

1. **Horace Walpole and Transgressive Romanticism** von Prof. Lessenich

Horace Walpole, public man of the world in his father's house in London's Arlington Street and Romantic rebel and solitary in his neo-Gothic mansion in Strawberry Hill close to Pope's Twickenham, famously broke rules and conventions both in his life and literature. Parading his homosexual effeminacy and his rebellion against his father, PM Sir Robert Walpole, he withdrew into the cloistral "gloomth" of Strawberry Hill as well as into the recesses of his own mind, exploring his unconscious by writing a novel from a dream, *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), and a mother-son incest drama from his awareness of the weakness of reason when challenged by dark erotic impulses, *The Mysterious Mother* (1768). Regressive and transgressive, the Gothic was an expression of both Enlightenment and Romantic disillusionism, contesting the optimistic eighteenth-century doctrine of man's rational autonomy and spurning the Neoclassical rules of decorum and probability.

2. **The politics of Otranto: Whiggism and the politics behind Walpole's 'The Castle of Otranto'** von Julia Pelger

It is said that Horace Walpole not merely inherited his father's title, but also his political sympathies, thus was a supporter of Whiggism. This political attitude also shows in what is considered Walpole's most famous work, *The Castle of Otranto*, which is considered the archetype of the Gothic story as it would be written in the following decades. But there is a historical and political aspect to the Gothic often ignored in contemporary analyses of *The Castle of Otranto*: Whigs steadily emphasized English nationalism as related to the Goths, consequently opposed to Roman Catholicism and Tory monarchism. Thus, Whiggish nationalism rather drew parallels to northern heritage and vigorous character attributed to the Goths than "to Roman enervation and corruption".<sup>1</sup> Gothic styled elements in the architecture of mansions and villas created by Whigs bear most evident proof of this identification with the Gothic past. Simultaneously, there is awareness of the destructive character of Gothic invasions. The cult of ruins acknowledges the loss that comes along with English rebellion against tyranny. Against this background, three aspects of Otranto shall be regarded closer concerning Whiggish political ideas and their establishment in Gothic literary aesthetics:

- (1) The Castle itself and its ghostly apparitions: despite appearing to epitomize medieval superstition, the spectres are connected to liberalism as they oppose Manfred's tyranny.
- (2) The characters and the hegemony of Otranto: pure lineage and ancient heritage overcome treacherous hegemony.
- (3) Protestant Christianity and divine prophecy: truth, honesty and obedience to divine will are the conditions authorizing the reign of a king.

Finally, Walpole's attempts to criticize or nuance the political implications of Otranto shall conclude the talk.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Nick Groom: Gothic Contexts, in: Horace Walpole: *The Castle of Otranto*. Oxford e.a.: Oxford University Press 2014.

### **3. Deviant Sexualities - the Monstrous and the Queer in Walpole's "The Castle of Otranto" von Sarah Hofmann**

The Gothic Romance, which is in itself a rather rebellious genre, allowed for the expression of consciously and unconsciously repressed desires. The repressed would return in the form of the monster, which embodies what is repressed in us, and further turns the society's dominant norms upside down. Thus, the monstrous appearance serves as a mirror image that is held up to the society in which it occurs.

As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has noted, "the Gothic was the first novelistic form in England to have close, relatively visible links to male homosexuality ..."<sup>2</sup> As Horace Walpole's "The Castle of Otranto" abounds with sexual imagery, this paper will attempt a queer reading of the text and look for traces of the monstrous and the queer in this foundational text of the Gothic tradition.

### **4. "It is good, because it's awful" - The Castle of Otranto as Camp von Max Stottrop**

Horace Walpole's 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto* is regarded to be the first Gothic novel, characterizing a whole genre and generations of writers to come. Two hundred years later Susan Sontag publishes her first essay *Notes on Camp*, which gave her immediate recognition in the intellectual world. In it, she argues that the eighteenth century can be seen as the origin of campiness. Camp, as a term to describe a certain aesthetic, was introduced in 1909 and denoted amongst other things ostentatious, exaggerated, and theatrical. This paper will give an introduction to the theory of Camp and how it developed from Sontag to Kundera and set the boundaries between kitsch and camp. In the second part, this paper will apply Sontag's characteristics on *The Castle of Otranto* and look for plot lines and characters to showcase campiness and ultimately prove Sontag's thesis.

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<sup>2</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.