

Introduction

Miles Leeson with Emma V. Miller

Literature has always had a fractious and convoluted relationship with the depiction of incest. From the sexual relations between Lot and his daughters in Genesis to the stories of Byblis, Myrrha and Philomela – perhaps best known today through Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* – tales of incest have been disseminated for thousands of years. In the myths and legends we associate with Western culture, incest has continually played a significant role. A number of versions of the fall of King Arthur, including those described in *The Post-Vulgate Cycle* and Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* indicate that the eventual demise of Camelot can be traced to Arthur’s incestuous liaison with his sister.¹ Incest, in this instance, can be interpreted as a political metaphor whereby the behaviour or the condition of the monarch, reflects upon the state of the nation.² In the Renaissance, incest in literature was, as Elizabeth Archibald puts it in relation to Shakespeare’s *Pericles*, ‘intertwined with the theme of good and bad kingship ... In Renaissance drama the incestuous protagonists tend to drag everyone else down with them as for instance in Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s A Whore* and Middleton’s *Women Beware Women*. There can be no recovery from consummated incest in these plays; villains and victims alike must die.’³ For the Romantics, in the words of Percy Shelley, incest ‘may be the excess of love or hate’,⁴ and incest appears repeatedly as a motif in both Romantic and Gothic writing, as a depiction of forbidden desire and of horror, from Matthew Gregory Lewis’ infamous tale of sexual transgression, *The Monk* (1796), to the yearning of a sister for her brother in Chateaubriand’s novella, *René* (1802), to Shelley’s depiction of father–daughter abuse in his tragedy, *The Cenci* (1819). Indeed, although often not explicitly depicted, incest has been read in the literature of gothic-romance throughout the Victorian age, in fictions such as Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897).⁵ As Paul A. Cantor asserts ‘incest epitomizes the transgressive force of the Gothic, its implacable urge

to go beyond all boundaries, especially the bounds of conventional law and morality.⁶ Literature has provided readers with a means to consider this ultimate taboo, to enforce the prohibition, to find a means to narrate suffering, sometimes to provide comfort, but also to cause a sensation, and even as a trope to explore something else entirely.

Building upon the integral role that incest has had in literary history, this collection of essays focuses on the variety of approaches that fictional practitioners have undertaken in the last sixty years or so to highlight the varying notions of incest that are inextricably linked to the contemporary debate. The diverse range of literary treatments of incest in this collection include: as a Freudian theory of adolescent developmental fantasy; as sexual abuse; as a conceit for political adaptation; as a tool for discussing and investigating cultural identity – but this is not an exhaustive list. Indeed, this collection is interested in the multifarious nature of the depiction of this most sensitive and controversial of taboos within contemporary literature, and how current psychological and sociological debates have informed current artistic practice and fictional poetics. The research in this volume addresses a variety of media and cultural figures, all of whom – implicitly or explicitly – have highlighted something important about the incest taboo. Our collection emerges from historical representations of, and discourses about, incest, but it also aims to engage dynamically with contemporary debate, and to examine critically how recent cultural and artistic considerations of incest have evolved from those of the past.

Beth Bailey has stated that, ‘While notions of childhood innocence were first clearly articulated in the 1760s and did not reach their sentimental apogee until the early nineteenth century, by the mid-eighteenth century, historians can already find a ‘new feeling for childhood,’ most particularly in relation to sexual crimes.’⁷ She writes of the increase in accusations of rape committed on ‘prepubescent girls’ between the 1600s and the end of the 1700s in Paris and states that even so, ‘charges of incest were almost non-existent.’⁸ Bailey dates the ‘first child protection organization’ as originating in New York in 1874⁹ and just over two decades later, Freud made his proposal that hysteria resulted from sexual abuse in infancy. Debates about raising the age of consent in the UK and the USA also intensified during this period. The age of consent in the UK was increased ‘from ten to twelve in 1861’, ‘then again to thirteen in 1875’.¹⁰ However, parliament resisted raising it to sixteen until a journalist named W.T. Stead brought the plight of child sex workers such as Elizabeth Armstrong to public attention in the 1880s. Armstrong was just thirteen when she was bought with the intention of using her as a sex worker and then subdued using chloroform.¹¹ As historian, Lloyd deMause, observed in 1976, ‘[t]he history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to emerge. The further back in history one goes, the lower the

level of child care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorised, and sexually abused.¹²

Concern about child abuse in the UK can perhaps be traced even further back, to what is thought to be the first 'reference to an age of consent' in 1275.¹³ Kathryn Cullen-Dupont explains how in the United States the age of consent 'was originally set at ten by common law' until 1864 when pressure from women's rights activists provoked change. Cullen-Dupont expands on this with an overview of the history of consent in the States, saying that Oregon was first to increase the age of consent to fourteen, but in some areas the reaction to women's campaigns was not to raise the age but to lower it, with Delaware amending it in 1872 to just seven years of age. Delaware did eventually increase the age of consent to fifteen 'but on the condition that rape be treated as a misdemeanour.' Similarly, 'Wisconsin raised the age of consent to fourteen in 1887 in response to women's demands', yet just twenty-four months later the state reacted to 'male complaint' and subsequently 'reduced both the age of consent (to twelve) and the punishment' with a proviso that there should be 'a lighter sentence "if the child shall be a common prostitute."¹⁴ Yet, while the campaigns to protect children from sexual offences were gaining in momentum, specific legislation on the subject of incest did not appear until the twentieth century. The Punishment of Incest Act was passed in England in 1908, but Scotland did not criminalise incest until 1986,¹⁵ yet it was not until the 2003 Sexual Offences Act that the specific offences of 'sexual activity with a child family member and inciting a child family member to engage in sexual activity' were created.¹⁶ As Judith V. Becker and Emily M. Coleman explain, 'the social problem of incest has been clouded by many myths. Initially, it was believed that incest was limited to certain geographical areas (e.g. Appalachia) and to only lower socio-economic families. Incest was thought to occur only once or twice and not to be an ongoing pattern.'¹⁷ Yet, even when the Kinsey Reports were published in two volumes in 1948 and 1953 respectively, and their findings on the sexual behaviour of American citizens, 'shocked experts and the public alike'¹⁸, as Judith Herman asserts, '[t]he public, in the judgement of these men, was not ready to hear about incest'.¹⁹ The Kinsey Reports were the work of a group of researchers led by Indiana University zoologist, Alfred Kinsey, and their findings suggested that 'the majority of the nation's citizens had violated acceptable moral standards as well as state and federal laws in pursuit of sexual pleasure.'²⁰ Yet, Judith Herman writes that, '[w]hile Kinsey and his associates dared to describe a vast range of sexual behaviours in exhaustive detail ... On the subject of incest, apparently, they felt the less said the better.'²¹ It is difficult to believe now that while some aspects of the report were received with shock, the statistic that '24 per cent of white, middle-class married women reported sexual abuse ... was downplayed',²² and even when another work detailing

the prevalence of incest was published in 1955, S. Kirson Weinberg's *Incest Behaviour*, 'no sensation, in fact no public response of any kind, attended its publication.'²³

During this period, even when it was accepted that intrafamilial sexual abuse had occurred, blame was in a number of cases directed to other members of the family, including underage victims, as Joseph E. Davis writes:

In fact without denying the pathology of the 'incest prone' father ... for some systems theorists it was the mother who despite her formal innocence in the sexual events, actually served as the 'cornerstone in the pathological family system' ... By effecting the role reversal with the daughter, by refusing sex with the father, and by denying the incest, the mother 'set up' the incest and made its perpetuation possible.

He goes on to describe how '[i]n the family systems model, the daughter was seen to play a complying role in the incest behaviour. She returned hostility, theorists argued, to her overly demanding mother and helped to reverse their roles'.²⁴ The emphasis on a perceived family rivalry has clear echoes in Freud's Oedipus complex theory. In *A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory*, the psychologist and psychoanalyst, John Bowlby suggests that Freud's change of direction, led to 'the concentration in analytic circles on fantasy and the reluctance to examine the impact of real-life events', something he states, 'has much to answer for'.²⁵ Developing his argument he writes:

It is not an analyst's job, so the conventional wisdom has gone to consider how a patient's parents may really have treated him, let alone to entertain the possibility, even probability, that a particular patient may have been the target for the violent words and violent deeds of one or both of his parents. To focus attention on such possibilities, I have often been told, is to be seduced by our patients' prejudiced tales.²⁶

However, it is Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson's *The Assault on the Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (1984) that has perhaps become the best-known polemic on Freud's rejection of the Seduction Theory. Masson highlights the 'icy reception' Freud describes when he presented the findings that led to 'The Aetiology of Hysteria', and how Freud states that fellow psychiatrist, Richard von Krafft-Ebing likened his theory to, 'a scientific fairy-tale'.²⁷ Masson quotes Freud detailing how shortly after he had presented his ideas, he felt 'isolated', and that he had 'written down in full' his ideas '[i]n defiance of my colleagues'.²⁸ However Freud might have come to his decision to so dramatically alter his professional stance, as Florence Rush asserts in her critique of Freud, 'The Freudian Cover-Up', his choice went on to profoundly influence the way that reports of sexual violence in the home were received by professionals and the general public alike.²⁹

Proving the occurrence of incest, like many sexual crimes, relies heavily upon the testimony of the victim, and therefore upon convincing the listener or reader of this testimony to believe their account. Yet, even if the actuality of incest is not disputed in general, individual narrators still must contend with a multitude of further challenges, as Chris O'Sullivan and Deborah Fry explain: 'Children often do not disclose sexual abuse because they believe the situation is normal, blame themselves, are afraid of the consequences, and/or fear they will not be believed. These barriers to reporting are often reinforced by the perpetrator.'³⁰ Furthermore, as Vikki Bell details, 'the incest prohibition' has been viewed 'as a gateway which once passed, takes one into a world of deviancy and illusions. ... [I]ncest is seen as a problem that will lead to the female survivor becoming a "problem" for society (she will become "anti-social").'³¹ This suggests a cyclical problem, whereby even if a victim's account is believed they may then be subject to being judged themselves.

However, a cultural shift is identifiable in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Building concern regarding women's rights at this time, in their intimate relationships as well as in the wider sphere, helped to direct the conversation towards the rights of children, as '[f]eminists linked spousal abuse with child abuse'³². Nancy Whittier has described how, although

[f]eminists continued to cast child sexual abuse as a crime against women and an example of the pervasiveness and violence of men's control of women' rather than 'as a unique issue. As activists in various locations began to expand their analysis of and work against child sexual abuse, and as the growing national women's movement brought them into increasing contact with each, the events and institutions in the late 1970s laid the groundwork for a broader movement against abuse in the 1980s.'³³

In 1971 John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* was instrumental in the debate of 'what is owed to children as a matter of justice'³⁴ and in 1973 C. Hardman published an article calling for children to be viewed 'as people to be studied in their own right, and not just the receptacles of adult teaching'.³⁵ Later in the same decade, during the International Year of the Child (1979), Michael Freeman gave a public lecture where he concentrated 'for the first time directly on children's rights' and 'identified "rightlessness" as a root cause of child abuse.'³⁶ However, it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that the 'paradigm shift' in attitudes on children's rights happened,³⁷ a change that was signified by the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989).

As discussions surrounding the occurrence of incest as a social reality grew amongst feminist writers, so did the number of other kinds of publications, including Maya Angelou's autobiography of her own experience of abuse in the home, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) and in 1972 Virginia

Woolf's memoirs, 'A Sketch of the Past' and '22 Hyde Park Gate' were released in full. Literary works concerned with incest also proliferated, with examples such as: Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955 Paris & 1958 New York), Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), Nabokov's *Ada or Ardor* (1969), Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* (1978) and Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1991), to name just a few.³⁸

However, despite developments in medical and cultural understanding of the reality of sexual abuse in the West, recent news coverage has revealed it has still continued to be prevalent. News coverage of events alleged to have occurred at the BBC (specifically the Savile cases but other investigations are on-going)³⁹ in the UK during the 1950s and 1960s illustrates how attitudes to accusers, victims and/or survivors of sexual abuse has altered very recently in many ways. In Austria in 2008, the Fritzl case, concerning the systematic imprisonment and incestuous rape of Elisabeth Fritzl by her father Joseph, resulting in seven offspring and one miscarriage, highlighted both the shocking nature of repeated, forced incest and also the changing media dynamic. A great deal of attention was – rightly – paid to the case due to the chain of events over twenty-four years which, to the media, was the direst apogee that incest could attain, with *Der Standard* reporting: 'The whole country [Austria] must ask itself just what is really, fundamentally going wrong.'⁴⁰

That Freud chose to name his theory of sexual development and incestuous fantasy after a mythical literary character has further complicated the relationship between the real life occurrence of intra-familial abuse and the literary depiction of incest. The Oedipus complex is a term used – and indeed misused by the media and others – in everyday discourse today, yet it undermines the actuality of sexual violence in the home, both in its definition and also by its reference to Oedipus. It suggests that incest is a fiction and also undercuts the power of fiction to educate and assist: the damage is two-fold. However, literature has been instrumental in helping to break through the taboo of talking of incest and thereby paving the way for survivors of abuse to speak out. It has also undoubtedly assisted in helping survivors find a space within the existing narratives to tell a different account of the experience of incest. Indeed the rise of autobiographical work by incest survivors is a growing area of publishing – Elisabeth Fritzl is, according to a report in the *Austrian Times*, writing hers for publication⁴¹ – and this too is an area ripe for academic discussion. Until very recently literature on incest generally did one of the following: disguised incest as something else so that it was suggested rather than made explicit in the text; depicted it as a historical rather than a current possibility; indicated that it could only be seen as an allegory for a political problem; or presented it in erotic rather than abusive terms. In order to seek assistance, those suffering from abuse required a means to explain

their experiences, a way of speaking of what was for many years unspeakable, and literature helped to shape a means to do this, both in terms of finding a new way of telling but also by providing re-readings and rewritings of existing motifs of incest. Where literature, though, arguably encounters problems, is, ironically, in its inherently fictional nature. A work of fiction may be able to explore and project the actual experience of an individual more effectively than many other means, it may be able to reach a wide audience and thereby influence a great number of people but how can a mode of art – that is in its very name fictive – assist those whose voices are most doubted? Literature may have increased awareness of incest in society, but whether it will ultimately assist or hinder the furtherance of understanding of the circumstances of incest becomes less clear with every development in the field.

This is a crucial concern, and raises questions about the very purpose of literature and its moral and social responsibility. Such concerns specifically connected to incest and trauma became more problematic in the 1990s with the allegations of False Memory Syndrome (FMS). Supporters of the FMS movement suggested that individuals had been coerced by their therapists to believe and report incidents of abuse, where none had occurred. The term False Memory Syndrome was coined in 1992 by Peter and Pamela Freyd, as a result of an allegation made against Peter, by their adult daughter after re-accessing what she understood to be a repressed memory.⁴² Michael Salter includes the False Memory Syndrome Foundation in his discussion of the ‘backlash’ against the change in attitudes towards reports of sex offences, which had ‘created alternative testimonial opportunities for victimised children and women away from the medico-legal traditions that had trivialised their accounts.’⁴³ He describes this new state of affairs as ‘a challenge not only to established expertise but to the project of governmentality itself and the gender order it legitimises’.⁴⁴ Raiit and Zeedyk include a list of those who have ‘depicted the FMS movement as a backlash to the shame and guilt aroused through the uncovering of endemic child abuse in the Western world.’⁴⁵ Although strongly defended as a concept by the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, it is also virulently contested by proponents of recovered memory theory and treatment. The work of Elizabeth F. Loftus and J.E. Pickrell does indeed indicate that memory can be tampered with. Of particular note is the ‘familial informant false narrative procedure’ research exercise, whereby subjects were encouraged to believe they were once ‘lost in a mall’, and which demonstrates that persuasive ‘interviewing’ can in some cases lead to reports of memories of occurrences that did not happen in reality.⁴⁶ Yet the relevance of this investigation to the issue of sex abuse has been questioned by, amongst others, Pope and Brown (1997), and research suggests that women with a documented background of abuse are not always able (or perhaps willing) to recall the event in years to come. Indeed it has been concluded that the inability to

engage with such events until a period of years has passed, if at all, may be to do with the nature of the event itself and the continued power of the abuser (Kelly, 1998).⁴⁷ An incorrect allegation of abuse would undoubtedly be a distressing scenario and one that ought to be guarded against for the benefit of all concerned, yet the widespread discussion of False Memory Syndrome led not just to protecting the innocent but also to deterring actual sufferers of abuse from seeking assistance. FMS continues to be a subject of intense debate, and one that can be seen to have informed literary examinations and responses to the topic of incest.

Incest in contemporary literature: The collection

This volume explores some of the literature that has depicted incest since the 1950s to the present day, asking crucially: Why incest? Why this particular presentation? And why at this point in time? This collection can only provide a sampling of the literary responses to this sensitive, convoluted and expansive topic, but we hope it will contribute to the debate commenced by others, such as Janice Doane and Devon Hodges in their book, *Telling Incest: Narratives of Dangerous Remembering* (2001) and by Elizabeth L. Barnes in her edited collection, *Incest and the Literary Imagination* (2002). We have deliberately sought to juxtapose authors who are well-known for writing on incest such as Ian McEwan, with those that have not been exposed to extensive critical consideration regarding this theme, such as Margo Lanagan, and we have extended our understanding of the literary 'text' to include the literary adaptation, as the televisual or filmic interpretation of a work of fiction can provide a culturally influential 'reading' of the literary object. There are literary examples included which may seem as if they do not meet the popular definition of 'incest', as they do not include sexual relations between blood relatives, but rather those that act in the stead of relations, such as step-father and step-daughter, such as Humbert Humbert and Dolores Haze in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. Yet under the Sexual Offences Act of 2003 in the UK, the definition of family includes those who act as a parent or who have been brought up in close proximity as if family.⁴⁸ We therefore feel that this is an important inclusion. We have also incorporated depictions of what is known as 'emotional incest' or 'covert incest', which is defined as follows:

According to Maloney ... it 'occurs when a child becomes the object of a parent's affection, love, passion and preoccupation. The boundary between caring and incestuous love is crossed when the relationship with the child exists to meet the needs of the parent rather than the need of the child.' It includes excitatory and sexualised relationships, even when there is no clear-cut, explicit sexual activity between the individuals.⁴⁹

This collection, however, is not intended to cover every type of literary depiction of the taboo, indeed, within the constraints of such a volume, it would be quite impossible. We are also literary critics, not psychologists or sociologists who may interpret the texts quite differently, but we have made every effort to be responsible with the subject matter, as even if literature does not pretend to constitute a factual history it is hugely influential and often reflects life. Literature can also convey the emotional experience of people in a way that the reportage of historical or scientific facts alone cannot.

We are aware that there continues to be debate regarding the most accurate or indeed, preferable terminology to describe the sexual relationships this book considers. We have decided to use 'incest' for the title as it is the term most easily understood by the majority of people to refer to sexual activity between family members and it includes all types of such activities, whether these can be argued to be potentially consensual or forced. The contributors have chosen the terms they think most suitable to the specific depictions of incest they refer to in their particular chapters, and this includes whether to refer to those subject to abuse, as 'victims', 'survivors', 'complainants' or one of the other less frequently used terms. As this is a text designed to encourage debate on literature and language we have not prioritised any lexical items, and for the sake of expediency we have not provided a list of alternative terms at every point the need for such a noun has arisen. Describing incest from the perspective of the victim/survivor/complainant of domestic sexual violence is a positive but relatively new phenomenon and a continually evolving process and so in this respect we have issued no restriction beyond observing an appropriate academic style of expression.⁵⁰

The collection is divided into four parts, which we consider cover four of the dominant literary presentations of incest in the latter half of the twentieth century. The essays within each of these parts seek to showcase the variety of literary presentations of incest which pertain to the group's overarching theme, while being distinct enough individually to act as a catalyst for critical discussion. In so doing the collection aims to provide not only an overview of incest narratives in the post-war period – as outlined above – but to enhance the reader's perception of both theoretical and historical constructs from within, and indeed beyond literature.

Part I, 'Behind closed doors', explores how incest has been narrated in terms of the everyday domestic environment, both as an exceptional occurrence but also, in some cases, as an event that is part of the 'ordinary' and understood framework of existence. Frances Pheasant-Kelly discusses Andrea Newman's novel *A Bouquet of Barbed Wire* (1969) and the two subsequent television adaptations of this text, and in doing so she engages with adaptation theory and contemplates the contemporaneous reaction of audiences to all three presentations of the narrative. She considers the characters' repression of incestuous desires, and their associated

concerns regarding loss, absence and grief. Introducing new interview material with Andrea Newman, unique to this collection, Pheasant-Kelly presents a timely reassessment of the fall-out of this controversial work. Justine Gieni follows this chapter by looking at Ian McEwan's early short stories and his novel, *The Cement Garden* (1978). She explores these fictions by interrogating the relationship between gender performance and domestic abuse. Through a discussion of the conflicts of masculine subjectivity in its dependence on and desire for the woman-mother, Gieni brings gender theory and feminist critique into conversation with established readings of McEwan's early work. The third essay in this part is by Rebecca White, who considers the debates surrounding memory and sexual trauma, and the specific conflict between the Recovered Memory Movement and the False Memory Syndrome Foundation in relation to Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1991), Kathryn Harrison's *Exposure* (1993) and Rachel Ward's 2009 film adaptation of Newton Thornburg's novel, *Beautiful Kate* (1982).

Part II, 'Incest and the child protagonist', begins with Vladimir Nabokov's infamous depiction of child abuse between step-father, Humbert Humbert and the orphaned Dolores Haze, *Lolita* (1955). Matthew Pateman examines the complex relationship between the text's sensitive content and its use of incest as a rhetorical device. He develops his argument to include the narratological presentations of this text in its various filmic incarnations, exploring the ethical implications of each of these independent and yet, arguably, interconnected interpretations of one of the most controversial novels of the twentieth century. In the next essay in Part II, Alice Mills explores whether literature intended for children does, or indeed, should, examine the issue of child abuse in the home, and whether literature has a responsibility to educate the child reader on how to deal with such a situation if it should occur. She examines a variety of the existing literature for children and young people in this respect, before providing a detailed extrapolation of Gary Crew and Annmarie Scott's *In My Father's Room* (2000). To conclude this part, Emma V. Miller examines Margo Lanagan's *Tender Morsels* (2008). As a text marketed toward the young adult group of readers, the violent sexual content of *Tender Morsels* has been subject to intense debate in the media and by parents and young readers alike. Miller considers whether the text can be defined as a work of trauma fiction, its relationship to its fairy-tale heritage and, in its presentation of reality and fantasy, how far it can be considered a work of feminist literature.

Part III, 'Incest as political conceit' is a consideration of one of the most established means of addressing incest in literary history, as a conceit for political unrest. Michael Mack begins this group of discussions, by reading the works of Pablo Pasolini as political allegory, whereby the scandal and the violence of his *oeuvre* arguably aim to expand the awareness of the reader or viewer, and illuminate the controversial and disturbing aspects of the world. Mack focuses his

discussion on the depictions of incest in Pasolini's literary and filmic output, and argues that through approaches such as allegory, a means for political improvement might be found. Robert Duggan follows this chapter by examining Iain Banks's 2007 novel *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*, by focussing on how Banks relates the novel's sibling incest to the text's complex concern with national identity. He explains that Banks has also been part of a wider preoccupation in contemporary Scottish writing regarding the habitation of border zones, where the border ceases to be an idealised geometric line and instead becomes a site that one can reside in and/or the ground against which the figure emerges. Incest too, is a topic concerned with borders, familial, sexual and cultural. Alistair Brown concludes this group by examining science fiction, which challenges our understanding of humanness and by extension the human family, by presenting the possibility of a posthuman environ, and questions whether in such a setting incest is even possible. He also explores scientific medical developments in the known world, and how they might impact upon our concept of family. His texts are Kaitlyn O'Connor's *Abiogenesis* (2012), Wyndham Lewis' *Plan for Chaos* (c.1951) and William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984). These essays all investigate the connections and the disjunctures between the personal and the political.

In the final group of essays, 'The rhetoric of narrating incest', Charles Mundy continues with the discussion of incest as metaphor, by exploring the concept of incest in the poetry of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath. He also seeks to situate their work in a long literary history of the manipulation of incest as a literary trope in Ovidian mythology, Biblical narratives and the writing of William Shakespeare. Mundy argues that Hughes's late work on Ovid's tales of incest, and on the various significances of metamorphosis, creatively engages in a complex dramatic exchange with Plath's poetry. The nature of this exchange is considered in terms of the conceptualisation of sibling relationships, and father–daughter relations in and between their poems. The second chapter in this group by Emma V. Miller and Miles Leeson, examines the efforts by characters in literature to romanticise incest, using its rarity, its alleged exclusivity, as a means to support their argument. Leeson and Miller examine this problematic depiction of incest under the lens of the Derridean concept of *différance*, considering how every word, even incest, no matter how it is presented is arguably unable to escape its context: linguistically, culturally, criminally and artistically. The authors concentrate their discussion on Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) and A.S. Byatt's *Morpho Eugenia* (1996). Miles Leeson then concludes the collection by examining the presentation of incest in the novels of Iris Murdoch and Simone de Beauvoir, with a particular focus on Murdoch's *The Black Prince* (1973) and Beauvoir's *The Mandarins* (1957). He examines the philosophical interaction between virtue, desire and sexual choice in the texts, and the role of such frictions within the fictional form.

The central issue here is one of intent; do both Beauvoir, and Murdoch – who exhibited a much greater artistic interest in incest than her French counterpart – depict incest as merely a narrative device or, rather, as a tool by which to promote a certain type of moral seriousness? It appears clear that both authors engage in each presentation of the incest taboo, but it is the ethics of writing incest which is at the centre of the discussion here.

We have sought to address what we consider to be the dominant literary depictions of incest in the latter half of the twentieth century, and those presentations that are of central concern to literary critics. We hope that this volume will inform and further the existing academic interest in this field and that it will prompt further investigation in what continues to be a dynamic and continually developing area of interdisciplinary studies.

Notes

- 1 For a discussion on incest in Arthurian literature see: Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 7, 216.
- 2 Carolyne Larrington writes that ‘the Post-Vulgate, mediated through Malory to Boorman, saw the incest as the cause of the Round Table’s collapse.’ See: Carolyne Larrington, *King Arthur’s Enchantresses* (I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 188.
- 3 Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, p. 236.
- 4 Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘Letter to Mrs Gisbourne’ (16 November 1819), in Mrs Shelley (ed.), *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments* (Edward Moxon, 1845), p. 137.
- 5 For more on reading incest in *Wuthering Heights* see: Eric Solomon, ‘The incest theme in *Wuthering Heights*’, *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 14:1 (June, 1959), pp. 80–3. For a discussion of incest criticism regarding *Dracula* see: William Hughes, *Bram Stoker’s Dracula: A Reader’s Guide* (Bloomsbury) pp. 44–8, 96. Also see: Emma V. Miller, ‘“We must not forget that there was a crime”: Incest, domestic violence and textual memory in the novels of Iris Murdoch’, *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies* 1:2 (Fall, 2012), pp. 65–94, doi.org/10.1353/jlt.2012.0014 (accessed 30 March 2017).
- 6 Paul A. Cantor, ‘The fall of the House of Ulmer: Europe vs. America in the gothic vision of *The Black Cat*’, in Thomas Fahy (ed.) *The Philosophy of Horror* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), p. 143.
- 7 Beth Bailey, ‘The vexed history of children and sex’, in Paula S. Fass (ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World* (Routledge, 2013), p. 196.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 196.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 198.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 198. For more detail on this and the debates regarding the age of consent in the UK and the USA see: Bailey, ‘The vexed history of children and sex’, pp. 196–9.

- 12 Lloyd deMause, 'The evolution of childhood', in Lloyd deMause (ed.), *The History of Childhood* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1974), p. 1.
- 13 Alisdair Gillespie and Suzanne Ost, 'The 'higher' age of consent and the concept of sexual exploitation', in Alan Reed et al. (eds), *Consent: Domestic and Comparative Perspectives* (Routledge, 2017), p. 163.
- 14 For all references to this author in this discussion, see: Kathryn Cullen-DuPont, *Encyclopedia of Women's History in America*, 2nd edn (Facts on File, 2000), p. 7.
- 15 Vikki Bell, *Interrogating Incest* (Routledge, 1993), p. 126.
- 16 Kim Stevenson and Anne Davies, *Blackstone's Guide to the Sexual Offences Act 2003* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 103.
- 17 Judith V. Becker and Emily M. Coleman, 'Incest', in Alan S. Bellack et al. (eds), *Handbook of Family Violence* (Springer, 1988), p. 188.
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