

You would, by now, have read *The Castle of Otranto* and the Prefaces to the first and second editions of the novel. As I hope to show in this video, they're almost as significant as Walpole's novel itself. What I want to focus on in this video is the Preface to the first edition of the novel, and then, in the second video, on the second Preface. I am using Nick Groom's recent edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, published by Oxford University Press in the 'Oxford World's Classics' series in 2014, so this is where my particular page references in this session are taken from. Turn, in whatever edition you are using, to the title page. As it reads, *The Castle of Otranto, A Story. Translated by William Marshal, Gent. From the Original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto, Canon of the Church of St. Nicholas at Otranto*. How, in these few lines, is the text presented to us? Do you notice that *The Castle of Otranto*, when it first appeared in late 1764, presented itself not as a story of modern, eighteenth-century provenance, but as a reissued translation of a work that was originally published in Italian, and written, so the title-page tells us, by someone named Onuphrio Muralto? Of course, this amounts to a crafty concealment of Walpole's own authorship, something that you might like to think about a little more in the discussion-thread after this video. Significant, too, is the fact that Walpole did not, as is commonly thought, publish *Otranto* at his own printing press at Strawberry Hill – this would, I think, have been too much of a give-away of its author's identity – but rather through the London-based publisher, Thomas Lowndes. When we turn to the 'Preface' to the first edition, we see Walpole continuing this hoax, in claiming that, as the opening lines read, 'The following work was found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England'. Why is this jarring, do you think? Well, I think that, in the eighteenth century, a time when British national identity was self-consciously Protestant, the notion of an 'English Catholic' would have inspired some alarm, and if not alarm, then at least a sense of unease or caution, a sense of 'otherness', perhaps, in the reader. For the eighteenth-century mind, there's almost something oxymoronic in the phrase 'English Catholic': since the Glorious Revolution of 1688, an event that we spoke about in last week's session, Britain had become a staunchly Protestant country, these credentials enforced by the Act of Union of 1707. Before us is a fiction, so the 'translator' William Marshal claims, that was first printed at Naples, Italy, 'in the black letter' – and what he means by 'the black letter' is the Gothic font or 'type', one of the meanings that we saw attached to the term 'Gothic' in last week's session. The story, he claims, was printed in the year 1529: why is this important? Well, I think the answer here is that, as Walpole well knew, the year 1529 was a crucial one in the English Reformation. More specifically, the year 1529 marked that year in which Thomas More, an ardent voice in the counter-Reformation, published his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, a defence of the Catholic religion and a refutation of the Reformist theologies of Luther. Walpole continues with this theme of counter-Reformation a little later on in the Preface when he says the following:

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 endeavour to turn their own arms on innovators; and might avail himself of his abilities as an author to confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstitions. If this was his view, he has certainly acted with signal address. Such a work as the following would enslave a hundred vulgar minds beyond half the books of controversy that have been written from the days of Luther to the present hour. (Preface, p. 5)

Note how Walpole, here, sketches out a combat between two different ideological positions: the first, that of the Reformers, the bearers of Enlightenment and the Reformed Protestant Religion, and the second, the forces of the Catholic counter-Enlightenment. *The Castle of Otranto*, he suggests, is part of the latter, a text that, issuing from what he earlier in the Preface calls the 'darker ages of Christianity', has the power to 'enslave a hundred vulgar minds' with superstition. As we recall, it has been kept, between 1529, the year of its printing, and the present moment of late 1764, in the library of a Catholic family. In all its concerns with ghosts, goblins, enchantments, and other mysterious happenings, *The Castle of Otranto* is offered as a fragment of the benighted medieval past or 'dark ages', a Catholic text that seeks to unravel the advancements brought by the Protestant Reformation.

[Back to DT on screen] Its time of writing, William Marshal or Walpole the translator claims, is probably somewhere 'between 1095, the aera of the first crusade, and 1243, the date of the last', also the time of its apparent setting. Despite its antique origins, William Marshal, Walpole's assumed guise as translator, feels that some sort of 'apology' is necessary. As he writes,

Even as such, some apology for it is necessary. Miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams, and other preternatural events, are exploded now even from romances. That was not the case when our author wrote; much less when the story itself is supposed to have happened. Belief in every kind of prodigy was so established in those dark times, that an author would not be faithful to the *manners* of the times who should omit all mention of them. He is not bound to believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as believing them. (Preface, p. 6)

Do you notice, here, how Walpole is sketching out a sense of the past in this section of the Preface? That period in history known as the 'Middle Ages' was, to his mind, a time not only of superstitious darkness, but also, he suggests, a time in which people actively believed in the miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams, and other 'supernatural' events such as those that are depicted in his story. This dark, benighted and superstitious past, he suggests, is different from the 'rational' present of England in the 1760s, a time when the 'marvellous', he suggests, no longer exists, not even in romances. We'll be looking at what he means by the term 'romance' in our next video, but notice, for the moment,

the strong historical vision of the medieval past in operation in the first Preface, and how Walpole is constructing a particular vision of the past through this framing technique of the discovered document.

There are a few other important issues in the first Preface to *The Castle of Otranto* to which I would like to draw your attention. The first is the following claim: 'Yet I am not blind to my author's defects. I could wish he had grounded his plan on a more useful moral than this; that *the sins of the fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation.*' Though, William Marshal the translator tells us, this is a work of 'entertainment', it is not without its moral meanings or messages, a moral, he claims, grounded in Christian theology derived from the Biblical, old-testament books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. I want us to consider this very carefully, not only for its mixing of mere entertainment with strong and serious moral imperative, but also because, in this claim, Walpole sets up a convention of Gothic writing that will become extremely influential from this moment onwards. In fact, from the eighteenth century, and right up to horror films of our own day, Gothic often draws upon the trope of the 'sins of the father' being visited on their children 'to the third and fourth generation', particularly if, by 'sin', we no longer mean it in the Biblical sense, but rather such secular terms as abuse, violence, misdemeanour, cruelty, and the such like. This is one of the most influential claims made in the first Preface, I think. Another issue to which I would like to draw your attention is the closing claim in the first Preface that 'The scene is undoubtedly laid in some real castle'. As we shall soon discuss, this particular claim would point readers of the novel directly towards Strawberry Hill, Walpole's own Gothic castle, when he disclosed his authorship of the novel in the second edition of 1765.