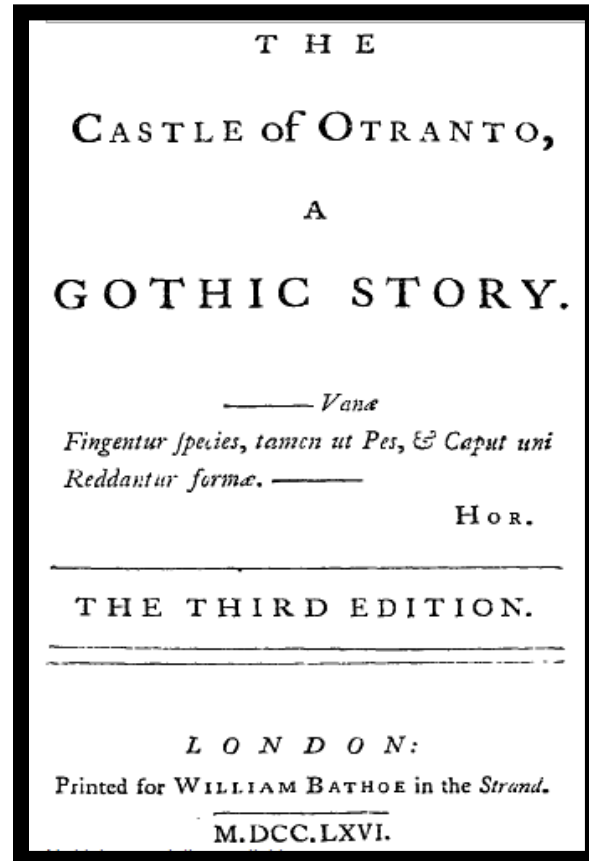


From *The Castle of Otranto* (Horace Walpole, 1764)



[following are a few excerpts from the early portions of the novel, available at Gutenberg.org – bolded sections show particularly clear examples of story elements that later came to be identified as characteristically Gothic]

[...] “Curse on Hippolita!” cried Manfred. “Forget her from this moment, as I do. In short, Lady, you have missed a husband undeserving of your charms: they shall now be better disposed of. Instead of a sickly boy, you shall have a husband in the prime of his age, who will know how to value your beauties, and who may expect a numerous offspring.”

“Alas, my Lord!” said Isabella, “my mind is too sadly engrossed by the recent catastrophe in your family to think of another marriage. If ever my father returns, and it shall be his pleasure, I shall obey, as I did when I consented to give my hand to your son: but until his return, permit me to remain under your hospitable roof, and employ the melancholy hours in assuaging yours, Hippolita’s, and the fair Matilda’s affliction.”

“I desired you once before,” said Manfred angrily, “not to name that woman: from this hour she must be a stranger to you, as she must be to me. In short, Isabella, since I cannot give you my son, I offer you myself.”

“Heavens!” cried Isabella, waking from her delusion, “what do I hear? You! my Lord! You! My father-in-law! the father of Conrad! the husband of the virtuous and tender Hippolita!”

“I tell you,” said Manfred imperiously, “Hippolita is no longer my wife; I divorce her from this hour. Too long has she cursed me by her unfruitfulness. My fate depends on having sons, and this night I trust will give a new date to my hopes.”

At those words he **seized the cold hand of Isabella, who was half dead with fright and horror**. She shrieked, and started from him, 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**. Isabella, who gathered courage from her situation, and who dreaded nothing so much as Manfred’s pursuit of his declaration, cried—

“Look, my Lord! see, Heaven itself declares against your impious intentions!”

“Heaven nor Hell shall impede my designs,” 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.

[...]

“Lead on!” cried Manfred; “I will follow thee to the gulf of perdition.”

The spectre marched sedately, but dejected, to the end of the gallery, and turned into a chamber on the right hand. Manfred accompanied him at a little distance, full of anxiety and horror, but resolved. As he would have entered the chamber, the **door was clapped to with violence by an invisible hand**. The Prince, collecting courage from this delay, would have forcibly burst open the door with his foot, but found that it resisted his utmost efforts.

“Since Hell will not satisfy my curiosity,” said Manfred, “I will use the human means in my power for preserving my race; Isabella shall not escape me.”

The lady, whose resolution had given way to terror the moment she had quitted Manfred, continued her flight to the bottom of the **principal staircase**. There she stopped, not knowing whither to direct her steps, nor how to escape from the impetuosity of the Prince. The gates of the castle, she knew, were locked, and guards placed in the court. [...]

As these thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, she recollected a **subterraneous passage which led from the vaults of the castle to the church of St. Nicholas**. Could she reach the altar before she was overtaken, she knew even Manfred’s violence would not dare to profane the sacredness of the place; and she determined, if no other means of deliverance offered, to shut herself up for ever among the holy virgins whose convent was contiguous to the cathedral. In this resolution, she seized a lamp that burned at the foot of the staircase, and hurried towards the **secret passage**.

The lower part of the castle was hollowed into **several intricate cloisters; and it was not easy for one under so much anxiety to find the door that opened into the cavern**. An awful

silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which, grating on the rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness. Every murmur struck her with new terror; yet more she dreaded to hear the wrathful voice of Manfred urging his domestics to pursue her.

[...] She **shuddered, and recoiled** a few paces. In a moment she thought she heard the step of some person. Her **blood curdled**; she concluded it was Manfred. Every suggestion that horror could inspire rushed into her mind. She condemned her rash flight, which had thus exposed her to his rage in a place where her cries were not likely to draw anybody to her assistance. Yet the sound seemed not to come from behind. [...] Fortifying herself with these reflections, and believing by what she could observe that she was near the mouth of the subterraneous cavern, **she approached the door that had been opened; but a sudden gust of wind that met her at the door extinguished her lamp, and left her in total darkness.**

Words cannot paint the horror of the Princess's situation. [...] For a considerable time she remained in an agony of despair.

At last, as softly as was possible, she felt for the door, and having found it, entered trembling into the vault from whence she had heard the sigh and steps. It gave her a kind of momentary joy to perceive an imperfect ray of clouded moonshine gleam from the roof of the vault, which seemed to be fallen in, and from whence hung a fragment of earth or building, she could not distinguish which, that appeared to have been crushed inwards. [...]

“Oh!” said Isabella, hastily interrupting him; “help me but to find a **trap-door that must be hereabout**, and it is the greatest service you can do me, for I have not a minute to lose.”

Saying a these words, she felt about on the pavement, and directed the stranger to search likewise, for a smooth piece of brass enclosed in one of the stones.

“**That,**” said she, “**is the lock, which opens with a spring, of which I know the secret.** If we can find that, I may escape—if not, alas! courteous stranger, I fear I shall have involved you in my misfortunes: Manfred will suspect you for the accomplice of my flight, and you will fall a victim to his resentment.”

“I value not my life,” said the stranger, “and it will be some comfort to lose it in trying to deliver you from his tyranny.”

“Generous youth,” said Isabella, “how shall I ever requite—”

As she uttered those words, a ray of moonshine, streaming through a cranny of the ruin above, shone directly on the lock they sought.

“**Oh! transport!**” said Isabella; “**here is the trap-door!**” and, taking out the key, she touched the spring, which, starting aside, discovered an iron ring. “Lift up the door,” said the Princess.

The stranger obeyed, and beneath appeared some stone steps descending into a **vault totally dark.**

“**We must go down here,**” said Isabella. “Follow me; dark and dismal as it is, we cannot miss our way; it leads directly to the church of St. Nicholas.