powerful than any book from Luther's time sneakily insinuates the falseness of Catholic superstition compared to the less powerful but more truthful Protestant (or Lutheran) writings.

He claims that the work can only be viewed as an entertainment but still feels the need to defend its supernatural elements, which he notes are rejected by modern (18th century) writers but were not at the time that *Otranto*'s author, "Onuphrio Muralto," was writing. Marshal argues that Muralto's presentation of such elements is consistent with what people would have believed in the time that the story was set.

At the time that Walpole was writing, the story's medieval setting and its associated superstitious beliefs were regarded as barbaric. Walpole's defense of such features in his "translation" of a fictional medieval author's work is presented as a historical artifact rather than as a deliberate use of the supernatural in literature.

He also praises the work's language, the realistic quality of the characters, and the pacing of the story, which is driven by the author's use of terror and pity. He defends a possible objection to the presentation of the servants as too comical, arguing that their "naiveté and simplicity" is key to uncovering important information and to driving the plot forward.

Walpole's praise of the literary qualities of the story serve to make up for the presence of the supernatural, and he further defends his authorship through his presentation of the peasants as simple and superstitious compared to the dignified nobility. However, his defense is not concerned with class distinctions or genre but rather with the utility of the servants as plot devices.

Marshal then defends his own defense and praise of the work by showing that he is aware of the story's faults, most notably the moral of the story: "the sins of the fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation." Marshal claims that the moral is weakened by the story's suggestion that disaster can be avoided by praying to St. Nicholas, and that this was an example of the monk's Catholic religious agenda. Nevertheless Marshal expects his readers will enjoy the story, as its "piety" and "lessons of virtue" make it superior to most romances.

Taking the roles of editor and translator, Walpole, as Marshal, points to the story's faults, which are assumed to be Muralto's religious lesson about the inevitability of doom passed from sinful fathers to future generations (an idea that originates in the Christian Bible) and about Muralto's contradictory lesson that prayer can avert disaster. After he criticizes Muralto's Catholic religious agenda, Marshal then immediately praises the story's "lessons of virtue" – which is perhaps Walpole's recognition (and creation) of the fictional translator's own hypocrisy.

He praises the original Italian version, deprecating his English translation while exalting Muralto's style "as elegant, as his conduct of the passions is masterly." Though he believes the story and its characters are fictitious, Marshal theorizes that the story is set in a real castle, based on the author's detailed description of certain rooms and objects, and invites curious readers to look for the original castle in the works of other Italian writers, claiming that doing so will make *The Castle of Otranto* "still more moving."

In praising the "original" Italian in comparison to his translation, Walpole masks self-praise as self-deprecation, deliberately pointing to an ancient Italian work that he himself created. By hinting that the story is set in Strawberry Hill, the faux-medieval castle he built for himself, Walpole humorously points to himself as the author by setting unsuspecting readers on a wild goose chase for the story's supposedly ancient and original castle.

THE SECOND EDITION PREFACE

Because of the public's acceptance of the book, Walpole wrote a new preface to the second edition of the novel in which he acknowledges his authorship of *Otranto* and apologizes for posing as Marshal and Muralto. He claims that he did so because he was uncertain of the public's reaction, as he was attempting to synthesize for the first time "the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern" — that is, the imaginative fantasy of medieval romance and the realism that had become popular in novels by Walpole's time. The result, according to Walpole, is the natural actions and feelings of his characters in response to supernatural events.

Now writing under his own name, Walpole claims that his anonymous publication of Otranto *was motivated by his wariness of public reaction. Contradicting "Marshall's" argument that the story's supernatural elements were to be expected of a medieval author, Walpole's claim that he is blending medieval and realist genres represents the beginning of his own brand of "Gothic."*

Walpole then expands on the explanation he gave in the first preface for his presentation of the servants. Defending the contrast between the comic quality of the servants and the serious tone of the rest of the novel, he argues that "[his] rule was nature," implying that unlike princes, servants do not lead "grave, important, or even melancholy" lives. He further argues that this contrast makes the noble characters more attractive, and their plotlines more engaging.

Whereas in the first preface, Walpole defended the servants' comicality and naiveté as a matter of plot, here he argues that his representation of the servants was determined by realism and by his desire to make his principal characters more dignified by comparison. By doing so, he simultaneously reinforces class distinctions in genre (where tragedy concerned nobles and comedies often concerned peasants) and exploits his peasant characters for the sake of his noble characters.

He uses Shakespeare as his model, highlighting the comic relief provided by lower-class characters from *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*. Responding to Voltaire's objection to "this mixture of buffoonery and solemnity," Walpole claims Shakespeare's superiority over Voltaire. He also points to a preface from one of Voltaire's earlier works, *Enfant Prodigue*, in which the preface author wrote that there is "un mélange de serieux et de plaisanterie" (or, a mixture of seriousness and jest) in comedy. Walpole argues that if such a mixture can exist in comedy, it can also exist in tragedy.

Walpole's justification for mixing comedy with tragedy is Shakespeare's own mixing of genres. Criticizing Voltaire for criticizing such practices, Walpole exhibits his nationalist literary pride. By comparing one of England's most-renowned writers (Shakespeare) with one of France's (Voltaire), Walpole insinuates the literary superiority of the English over the French. By pointing to the preface of one of Voltaire's early works as proof of his own genre argument, Walpole further discredits Voltaire's later criticisms of Shakespeare.

Though he acknowledges that the author of the preface in Voltaire's book was actually Voltaire's editor and not Voltaire himself, he then claims that they – Voltaire and his editor – are in fact the same person, based on one of Voltaire's previous writings. Walpole then shifts gears, criticizing French poetry in relation to Shakespeare, before telling the reader that he wrote *Otranto* both as "a new species of romance" and as a faint imitation of Shakespeare: "the brightest genius this country, at least, has produced."

Though Walpole does not substantiate his claim that Voltaire is the author of Enfant Prodigue's *preface, such a claim further compares Walpole with Voltaire, since Walpole himself was his own editor, or rather "translator," in disguise. By then criticizing French poetry, by proclaiming Shakespeare's superiority to Voltaire and his French contemporaries, and by claiming that he is imitating Shakespeare, Walpole is implying that his writing, like Shakespeare's, is superior to Voltaire and French poetry.*

CHAPTER 1

Manfred, the prince of Otranto, has two children, a beautiful, virginal 18-year-old daughter Matilda, whom he ignores, and a sickly, unaccomplished 15-year-old son Conrad, whom he favors. At the beginning of the story, Manfred is impatiently waiting for the marriage between his son and Isabella, the daughter of the Marquis of Vincenza. Hippolita, Manfred's wife, previously noted several times the danger of an early marriage for their son, but Manfred only ever responded by blaming her for her supposed sterility. Though Manfred's friends attribute his impatience to the poor health of his son, they are afraid to comment because of Manfred's temper. In contrast, the servants gossip widely that Manfred is trying to avoid an ancient prophecy (that "the **Castle** and Lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it"), despite their inability to see how the prophecy could be connected to Conrad's marriage.

The narrator's description of Matilda as a young, beautiful virgin points to the economic value assigned to virginity — whose associated qualities of marriageability and reproductive utility motivate Manfred's interest in Isabella and his disinterest in his wife Hippolita, who is sterile. However, Manfred still favors his son over his daughter, a sign of his sexism even within an already patriarchal system in which Matilda would be considered valuable currency. Though the peasants are correct in guessing Manfred's motivations for the early marriage, they have no evidence to support their assumption, showing that even if they have a kind of instinctual sense of the truth they are also simple and superstitious in comparison to the nobles, who attribute kinder reasons to Manfred's impatience.

The wedding is set for Conrad's birthday, and on the day of the event, everyone but Conrad is at the chapel. A servant sent to retrieve the young groom rushes back to the chapel in fear and points wordlessly to the court. Everyone is in terror; Hippolita faints, and Matilda and Isabella take care of her, while Manfred goes out to the court, only to discover that a **giant helmet** with black feathers had fallen from the sky and crushed Conrad to death.

As Walpole pointed out in his prefaces, terror drives the story forward. Without knowing what made the servant fearful, everyone in the chapel is in terror. Hippolita even swoons, an act that overwhelmed noblewomen often do in Gothic literature. The cruel irony is that Conrad dies on both his birthday and the day he was to be married, but the manner in which he dies also makes this irony humorous: that he is killed by a giant helmet falling from the sky is utterly absurd. The helmet, the story's first supernatural appearance, also triggers the fulfillment of the prophecy feared by Manfred. The appearance of the giant helmet, combined with the prophecy that the real ruler of Otranto would be "too large" to fit in a castle, suggests that true ruler was the owner of the armor.

Manfred, at first speechless, seems less upset by the death of his favorite child and more interested in the **giant helmet**. Utterly unconcerned for his wife and daughter, his first words are an order to "take care of the Lady Isabella." The servants bring a shocked and distraught Hippolita to her room. Matilda assists her, as does Isabella, who regards Hippolita as a mother and who is secretly relieved not to have to marry Conrad – both because she does not love Conrad and because Manfred's temper toward Matilda and Hippolita terrifies her, despite his unusual kindness towards her.

Though Conrad was his favorite child, Manfred's lack of concern for him suggests that his interest in Conrad was linked more to his marriage with Isabella, which will cement Manfred's family's claim to the throne, than to Conrad himself. Manfred's ominous order to "take care of the Lady Isabella" foreshadows his later sexual advances on Isabella. That Isabella views Hippolita as a mother implicitly poses Manfred as a father figure, albeit one that terrifies her. This de facto father-daughter relationship between Manfred and Isabella makes Manfred's sexual interest in her doubly incestuous, as she was also meant to be his daughter-in-law.

In the court, all of Manfred's attention is on the **giant helmet**. When a young peasant observes its similarity to the helmet on the statue of Alfonso the Good in the church of St. Nicholas, Manfred flies into a rage, grabs the peasant, accuses him of treason, and threatens to kill him. Surprised yet remaining dignified, the peasant easily removes himself from Manfred's grasp and humbly asks what he did wrong. Without responding, Manfred orders his servants to seize him.

The contrast between Manfred's and the peasant's behavior seems at first to contradict the dichotomy that Walpole has set up between the naïve and superstitious peasants and the dignified and refined nobility. That the peasant is observant, dignified, strong, and humble, especially in comparison to Manfred's unwarranted rage, reveals their true natures (spoiler alert): the peasant as Otranto's rightful ruler and Manfred as a usurper who stole the throne.

At that moment, a few peasants returned from the church, confirming that Alfonso's statue was missing its helmet. Panicked and enraged, Manfred accuses the young peasant of killing Conrad through witchcraft and orders his men to imprison the peasant underneath the **giant helmet**. While the other peasants form a mob, cheering Manfred's vilification of the young peasant, Manfred's friends urge him, unsuccessfully, not to pass such a severe and unwarranted punishment.

After the peasant is proved right, Manfred is even more unreasonably angry. His order to have the peasant imprisoned shows that he is not a just ruler, and is more like a peasant than a nobleman – a fact emphasized by the contrast in the other peasants' and noble's reactions. While the other peasants (and Manfred) accuse the young peasant of witchcraft, the nobles recognize how illogical and unfounded their accusation is.

Hippolita, who has regained her consciousness, is now entirely focused on Manfred's wellbeing and orders Matilda to watch over him. Matilda, ever the dutiful daughter, obeys, despite her fear of her father. However, when Manfred opens the door, he is unable to recognize Matilda, asking who she is. When Matilda responds that she is his daughter, Manfred yells at her to leave, saying "I do not want a daughter."

Despite Manfred's cruelty towards her and her sterility, Hippolita is completely devoted to her husband. When she sends Matilda to comfort him, Manfred's inability to recognize his own daughter foreshadows two things: his inability to recognize Isabella as a daughter (and desire to marry her) and another instance later in the book when Manfred will fail to recognize Matilda, with deadly consequences. His declaration that he does not want a daughter suggests both that he wants a son (i.e. a male heir) instead and that he wants Isabella as a wife rather than as a daughter (in order to produce sons).

Not wanting to upset her mother, Matilda returns to Hippolita with news that Manfred is well. A servant arrives, summoning Isabella to speak with Manfred in the gallery. When Isabella arrives, Manfred orders his servant to take away the light. Forgetting Isabella's name, he is at first confused but soon regains his focus, telling Isabella that his son was unworthy of her, renouncing his fondness for his son, and claiming that "the line of Manfred calls for numerous supports."

That Manfred has the light taken away, leaving himself and Isabella in darkness, represents the nefariousness of his plans. Manfred's forgetting of Isabella's name suggests how his mind is overwhelmed by his desires (and also how for him all women are just means to an end). That Manfred forgets Isabella not long after forgetting Matilda also suggests that for Manfred the two of them are connected: that for Manfred Isabella might be a proxy for Matilda, and his desire for Isabella is therefore a stand-in for an even more incestuous desire for his own biological daughter. Manfred's insistence that he requires "numerous supports" – a euphemism for multiple women producing multiple heirs – is sinful both because of his desire for bigamy and because of the incest that would result from such a marriage.

Surprised, Isabella believes that Manfred suspects her lack of love towards Conrad. Isabella tells him not to worry, that she would have been faithful to Conrad had they married and that she will always view Manfred and Hippolita as her parents. Cursing Hippolita, Manfred insinuates that he will be a better husband for her than Conrad, but Isabella, forsaking marriage until her father arrives to arrange another engagement, does not understand until Manfred declares outright his intention to marry her. Despite Isabella's protests that he is her father-in-law and Hippolita's husband, Manfred claims that he is divorcing his wife in order to produce more sons through Isabella. Grabbing a horrified Isabella, he proclaims his intention to have sex with her that night.

At first unsuspecting of Manfred's motives, Isabella's loyalty toward Manfred and Hippolita as parents shows that she is a dutiful daughter and would have been a dutiful wife. Unlike Manfred, Isabella is able to recognize that a marriage between herself and Manfred would not only be incestuous and sinful but also a betrayal of Hippolita. However, Manfred is intent on producing male heirs to extend his family's rule, regardless of the sinful means by which he will try to reach his goals. His desire for power outweighs any care about morality.

Screaming in fear, Isabella runs away but is followed by Manfred, who is momentarily distracted by moonlight shining on the **giant helmet** through the window. Though Isabella claims that Manfred's intentions are against heaven's will, Manfred claims that neither heaven nor hell will stop him. At that moment, while Isabella escapes, a painting of Manfred's grandfather moves out of its portrait and leads Manfred to a room, only to have the door slam shut before he can enter.

As Isabella tries to reason with him that Manfred's attempt to rape her is against divine will, Manfred's pride and worldly desires make him unable to see that he is not as powerful as God. Yet as soon as he declares his superiority to heaven, he is hindered by supernatural phenomena.

Meanwhile, a frightened Isabella is thinking frantically about where to go. Despite her initial instinct, she decides not to go to Hippolita, as she suspects both that Manfred would find her there and that he would kill Hippolita. Remembering an underground passage leading away from the **castle**, she decides to seek sanctuary at the church of St. Nicholas. Her journey to the secret passage is haunted by an eerie silence, howling winds, and the sounds of creaking doors. At the door of the passageway, her lamp is suddenly blown out by the wind and she sees a mysterious figure, whom she fears is the ghost of Conrad.

Isabella's flight from Manfred is fraught with what became typical features of the Gothic novel – these features were inspired by Otranto *itself. Secret passageways, silences, eerie winds and noises, and lights suddenly going out, proliferated not only in Gothic novels but also remain as elements of what might be described as the descendants of Gothic novels: modern horror novels and films.*

However, the figure is a stranger, whose kind voice offers to help Isabella and to protect her from Manfred with his life. Together, Isabella and the stranger open a trap-door, but soon hear the voices of Manfred and his servants. Isabella goes down the stairs before Manfred arrives, but the trap-door slams shut between herself and the stranger. Manfred, believing he will find Isabella, discovers instead the young peasant, who had escaped from the **giant helmet**. Manfred questions the peasant, who spins the truth in order to protect Isabella.

In helping Isabella escape through the trap door (another Gothic staple), the peasant, who was wrongfully imprisoned by Manfred, shows that he is kind and chivalrous. When he helps Isabella escape, his character begins to emerge as the story's hero.

While Manfred contemplates pardoning the peasant, two servants, Diego and Jaquez, arrive in fear. With some difficulty because of their rambling and inarticulate speech, Manfred learns that during the servants' search for Isabella, they encountered a **giant leg in armor** in the court. The peasant expresses interest in pursuing the "adventure," and Manfred, impressed that his bravery is "above [his] seeming," allows the peasant, along with a few servants, to accompany him to Hippolita's apartment.

Once again, Manfred's hunt for Isabella is thwarted by the supernatural, this time in the form of a giant leg in armor. The peasant's bravery, uncharacteristic of a peasant's stature, hints that he is not a peasant at all, but rather a noble. The peasant's interest in "adventure" was typical of medieval knights in chivalric literature.


The narrator then flashes back to Manfred in the moments immediately after Isabella escaped him. Manfred, searching for Isabella in Hippolita's room, rejects his wife's affection, asking only for Isabella. He accuses a confused Hippolita of jealousy, ominously declaring that she will soon understand, and orders her to send him her chaplain before leaving the room.

Intent on marrying Isabella, Manfred is cruel to Hippolita, who nevertheless remains a faithful and devoted wife. The one-sidedness of their relationship is evidence of the patriarchal society they live in.

Back in the present, Manfred meets Hippolita and her chaplain in the gallery. Hippolita, who had been informed by Diego of the **giant leg in armor**, assures him that it was merely a story, though secretly, both Hippolita and Manfred believe it was real. Calmed by Hippolita's kindness, Manfred begins to feel remorse and shame for his treatment of Hippolita and Isabella. However, emboldened by the thought of his wife's submission, he is unable to maintain this state of mind and turns back to "exquisite villainy," now convinced that Hippolita will not only agree to a divorce but convince Isabella to marry him. He then orders his men to guard every exit and orders the peasant to remain in one of the **castle's** rooms to be questioned further the next day.

Hippolita, concerned about her husband, tries to reassure Manfred by denying the supernatural events recounted by the servants. However, by doing so, Hippolita is placing her love for her husband above what is presented in the story as divine will. Emotionally fickle, Manfred almost repents his crimes, but is unable to relinquish his sinful desires. Note how it is his wife's own submissiveness – her behavior as a "model" subservient wife – that pushes Manfred to further sin. In treating Manfred as the ultimate authority, Hippolita enables his sinning.



CHAPTER 2

Now in her own room, Matilda is restless and overwhelmed with emotion at her brother's death, Isabella's disappearance, and the ominous tone and rage Manfred had exhibited toward her mother. Her servant, Bianca, fills her in on the latest gossip about the discovery of the young peasant and the **giant leg in armor**. Matilda, however, is more concerned about Isabella, her mother, and her brother's burial.

The contrast between Matilda and Bianca is another example of the story's distinction between nobles and peasants. While Matilda is focused on the gravity of the story's events, Bianca is more interested in the castle gossip.

When Bianca speculates about Manfred's desire for grandsons, the two women have a discussion about marriage, in which Bianca claims that "all men use their wives," as Manfred does Hippolita, "when they are weary of them," but that "a bad husband is better than no husband at all." Matilda explains that she would much rather become a nun and is thankful that her father has rejected numerous proposals for her. Bianca then teases Matilda for her adoration of a painting of Alfonso, a heroic past ruler of Otranto, but Matilda claims she is not in love with the painting and reveals that her mother has told her to pray at Alfonso's tomb. Despite her mother's lack of explanation for this, Matilda, as a dutiful daughter, does so without question.

Bianca's seemingly contradictory claims that men "use" their wives but that "a bad husband is better than no husband" suggests that in such a worldview, women are meant to be married and to be used, that they are objects. Matilda's gratefulness that her father has rejected marriage proposals for her is darkly ironic, both because Manfred will later be all too ready to trade her off to Frederic for Isabella, and because Manfred's desire for Isabella, arguably a proxy for Matilda, poses similarities to a set of medieval stories –Constance tales – which often involved kings rejecting marriage proposals so that the fathers could fulfill their sexual desire for their daughters.

While the women are talking, they hear a voice from the room below Matilda's. Though Bianca becomes terrified that it is a ghost, Matilda opens a window and realizes that it is a stranger singing. Though they cannot see each other, the stranger reveals himself to be polite, well spoken, pious, and unhappy. Bianca assumes that because he is unhappy, he is in love, and she immediately wants to pry into his life, but Matilda is skeptical of Bianca's reasoning and decides to respect his privacy. However, when the stranger asks about the missing princess, Matilda becomes suspicious that he is spying on her father and ends the conversation.

Once again, the contrast between Bianca and Matilda's behavior reveals their differences in class. Whereas Bianca oversimplifies a situation about which she has no direct knowledge and pries into others' lives, Matilda is more logical and respectful of others' privacy. Even despite her father's strange behavior and temper towards her mother, Matilda maintains her filial loyalty by ending her conversation with the stranger.

Bianca reveals that the servants believe the stranger helped Isabella escape. She insinuates that the stranger is unhappy because he is in love with Isabella and that he may have been responsible for Conrad's death, suggesting that perhaps the stranger is a prince in disguise. Matilda dismisses Bianca's speculations and resolves to question him about Isabella later. Bianca continues to chatter, suggesting that Isabella and the stranger perhaps orchestrated Conrad's death and that Isabella secretly mocked Matilda's aspirations for nunhood. Despite Bianca's gossip, Matilda steadfastly defends Isabella and their friendship.

Like the mob of peasants in Chapter 1, Bianca jumps to conclusions with no evidence. Despite being the confidante of both Isabella and Matilda, Bianca gossips about Isabella to Matilda with little regard for the conflict that her speculations may sow between the two princesses. One of Bianca's wild speculations, however, is correct — the stranger does *turn out to be a prince in disguise, recalling Walpole's assertion in the first preface that the servants often bring to light important parts of the story through their simplemindedness.*

At that moment, a servant interrupts them with the news that Isabella has sought sanctuary at St. Nicholas's church and that Father Jerome of the church is now informing Manfred, who is in Hippolita's room. The narrator jumps to the interaction between Jerome and Manfred, in which Manfred tries to question Jerome alone to prevent Hippolita from learning information he doesn't want her to know. Jerome nearly tells Hippolita why Isabella sought sanctuary, but Manfred interrupts him, claiming that as a priest, he has no business in Manfred's affairs, and that, as a woman, neither does Hippolita. Jerome, however, asserts his status as "minister of a mightier prince than Manfred."

In the story's first interaction between Manfred and Jerome, the two men argue, as they will throughout the story, about who has greater authority. While Manfred asserts that religion has no right to interfere in his rulership, Jerome insists that God's will is greater than any human king's. Manfred's mistake, according to the story's fictional author and Catholic priest Muralto, is to presume that his worldly authority is greater than or equal to divine will. Manfred's impiety is also accompanied by his misogynistic claim that women have no place in politics.

Jerome then passes along a message from Isabella to both Manfred and Hippolita, affirming her compassion for Conrad's loss and her respect for them both as her parents, and requesting their consent to stay at the church. Angry, Manfred refuses and blames the young peasant for Isabella's flight. While Manfred tries to assert his role as Isabella's parent in order to regain her for himself, Jerome repeatedly questions the propriety of such an arrangement, insinuating his knowledge of Manfred's wrongdoings without explicitly informing Hippolita, who decides not to hear anything her husband does not want her to learn. Hippolita goes to her oratory, a private room for prayer, leaving the two men alone.

While Isabella's message to Manfred and Hippolita is meant to assure her own safety, her message also reaffirms her status as Manfred's and Hippolita's de facto daughter, thereby maintaining her filial duty and making clear to Manfred the boundaries that such a relationship entails. However, Manfred refuses to adhere to such boundaries and tries to assert his role as her father in order to become her husband. Jerome's defense of Isabella marks the beginning of his role as her protector in the story. Hippolita's submissive refusal to hear of her husband's suspicious behavior will also recur throughout the novel.

Now in his own room, Manfred has a private discussion with Jerome and claims that his attempt to rape Isabella was motivated by "reasons of state." He tries to bribe Jerome with money for the church into persuading Hippolita to agree to a divorce and become a nun, arguing that his life, his family, and the state of Otranto depend on a divorce and his having a son. Unwilling to betray Isabella even for the good of the church, Jerome accuses Manfred of "incestuous design," and vows to protect Isabella. He urges Manfred to resign himself to God's will.

Attempting to sway Jerome to agree to a sinful divorce, Manfred commits the sinful acts of bribery and lying. Like the mob of peasants, he is illogical, unable to supply a valid reason for his attempted rape of Isabella. Whereas Manfred is willing to commit any sin for the sake of his own power, Jerome refuses to accept his bribe and false excuses in order to protect Isabella.

Realizing that his line of argument isn't working, Manfred backtracks and claims that his desire to divorce Hippolita stems instead from his tortured conscience over the possible illegality and incestuous nature of their marriage. Jerome recognizes Manfred's attempt to manipulate him but decides to play along, as he fears for Hippolita, Isabella, and whomever else Manfred might harm if angered. When Manfred interrogates Jerome about the peasant, Jerome unwisely confirms a romantic connection between the peasant and Isabella, thinking it might help her later.

Manfred once again exhibits his lack of reasoning skills: right after Jerome accuses him of "incestuous design," Manfred feigns remorse over his supposedly incestuous marriage to Hippolita, asking the priest to sanction a divorce so that he will be able engage in yet another incestuous marriage with Isabella. Jerome's ability to see through Manfred's deceit, and Manfred's inability to detect Jerome's foreshadows the novel's later revelation of their true natures, Jerome as a noble and Manfred as a false king.

Seething over the false information Jerome gave him, Manfred has the peasant brought from his room to the great hall for questioning. As Manfred begins to question the peasant, whose name is Theodore, Matilda and Bianca happen to be walking by. Seeing for the first time the stranger with whom she had been talking the night before, Matilda is stunned to realize that the peasant looks exactly like the painting of Alfonso that Bianca had teased her about. Manfred, who is furious about the peasant's supposed love for Isabella, sentences Theodore to death. Overhearing the sentence, Matilda faints, causing Bianca to scream out, "The princess is dead!" Manfred dismisses her "womanish panic" and has Theodore brought out to the court for his execution. Resigned but dignified, Theodore accepts his impending execution but asks for a confessor.

That Theodore looks exactly like Alfonso, Otranto's last king before the rise of Manfred's line, foreshadows his eventual ascension to power. That Theodore is a doppelganger is of little surprise in a work of Gothic fiction – where such things are common –but unlike most doppelgangers, Theodore is good, rather than evil. Just as they were in the first chapter, Manfred angrily delivers Theodore an unjust sentence, and Theodore accepts it with grace and resignation. The contrast between the two represents the fundamental differences of their natures, which contradict their social roles at the moment. Theodore behaves like a noble and will later become ruler, whereas Manfred, who behaves poorly, will later lose his power, which he only gained illegitimately.

When Jerome arrives as a confessor, he realizes that he inadvertently put Theodore in danger. Remorseful, he confesses to fabricating a relationship between Isabella and Theodore, which further angers Manfred. As Theodore kneels down to be executed, his shirt slips over his shoulder and uncovers a birthmark. Jerome recognizes the mark and reveals that he is Theodore's long-lost father and was previously the Count of Falconara. Manfred promises to spare Jerome's son if he brings Isabella back to the castle. Theodore nobly but impetuously declares he is prepared to sacrifice his life. Before Jerome can respond either to Manfred or to Theodore, they are interrupted by the sound of a trumpet outside the **castle** gate. At the same time, the feathers of the **giant helmet** bow down by themselves.

This is the first of the novel's revelations of long-lost fathers and secret identities. Theodore, whose behavior has been described as above his social standing as a peasant, is now revealed to be of noble lineage, suggesting that manners and morals are determined by blood. Manfred, who has exhibited wildly unjust behavior, is by implication, perhaps not of noble blood. The interruption of Theodore's execution is, much like Isabella's escape, facilitated by the appearance of the supernatural. Just as his hunt for Isabella was thwarted by divine will, so is Manfred's decision to execute the true ruler of Otranto.

CHAPTER 3

Shaken by the **helmet's** moving feathers, Manfred seeks an explanation from Jerome, who says that Manfred has angered heaven and must submit himself to the church. At Jerome's request, Manfred agrees to let Theodore live and has Jerome see who is waiting outside the **castle**. The herald outside asks for "the usurper of Otranto," which angers Manfred. Eager to reassert his dominance, Manfred reneges on his promise to Jerome and ransoms Theodore's life in exchange for Isabella.

Just as Manfred almost repented in Chapter 1 for treating Hippolita poorly, he nearly does so again by turning to Jerome's authority. However, once again, he is unable to overcome his pride and hunger for power.

Once Jerome is ushered out and Manfred imprisons Theodore in a tower, the herald announces the reason for his arrival: on behalf of his lord Frederic, he is demanding the safe return of Frederic's daughter, Isabella, who had fallen into Manfred's hands after he bribed her guardians. Frederic also demands control of Otranto, as Frederic is the closest blood relative to Alfonso. The herald challenges Manfred to single combat. The narrator reveals that Manfred was aware of the legitimacy of Frederic's claim over Otranto, and that it was for this very reason that he had tried to unite his line with that that of Frederic through Isabella. Thinking he might be able to convince Frederic to give him Isabella's hand in marriage, and wanting to prevent Frederic from learning anything about Isabella's flight, Manfred invites Frederic's champion into the castle. Meanwhile, Jerome is extremely anxious about the fates of Theodore, Isabella, and Hippolita. These anxieties are only intensified when he reaches the church, where he discovers that Isabella has gone missing again. Jerome deduces that Isabella heard a rumor from one of the monks that "the princess was dead" and fled the church, believing that Manfred had killed Hippolita and would be coming for her next.

The announcement made by the herald reveals that Manfred is even more devious than previously shown. Whereas at the beginning of the novel, Isabella was under the impression that her engagement to Conrad had been arranged by Frederic, here the reader learns that Manfred had bribed her guardians to make the wedding happen. As the herald's claim shows, legitimate rule is determined by bloodlines. Despite the fact that Frederic is the best claimant to the throne, Manfred continually tries to undermine the rules of rightful kingship, just as he does with marriage and religion.

Back at the castle, Frederic's champion has brought a host of knights and servants with him, as well as a **gigantic sabre**, or sword. Manfred claims he will fight Frederic's champion the next day and presents a façade of hospitality, all the while asserting the legitimacy of his rule, trying to gain the knights' confidence first through a friendly feast, then through pity for his recently lost son Conrad. The knights barely respond to Manfred's obviously contrived efforts to appease them, but Manfred continues to talk and begins to discuss his marriage to Hippolita. As he did with Jerome, he claims that his supposedly incestuous marriage has troubled him and that in order to avoid incest and restore Alfonso's line, he intended to marry Isabella, "who is dear to [him] as [his] own blood."

This is the first appearance of the giant sword, the appearance of which helps to fulfill the prophecy about the end of Manfred's lineage. That the sword is a weapon, which is meant to attack, rather than a piece of armor, which is meant to protect, suggests that an abrupt and perhaps violent change will occur. Acknowledging Isabella as "my own blood," Manfred makes the same illogical argument to Frederic's men that he made to Jerome: that he must commit incest in order to avoid incest.

At that moment, Jerome and his fellow friars arrive at the castle, interrupting Manfred's speech. Jerome then reveals to Manfred, as well as to Frederic's knights, of Isabella's flight from sanctuary. Manfred pretends that he himself sent Isabella to sanctuary in the first place, and Jerome, fearing for Theodore's life, decides not to correct him. However, another friar declares that Isabella had in fact escaped from the castle to the church just the night before. One of Frederic's knights then proclaims Manfred's treachery and begins to organize a search for Isabella. Manfred secretly gives orders to contain the knight's men even as he appears to assist him.

Manfred's plans are again thwarted by divine will—however this time, his attempt to assuage Frederic's men are interrupted by monks, rather than by the supernatural. Though the truth about Isabella's escape is revealed, Manfred nevertheless attempts to maintain his control through deceit and sin.

Manfred also gives orders for his men to search for Isabella. But this leaves Theodore's tower unguarded, and Matilda takes the opportunity to rescue Theodore. The two of them instantly fall in love. Matilda offers to send him towards the sanctuary of the church, but Theodore refuses on the grounds that sanctuary is "for helpless damsels, or for criminals." So, instead, Matilda gives him a suit of armor as well as directions toward the caves behind the forest.

By rescuing Theodore from a locked tower, Matilda reverses traditional gender roles – Matilda acts as the usually male knight in shining armor, while Theodore plays the damsel in distress. However, once he is free, he refuses to occupy a normally "feminine" role by dismissing sanctuary as the domain of "helpless damsels, or for criminals," — without recognizing that he himself was helpless and was charged as a criminal (though he was innocent). By giving Theodore the suit of armor, Matilda gives him not only a means of protection but also a symbol of nobility and a masculine token of chivalry, thus returning him to a traditional gender role.

Theodore goes to one of the church's convents to tell Jerome that he is free, but when he arrives he discovers that Jerome is elsewhere and that Manfred's men are searching for Isabella. Gallant and eager for an adventure to prove himself, he races to find Isabella first in order to protect her from Manfred. He soon finds her in the caves to which Matilda had given him directions and vows to protect her. When Isabella is reluctant to retreat further back into the caves with a strange man, he assures her that he is in love with another woman.

Now in the suit of armor and seeking adventure, Theodore is the archetypal chivalric knight from medieval literature. As an archetypal damsel in distress, Isabella is the perfect quest for Theodore to prove his worth as a knight; by doing so, he solidifies his identity as the story's hero.

Not long after, an armed knight approaches the mouth of the cave. Theodore, unaware of the arrival of Frederic's knights, believes that this man is working for Manfred and badly wounds him. Only then does Theodore discover that the knight is Frederic's champion. After confirming that the woman in the cave is Isabella, the knight, believing that he is dying, reveals his secret identity: *he* is Frederic, Isabella's father, and the three of them return to the castle.

The chapter ends with the revelation of another long-lost father in disguise, but this time it is Isabella's father Frederic who appears. Isabella's comment to Manfred in Chapter 1 that she will not marry until her father's return, combined with Frederic's arrival, suggests that another wedding may soon be underway.

CHAPTER 4

The **castle's** doctors examine Frederic's wounds, none of which are life-threatening. As he is being cared for, Frederic meets Hippolita and Matilda, and falls in love with Matilda. And though Matilda's love for Theodore remains, she is uncertain of his love for her because he arrived at the castle with Isabella, who is also clearly in love with Theodore. Wishing to spend more time with Matilda, Frederic tells them all his backstory – that he fought in the Crusades and was captured by "infidels." While captured, he dreamt that his daughter was in danger and that he would learn more about what to do by going to a forest near Joppa. After he was freed, he searched for the forest, as his vision directed him, and was led to a hermit on his deathbed. With his dying breaths, the hermit told Frederic about a secret from St. Nicholas: where to find a **giant sword**. Once Frederic and his men unearthed the sword, they saw that it contained a prophecy saying that "Alfonso's blood alone" can save Isabella at Otranto.

Frederic's desire for Matilda mirrors that of Manfred's for Isabella. Like Manfred, who was unable to recognize his daughter Matilda, Frederic is at first unable to recognize Isabella. Both Manfred and Frederic are fathers who desire each other's daughters, suggesting perhaps a latent incestuous desire for their own daughters. Matilda's uncertainty about Theodore's affection foreshadows her later tense interaction with Isabella.Frederic's arrival at Otranto (and thus an impediment to Manfred's plans) is revealed to have been driven by divine will, that of St. Nicholas. The giant sword contains the second prophecy of the novel, one that further emphasizes Isabella's role as a damsel to be saved.

Manfred arrives and is shocked to see an armor-clad Theodore, whom he mistakes for Alfonso. When Manfred realizes it is Theodore, he is furious that Theodore escaped. Assuming Jerome helped him, Manfred demands to know how Theodore came to be separated from and then reunited with his father. Theodore reveals that he was kidnapped as a child by pirates, along with his mother. Though she died not long after, she left him a note saying that he was the son of the Count of Falconara. He remained the pirates' slave until two years before the story takes place, when a Christian ship set him free. After unsuccessfully searching for his father at his castle and in Naples, he wandered into Otranto and began to work as a farmhand in order to support himself. Frederic vouches for Theodore's bravery, warmth, and honesty, after which they all retire to their rooms.

In telling Manfred how he came to be at Otranto, Theodore confirms his nobility by mentioning a document confirming his identity. As Manfred will later reveal, such documents about bloodlines are especially significant for determining rulership. That the ship that freed Theodore was a Christian ship reinforces the novel's alignment of good and evil with Christian and non-Christian characters.

The next day, Matilda and Isabella decide to meet, as they are both in love with Theodore, who has come between them. Aware that Theodore is in love with Matilda, Isabella decides to encourage Matilda to become a nun as she always wanted, while Matilda wishes to find out from Isabella if Theodore has feelings for her. After some awkwardness in which both women are reluctant to admit their feelings, Isabella confesses that Theodore is in love with Matilda. Both women try to give up their claim to the other for the sake of their friendship, until they are interrupted by the arrival of Hippolita.

Matilda's and Isabella's love for Theodore forms a wedge in their friendship, causing them temporarily to place their jealousy over their better natures. It is only when they relinquish their claim to romantic love that they are able to revert back to their selfless and generous natures. The narrator thus presents romantic love as a divisive, corrupting, and in Manfred's and Frederic's case, potentially incestuous force.

Hippolita, who believes that Otranto will fall into Frederic's hands, announces that she has proposed to Manfred a marriage between Frederic and Matilda in order to unite the claims of both lines. The two young princesses are horrified, especially Isabella, who hints at Manfred's crimes and tells Hippolita that Manfred intends to divorce her. Though she believes in Isabella's innocence, a grief-stricken Hippolita makes excuses for her husband, suggesting that Isabella perhaps misunderstood the situation, and hinting at a disastrous destiny she believes will befall them all. She then resolves to agree to the divorce and to become a nun in one of the nearby convents, believing that this "sacrifice of [her]self may atone for all." When Isabella begins to pray to the angels of heaven that she won't have to marry Manfred, Hippolita stops her, reminding her that her father has authority over her. Despite her newfound awareness of Manfred's crimes, Hippolita refuses to acknowledge them.

Though Hippolita becomes aware of at least some of husband's misdeeds, she refuses to believe them, choosing her devotion to her husband over her conscience. Though Hippolita's proposed resolution, divorce and nunhood, may be a sacrifice in her own eyes, it is exactly what her husband wants and would only make Manfred's attempt to marry Isabella that much easier. That Hippolita stops Isabella from praying to heaven so that she will obey her father first indicates the extent to which Hippolita's priorities are out of order; just as she privileged her husband's wishes over her conscience, Hippolita privileges fatherly authority over divine authority.

Hippolita then finds Jerome in the church, seeking his guidance about the morality of a divorce. At that moment, Jerome is urging his son to suppress his feelings for Matilda, as "a tyrant's race must be swept from the earth to the third and fourth generation." Unused to having to obey a father's orders, though, Theodore finds himself unable to stop loving Matilda. Hippolita asks Jerome to dismiss his son, and once they are alone asks for his opinion about marriages between Matilda and Frederic, and between Isabella and Manfred, as well as her consent to a divorce. Though Hippolita finds both proposals agreeable, Jerome vehemently opposes them, explaining that a divorce resulting in the marriage between Manfred and Isabella would be against heavenly will.

Originating from the Bible, Jerome's declaration about the destruction of a tyrant's race both foreshadows Matilda's death and categorizes it as divinely sanctioned. Theodore's love for her, despite his father's warning, is therefore a struggle between his passion and his piety.

While Hippolita is conversing with Jerome, up at the castle Manfred is proposing to Frederic that they marry each other's daughters. Frederic, tempted by the prospects of eventually ruling Otranto and marriage to Matilda, weakly protests the double marriage for the sake of appearances, but eventually agrees on the condition that Hippolita give her consent.

Like Hippolita and Theodore, Frederic has difficulty controlling his worldly desires for both Matilda and political rule, and is tempted by Manfred's proposal. The double marriage that Manfred proposes would be incestuous not only because of Isabella's position as Manfred's de facto daughter, but also because the marriages would result in entangled in-law relationships already considered incestuous. If Frederic and Manfred were to marry each other's daughters, they would be their own daughters' sons-in-law.

Manfred then immediately seeks out Hippolita, who is still talking to Jerome at the church. As they have done so several times already, Manfred and Jerome engage in a verbal tussle about whether Jerome's religious authority supersedes Manfred's political authority. Manfred, claiming to know the procedures for divorce better than Jerome, leads Hippolita away to speak with her privately. But before he leaves, he secretly orders one of his spies to remain in the church.

Manfred is still unable to recognize the authority of the divine over the worldly, and refuses to recognize any authority that Jerome, as a priest, might have. Meanwhile, Manfred treats the Church as a political entity rather than a spiritual one when he leaves a spy within it.

CHAPTER 5

On their way back to the **castle**, Manfred worries about what he is convinced is a love affair between Isabella and Theodore, but he nevertheless resolves to gain Isabella for himself. He uses every possible argument to convince Hippolita to divorce, only to find that Hippolita readily, though passively, agrees to go through with it. Manfred decides to use Matilda as a bargaining chip to convince Frederic to give him Isabella.

Hippolita's easy agreement to a divorce is both a sign of her wifely submission and of her earlier belief that it will somehow allow her to sacrifice herself to prevent an unspecified disaster for her family. Manfred's decision to use his daughter for his own gains is evidence of a patriarchal society, a system in which women are objectified and exploited by men.

Delighted with his wife's response, he quickly leaves to inform Frederic. On the way back to Frederic, though, he meets Bianca. Knowing that Bianca is Isabella's and Matilda's confidante, he tries to ascertain the exact nature of Isabella's and Theodore's relationship. However, after a long, rambling, and unsatisfactory response from Bianca, Manfred knows little more than he did before. Still, he bribes Bianca with a jewel to spy on Isabella.

Like Jaquez and Diego in Chapter 1, and unlike the novel's noble characters, Bianca rambles inarticulately when responding to Manfred's questions. Her acceptance of Manfred's bribe contrasts with Jerome's earlier rejection of a bribe from Manfred, showing that she, as a peasant, is represented as morally inferior to the story's nobles.

Manfred finally reaches Frederic, but just as he is about to tell Frederic his good news, Bianca bursts in. She is terrified, and in her terror she tells Manfred that as she was going to do her spying she was scared away from Isabella's quarters by the sight of a **giant hand in armor**.

Manfred's plans are again thwarted by the supernatural. The appearance of this divine intervention as a giant hand evokes the "hand of God," a pointedly over-the-top message that Manfred's actions will not be tolerated by the forces of heaven.

Frederic, having learned of Manfred's treacherous spying, now decides not to go through with the double wedding. Manfred, however, tries to sway him by praising his daughter's beauty. Frederic remains tempted by the thought of Matilda, and even more so by the power of ruling Otranto. And yet, he still wavers in his decision, and decides to see if Hippolita truly consented. At that moment, however, an announcement is made that a banquet has been prepared, and Manfred, still hopeful that he can convince Frederic, tries to manipulate him by seating him next to Matilda at the feast and by getting him drunk.

Despite learning of Manfred's deceit, Frederic is still tempted by worldly desire and power. Manfred's attempts to sway him further reveal the gender structures of marriage and power in a patriarchal society. By using his daughter's appearance to tempt Frederic, Manfred appropriates his daughter's body to facilitate an exchange for political rule. Matilda's and Isabella's bodies are currency to these men, both of whom believe that by disposing of their daughters through marriage, they will gain Otranto.

Once the banquet is over, Frederic desires Matilda more than ever and goes to see Hippolita in her oratory in order to confirm her consent. At the oratory, Frederic finds a mysterious cloaked figure kneeling in prayer. However, when he approaches the figure he discovers that it is not Hippolita as he thought, but a skeleton in a hermit's cowl – it is the ghost of the hermit he met in Joppa. The ghost scolds him for subordinating his mission to save his daughter below his own carnal desires and orders him to forget Matilda. Torn between "penitence and passion," Frederic falls in agony to the floor and prays to the saints. Hippolita then arrives to find his motionless body on the floor, and thinking he is dead, screams out. The noise brings Frederic back to his senses, and he exits the room tearfully, hinting at his love for Matilda but leaving Hippolita with little explanation. Heading for his own room, he runs into Manfred, who wants to celebrate with him. But Frederic, still shaken by the apparition, brushes off the drunk and irritable Manfred, who had just been rejected once again by Isabella.

Persuaded by Manfred's temptations, Frederic succumbs to his worldly desires and is stopped only by the ghost's reminder that Frederic's mission was not to hand Isabella over to Manfred but rather to save her from Manfred. Another example of divine intervention in the novel, the appearance of a ghost is also a common feature of Gothic literature. It is worth noting that despite Frederic's temptation for power and lust, the appearance of the ghost does shift him to a new path. This stands in stark contrast to Manfred, who despite being thwarted by the supernatural multiple times, never ceases to focus on his worldly desires. While Theodore serves as a contrast to Manfred by displaying constant nobility to Manfred's constant ignobility, Frederic offers a different kind of contrast: he is similar to Manfred, but his example shows that even one such as he can give himself to heaven rather than pursue only his own worldly desires.

Furious at these rejections, Manfred becomes all the more enraged when his spy at the church informs him that Theodore and a lady are secretly meeting at Alfonso's tomb in the church. Believing that Isabella rejected his sexual advances because of her eagerness to meet Theodore, Manfred decides to spy on them himself. Guided by faint moonlight from the church windows, Manfred is able to sneak up behind the couple undetected. When he hears the couple discuss getting married, his fury rises and he stabs the woman from behind, believing that it is Isabella. However, it is not Isabella but Matilda, his own daughter. Realizing his mistake, Manfred tries to kill himself but is stopped by a few monks, who were drawn to the commotion. Though the monks try to help her, Matilda urges them to help her father instead and insists that she be brought to her mother in the castle.

Manfred's stabbing of Matilda fulfills Jerome's previous warning about her fated destruction. Just as moonlight distracted Manfred from Isabella's initial escape, here it guides Manfred to the murder of his own daughter, suggesting that like Conrad's death by a giant helmet, her death also occurred by divine will. Also note how, earlier in the book, at different times Manfred couldn't recognize Matilda or Isabella. Here he again fails to recognize them, mistaking them for each other, to deadly result. There is a suggestion here that treating women like objects has made Manfred blind in a way that dooms him. Only now that he has killed his daughter does Manfred finally begin to feel real remorse for his actions.

The monks and Theodore are bringing Matilda to the **castle**, with Manfred following behind in despair. Hippolita, who had heard the news, rushes toward the church to find her daughter but faints halfway there and is revived by Isabella and Frederic. In a gesture of daughterly devotion, Matilda clasps the hands of both her mother and her father to her heart, and a remorseful Manfred throws himself on the ground, cursing himself. Worried that Manfred's and Hippolita's emotions will overwhelm Matilda, Isabella takes charge, ordering Manfred to his apartment. She also has Matilda brought to the nearest room in the castle. Though Theodore tries to marry her before she dies, Matilda focuses almost entirely on her mother, forgives her now absent father for killing her, and dies shortly thereafter.

Even on her deathbed, Matilda clings to her filial duty, forgiving her father for killing her. Despite her newfound love for Theodore, Matilda pays more attention to her mother than to him, privileging her love for her mother over romantic love. Isabella's clear-headed decision to take charge of the situation foreshadows her later position as Theodore's wife and princess of the castle.

As Theodore mourns over the body, Isabella is walking Hippolita back to her room, when they meet Manfred in the court. Manfred, who was on his way to see Matilda, realizes that his daughter is dead, and at that moment, the earth rocks and the **giant helmet** clamors. Believing the end of days is here, Frederic and Jerome rush out to the court, dragging Theodore behind them. As soon as Theodore steps out, part of the **castle** walls behind Manfred crash down, and a giant ghost-like image of Alfonso appears over the ruins, declaring that Theodore is the true ruler of Otranto.

That the castle walls fall only behind Manfred suggests that his power as ruler has now fallen apart. The appearance of the giant ghost in the ruins' place signals Manfred's replacement as ruler of the castle by Alfonso's heir, Theodore, and fulfills the prophecy about the rightful owner of the castle having "grown too large to inhabit it."

Everyone in the court falls to the ground in recognition of the "divine will." Hippolita decries "the vanity of human greatness" and declares to Manfred that only retiring to the church's convents will save them. Grief-stricken for his daughter's death, Manfred repents for his crimes and is finally ready to listen to Hippolita. In order to atone, he confesses to killing his daughter in the church and reveals the story of how he came to rule Otranto. His grandfather Ricardo had been Alfonso's chamberlain and, during the Crusades, murdered Alfonso and then forged Alfonso's will in order to gain power. Returning to Otranto, Ricardo's ship was wrecked in a storm, and Ricardo then made a deal with St. Nicholas ensuring his survival and rule over Otranto in return for building a church and two convents dedicated to the saint. St. Nicholas accepted, but also decreed that Ricardo's line would rule only until the rightful ruler grew too large to inhabit the **castle**.

For the first time in the novel, Hippolita criticizes her husband for his pride in worldly power rather than his humility for divine power. Manfred's readiness to repent and to listen to his wife is a marked change from his previous impiety and misogynistic attitudes. His revelation that his grandfather had both murdered the rightful ruler of Otranto and forged a will to obtain power for himself further confirms Jerome's declaration that a tyrant's third and fourth generations will be destroyed. Both Matilda and Conrad (the fourth generation) were killed; however, Manfred (the third generation) is able to escape destruction by praying to St. Nicholas, recalling Walpole's earlier criticism in his first preface about "Muralto's" conflicting moral lessons.

Jerome then completes the story by recounting Alfonso's secret past. Before Alfonso fought in the crusades, he married a Sicilian woman named Victoria, who gave birth to a baby girl who eventually became Jerome's wife. This means that Theodore is a direct descendant of Alfonso. In atonement for his sins, Manfred abdicates the throne and retires to one of the nearby convents to become a monk, while Hippolita retires to the other convent to become a nun. Frederic relinquishes his own claim to Otranto, and offers Theodore Isabella's hand in marriage. Because Theodore is still in mourning for Matilda, he is reluctant at first, but after bonding with Isabella over their shared loss, he eventually decides to marry her.

After Theodore's right to rule is declared by the ghost of Alfonso, Jerome reaffirms this right by confirming his son's bloodline, suggesting that both noble blood and divine will are necessary for "legitimate" rule, evoking the medieval concept of the doctrine of the divine right of kings, in which kings ruled because it was the will of God that they hold the throne. Because of the ghost's declaration, Manfred, Hippolita, and Frederic finally overcome their worldly desires. Theodore's marriage to Isabella unites two families' claims to the throne. As the only surviving and successful marriage in the novel, Theodore's and Isabella's marriage is founded not on romantic love, as was Theodore's relationship with Matilda, but rather on companionship.

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