The Gothic Place as the Center of Power and Ruin

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This thesis interrogates the Gothic literary genre of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and proposes using place as a lens through which contemporary critics may read social and political resistance in a given piece of Gothic cultural production. The history of the genre is explored and its defining characteristics enumerated through a discussion of how, exactly, individual works cohere across a span of nearly two hundred years. The roots of the Gothic – including the medieval romance and literary Romanticism – are explored in order to shed light on how Gothic comes to be and the ways in which the genre stands in contrast to its antecedents. From there, the discussion turns to the ways in which Gothic uses place as an argument in itself against the institutionalization of power.

This project examines the relationship between power and decay of social structures within British Gothic novels by exploring the ways in which the spaces within those novels – often the Gothic buildings themselves – function as both power centers and places of ruin. The paper demonstrates first that this relationship within the genre persists across such borders as the author’s time, place, nationality, and gender, marking it as a constitutive if unacknowledged element of the Gothic. Secondly, it is shown that this confluence of power and decay within the spaces of the Gothic exists independent of the activities of characters within the novels, and that this independence from changes in the plot suggests that the role of the space is foundational to understanding the novels. Thirdly, this relationship between decay and power represents an inversion of social power structures – patriarchy, aristocracy, clergy, and so forth – and the characters that typify these structures. Finally, a broader metatextual and historical argument is made that this inversion of the power structure represents an attack on institutionalized and socially ordered power.

The significance of this argument lies in that a majority of scholarship about literature in the long nineteenth century seems largely to ignore patterns of place and space; a blind spot in literary criticism that could use more exploration. How narrative gets framed within a culture is intimately tied into authorial choices about setting, and
these choices both reflect and influence the broader cultural discourse, shaping ideology by framing stories in a consistent way across over a hundred years. In the case of this argument about the Gothic, beliefs get expressed and shaped by authors framing narrative as being centered about a corrupt power structure: a device that has a range of wider implications about British culture at large and eventually serves as a rhetorical attack on both institutionalized power and Englishness.

The interpretation of the Gothic here is primarily historicist and this thesis seeks to frame a discussion of individual Gothic works within their particular historical contexts. Feminist, psychoanalytical, and Marxist discussions of the Gothic are addressed and then largely discarded in order to present the Gothic as a coherent social and political project that interacts meaningfully with history. During the discussion of theoretical methodology, questions are raised and answered about the appropriateness of several comparisons – most especially, the comparison of Gothic to Marxism – that would seem to be counterintuitive. In fact, counterintuitive claims are a hallmark of this piece, which requires a basic re-imagining of how Gothic is discussed and understood.

The first chapter focuses on the meaning of what is called the Gothic Place and how this idea of place is constitutive to an understanding of the genre. This chapter discusses how the Gothic Place – the literal stage of gothic events – is almost always presented as a power center of some kind; and yet, even while being a center of power, it is still suffering from decay in many ways. This phenomenon is explored through Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* and Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* because these two novels provide good examples for the ways in which space becomes central to a novel in a way distinct from the activities of other characters. Together, both these novels are important because of their historical moments: *Otranto* founding the Gothic genre and *Wuthering Heights* doing something similar for the Gothic Revival almost a century later. While the discussing how place is central to an understanding of these two novels and the broader Gothic, the discussion of these two books is used to suggest correlation between the Gothic and a broader cultural dialogue about aesthetics and the nature of beauty and the sublime.
The second chapter focuses on the Gothic Place as it represents an inversion of social power structures and also describes the historical roots of Gothic in romance and Romanticism as well as the meaning of the Gothic’s departure from these antecedents. The chapter continues the discussion of *Wuthering Heights* and also incorporates Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Stoker’s *Dracula* – two works at opposite ends of the nineteenth century – in order to give the reader a sense of just how the Gothic is evolving and the ways in which it is growing into a resistance genre as a departure from the mainstreaming ideas of Romanticism. The argument about how Gothic develops as a tool of resistance continues to focus on the Gothic Place, and the discussion explores the way in which power is vested in place for the Gothic: specifically, how power is vested within ownership and legal power of physical property, and the dangers inherent in this system.

In the final chapter I make the case that the Gothic relates to Marx through the Gothic’s use of place as an argument – that physical places are icons for the oppression and destruction that they perpetuate – and also that they serve a similar subversive function. My argument compares and contrasts how the Gothic and Marxism are subversive in the nineteenth century and postulates that this coincidence exists because the Gothic and Marxism arise from the same cultural context: centralization of power in Europe, the expansion of Eurocentric Empire around the world, and the Industrial Revolution. I argue that Marx’s ideas of base and superstructure – the idea that an economic base predetermines how culture and society work – correlate with the idea of the Gothic Place as a predestinating force: manipulating outcomes as much or sometimes more so than characters. The purpose of this comparison is to discuss both Gothic and Marx as trying to fight back against this idea of predestinating forces – or at least trying to expose them in preparation for fighting them – as an extended reaction against the Protestant Reformation and the rise of predestination theology in Protestant Europe as a means of shedding light on the roots of the Gothic.
INTRODUCTION

The very first sentence of Fred Botting’s The Gothic lends a certain kind of irony to his choice of title and the ensuing exploration of the Gothic genre. He writes, “These days it seems increasingly difficult to speak of ‘the Gothic’ with any assurance” (1). Any modern discussion of the topic would seem to require specialization and particularization: a discussion of Victorian Gothic, or American Gothic, or Female Gothic, or Queer Gothic, or Film Gothic, or any other of the countless offspring of the genre. While this is true, it is also important to note that despite this balkanization of the genre, the various subsets nevertheless cohere through a shared language and a shared history. Those elements that make the Victorian or the American or the Female or the Queer or Film “Gothic” have a history, and interrogating that history is what allows insight into how each instantiation of “the Gothic” interacts with the next and with parent genre. For the purpose of this work, the most prominent element that constitutes the Gothic and helps those instantiations cohere across time, across geography, and even in different media, is the Gothic Place.

The topic of this thesis is the confluence of power and ruin surrounding what I call the Gothic Place: made a proper noun in this case because I wish to distinguish it meaningfully from mere setting. I plan to argue that place is a constitutive element of the Gothic, and as such place can be used as a mechanism for understanding what it is Gothic works are doing. In my critique of the genre, I see the Gothic as, with few exceptions, attacking bodies of institutionalized power: governments, religious bodies, social hierarchies, professions, cultural mythologies, and more. With reference to what I call the Gothic Place, I see these attacks coming as presentations of places of power – castles, manors, churches, cities, homes, hospitals and the like – as places of destruction instead of order, or of order masking ruin. My argument is that when a Gothic work discusses place as a ruined power center like a haunted castle, it is undermining the institution of power that such a building or edifice represents. At the same time, I make the case that the solid physicality of the place is important because destruction within a given novel emanates from the Gothic Place and not from the actions of characters, meaning that human destruction is rooted in the foundations of the power centers meant to guard against that same destruction.
In the first and second chapters I work to discuss the roots of the Gothic genre in the romance genre and the relationship that the Gothic had with contemporary literary Romanticism. That Gothic has roots in the romance genre is a generally accepted idea in literary criticism. I argue that the Gothic is also related to Romanticism and that, at the beginning of their “lives” as ideas, they perform similar functions and have a similar romance (if I may be allowed the phrase) with revolutionary movements in Europe. As Fred Botting writes in *Gothic: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*

Elements of the romantic and Gothic aesthetics find themselves absorbed by the movement belatedly distinguished as Romanticism: darkness and mystery provide the conditions for solitary and introspective reflection, allowing inspiration to attain spiritual and visionary heights; wild nature offers suitably sublime scenes for emotional and imaginative creation. Although there may be [...] a common ancestry linking Romanticism and Gothicism, all traces of filiation are denied by the time the former is defining itself, a time, indeed, at which Gothic novels were reaching their peak. (11)

I go to some length to untangle the romance genre from Romanticism the movement since while the Gothic is related to both romance and Romanticism they are not the same thing and the distinction is important for my topic. The romance genre dates back to the middle ages and is used most often to describe a cycle of social order slipping in some way into disorder then righting itself through some heroic actor. Romanticism in the literary sense is more radical and revolutionary; as Lukács wrote, a “rebellious protest against the oligarchic rule of the big capitalists” (*Historical Novel*, 178), pushing at social mores and attacking power where the romance genre seeks to reinforce the social order. The distinction is important because I argue that the Gothic in many ways subverts and inverts the romance structure of order, to chaos, to restoration by presenting narratives (like *Wuthering Heights*) in which a “hero” moves from chaos to order back to chaos, or where (like in *Dracula*) order only manages a pyrrhic victory over “chaos.” At the same time, I argue that the Gothic is departing from its related movement Romanticism over the course of the nineteenth century. Or rather, it is better to say that they are both moving away from one another: Romanticism becoming more conservative as a movement after the horror of the French Revolution and the Gothic reacting against this retreat by Romanticism by struggling to remain and become more subversive.
In the final chapter I make the case that the Gothic correlates to Marx through the Gothic’s use of place as an argument – that physical places are icons for the oppression and destruction that they perpetuate – and also that the Gothic and Marxism serve a similar subversive function. My argument compares and contrasts how the Gothic and Marxism are subversive in the nineteenth century and postulates that this coincidence exists because the Gothic and Marxism arise from the same cultural context: centralization of power in Europe, the expansion of Eurocentric Empire around the world, and the Industrial Revolution. I argue that Marx’s ideas of base and superstructure – the idea that an economic base predetermines how culture and society work – correlate with the idea of the Gothic Place as a force within a novel: manipulating outcomes as much or sometimes more so than characters. The purpose of this comparison is to discuss both Gothic and Marx as trying to fight back against this idea of predestinating forces – or at least trying to expose them in preparation for fighting them – as an extended reaction against the Protestant Reformation and the rise of predestination theology in Protestant Europe as a means of shedding light on the roots of the Gothic.

Before one can really wade into those arguments and absorb them in the way I intend, a discussion of terms and a contextualization of my argument is important. First, an understanding of the Gothic itself and what I mean by the Gothic Place is key. The Gothic Place stands in contrast to mere setting for my reading because it is purposeful and it functions as an argument unto itself. It is significant to an argument that Emily Brontë makes about institutions of power that Wuthering Heights is a manor house and not a church or a castle or a city. A ruined structure, by its existence in the narrative, argues that similar centers of power are in some way ruined, and further that decay and destruction are structural components of power.

My conception of the Gothic is more complex than that, however, and admittedly runs counter to the more prevalent notions of what Gothic is and does. Though major strands of criticism see Gothic as marginal and subversive, as I do, my criticism departs from traditional discussions of what is being subverted and how. For a long time, Gothic and romance were considered “low” genres to be used as a measuring stick for the stratification of literary production. As Botting says,

The critical discourse of early Gothic scholarship consistently reproduces the set of assumptions in which more laudable forms of literary endeavour are constituted, defined
and rendered knowable only through their difference from the inferior form of literary production that is the Gothic romance. (*Gothic: Critical*, 13)

An especially influential method for interpreting Gothic in a more serious way – as opposed to using it as the floor for a canonical hierarchy – has been deployed by feminist critics in discussing the Female Gothic. Such critics as Nancy Chodorow and Ellen Moers interpret Gothic novels as explorations of the female condition and the anxieties and issues of womanhood. Rita Felski writes in *Literature After Feminism*

One of the reasons that Gothic is interesting to feminists is that it offers a symbolic expression of female paranoia. The Gothic novel [...] gives full rein to female ambivalence toward male sexuality. It treats masculinity as a disturbing mystery. It probes relentlessly into the connections between sex and violence, desire and pain, terror and pleasure. The brooding, enigmatic villain [...] is a multivalent symbol of the “paternal sublime,” of a father who is seen as remote, fascinating, and all-powerful. [...] The relationship, however, also emphasized women’s exclusion from male power. (152)

Feminist questions in the Gothic orbit around female identity, female agency, female psychology, and perhaps most especially the female body. Feminist criticism overlaps in many ways psychoanalytical interpretations of the Gothic. Elaine Showalter writes in “American Female Gothic” that, in the mid 1980s, some feminist critics began interpreting Female Gothic through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis “as a mode of writing corresponding to the feminine, the romantic, the transgressive, and the revolutionary” (261). They also took Freud’s famous works, especially “Dora” and *Studies in Hysteria*, along with the theoretical work of Kristeva, to equate “the Gothic with the feminine unconscious, and with the effort to bring the body, the semiotic, the imaginary, the pre-Oedipal [M]Other Tongue into language” (261).

Other psychoanalytical readings of the Gothic see Gothic as an expression of the subconscious: an illustration of the struggle over primordial fears, especially with regards to the uncanny. This derives from Lacanian psychoanalysis, but also – perhaps most especially - Freud’s famous essay, “Das Unheimliche” or “The Uncanny.” One influential explorer of Freud’s ideas in “The Uncanny” was Hélène Cixous. Allan Lloyd writes that “[Cixous] identifies a particularly significant aspect of the uncanny, its echoing, reverberating emptiness, in which the search for stable meaning is continually frustrated, and it is easy to see how this aspect of the uncanny may arise within the uncertainties so often cultivated in the Gothic” (137). A deep
well of criticism in the Gothic is the notion of the uncanny – the perception of things both alien and familiar that so infuses the Gothic. Slavoj Zizek, who Lloyd calls “one of the liveliest and most accessible commentators on Lacan’s ideas as they might inform a view of the Gothic” (142), described, in reference to a film by Alfred Hitchcock, the Lacanian nature of the uncanny, saying

Here we have […] what Lacan calls the point de caption (the quilting point) in its purest: a perfectly natural and “familiar” situation is denatured, becomes “uncanny,” loaded with horror and threatening possibilities, as soon as we add to it a small supplementary feature, a detail that “does not belong,” that sticks out, is “out of place,” does not make any sense within the frame of the idyllic scene. (Zizek 88)

Lloyd writes that “Freud identifies some other major themes involved in the uncanny which are also often found in Gothic fiction: The double, the repetition compulsion, and the idea of the omnipotence of thought” (137), and that the “double offers a way of expressing divisions and fragmentations within the self…” (138). Beyond the uncanny, though, the psychoanalyzed Gothic delves into the depths of the unconscious: into a realm of metaphors and symbols that, like the feminist readings, illustrate the landscape of the mind through its anxieties.

This feminist and psychoanalytic legacy of criticism leads, understandably, to an articulation of the Gothic as a reflection of internal struggles against dominant ideas of sexuality and other moralities. Dracula is seen as articulating anxieties about homosexuality – a story of a strong man overpowering another in a sexual allegory – or, in a more general sense, subconscious fears about the foreign Other. The Mysteries of Udolpho and Wuthering Heights are both often interpreted as an exploration of a woman’s view of male sexuality: a tale in which the woman is both attracted and repulsed by the masculine “homme fatale.”

In contrast I conceive of the Gothic in a historicist way: grounded in its historical context and interacting with a broader subversive political project that interacts with that context. While the genre’s conventions and uses – which I discuss in Chapter 1 – are fairly consistent through time, the Gothic was not borne ex nihilo: it has a beginning, and its development is historical and intersects with important ideological movements. I tend to conceive of all pieces of cultural production as situated in history: informed by and in some cases informing the culture in which they were created. I see works that are divorced from this historical situating and treated in a vacuum as losing both the intent of the authors and the real effects on their contemporary
culture. Pieces of cultural production exist in and interact with history. With respect to the Gothic, I see it more as an ideological construction than merely as a set of narrative or structural conventions; spanning a range of authorial, historical and geographical contexts yet addressing similar issues. I argue here that the conventions of the Gothic further an ideological goal that has meaning beyond the nineteenth century: exposing the toxic nature of institutionalized power.

I also will tend to argue that the Gothic, like Marxism, is concerned with material and physical change, which would tend to fly in the face of many readings of the genre which see supernaturalism, emotionalism, and the sublime and so interpret the Gothic as a space of psychological or metaphysical concern. Such psychological readings are, nevertheless, quite natural! A space like the Gothic – defined as it is by its psychological attributes like terror, madness, and mysticism as much as anything – invites such a reading. My view contrasts with this traditional interpretation of the Gothic use of sublime and supernaturalism in that I take the presence of these incorporeal elements not as indicators of psychic interest necessarily, but as examples of deviance. I see the Gothic as using terror and the supernatural as another means of expressing decay around the center of power: in the case of the supernatural or terrible, a decay of ordered reality and an ordered mind. Consequently, I interpret the supernatural as an element of the destruction anchored to the physical edifice of power and thus forming part of the critique of power represented by the Gothic Place.

It is also important to keep in mind the use of Marx throughout this project. Since I deal with Gothic literature and Marxism heavily in the third chapter, it can become easy to conflate Marxism the ideology with Marxist literary critique, as though I were making some complex point about the relationship of the Gothic genre to Marxist discussions of the Gothic genre. Marxist criticism of the Gothic genre is sparing here, but Marx himself and the historically-situated development of his ideas play an important role. Since I see Gothic as an ideological project I compare it to Marxism as an ideological project. I compare their respective developments and their arguments about underlying structures affecting human behavior, but it should not be thought that I mean to use one to interpret the other here. On the contrary, they need have no direct relationship at all – and I certainly do not mean to suggest that Marx was reading Brontë or vice versa – but I mean only to say what I have said in Chapter 3: that both
Gothic and Marx spring independently from the same historical, political, and social milieu, and that the comparison illuminates an understanding of the Gothic.

Finally, it should be noted that, even though I do not make a Marxist critique of the Gothic, the elephant in the room is that a Marxist critique of the Gothic would fly in the face of my findings. Marxist thought is most often correlated not with the Gothic, but with Realism because of the Marxist materialist insistence on the primacy of the physical world; everything else from faith to consciousness to the “supernatural” is epiphenomena. In the words of George Lukács, the themes of such novels are “indiscriminate and unrelated” and they are “full of an adventurous or emptily antiquarian, and exciting or mythical exoticism” (Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 183). Consequently, since the Gothic seems to peddle in these fantastical ideas and epiphenomena, a Marxist critique sees the Gothic as an expression of false consciousness and something to be rejected as reality “stylized and idealized into the gigantic and barbaric out of romantic protest” (Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 183). The resolution of this conflict rests on two points for my reading. The first is that, if it were possible to have a “Gothic reading” of the Gothic, then I believe the Gothic would agree with Marxism that these things are epiphenomena. As I said earlier, I interpret the fantastical elements of the Gothic to be elements of deviance that highlight the destruction inherent in the centers of power: much in the way Marx sees the epiphenomena of religion and mysticism and so forth as highlighting the flaws of the capitalist base. In that sense, I think a Marxist dismissal of the Gothic as frivolity is premature and a little superficial since they agree on that point.

The second, and perhaps more salient point is that the purposes I see in the Gothic are different from those in Marxism, and this distinction centers again on Marxist materialism. I argue that while Marxism sees capitalism as flawed and seeks to replace it with a new kind of order, the Gothic sees power as inherently flawed and would see it replaced with a return to an idealized anarchy drawn from the Romantic interpretation of Edenic purity or “initial, undivided condition” (Abrams 152). This means that while Marx sees the physical as primary and so seeks to manipulate it, the Gothic sees the physical as an impediment to realizing a philosophical and metaphysical restoration. In that sense, the Gothic is very concerned with the physical because it means to sweep it aside, but it does not treat physicality as primary the way Marx does. This conflict is emblematic of the difference between the Gothic and Marx that is so interesting about this discussion. Both Marx and the Gothic arise from a similar historical
provenance, both attack a similar project, and both deploy physical place as an argument against power, and yet their methods and goals are still in striking contrast: a contrast that perhaps betokens a uniqueness in the cultural dynamic between Germany and England that would cause one to favor the physical and the other to favor the spiritual.

What ties this all together, however, is the centrality of place as an argument and how underlying forces manipulate human behavior. Any discussion of how place came to be central or became an argument within the Gothic should not overshadow an understanding of the Gothic Place itself. This thesis, in essence, illuminates the Gothic Place by presenting three primary ideas that I see surrounding the Gothic. The first is the Gothic conceptualization of power as being primarily legal and economical surrounding ownership and the legal control of place. The second is the discussion within the Gothic of how that idea of power is implemented, controlled, and abused within a capitalist and rapidly industrializing society. And finally, having established the nature and the function of power as conceptualized by the Gothic, I present the idealized conception of power for the Gothic, which ultimately consists of undoing the constructions of power represented by the Gothic Place and replacing them with a utopian, anarchic individualism; a “return to the garden” reminiscent of the Romantic search for redemption.
CHAPTER 1
THE GOTHIC PLACE

The role of place in the Gothic as a genre is central to a given text, and though generally acknowledged in passing the Gothic Place is often relegated in criticism to a secondary elemental status within the genre: a kind of attendant epiphenomenon of other more central ideas and tropes. The character of the Gothic Place – such archetypical Gothic locations as haunted castles, crumbling churches, dark towers, and even cities teeming with corruption – tells us a great deal about its role in the genre and in the broader literary and historical discourse, while its consistency across the genre raises questions about its purpose aesthetically, thematically, and symbolically. More than that, the role of the place within the genre is so strong that it sometimes overwhelms the active characters and becomes like a character itself; participating in the novels almost as much as the people themselves. The "Gothic" – from a word first used to describe architecture – is largely defined by its setting: its literal architecture. And from the earliest manifestations of the Gothic in Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* in 1764, to Stoker’s *Dracula* over one hundred and thirty years later, and even into non-British Gothic like Herbert De Lisser’s *White Witch of Rosehall* and Toni Morrison’s *Love*, the presentation and characterization of the Gothic setting has been remarkably consistent. Seemingly regardless of its location in space or time the Gothic Place – the literal stage of Gothic events – is almost always presented as a power center of some kind. Yet, even while being a center of power, the Gothic Place almost without exception suffers from aesthetic, political, physical, and existential decay. Furthermore, this confluence of power – embodied within a place – and ruin implies a broader criticism of power within the culture at large, especially when found within a low-culture “sensational” genre like the Gothic.

The framing of the Gothic becomes crucial early in any discussion of the genre, and a brief examination of the elements that create the Gothic are important to an understanding and an investigation of place therein. The term Gothic comes with a wide array of trappings, assumptions, and traditions in a European context that form a matrix of understanding and interpretation of the genre. On the one hand, as Patricia Thompson describes it, “the Romantic subsumes the Gothic; from the vast cloak of Romanticism, the narrower Gothic shroud is cut”
(221), making it tempting to describe the Gothic as merely a kind of literary Romanticism. While it is true that the Gothic is related to Romanticism, it is more than that; more complex and more contributive to culture than this classification would permit. As Fred Botting writes in his book *Gothic*, “it is impossible to define a fixed set of Gothic conventions” because the Gothic is “a hybrid form incorporating and transforming other literary forms and developing and changing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing” (14). The word “Gothic” has been used “both positively and pejoratively to refer to a genre characterized by a general mood of decay, action that is dramatic and generally violent or otherwise disturbing, loves that are destructively passionate, and settings that are grandiose, if gloomy or bleak” (Murfin 191). The Gothic novel is also a romance “typically written as a long prose horror narrative that exhibits the qualities of doom and gloom as well as an emphasis on chivalry and magic” (Murfin 192). Alison Holland observes that the Gothic often uses space and place to help produce this emotional sense by employing “images of enclosure and weight [juxtaposed] with images of space and vertigo” (328). On the character level, she says, one often sees hyper-emotionalism and melodrama, especially in screaming women who are being menaced by diabolical men. They function to create a space in which, “feeling and emotion exceed reason. Ambivalence and ambiguity prevail and suspense and uncertainty are fostered” (Holland 328). We also often have a romantic engagement of two characters, one that is forbidden or doomed in some way, yet at the same time intensely passionate. Woven in with these features are psychological and supernatural horror elements like ghosts, madness, vampires or witches: some kind of otherworldly device that adds a fantastic side and a heightened tension to the story. And at the basic linguistic level, the Gothic employs a vocabulary that sets the tone for the novel: verbally baroque descriptions indicating gloom, mystery, or fear.

The Gothic Place itself carries its own traditions within the genre. It is of course a dangerous place: often a dark, mysterious castle or mansion where ghosts and villains are lurking (Hume 282). And therein lies the secret to understanding the Gothic Place: it is a place of power. Architecture that is called gothic\(^1\) is typically associated with certain kinds of building. In European architecture, such a description as “gothic” is often attributed to churches like Reims Cathedral, monasteries like Mont Saint-Michel in Normandy, or palaces such as the

\(^1\) For convenience and to avoid confusion, I use “gothic” to refer to the architectural style, and “Gothic” to refer to the literary genre.
Palais des Papes in Avignon. In literature it is much the same with gothic architecture: abbeys in Roche’s *The Children of the Abbey*, manor houses in Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and Shelly’s *Frankenstein*, castles in Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* and Stoker’s *Dracula*. What binds all these places – literal and literary – together is their status as places of power. The church, the abbey, the castle, and the mansion are all centers of power in one way or another, and their roles as power centers are tied to their function as spaces in their respective novels. Furthermore, while just how Gothic place becomes characterized varies in the concrete details – the abbey, the castle, the mansion, and so forth are not, after all, interchangeable edifices – it nevertheless remains remarkably consistent in the abstract, and this consistency highlights the fact that while some literary genres may have setting as an incidental and the substance of the writing could be easily transported to any scene, the constructed, powerful, and yet still ruined place is central to the Gothic mode of writing.

An appropriate place to start the examination of such an idea is Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, both because Walpole’s only novel is rightly credited with giving birth to the Gothic genre, and because *Otranto*, as we might expect, provides an archetype for the confluence of place, power, and ruin that later authors pay tribute to. And like later Gothic works, place in *Otranto*, in this case the castle itself, is central to understanding the novel as a whole, in both a figurative and literal sense. The castle, in a concrete sense, is central in *Otranto* as the literal focus of all narrative activity. Walpole actually goes further than many Gothic writers in highlighting place by changing perspectives from character to character within the novel, while always remaining focused on the castle. Walpole treated characters in *Otranto* as essentially interchangeable: secondary to the action, which itself was closely tied to place. In fact, the characters have been criticized for being flat, stock characters, and Walpole for “systematically sacrificing [characters] to other, more highly valued aspects of narrative such as moral and plot” (Napier 34). This superficialization of character, along with the periodic shift in perspective around the castle highlights the centrality of place and causes attention to be drawn away from the characters, allowing them to be treated as types; types that would be appropriated by later Gothic writers.

This acute focus that Walpole places on the castle in *Otranto*, while highlighting it as a Gothic Place in general, also helps underscore the place’s role as a place of power: political, social, and spiritual. It is, first and foremost, of course a castle: a fortress to defend against
military attack and serve as a base for the same, making it the center of military power. More importantly, it is also a palace that at once protects the ruling nobility from the public gaze and paradoxically puts them on display within the most prominent building on the landscape. By ensconcing the rulers in a palatial fortress, their protection also becomes a means of broadcasting their status to the locals and to foreigners: a posture that both projects power and invites challenge. In this way a castle becomes not only the seat of political power, but also the focus of social interest. A castle is a reliquary to preserve and display the most important people in a society: a place where the person becomes an object and a symbol of power more than a person. This social interest is magnified in Otranto by the fact that the castle itself houses not just the throne and the living space of the royals, but also the church and the tomb, and, being literally a court of Manfred the monarch, the judiciary, thus creating a singular space in which all the levers of power and major functions of a wider society rest.

The use of the Gothic Place as power center is not anchored to a single historical – or even geographical, racial, or gendered – moment. While Otranto sets the tone for the Gothic Place, the similarity between it and later Gothic places is remarkable. The centrality of the place as a social, political, and spiritual power center persists from Otranto in the mid 18th century to Dracula at the end of the 19th century. A striking example of this is Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights, which is useful for comparison to Otranto not only because of the centrality of place to the workings of the novel, but also because the publication of Wuthering Heights in 1847 places it near the mid-point of the Gothic genre’s popularity in the period as well as near the beginning of the Gothic Revival: a return to the Gothic genre after an early century lull in interest.

As in Otranto, Wuthering Heights focuses the narrative around the book’s namesake: the manor house of Wuthering Heights. Even while the story is, as Mr. Lockwood says, a “story about [his] neighbors” (25), the arc of the narrative is such that, as with The Castle of Otranto, the focus shifts from person to person while remaining generally fixed on the Gothic Place itself. The double framing of the story – a technique typical of romance in the period –

2 This ability of the castle to make a symbol out of a person – to change someone from a man into a King, with all the attendant political and ideological significance of that symbol – betokens the effect that the Gothic is often said to have on character: flattening them out into a “type.” The castle becomes a reliquary not only because it preserves and displays, but because it makes objects out of people.

3 In fact, the trope extends well beyond that into the 20th century with Carribean, Central and North American, and even Asian writers in ways that are beyond the scope of this immediate discussion.
contributes to this effect. For *Wuthering Heights*, the character focus is constructed in such a way – through the double framing of the tale – that the main character becomes somewhat unclear. Strictly speaking, the story is framed as one of Mr. Lockwood’s experience renting Thrushcross Grange. This in turn frames a story about Nelly Dean and Zilla as they lived as servants at Wuthering Heights. And this story too frames what one might call the “real” story of *Wuthering Heights*: the romantic, trans-generational saga of Heathcliff and Cathy Earnshaw. What remains constant through these layers of narrative and the multi-generational timeframes is the centrality of the manor itself.

At the same time, though, *Wuthering Heights* is unlike *The Castle of Otranto* in that the narrative of Brontë’s novel is free to orbit away from the power center in such a way that it collects information about its effects outside itself. The power of Wuthering Heights is projected beyond the grounds themselves, influencing people not immediately of the place. The space within the novel is detached and isolated from the outside world, with only brief mentions being made of the existence of London (135, 144, 218, 223). Nevertheless, even in its isolation, Wuthering Heights is able to affect people and places not immediately on the grounds. While the narrators will highlight how the Heights projects power, “spreading such bad influence to the Grange” (80), disrupting and conquering the lives of the Lintons (74, 112), we also get glimpses in the novel of how its power extends even further, affecting the Village (124-5), the Moors (40), and even outsiders to this detached space like Mr. Lockwood. Structurally, the narrative reinforces this model of power projection by giving us the story through outsiders like Mr. Lockwood, Nelly Dean, and Zilla. For the most part, they are not party to events in the novel, yet while they are not tied to the events or the place necessarily they are still drawn into orbit around Wuthering Heights.

And like the castle in *Otranto*, the manor of Wuthering Heights is a literal center of power in addition to being the structural core of the narrative. As a manor house, it is a center of social and economic power. Like in *Otranto*, Wuthering Heights as a manor functions as a paradoxical confluence of sequestration and display: it is at once a building meant to isolate the rich and powerful while at the same time projecting power and prestige. The difference between power in *Otranto* and *Wuthering Heights* is, however, twofold. First, the castle represents a more condensed power with all the levers of social, political, and religious power existing in one place, whereas the Heights does not have similar mechanisms of religious and
military power. Secondly, even while the Heights lacks as many levers of power as the castle has, Brontë’s Gothic Place exerts more external control over orbiting places, while scant evidence exists that the castle has similar external power.

The discussion of power in the Gothic Place in both *The Castle of Otranto* and in *Wuthering Heights* is an incomplete one if it remains limited to corporeal manifestations of power. In both instances, the corporeal is a single facet of the overall discourse on power, for psychological and supernatural power permeates these places. These two books are emblematic of the way in which the Gothic genre at large uses other literary devices associated with the Gothic – horror, the supernatural, forbidden romance, and so forth – to highlight the centrality of the Gothic Place in the genre. The fantastic and supernatural elements that define the genre are intimately linked with the use of place to the extent that horror and the supernatural become indicators of the psychic and otherwise invisible power embodied in the Gothic Place.

For Walpole’s castle, we see that it is riddled with the trappings of horror so natural to the Gothic. The castle is haunted by terrifying specters of an armored hand and helmet, which are made even more fantastic because of their colossal size. The haunting of the castle is punctuated by death after the shocking end of Manfred’s son Conrad (21) who is mysteriously crushed on his wedding day by the huge helmet. The oversized helmet, after crushing Conrad and sending Manfred’s line into ruin, actually helps the young man Theodore – the “sorcerer” scapegoated for Conrad’s death (22) – escape by, ironically, cracking the foundations of the castle (31). The specter of the helmet is followed by specters of an enormous hand (103) – connoting “an arbitrary, executive power” (xxx) – and a giant spectral leg (34-5), and eventually the giant ghost of Prince Alfonso, original lord of Otranto (113). The psychological horror of both the specters and their enormous size is enhanced as Manfred apparently loses his mind and tries to forcibly take his daughter in law as his wife (25-6), chasing her around the castle in a rage. In this way, the castle is shown to be a center of supernatural and psychological power, though this power invariably leads to destruction.

*Wuthering Heights* shares *Otranto*’s use of psychological and supernatural horror eighty years later, though Brontë focuses more heavily on the psychological horror devices and leaves the supernatural somewhat ambiguous. The most powerful psychological element is the grounds of Wuthering Heights themselves: a dreary, ancient building crumbling with antiquity
and situated on a wind-swept outcropping – “‘Wuthering’ being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather” (2) – in the middle of a bog. The psychological effect of this gloomy place, especially contrasted to the typically genteel portrayal of Thrushcross Grange within the novel, is poignant, and it further seems to translate into – or project onto – the characters that get trapped there. While Heathcliff’s viciousness and violence, his “hellish villainy” (129) are emblematic of the psychic horror happening there, these traits cannot be said to be inherent to Heathcliff. He does, after all, get introduced into the story as an innocent, if odd, child (26). The atmosphere of the place itself, however, poisoned Hindley and Heathcliff, who in turn poison Isabella, Linton, Hareton, and finally Catherine. Proximity to Wuthering Heights seems to make monsters of otherwise normal people, and the only person who is allowed to escape without similar psychic corruption is the elder Catherine. Catherine’s corruption, if it exists, is of a different nature, for she winds up dying for love of Heathcliff and haunting Wuthering Heights. Catherine’s specter is really the only touch we get of supernatural horror in Wuthering Heights (18), but it is interesting because of its ambiguity. The reader, like Lockwood, is never satisfied that the specter is real or a dream, a situation that echoes the “revealed horror” tradition of the Gothic genre without revealing much.

The psychological and supernatural power centered on these Gothic places reveals another trait intimately linked with places and power centers in the Gothic genre. As the two examples of Otranto and Wuthering Heights demonstrate, what unseen power exists surrounding the Gothic Place is almost entirely destructive, leading the people there, and in cases the place itself, into ruin. This ruinous effect of supernatural power is not unique, and in fact all artifacts of power within the Gothic contribute to the ruin of the Gothic Place. Across the genre this characterization is remarkably consistent: a castle or manor is in a state of political, physical, and existential decay; abbeys and churches, centers of spiritual-political power, are in ruins or abandoned; these centers of power, from castles to towers to cathedrals, are presented in close proximity to death, disease, and the grave. This presentation of power and the centers and accoutrements of power being linked with ruin in the Gothic colors the nature of that power and the ways in which it is both exercised and understood.

Wuthering Heights exemplifies the power center in ruins. Notwithstanding its role as a wealthy manor house, the complex is fairly isolated from the wider world, limiting its broader
social and political impact. The place exists at the borderland of society and the wild, closed off from Britain at large except where absolutely necessary, or, in the case of Mr. Lockwood and his London roots, when people enter from outside the place’s sphere of influence and become trapped. Physically, the Heights are in disrepair, the elements that make it Gothic – its situation on a blustery crag in the middle of a bog – represent its ruin. Mr. Lockwood describes both its decay and its dreary atmosphere on his first visit there, saying

> Pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there at all times, indeed: one may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. Happily, the architect had foresight to build it strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones.

Before passing the threshold, I paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front, and especially about the principal door; above which, among a wilderness of crumbling griffins and shameless little boys, I detected the date ‘1500,’ and the name ‘Hareton Earnshaw.’ (2)

Standing in contrast to Thrushcross Grange, where the atmosphere is bright and controlled, Wuthering Heights is a dark and wild place characteristic of the people that live there. Isabella Linton describes the dichotomy between the two places fairly well when she describes her escape from Wuthering Heights, saying

> blessed as a soul escaped from purgatory, I bounded, leaped, and flew down the steep road; then, quitting its windings, shot direct across the moor, rolling over banks, and wading through marshes: precipitating myself, in fact, towards the beacon-light of the Grange. And far rather would I be condemned to a perpetual dwelling in the infernal regions than, even for one night, abide beneath the roof of Wuthering Heights again. (134)

Still, it remains superior to the Grange as the Grange is easily conquered, succumbing to the ruinous power of the Heights, suggesting that culture and civilization may be easily swept aside by brute strength, and that ruinous strength may in fact be at the center of power. The characters, like the Heights itself, have a veneer of civilization masking a “wild beast’s fondness” or a “madman’s rage” underneath (53), as though “God had forsaken the stray sheep there to its own wicked wanderings, and an evil beast prowled between it and the fold,
waiting his time to spring and destroy” (79). Nevertheless, the development of the characters’
decay is correlated with their interaction with the Gothic Place – many of them only fall into ruin
after coming into contact with it – while the Gothic Place remains ruinous throughout. In this
way Wuthering Heights shows us a power center that seems detached in its decay from the
characters: Heathcliff’s viciousness and eventual ruin become an extension of the environment
and function more as a product of the space itself.

In Walpole’s novel, the castle and the accoutrements of power within it are as decadent
as those in Wuthering Heights, and the castle functions as a power center in decline for two
main reasons. Firstly, the power of the castle’s tenants is tenuous at best because it is stolen.
Manfred is a “usurper of the principality of Otranto” and so already the sense of the Power
Center’s strength is troubled (61). Secondly, the political power of the lord is in ruins because
Manfred has produced only a sickly male heir that dies early in the story, leaving his lineage in
ruins (24). But even if Conrad had not died, Manfred says

he was a sickly, puny child, and Heaven has perhaps taken him away, that I might not
trust the honours of my house on so frail a foundation. The line of Manfred calls for numerous
supports. My foolish fondness for that boy blinded the eyes of my prudence - but it is better as
it is. I hope, in a few years, to have reason to rejoice at the death of Conrad. (21)

Such an admission suggests that Manfred though his line was in ruins already. Yet, apart from
Manfred’s weaknesses as the castle’s lord, the place itself is surrounded and infused with
terror, decay, and death: the ghostly apparitions, the crumbling castle courtyard (31), the death
of Manfred’s sickly heir, and the recurring image of Saint Alfonso’s tomb (40, 41), all contribute
to the overall decay of the space. In fact, it seems as though in Otranto, power, the powerful,
and the accoutrements of power are presented as being in stages of flux. From the beginning
this is true of Manfred, who we first are given at the moment he is about to realize his dream of
perpetuating his line even through a “homely youth” who was “sickly, and of no promising
disposition” (1), and from there at the death of his son we see him begin to decline from the
height of his power. Manfred’s role as lord and his fall from power are tied to the fates of the
levers of power in the novel, and as he goes into decline so do the political, moral, and judicial
states of the castle as he hands out “preposterous sentence[s]” and “ill-grounded resolution[s]”
(22). More graphically, the castle itself is crumbling as the story progresses, with the very
foundations of the courtyard where Manfred’s son and heir were slain collapsing into the
catacombs beneath them. Finally, this flux of power is epitomized as the true lord of the castle, the Knight of the Gigantic Saber returns during the novel to lay claim to the castle (60), problematizing who controls the castle’s power until the giant specter of Prince Alfonso finally appears and declares Theodore the true ruler.

Through all of these events, however, the power dynamic is presented not as a product of the characters, but as a feature of the space: connected, in some ways supernaturally, with the castle itself in a way independent and irrespective of its occupiers. The castle kills Manfred’s heir, rescues Theodore, and hides Isabella, while Manfred and the true lord of Otranto, Isabella’s father, work throughout the novel to lay claim to the castle. The same can be said for *Wuthering Heights*. The corruption and decadence of a given character in *Wuthering Heights* is proportional to that character’s proximity to the Heights itself, while activity in the novel heavily centers on inheritance and control of the Heights and the Grange. The very existence of the manor drives activity in the novel and shapes the characters within it.

As with the manifestations of power in the Gothic, the supernatural elements are unique when discussed in the context of ruin. The presence of supernatural and psychological unrest in the Gothic Place represents a kind of decay in its own right: a ruin of reality and the mind. The ruin of the characters is often a psychological ruin more than just a physical one. For Walpole, this means that, appropriately enough, Manfred becomes unhinged by his desire to hold on to lordship of Otranto, unsettling the psychological order of the book’s central power figure and making him, in the words of Theodore, a “tyrant” and a “savage, inhuman monster” (109). The same is true for Brontë, who presents Heathcliff as a “lying fiend! a monster, and not a human being” (112), whose psychological power – both his much-remarked diabolical cunning and the sheer force of his will that drives the plot of *Wuthering Heights* – is almost purely destructive. And like Manfred, Heathcliff’s character is where the most power is seated in the novel. Both Manfred and Heathcliff exemplify the importance of the psychological and how decay at the psychic level is central to the motion of a Gothic plot.

The supernatural functions much the same way, representing as it does a ruin of reality and the natural world just as the psychological betokens a ruin of the mind. The horror elements of ghosts and specters in both novels – most especially the appearance of specters and ghosts – function not just to heighten the psychological unrest through terror, but also to represent the unraveling of accepted reality within the center of power. The tenants of Otranto
vacillate between affirming “the reality of the vision” of their ghosts and treating them “as a delirium” (38), while Mr. Lockwood has trouble distinguishing between his dreams and reality when confronted by his “ghostly Catharine” during his first, and only, night at Wuthering Heights (17-8). This ambiguity about accepted reality further troubles order at the center of power by subverting not just the power of that place, but also what may be taken for granted about definitions of reality.

Together, *Wuthering Heights* and *Otranto*, through their interplay of power and ruin through corporeal, psychological, and supernatural devices, highlight an eighteenth and nineteenth century fascination with power and ruin that often manifests in binary relationships. Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange are opposites of each other, ugly and beautiful, yet their fates are intertwined. The same is true for Heathcliff and Cathy, who in all ways are opposites except that “whatever souls are made of” the two of there are the same (71): Heathcliff being foreign, coarse, and harsh, while Cathy being English, refined, and beautiful. But often the two sides of the binaries are not even as far apart as the Heights and the Grange, or as Heathcliff and Cathy. The Castle of Otranto is both a palace for the lord and a tomb for his son; Wuthering Heights is a retreat for the Earnshaws and a prison for them as well; Heathcliff is both compelling and terrifying (194); Manfred is both powerful and out of control before he metaphorically switches places with Prince Alfonso at the end of *Otranto*, both of them trading death and kingship, ultimate power for ultimate ruin. Beauty and ugliness, natural and unnatural, master and subject, power and ruin, these binaries are made manifest and help explore the interaction between two seeming opposites, in turn questioning whether these things are naturally opposed. This questioning of relationships of opposition springs from

[a] fascination with the primordial darkness, the oxymoronic ‘fascination of the abomination’ [that] was prevalent in the late nineteenth century. A perusal of the periodicals of the period […] reveals that they aimed to tell the unvarnished truth about the ugly and frightening realities of man’s nature hidden behind the attractive façade. (Elbarbary 113)

This fascination with peering behind the veneer of civilization would seem to indicate an underlying belief in the Gothic writer that, to some extent civilization was, indeed, a veneer. Gazing behind the curtain to see the corruption and ruin behind people and places of power would strongly suggest that eighteenth and nineteenth century authors perceived ruin and corruption behind those people and places of power: a reality hardly limited to that time and
place. Furthermore, as the denouement of *Wuthering Heights* and *Otranto* suggest, the strength of that edifice of power correlates with the depth of ruin lying behind it.

What Elbarbary describes as the “fascination of the abomination” is more than merely peering behind the mask of the powerful. There is an aesthetic principle joining beauty and ugliness and majesty and horror together that links Gothic with a broader artistic discourse within the culture. The interplay of these seemingly incongruous traits points to a metatextual discussion about the nature of beauty and taste that at the same time returns to the discussion of place. In the 18th and 19th centuries there is a discourse within British culture over the nature of and the relationship between beauty and ugliness. This discussion is most relevant with regards to the contemporary discourse over the meaning of the “sublime.” Its importance to the Gothic manifests in how closely the aesthetic discussion of beauty and sublimity track with the Gothic emphasis on space, suggesting that the Gothic use of space betokens ideas that are relevant beyond the internal discourse of the genre.

Sublimity as a natural aesthetic quality apart from beauty owes some of its earliest distinction to Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury, as well as John Dennis. They were some of the first to articulate the sublime as an expression of appreciation for dreadful and irregular forms in nature, as opposed to ordered and beautiful forms. Both men’s articulation of sublimity were rooted in their experiences traveling the Alps, where John Dennis, in his first comments on the subject published in *Miscellanies* in 1693, described his journey as a “pleasure to the eye as music to the ear,” but “mingled with Horrors, and sometimes almost with despair” (Nicholson). Shaftesbury made similar observations in the *Moralists: A Philosophical Rhapsody*, characterizing the experience in the Alps as both fearful and pleasurable, remarking most especially on the fearful qualities of space.

Another key player in the dialogue over sublimity is Edmund Burke, whose concept of the sublime was developed in *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* in 1756. Unlike Shaftesbury, who argued that sublimity was a quality apart from and beyond beauty, Burke’s conception of the sublime was as a quality opposed to beauty; antithetical to beauty in a way similar to light and darkness. In his explication of beauty and sublimity, he characterizes beauty as orderly, smooth, small, and says that “terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime” (Part II, section VI). In contrasting the two qualities, he writes:
For sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small: beauty should be smooth and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates it often makes a strong deviation: beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy: beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive. (Part III, section XXVII)

Nevertheless, while the beautiful and the sublime are characterized as mutually exclusive, they are understood by Burke to both produce pleasure in the observer; in beauty, the pleasure of seeing the beautiful, and in sublimity, the pleasure of escaping from that sense of horror when it is over.

The aesthetic discussion of sublimity and beauty as understood by Burke helps describe the ways in which the Gothic begins to overturn the binaries of Power and Weakness, Order and Ruin. In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë sets up several binaries, and her construction of the horror and decay of Wuthering Heights against the order and beauty of Thrushcross Grange can be understood in the burkean terms of Beautiful vs. Sublime. Thrushcross Grange is beautiful; it is orderly and symmetrical. By contrast, there is little that is beautiful in Wuthering Heights. Nevertheless, Wuthering Heights is definitely striking and compelling in the ways that make a space sublime; it is fearful, irregular, horrific, and its position on a crag in the middle of the moors weaves the space with a sense of the vast and terrifying space. Similarly, the castle in *Otranto* vests power within sublimity. The supernatural horrors of the castle are larger than life objects and body parts, recalling the requisite horror of scale associated with space in the sublime. The ghostly and enormous armor is associated with an invisible power of the past that haunts the corporeal power inhabiting the castle, and the shock associated with seeing them is tied not only to their fantastic nature but also to their intimidating scale.

This binary of Beauty vs. Sublimity is not without its exceptions, and this ambiguity about the distinction plays out within the Gothic. First, the conception of the sublime is not entirely Burke’s. The Earl of Shaftesbury’s discussion of the Sublime conceived of the difference between Beauty and Sublimity as not one of kind, but of degree. Shaftesbury was concerned more with awe at the grandeur of space, especially with regards to the Alps where “space astonishes” (390), and his notion of the sublime was not an aesthetic quality in opposition to beauty, but a quality of a grander and higher importance than beauty. Secondly,
the sublime is not always in opposition to beauty because beauty can be discovered within the sublime. Decay and ruin have a beauty of their own, and Shaftesbury’s comments on his experience in the Alps convey both his pleasure and his repulsion, observing such dreadful spectacles as the “wasted mountain” that showed itself to the world as a “noble ruin” (390-91). The beauty of decaying spaces is of a different kind: more tied to awe and power than mere pleasure. In Shaftsbury’s view, the beauty of the sublime is accentuated by the horror it invokes. Similarly, the ruin within Otranto and Wuthering Heights is confounded because, though in ruins, they are still powerful; though they are in decay they are still compelling. They are central despite their ruin and the paradox of this confluence highlights both power and ruin within the Gothic Place. The place is that much more powerful because it is a ruin, and the ruin is more profound because it is located at a place of power.

The relationship between power and ruin is not entirely consistent, though. The temporal distance between The Castle of Otranto and Wuthering Heights – roughly sixty years – is highlighted by the way in which each interprets the relationship between power and ruin. Otranto and Wuthering Heights treat power and ruin as traits in development. Power is in flux for Walpole and for Brontë, with the castle falling into ruin from power as Manfred’s power collapses and the Heights becoming powerful up from ruin through Heathcliff after Hindley drives it to financial ruin. But though they may exist along the continuum between Power and Ruin, both spaces remain central and fortunes of the space affect the direction of the narratives. For the Heights, power is not truly lost by having fallen into ruin, and at the same time the Castle of Otranto shows that power is no vaccine against future ruin. In fact, as we will see later, that power may be the very cause of its ruin.

The bond between power and ruin in presentations of place is strong in the Gothic, as the examples of The Castle of Otranto and Wuthering Heights surely attest, but more than just being evident, this corollary betokens a more specific criticism of power in Victorian and immediately pre-Victorian culture. While we can safely say that the Gothic Place is place where there exists a symbiotic relationship between power – physical, political, psychological, and spiritual – and the ruin of that same power, it says something about the nature of power that this relationship exists at all. And that these places and accoutrements of power in the Gothic are always in variance with accepted norms and realities within the culture may suggest that Gothic narrative is presenting the reader with either an ideal vision – which seems unlikely
– or a commentary on the nature of social power as it exists. And if it is a commentary on the nature of social power, it becomes important to wonder just how this critique is being delivered, what that critique is saying, and finally what it means about the broader culture and the devices of power within that culture.
The Gothic Place is an often overlooked, yet broadly constitutive element of the Gothic genre, and it is central to a discourse on Gothic for reasons beyond merely the facile similarities of each Gothic environment in any given novel – atmospheric gloom, physical decay and ruin, psychological and supernatural horror, and so forth. The superficial traits of the Gothic Place, as will be shown here, exist to reinforce the confluence of power and decay. Furthermore, there is a deeper relationship between power and ruin in the Gothic Place beyond merely their being correlated in a given Gothic story. The presentation of the Gothic Place as a binary in flux – the powerful becoming ruined and the weak becoming powerful – represents a power inversion within the space. The edifices and simulacra of power – castles, manors, cathedrals, kings, and clergy – fall into ruin to be replaced their opposites in the same way that the virtuous man falls into ruin to be replaced by his monstrous double. That this function seems to orbit centers of political and social power so consistently across the genre betokens a wider critique about the nature of these kinds of power and the structures they inhabit. Beginning with *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 and persisting even through *Dracula* in 1897 and beyond, this centering of ruin around the social structures within the dominant culture persists and in fact intensifies. The inversion of power and ruin in the Gothic Place, and the other binary inversions within the genre anchored thereto, speak to critiques of social structures like clergy, aristocracy, and even capitalism that, as the nineteenth century progresses and the Gothic continues to mature, develops as a rhetorical attack on institutionalized power.

It is not only place that inverts power binaries within the literary Gothic, and in fact power and weakness is not the only binary inverted in the genre. Quite the contrary, while a power binary tied to space is important to this reading, "Gothic effect depends upon the production of a monstrous double" (Halberstam 54), and the genre itself broadly relies on binary and inversion thereof. In a given Gothic text, it is not unusual for the classically Aristotelian physical/spiritual binary, as well as the binary relationship of life and death, to
become troubled as supernatural powers intrude upon the corporeal world; Otranto has its ghosts, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) has its demons, *The Beetle* (1897) has its monsters, and *Dracula* has its vampire shaping narrative as much as normal corporeal forces. Madness, dreams, and terror – explored in such novels as *Wuthering Heights* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* – serve a similar function in the Gothic, shaping the story in a way usually reserved for physical forces and troubling the boundary between physical and psychological, real and perceived. All of these, of course, are anchored to space in their own ways, with terror and madness and hauntings and vampiric attacks afflicting people within a gloomy castle like Udolfo, an abbey like Northanger Abbey, or a crumbling mansion like Wuthering Heights. Beauty and ugliness also become troubled and inverted in the Gothic, with the most villainous or frightening characters like Count Dracula often being the most compelling, and the beautiful characters becoming consumed by their monstrous doubles as in *Jekyll and Hyde* or *Frankenstein*. Love and hate, pleasure and pain, follow the inversion of beauty and ugliness as normal characters become entangled with these beautiful, terrible Gothic figures or grapple with dark reflections of themselves. Some inversions transcend merely character or place binaries, however, and such inversions affect the text on a more fundamental, if more subtle level. At times, the Gothic will trouble and invert the traditional narrative forms of its parent genre romance, and in doing so highlight the ways that the Gothic departs not only from romance but also from the Romanti
cism, as well as the reasons for this departure.

*Wuthering Heights* serves as an exemplary model for power inversion that centers on the Gothic Place, in no small part because the place itself infuses and often dictates the activities of the human characters. As I discussed in Chapter 1, while Brontë presents us with powerful characters like Heathcliff that would seem to drive the narrative, even he is transitory and secondary to the place itself: Wuthering Heights. While the story is, as Mr. Lockwood says, a “story about [his] neighbors” (25), the arc of the narrative is such that, as with *The Castle of Otranto*, the focus shifts from person to person while remaining generally leashed on the Gothic Place itself in Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff himself is often seen as inextricable from the movement of the plot in Wuthering Heights, and for good reason. He is, after all, seemingly central to the conflict in the novel. Yet as powerful and as plot-driving as Heathcliff

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4 From here on it will be helpful to note that I use capitalization to help distinguish “Romantic” – referring to Romanticism – from “romantic” – referring to the romance genre.
seems, he, like Hindley and Isabella and every other tormented character, is a product of the atmosphere, as he admits himself saying in reference to Hareton, “we’ll see if one tree won’t grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it!” (136). This statement is emblematic of Heathcliff’s fatalism in *Wuthering Heights* that places agency outside of himself, abrogating responsibility even while he works his “hellish villainy.” As Heathcliff himself suggests here, he is not demonstrably different from Hareton or Hindley as they all turn out monstrous because of Wuthering Heights. Brontë encourages the reader to displace responsibility for Hareton’s toxic character by blaming Heathcliff, and Heathcliff’s toxic character by blaming Hindley, and Hindley’s character on the whims of fate. By robbing the characters of this agency, Brontë highlights how, their actions notwithstanding, the story is less about them and more about the tragedy of how the atmosphere around them has poisoned their lives. The multiple framing of the story – popular with nineteenth century romance – also helps to render the human protagonist ambiguous, while the shifting focus on character functions, as it does to a stronger degree in *Otranto*, to highlight the centrality of the place itself by muting the agency of characters through a fatalism tied to place. What remains constant through these layers of narrative, the multi-generational timeframes, and the changing characters is the centrality of the book’s namesake – Wuthering Heights – which could in turn be interpreted as the true main character of Brontë’s novel. As such, how power inversions function in the novel are closely linked to place, and any interpretation drawn from the manor house will have echoes throughout the novel.

Power becomes inverted within *Wuthering Heights* in a number of ways, not the least of which is, of course, tied to ruin and decay. Wuthering Heights as a manor house is in a state of ruin even while being a power center. It is set up as a contrast to Thrushcross Grange in that the Heights are in decay economically, socially, morally, and spiritually, whereas the Grange is strong on all similar points. And yet, it is Wuthering Heights that projects power within the text – corrupting and inverting the characters that come into its orbit – and controls people and events in a way that Thrushcross Grange never seems to. In fact, while activity and dynamism typify the Heights even in its ruin, the Grange is an inert space on the periphery of activity. The Grange, which seems as though it ought to typify the proper Victorian upper class, is weak and powerless within the novel, and the people tied to the Grange are similarly powerless to resist the predations of Heathcliff and, by extension, Wuthering Heights. While Wuthering Heights
gives its inhabitants a feral kind of strength even as it destroys them. Thrushcross Grange appears to have an enervating effect on those who live there. The Grange kills Edgar Linton, Isabella, and the elder Catherine from wasting diseases, afflicts Mr. Lockwood with a similar sickness for near the duration of the novel, and leaves Linton Heathcliff a wan, sickly boy whom Heathcliff “would be glad to have […] in his grave” (170). All the trappings of power that the Grange ought to possess as an idealized aristocratic home instead inhere in the Heights, and the veneer of civilization that the Grange projects is an attractive mask for a place that essentially weakens characters and opens them to destruction from the Heights.

The manor house at Wuthering Heights and the power inversion it represents serve as touchstones for a larger array of character, thematic, and even structural inversions within the text. Thematically, wealth and poverty take a prominent role in *Wuthering Heights* as power is intimately linked with wealth in the novel, and yet it is the wealthy – the Earnshaws and the Lintons – who are brought low in the novel while the poor – especially Heathcliff – become powerful. Hindley Earnshaw inherits Wuthering Heights, but his moral weakness, his drunkenness, and especially his gambling ruin him financially leaving him to “die in debt […] his whole property mortgaged [with] the sole chance for the natural heir [being] to allow him an opportunity of creating some interest in the creditor’s heart, that he may be inclined to deal leniently towards him” (137). In effect, it is Hindley who makes room for the fatherless gypsy Heathcliff to usurp that inheritance and become the novel’s most powerful character. But temperance and virtue are no guarantors of power, as the fate of Edgar Linton demonstrates. Edgar himself is aware of the danger approaching, as Nelly describes when she says, “Leaving aside the degradation of an alliance with a nameless man, and the possible fact that his property, in default of heirs male, might pass into such a one’s power, he had sense to comprehend Heathcliff’s disposition: to know that, though his exterior was altered, his mind was unchangeable and unchanged” (74). Nevertheless, Edgar does little to stop the incoming calamity, and so Edgar Linton and Thrushcross Grange are eventually conquered by Heathcliff through a similar weakness in the structure of social and economic power that allows Heathcliff to take Wuthering Heights. Both houses fall prey because of the capitalist way in which legal and social institutions structure wealth in the novel – Wuthering Heights goes to Heathcliff to

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5 Along with Heathcliff as ascendant poor person, there’s also the kind of narrative power that Zilla and Nelly have, along with the disruptive power of Joseph.
pay Hindley’s personal gambling debt and Thrushcross Grange goes to Heathcliff because of his marriage to Isabella. The way in which wealth is controlled within the novel – through primogeniture and bloodline, post mortem transferences of property – allows for both places to be destroyed and overtaken by what started out as a poor orphaned gypsy.

On a character level the roles of hero and villain are highly problematized in *Wuthering Heights* as the reader is presented with multiple tragic villains and Byronic heroes, which in turn betokens an inversion of proper – or at least expected – power relationships. Emily Brontë goes to pains to create sympathy in the reader for Heathcliff, Hareton, and even Hindley. Though these characters, and especially Heathcliff, are introduced as villains early on in the framed tale, that villainy becomes muted through an exploration of the characters’ backgrounds. Heathcliff is definitely monstrous and a “damn hellish villain” (129), but he is also a tragic character suffering a psychic burden stemming from his initial powerlessness at the beginning of his life with the Earnshaws. Hareton’s character is similarly vexed, for though he is an uncultured brute and even cruel, Brontë makes certain that the reader knows that his cruelty is not a quality inherent to him, but acquired through abuse and the toxic atmosphere of Wuthering Heights. Though it is difficult to see just how Hindley Earnshaw becomes villainous, we nevertheless have our interpretation of his ignoble decline and end colored by the sympathy that Nelly Dean has for him. She makes no excuses for Hindley, but his downfall is still tragic to her, as though it could have gone very differently. She says

\[\text{I used to draw a comparison between [Edgar Linton] and Hindley Earnshaw, and perplex myself to explain satisfactorily why their conduct was so opposite in similar circumstances. They had both been fond husbands, and were both attached to their children; and I could not see how they shouldn’t both have taken the same road, for good or evil. But, I thought in my mind, Hindley, with apparently the stronger head, has shown himself sadly the worse and the weaker man. [...] One hoped, and the other despaired: they chose their own lots, and were righteously doomed to endure them. (136)}\]

For Nelly and for Brontë, Edgar and Hindley ought to have had similar fates save that Hindley succumbed to a moral weakness and eventually became villainous. By the end of the novel, however, Edgar’s moral strength in comparison to Hindley does little to make him heroic as his family is victimized and his estate falls into his enemy’s hands. Again, though, this
problematizing of protagonist, antagonist, hero, and villain also harkens back to Brontë’s overall focus on place within *Wuthering Heights* instead of on character. Their roles can be more easily inverted and otherwise manipulated because the focus is essentially not on them.

The inversion of character roles anchors the metatextual and structural inversions within *Wuthering Heights* that in turn tie the novel to its romance antecedents and frames the Gothic’s evolution. On the one hand, characters in the novel problematize the relationship between author and audience because the story has two frames. It is a story about Wuthering Heights told to Mr. Lockwood by Nelly, who then relays the story to us the readers. All the tellers of the story within the novel are also part of the audience, for rarely do they even take part in the action that they recreate for one another in the telling. Though this kind of framing is popular in the nineteenth century, it takes on a particular power when juxtaposed with the manifold inversions in *Wuthering Heights*. On the other hand, Heathcliff’s overall narrative arc works as an inversion of the classic romance story line. In the romance, the typical narrative arc involves the circuitous journey in which an aristocratic or otherwise high-status hero falls from his proper place and must fight his way back to a reaffirmation of social order. Heathcliff’s narrative arc is completely the opposite. He begins life as an apparently foreign orphan with no status and fights his way up from there towards power and wealth through the creation of social chaos until his death at the end of the novel. None of those who at the beginning fall from their proper place ever return to power, and throughout the novel only those who begin at the bottom ever gain power: Heathcliff through his measured creation of social chaos, and also Hareton and Cathy who, somewhat ominously, inherit Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange after Heathcliff’s death. This structural inversion of the romance storyline is telling because it signals a departure within the Gothic from its more conservative parent genre and is one point at which the Gothic establishes a kinship with contemporary – and at that point more revolutionary – Romanticism.

To fully explore the meaning of the Gothic maturation away from the prototypical romance form, as well as how power functions in and is manipulated by each, requires an examination of Literary Romanticism. Romantic literature can be characterized by an array of attributes that, while they may not be absolutely true across every instance of the Romantic, nevertheless capture the Romantic style and the central purpose of the form. Primary among these characteristics was the attempt to reconcile human individuality with the infinite: a project
that had particular resonance for the discourse on beauty and sublimity. Individuality in Romanticism relied heavily on heightened perception of emotion and the sensual as a curative for what was perceived as the dry rationalism of the eighteenth century. It was through this heightened emotionalism, the use of the imagination, and the subconscious that the new Romantic individual meant to perceive and to comprehend the infinite in its various contemporary forms. The roots of this ideological trend were in a number of contemporary factors including the revival of medievalism, Elizabethan romance, philosophical Idealism, and perhaps most importantly to this discussion the French Revolution.

In M. H. Abram's *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (1971) he describes Romanticism as profoundly philosophical, a "metaphysics of integration" whose key was "the 'reconciliation,' or synthesis, of whatever is divided, opposed and conflicting" (182). The primary literary device was the journey, resurrected, like many things Romantic, from medieval romance, in which the heroic figure, as representative of all mankind, falls through a “disastrous splintering of the primal unity” into individuated and conflicted existence, “a division, fragmentation, and estrangement from” that “undifferentiated unity” (Abrams 151), but eventually is “redeemed” through a “process of reintegration” into the “initial, undivided condition” (152). This trope was, of course, the secularized permutation of the Christian and Neoplatonic metaphysics, which presented human existence as a sequence of “Grace” or “Cosmic Unity,” followed by a “fall” into “differentiation” and “multiplicity,” until finally returning to the original goodness. Much of what distinguishes Romantic writers, Abrams writes, “derives from the fact that they undertook […] to save traditional concepts, schemes, and values which had been based on the relation of the Creator to his creature and creation, but to reformulate them” within the new context of the time (13).

Abrams describes how the Romantic was heavily invested in these tropes, but that the secularization of an essentially religious metaphysics was the direct result of the French Revolution: a key turning point in the estrangement of Gothic and Romanticism. While literary Romanticism was tangling with the idea of integration, unity, and redemption, the French Revolution seemed to promise all of those things in a very tangible way: a movement that would bring the idea of heaven on earth including social harmony, freedom, and radical individualism. When the Revolution destroyed those hopes over the course of the Reign of Terror, the Romantics were forced to reassess themselves. Originally great supporters of the
Revolution, the bloody truth behind their idealism forced them to transfer their quest for liberation and reconciliation from physical and political realms and into philosophical ones. The external transformation became an internal transformation for post-Revolutionary Romanticism. Romantics became subdued by the harsh realities of the French Revolution and began pursuing a subtler, internal dialogue on reconciliation of opposing forces. During this transition, however, the Gothic does not react in the same way. On the contrary, the Gothic departs from Romanticism by continuing to explicitly and externally reproduce those conflicts. In fact, the Gothic, especially as time passes in the nineteenth century and the two ideas continue to diverge, distances itself from Romanticism by not only cleaving to its revolutionary roots but by subverting the tropes of the romance. For *Wuthering Heights* this meant overturning the central narrative arc adopted by Romanticism. Heathcliff does not begin in the metaphorical “state of grace” typical of the romance – a place of wealth, power, and social order – and the trajectory of his life is clearly the reverse of the “fall from grace” and subsequent “redemption” model. Heathcliff’s fortunes increase as he becomes more inhuman. And again, the subversion of the romantic storyline is emphasized in its own way by Brontë’s decentering of the narrative from characters and refocusing onto place. Not only is the fall and redemption inverted, it is made secondary in *Wuthering Heights*. Furthermore, in a more broad sense the consistent presentation of opposing binaries causing mutual destruction – Catharine and Heathcliff, the Heights and the Grange, the Wealthy and the Poor, Foreign and Domestic – undermines the Romantic “metaphysics of integration” (Abrams 182).

But Brontë is, of course, not the only, or even the best, example of the ways in which the Gothic departs from and undermines the Romanticism and the romance. The Gothic breaks thematically and structurally with the Romantic across the lifespan of the genre, this breakage becoming more pronounced as time passes and Romanticism moves away from its revolutionary roots, and still very present in many other works in a variety of temporal places. Later works like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and *Dracula* (1897) focus heavily on the narratives of villains instead of heroes and heroines, diluting the typical focus on the heroic arc of a virtuous noble even while maintaining a form of the fall/redemption model. At the same time this particular departure, this shift in focus towards the deviance over of the norm, would seem to signal an attack on the ethnocentrism or homo-centrism typical of romantic work. *The
*Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) subverts the heroic storyline of the romantic in a different way from *Wuthering Heights*. Dorian Gray begins an amoral Aristocrat, falls into even deeper moral and spiritual ruin, and eventually his hedonistic individualism destroys him. While *Wuthering Heights* is published in the mid nineteenth century, and these other examples are later, earlier Gothic novels tended to stay closer to the original romance frame though they pulled at the romantic underpinnings in other ways.

The *Mysteries of Udolpho*, widely considered a foundational Gothic work, took the romantic literary form and punctuated it with passion and terror; a technique that ends up highlighting an underlying Gothic attack on power. Mysterious disappearances, rumors of ghosts, imprisonment, marauders and kidnappers, suspected murder, sickness and madness all make an appearance over the course of Radcliffe’s narrative, adding archetypal Gothic flavor to this romance. Radcliffe was a founder of the terror novel, but her work is not as sensational as those who took up the Gothic mantle later. She uses the same devices and tropes mentioned above, yet her work is more emotional and psychological, focusing on the precarious psychological state of the heroine more than the events themselves. Radcliffe’s heroine is frequently endangered but almost never in a life-threatening way, with things always ending well for her by the end of the story. Likewise, the horror and supernatural elements that Radcliffe gives the reader in *Udolpho* are carefully explained away by the novel’s end, leaving the story with a tidy denouement and a happy ending.

With reference to the project here, *Udolpho* would seem to be an antithesis to the notion of the Gothic as a mode of inverting power narratives and a departure from the romantic and Romanticism. Unlike matured instances of the Gothic like *Wuthering Heights, Dorian Gray*, or *Frankenstein*, the Romantic redemption trope is very much intact for *Udolpho* at the birth of the genre, albeit with the embellishments of the archetypal Gothic devices. It would seem as though the narrative of *Udolpho* only inverts power insomuch as the virtuous aristocrat Emily St. Aubert loses her power because she is a genteel woman and open to the predations of Signor Montoni. Power is not inverted so much as lost and regained in the typical romance fashion, seeming to leave little room for the ways in which this example of the Gothic is subversive even against its Romantic background. But by now we have learned not to rely on the narrative to give us the Rosetta Stone of interpretation. As is so often the case, a
reexamination of place sheds more light on the ways in which power becomes inverted and the confluence of power and decay comes to represent a critique of the power center.

Udolpho Castle itself represents an inversion of the power center in the same way that the Castle of Otranto and the manor at Wuthering Heights do: as decaying edifices embodying a range of social power constructions. It embodies many of the things that the Castle of Otranto embodies from political power to military power to death and ruin, and it also expands on Walpole’s characterization of the castle by making the space a foreign Other in a number of ways. Udolpho Castle is literally foreign in that it is in the Apennine Mountains in Italy and so removed from the native France of the St. Aubert family. In contrast to Otranto, Udolpho is characterized not by the great activity stirring there, but by how little, functioning as it does not as a home – Montoni often remarks early on of visiting the castle “to receive some rents” and Emily says that “it appeared that he had not been there for two years” (150) – but instead as a fortress (336), a prison (198), and a tomb (257). But even more than just being a fortress in another country, Udolpho is, unlike Otranto, a castle at the fringe of civilization instead of the center, which affords it, and by extension Signor Montoni, an important advantage. It is Udolpho’s separation that allows it so much latitude to project power in the novel, functioning as it does as a base for Signor Montoni’s lawlessness. Emily says of Signor Montoni’s brigands

Sometimes they formed themselves into bands of robbers, and occupied remote fortresses, where their desperate character, the weakness of the governments which they offended, and the certainty, that they could be recalled to the armies, when their presence should be again wanted, prevented them from being much pursued by the civil power; and, sometimes, they attached themselves to the fortunes of a popular chief, by whom they were led into the service of any state, which could settle with him the price of their valour. From this latter practice arose their name—condottieri. (285)

Udolpho and its inhabitants stand apart from the enforcement of law and act as a law unto themselves: ironic given that the conflict of the novel centers around Signor Montoni’s attempt to manipulate inheritance laws to acquire the property of the St. Aubert family.

This foreignness, combined with the contrast between Castle Udolpho and the St. Aubert chateau La Vallee, is important as it colors an interpretation of the use of power in the
novel, locating power in an Other and foreign place and thus undermining the “ideal” model of power. Radcliffe describes Emily’s first impressions of the castle, saying

Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni’s; for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object. As she gazed, the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper, as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendour. From those, too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiness of evening. Silent, lonely, and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all, who dared to invade its solitary reign. (179)

The castle’s enormity and age suggest power, but the effect is menacing. It is a dark place, “silent, lonely, and sublime” from which Signor Montoni plots his evil designs. By contrast, La Vallee is a thriving, light, and lively place. Radcliffe describes it on the very first page:

On the pleasant banks of the Garonne, in the province of Gascony, stood, in the year 1584, the chateau of Monsieur St. Aubert. From its windows were seen the pastoral landscapes of Guienne and Gascony stretching along the river, gay with luxuriant woods and vine, and plantations of olives. To the south, the view was bounded by the majestic Pyrenees, whose summits, veiled in clouds, or exhibiting awful forms, seen, and lost again, as the partial vapours rolled along, were sometimes barren, and gleamed through the blue tinge of air, and sometimes frowned with forests of gloomy pine, that swept downward to their base. These tremendous precipices were contrasted by the soft green of the pastures and woods that hung upon their skirts; among whose flocks, and herds, and simple cottages, the eye, after having scaled the cliffs above, delighted to repose. (3)

Ann Radcliffe portrays the château as a “picturesque” place that soothes the mind, fosters tranquility, and is “filled with that cheering freshness, which seems to breathe the very spirit of health” (60). Like Udolpho and Signor Montoni, La Vallee embodies the personality of its owner Monsieur St. Aubert, who had “retired from the multitude 'more in pity than in anger,' to scenes of simple nature, to the pure delights of literature, and to the exercise of domestic virtues” (3).
The contrast between these two spaces highlights the way in which power is projected in *Udolpho*: namely, the foreign power center overtaking the weak and tranquil “civilized” space. Though the narrative of *Udolpho* is not centered on the decaying edifice to the same degree that it is in *Wuthering Heights*, the castle does function as the source of corruption and ruin that seeks to undermine the civilized and socially exalted space of La Vallee. It does this as an outside force, a foreign element intruding upon the civilized space and exploiting the inherent weaknesses thereof. For La Vallee and the St. Auberts, this means the institutional construction of wealth and power – law that structures how wealth is created, maintained, and inherited – is manipulated in an attempt to destroy them. That Signor Montoni from the decaying ruins of Udolpho is able to attack in this way is significant because – as is often the case in the Gothic – it places the foreign power at an advantage vis-à-vis the domestic one. Like Brontë’s Thrushcross Grange, La Vallee is weakened by its own civilization, its own adherence to law and social custom, and the lawless outsider in Udolpho is able to attack it. It is Udolpho’s place in the narrative – tied as it is to the foreignness and aggression of Signor Montoni and Count Morano – that signals an erosion of social power around the civilized structures. This critique from Radcliffe, coinciding as it does with the violence near the end of the French Revolution, marks what Abrams identified as the key moment of change within Romanticism away from ideas of external struggle and towards a more internalized dialogue. In that sense, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* rests as a Gothic romance at the historical fork in the road where the Gothic and Romanticism begin to part ways. Here is the point in which Romanticism retreats into the cerebral and ideal, and where the Gothic, while still in dialogue with its romantic roots and with Romanticism, retools itself towards more concrete discussions of power.

The ways in which “civilization” is imperiled and thus subverted in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* are strikingly similar to those in *Wuthering Heights* and *Castle of Otranto*, though Brontë takes this theme and expands it. Signor Montoni, much like Brontë’s Heathcliff and Walpole’s Manfred, uses property and inheritance – the way in which wealth and power is structured in European society – as a weapon against his enervated enemies. In many ways, *Wuthering Heights* functions as a mirror image of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Signor Montoni and Heathcliff are closely similar characters, though the focus of the narrative is reversed and we follow Emily St. Aubert, an easy stand-in for Isabella Linton. The ways in which Brontë
departs from Radcliffe are interesting, however, for what they reveal about the evolution of the genre. First and foremost, the “good” and “virtuous” characters are not the focus in *Wuthering Heights*, for if the plot can be said to follow anyone it follows Heathcliff and his rise to power. With this, we also see Brontë humanizing the villain in a way that distinguishes him from the stock character of Signor Montoni. Secondly, while Radcliffe takes pains to expose all mystery in her novel in the tradition of the “explained supernatural,” Brontë does no such thing, leaving a range of questions, especially about the horrific and supernatural, unresolved. Finally there is, of course, very little note of redemption in *Wuthering Heights* similar to Emily St. Aubert’s restoration to her station: Heathcliff is largely victorious in all his designs and succeeds in destroying “civilization” and himself by the end of the novel.

These departures are indicative of the distance between Radcliffe and Brontë in time, and also the distance between Romanticism and the Gothic genre at different times. *Wuthering Heights* represents the growing departure of Gothic from the increasingly establishment Romanticism and the romance genre, inverting as it does social order by problematizing the “normal.” Brontë’s focus on the immoral and monstrous effectively displaces social virtue as the norm within *Wuthering Heights*. Together with her disinterest in fully explaining the horrific and supernatural in her novel, as well as the only muted kind of “redemption” at the end, this departure signals a break from Radcliffe, whose novel cleaves closer to the romance genre and essentially reinforces the stability of the social order. For Radcliffe, it is the chaos, terror, and instability that are out of place and right themselves by the end of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. For Brontë it is quite the opposite. Chaos, immorality, and instability are the natural state of things in *Wuthering Heights* while social order and stability — along with purely virtuous characters — are the anomaly.

As time passes the departure of Gothic from Romanticism becomes even more pronounced until many elements that typified the Gothic in Walpole and Radcliffe no longer fully apply. Stoker’s *Dracula*, published in 1897, is a prime example of the Gothic genre late in its evolutionary departure from Romanticism, and in Stoker’s novel the inversions of power in earlier novels, and the inversion of the romantic hero arc, are even more pronounced and further trouble the understanding of places and institutions of power. Like the castle of Udolpho, Castle Dracula functions as a center of power but also as a prison when Dracula traps Jonathan Harker and a tomb, a trait magnified by Dracula’s undead nature and his need
to recover his strength by sleeping in “his coffin-home” (382). The same is true for the Carfax Estate that Dracula purchases in England, which used to be an abbey (36), for it is a former institution of power now indwelled by an antithetical force embodied by the vampire. And like the troubled distinction between real and unreal we see in *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Wuthering Heights*, the boundary between the real and unreal becomes particularly troubled in *Dracula* because the man is, after all, a supposedly mythical creature. And just as in *Wuthering Heights* and *Udolpho* before it, the villain here is a powerful foreign male who uses gender, sexuality, physical strength, as well as property and wealth, to destabilize a civilizing power center.

Count Dracula’s purchase of Carfax Estate links together earlier novels by presenting, as its antecedents did, scenarios in which capitalist ideology and British law undermine themselves. The vampire purchases this double institution of power – a noble estate and a religious edifice – as property and uses it as the touchstone for his attacks on English persons, property, and ideology. He easily insinuates himself into the English framework of wealth and power and uses that framework, along with his own supernatural powers, to attack the symbols of “civilization.” Similarly, Heathcliff, a foreigner like Count Dracula, manipulates the capitalist frame of wealth control to purchase his own English nobility in the form of Wuthering Heights. And like the vampire, Heathcliff uses this as a staging area to attack the edifices of “civilization” embodied in large part by Thrushcross Grange. Earlier still, Signor Montoni spends the arc of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* trying to wrest away control of the St. Aubert family holdings, trying to inherit the land in much the same way that Heathcliff acquires Thrushcross Grange, and also attempting to coerce Emily into signing legal documents ceding away control. In each case property and place are at the center of this grab for power and propagation of destruction, and in each case it is the capitalist and British socio-political framework that enables this attack.

There are changes, though, that *Dracula* makes to the model of subversion that preceded it and these changes betoken a deeper criticism of power within this late Gothic than what came before. For instance, it is interesting that in *Dracula* the vampire is tied to his foreign place necessarily – he must sleep in his native earth he brings with him from Transylvania (81) – but he maneuvers around this “law” by taking the soil with him and, in effect, establishing a beachhead in London from which he can more effectively carry out his
designs. Dracula, without transporting the edifice of Castle Dracula, has nevertheless transcribed the corruption of that place onto a new edifice at Carfax: a gesture reminiscent of the way Dracula shares blood with Mina Harker and takes a new “bride.” In this instance, Count Dracula manipulates the natural laws that would normally bind him towards his own destructive ends. And unlike earlier villains like Signor Montoni and Heathcliff who were strong in a perfectly regular sense, Dracula is supernaturally strong – as strong as twenty men (224) – and persistently supernatural. By that I mean that, in contrast to the other novels, there is no ambiguity about Dracula: he is a supernatural creature. More than that, while the supernatural is typically confined to the Gothic place in earlier novels, Dracula is able to attack his foes directly at the civilized place because he, in a sense, mobilizes place and takes it with him. These attacks are more than just financial or physical, as they are in Brontë and Radcliffe. Dracula attacks spiritually, existentially, and culturally. Whereas Heathcliff and Signor Montoni attack the civilized place physically, socially, and financially, Dracula also attacks at a fundamental societal level.

These changes affect the rhetoric of power in the Gothic and represent an intensification of the differentiation of Gothic away from the increasingly establishment Romanticism, and of the attack on establishment power in general. Dracula functions as a fairly straightforward attack on English masculinity. Englishness is weakened within the novel while foreignness is powerful. Harker and the other Englishmen are weak and ineffectual – Stoker emphasizes this by feminizing Harker in his captivity, “sitting at a little old oak table where in old times possibly some fair lady sat to pen” (36), and giving the most strength and agency to the American Quincy, the Dutch Van Helsing, and of course the Romanian Count Dracula – and the English are easily destroyed by Dracula. Within the novel, only foreigners have active power – for good or evil – and only foreign people, the American and the Dutchman, are able to do anything meaningful about the vampire. Like the previous novels, Dracula attacks a fundamental element of Englishness, the domestic female, but unlike Heathcliff and Signor Montoni, who eventually fail to take over this domestic pillar of Englishness, Dracula succeeds in taking Mina and making her just like him – foreign and powerful – while the Englishmen are powerless. Through Dracula effective power is vested “out there” and not in England, the English paraphernalia of power like civility, wealth, and empire notwithstanding. The “power” that the English derive from civilization is actually a
weakening and enervating force that opens them to predation from the uncivilized. That Dracula has a “happy” ending and seems to affirm the victory of social order over the dangerous Other in the end is ultimately pyrrhic and misleading. The English manage to defeat the vampire, but only because of the intervention of foreigners, while Count Dracula has still been incredibly successful at undermining Englishness by destroying Mina Harker, the very vessel of Jonathan Harker’s future primogeniture.

This enervation of Self in the face of the Other ties easily into the other novels already discussed. Heathcliff is foreign and he infiltrates the weak and decadent English nobility with ease and destroys them. At the same time he demonstrates that in England wealth and power are essentially equivalent, and that power can be wielded however one wants so long as one is free from what the English expect are the attendant social graces of nobility: “that fineness of structure in the body, which renders it capable of the most delicate sensation; and of structure in the mind which renders it capable of the most delicate sympathies – one may say, simply, “fineness of nature”” (Ruskin): an English expression of nobility that clashes with the foreign expression of Count Dracula. Similarly, Signor Montoni is a foreigner who projects his power to destroy through legal means tied to inheritance and property. Even in Castle of Otranto there are signs of this nascent theme in that Manfred himself is part of the destructive power and is himself “foreign” to the castle: that is, he is a usurper to the throne.

But it must not be forgotten that destruction is in orbit around power, and not just the dominating kind of power exemplified by Heathcliff, Montoni, and Dracula. While they are driving forces in the novel, they are competing with the establishment edifices of power like Thrushcross Grange, La Vallee, and London, which are further embodied by Edgar Linton, Mr. St. Aubert, and Jonathan Harker. So while the powerful can be said to be coming from the outside, from the foreign place, to destroy Englishness, the Gothic is not necessarily a rallying cry for English nationalism or empire but remains an attack on institutionalized power. This is because the hegemonic manifestations of the “powerful” in these novels – the cultured aristocracy and bourgeoisie – are powerful in the social sense, but completely decadent and bereft of meaningful agency. The normal and the othered representations of power, as well as the way in which both come to ruin, are linked. Nobility is nobility, power is power, and Dracula, Heathcliff, Hindley, Lockwood, and Harker are all symptoms of the same problem: the destructive nature of power itself. Its brutal influence destroys in various ways, but always
destroys, and this inherent weakness of the socially powerful within Gothic writing suggests that the Gothic itself calls into question the viability of these models of social power.

This attack’s relation to place is important and cannot go unnoticed. It relates to the inversion that surrounds place that we saw in chapter one, and “foreign power” invades using the politics of place to destroy Englishness. Wealth, status, inheritance, and the law are the weapons most often used by the foreign usurper to drive the civilized from their place in a physical, social, and psychological sense. The significance of these attacks on places of civilized power arises from qualities inherent to those places, and attendant to their status as “civilized.” These places are at the center of wealth, the center of power, the center of society, and the center of culture, and it is law and culture that allow them to be attacked within the Gothic. Furthermore, the very fact that these places embody wealth, power, and civilization mean that their destruction is equivalent to the destruction of wealth, power, and civilization. It is because of the way the dominant culture is constructed – through law, tradition, patriarchy, hierarchy, and aristocracy – that creates a situation in which the tugging of this one thread at the power center can potentially unravel the entire complicated tapestry of civilization. England’s mechanisms for creating and projecting power are the very tools of her undoing, troubling her relationship to power so that it becomes as much a source of danger as a source of strength.

These power inversions all trouble the understanding of power, and at various times function as an attack on power in the abstract, and often on the powerful in particular. The tone and vigor of these attacks coincide remarkably with the historical turns of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Gothic and Romanticism appear and both manipulate the romance genre – which suggests slippage in society yet typically reinforces the dominant social order – to serve a more subversive end. Then, after the French Revolution, Romanticism, the voice of the revolution at the end of the eighteenth century slowly became the voice of the establishment during the nineteenth, while the Gothic diverged and searched for ways to remain more subversive. At each instantiation over the course of the genre, Gothic explores power as a vexed concept that is inherently dangerous, and over time this danger becomes more and more vested in the physical edifices of power and in the idea of England itself. Just as the divergence of the Romantic and Gothic produced an intensification of the critique of power within the Gothic as the Romantic became more
closely associated with the establishment, so too does the Gothic become more specific in its attacks on tangible institutions and people and the ways in which these edifices of power interact with the idea of civilization and of Englishness in particular. And while the revolutionary heritage of Romanticism is nurtured by the Gothic in England over the course of the nineteenth century, it begins to stand in contrast to the continent where the seeds of revolutionary thought became much more tangible.
CHAPTER 3
GOTHIC RESISTANCE AND PREDESTINATION

In Gothic, the argument goes, identity is not determined from the inside out, but from the outside in… - E. J. Clery

The project of the Gothic as discussed in my approach would seem to be a very contextualized one, relying as it does on historical situation to articulate a critique of and a resistance to the institutions and edifices of power. Similarly, the use of place within the Gothic would seem to be very contextual, relying as it does on familiar (if uncanny) buildings and spaces as symbols of power accessible enough to an audience for an author to communicate resistance. It follows that then that a discussion of the Gothic’s use of place and the context it exists within would have to account for a diverse span of history and space that may or may not be coherent, especially when considering the contributions to the genre of continental, American, and contemporary Gothic works. In this sense, it would make sense to say that the Gothic and discussions of it would require a much larger frame than simply linking specific works to specific contexts.

One of the most prominent ideological contemporaries to the popularity of the Gothic was Marxism, and their coincidence is significant because their projects regarding power are similar. Both the Gothic and Marxism would seem to share the same contextual sources – a milieu of industrialization, urbanization, late monarchism, European capitalism, and so forth – and these two ideas in concert provide a deeper understanding of their respective roots. Yet certainly not every social movement in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was subversive in the way Marxism was. While it is true that a multitude of social movements grew out of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and share the same context with Marxism and the Gothic, the comparison of the two is apt because of the ways in which they engage with power. In fact, the use of the power center in the Gothic as a confluence of socio-political control and destruction functions within late eighteenth and nineteenth century British culture as a criticism of European power structures that correlates with the formulation of control in
Marxism. Both the Gothic and Marxism are expressions of the frustration with institutional power, both grow out of the same concerns, and both express some of the same resistance against those power centers. Perhaps most importantly, the Marxist expression of Base and Superstructure, and the attendant notions of how impersonal structures shape human behavior, forms a good theoretical corollary for the predestinating way in which Gothic describes place.

The task remains, though, of finding a way to discuss individual works across such a historically and contextually diverse space as the Gothic genre includes. The Gothic begins in the eighteenth century and continues as a coherent genre through waxing and waning popularity into the early twentieth century. It would be untenable to suggest that the Gothic does the same thing in 1764 as it does in 1850 or 1910, or that the Gothic exists to speak to a specifically troubling historical provenance that spans 150 years. While each instance of the Gothic may spring from a troubling historical context, there is little to suggest that Bram Stoker is particularly shocked by the French Revolution a hundred years later, or that Walpole’s criticism of the British throne presaged the ascendancy of Queen Victoria or the fracturing of the British Empire. Because the Gothic covers such a broad span of history there may seem to be no way to account for historical contexts across such a diverse space, yet individual Gothic novels still respond to specific instantiations of power. The troubling of power within the Gothic works in both a broad sense across the genre and in specific instances, but this criticism of power, while historically situated, is not fixated on individual instantiations of power. This is because “the Gothic” does not arise as a response to a specific event. Instead, the collected effect of many individual Gothic novels’ choices speaks to fundamental flaws in the very structure of culture.

Inasmuch as historical context is, as Marx might say, an epiphenomenon – a secondary manifestation of an underlying structure – the Gothic speaks to an ahistorical project even while manifestations of the Gothic function in a historical context. That is to say that the Gothic, broadly speaking, is not tied to and does not speak to a single historical context. While the Gothic may seem to uphold the status quo in many instances, closer examination often reveals points of resistance against a hegemonic social order. Yet Gothic novels are not, in the aggregate, a resistance to some specific historical site; instead, the generalized attack on
power that Gothic literature conveys across its myriad instantiations provides a frame for resistance to institutionalized power in different contexts.

The way that specific examples of the Gothic interrelate across time, though it is rarely in some direct fashion, nevertheless reveals the relationship that the Gothic does have with historicity. For this, it becomes important to interrogate the specific issues that a given piece speaks to, its historical provenance, and to examine that larger link to the genre’s ideological project of critiquing power. There can be no more representative example for the early Gothic than *The Castle of Otranto*, and for Horace Walpole writing in 1764, the project of the Gothic genre was inextricably linked to political processes. “A central tenet of the theory of the novel in the eighteenth century was the existence of a functional link between fiction and social reality” and this holds true for Walpole especially (Clery xxiii). Walpole’s political beliefs obviously seep into his creation of *Otranto* as Walpole was strongly opposed to the centralization of power. E. J. Clery writes

According to Whig historiography, the Anglo-Saxon Witenagemot was the forerunner of the modern Parliament, embodying an ideal balance of power shared by monarch, lords, and commoners known as the ‘Gothic Institution’. Disruption of this balance gave rise to the tumultuous events of the seventeenth century: the Civil War, the establishment of a Commonwealth followed by Restoration of the Stuart Line, the deposing of James II, and finally the installation of the Protestant William of Orange and Queen Mary. […] Walpole, with all the force of his lively imagination, identified with the cause […] He arranged around his bed the trophies of limited monarchy; a copy of the Magna Carta on one side, the warrant for the execution of Charles I on the other. (xxvi-xxvii)

Walpole was a member of parliament, and as a Whig at the time was embroiled in many dustups over the perceived abuses of monarchial power. It was in the midst of such turmoil that he had his dream that lead to the writing of *The Castle of Otranto*. Clery writes in his introduction to *Otranto*

As [Walpole] writes in the *Memoirs*, he fully expected the outbreak of civil war: ‘My nature shuddered at the thought of blood.’ Against this background, Walpole’s dream occurred, of a gigantic hand in armour, resting on the uppermost banister of a staircase. In terms of Whig demonology, the armoured hand connotes an arbitrary, executive
power; its appearance in a scene resembling [Walpole’s home of] Strawberry Hill implies an invasion into Walpole’s affairs. Whatever the unconscious origins of the dream might have been, once Walpole had awakened he was left with an image which could not fail to arouse the deepest interests of his conscious mind. It provided the raw material on which his politicized imagination went to work, and the stark emblem of power was mediated by a narrative expansion. (xxix-xxx)

Otranto can be read in many ways as a direct allegory for the political turmoil of the time and as an allegory it is historically contextualized. This instantiation of the Gothic refers to a point in history, and inasmuch as Walpole can be credited with fatherhood of the Gothic genre, then the seed of the Gothic has a historical source. Nevertheless the Gothic is not chained to its historical catalyst: its use and its relevance continue beyond the historical circumstances that it originally was used to address.

Eighty years later when Brontë publishes Wuthering Heights, the Glorious Revolution and the parliamentary concerns of Walpole are a distant memory and the British Empire is at the height of its expansion under Queen Victoria and the Industrial Revolution. Consequently, Wuthering Heights speaks to a different context in addition to being infused with the personality and history of its own author. As we saw earlier, Wuthering Heights troubles power around inheritance, foreignness, and the idea of aristocracy, in some ways like Otranto does. In contrast to Otranto, however, Wuthering Heights gives us a different scale and a different focus, discussing plays of power at the edges of civilization instead of at its heart. The troubling of power in Wuthering Heights, especially with regards to Heathcliff’s self-made rise to power, is focused less on nobility itself and more on the expanding bourgeoisie, as well as the power vacuum at the margins of society that arises from urbanization. There is also the issue of the rapidly expanding empire itself, taking control of territories abroad in a way reminiscent of Heathcliff’s acquisition of satellite powers. Furthermore, there is the problem of Queen Victoria herself, who is almost entirely of German descent, and spends her life using her children to pull the strings of power in Europe: another mirror of Heathcliff’s behavior as a foreigner taking up the mantle of power and controlling satellite powers from afar.

And another forty years later near the turn of the century, Robert Louis Stevenson presents us with The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886). For Stevenson, London itself is the Gothic Place and functions as a very clear confluence of order and chaos,
prosperity and ruin, exemplified in the main character Dr. Jekyll much the same way that Wuthering Heights, the manor house, manifests its Gothic characteristics within Heathcliff. London is, “an Enigma composed of multiple layers of being [and] its confines held virtually all classes of society conducting what were essentially independent lives” (Soposnik 717). In Jekyll and Hyde it is a place of contrasts: the lovely and refined disguising the ruined to such a degree that the confluence is startling when discovered. In several places, Stevenson gives us London as a charming bustle with an “air of invitation, like rows of smiling saleswomen” full of “florid charms,” “freshly painted shutters, well-polished brasses, and general cleanliness and gaiety of note” (3). Even so, this face of London, he notes, shines “out in contrast to its dingy neighbourhood” (3). Stevenson writes

As the cab drew up before the address indicated, the fog lifted a little and showed him a dingy street, a gin palace, a low French eating house, a shop for the retail of penny numbers and twopenny salads, many ragged children huddled in the doorways, and many women of many different nationalities passing out, key in hand, to have a morning glass; and the next moment the fog settled down again upon that part, as brown as umber, and cut him off from his blackguardly surroundings. (40)

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are emblematic of this dualism within London itself: a struggle within a single body between two seemingly antithetical forces. Irving Soposnik writes about the role of London in Jekyll and Hyde, commenting

London was much like its inhabitants, a macrocosm of the necessary fragmentation that Victorian man found inescapable. Unlike Edinburgh with its stark division of Old Town and New, London represented that division-within-essential unity which is the very meaning of Jekyll and Hyde. As both geographic and symbolic center it exemplifies what Stevenson called it in New Arabian Nights, “the great battlefield of mankind.” (718)

In this way we can see that the focus of the novel is not only the struggle within the man, but also the struggle within the city.

Stevenson’s London can also be further historically situated to interesting effect. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was published in the same year as the introduction of the Home Rule Bill in 1886, which would be the beginning of the political dissolution of the British Empire as it ceded many political powers to British territories. Just as the political structure of the empire fractures, so too does the Gothic move away from attacks on purely political and aristocratic
The attack by the Gothic within *Jekyll and Hyde* switches away from monarchy and political devices towards the power and authority of professionals, doctors, and the bourgeois middle class. At the same time, *Jekyll and Hyde* moves away from the edifices embodying political power and towards those embodying a broader kind of power. Instead of the castle or the manor or the cathedral, Stevenson’s instantiation of the Gothic takes place in the crowded city though still, interestingly enough, at a borderland between civilization and barbarity in the heart of London. No longer is it just the aristocrat in his castle who embodies ruin and power, but also the bourgeois professional in his city parlor who both heals and destroys.

The major benchmark that persists across most instances of the Gothic and through the protean critiques of power at different stages is the corrupted power center; a fact which signals a broad attack on power from the genre instantiated in specific critiques of multifarious power structures. One can see that the genre as a whole does not attack clergy or aristocracy or professionalism or even capitalism in a uniform way. *The Castle of Otranto* attacked centralized power and monarchy through a crumbling castle controlled by a false king; *Wuthering Heights* attacked primogeniture, nobility, and civility through a tale of two vastly different houses ruled by the same monstrous criminal; *The Monk* subverts ecclesiastical authority through presentations of the cathedral riddled with impious, hypocritical, and often evil clergy; *Dracula* takes a shot at the idea of English civilization through juxtaposition of powerful foreign places and corrupted or enervated English ones. The Gothic may attack all these things individually, but it is part of the larger project of attacking concentrations of social power: exposing it through the exploration of the rotting edifices of society.

Yet while Marxism would replace the power structures of capitalism with what it suggests is a more egalitarian power structure of its own, the Gothic idealizes a world in which power itself is dispersed and uncentered: a return to the “state of grace” envisioned in the Romantic and Neoplatonic amendment of the Christian redemption model (Abrams 13). The Gothic, with its lionization of the heroic individual and demonizing of structured power, would replace concentrations of social power with an anarchic, radical individualism. Even in instances where the individual is destructive – Heathcliff, Dracula, Signor Montoni – that individual still is powerful, has agency, and can act in the ways those chained to the centers of power cannot. Even Walpole, who sees aristocracy as a necessary function of society, would see power dispersed among many, albeit nobly entitled, individuals. Gothic writers in general
see the individual as the force of effective change and institutions as mechanisms of
destruction where they are meant to be a refuge.

The implications of this for the examples here are important since the project of the
Gothic – as well as this discussion – ties together a range of works over time and space that
would not seem, in a superficial sense, to ideologically cohere beyond merely the umbrella of
genre. Instances in which the power center is being critiqued in the Gothic – troubled, inverted,
corrupted, and destroyed – serve as a touchstone for the novels that help them cohere across
so diverse a space. Dracula may be critiquing English masculinity and sexual power, while The
Monk critiques religiosity and clergy, or Jekyll and Hyde attack urbanity and bourgeois
hypocrisy. These works do not need to perform their critiques in exactly the same way or even
point to the same specific issue. Yet all of these tie back into the Gothic subversion of power
centers – the castle as the male aristocrat for Dracula, the castle and the manor as the
embodiment of primogeniture in Udolpho, and London itself as the simulacrum of Industrial
Revolution “progress” in Jekyll and Hyde. The Gothic, as a genre, provides a suitable frame
through which the centers of power can be interrogated, and all three works may make use of
the Gothic and the corrupted power center since they each critique culturally hegemonic ideas
of power.

This coherence and broad applicability across many contexts, even while maintaining a
unified metanarrative of corruption at the center of power, mirrors in many ways the project of
Marxism, and the timely concurrence of the two ideas is no mere coincidence. On the contrary,
both ideas emerged from the same cultural and political milieu and of course speak to similar
issues. The criticisms of power and the accoutrements of power in the Gothic resonate
strongly with Marxist criticisms of capitalist structures. Marx and Engels write in the Communist
Manifesto

Modern Industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the
great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of laborers, crowded into the factory, are
organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army, they are placed under the
command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of
the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois state; they are daily and hourly enslaved by
the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, in the individual bourgeois manufacturer
himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful and the more embittering it is. (226)

But according to Marx, this oppression and exploitation is not incidental, but a constitutive feature of capitalism, much in the same way that corruption is a feature of power in the Gothic. Marx writes, in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.

For Marx, oppression of the worker by the upper classes is a natural result of the capitalist means of production, and the evils that come from capitalism are fundamental attributes. This fundamentality of corruption within the established order resonates in Gothic critique, though Gothic critiques of power are broader than merely “capitalism” and touch more instantiations of power than early Marxism tackles. At the same time, while Gothic criticisms would seem to pine for an idealized anarchic state of man – the pure, pre-fallen man of the re-imagined Christian Platonism – Marxism does not reject organized power *in toto*, instead arguing that power has been organized incorrectly. Nevertheless, both Marxism and Gothic critique see corruption as a constitutive trait of the contemporary political system, not an aberration, and British Gothic critique goes hand-in-hand with Marxist critique given that Britain was the very source of industrialization and the model of state capitalism.

There is a symbiosis between the emerging Marxist ideas of bourgeois, aristocratic oppression of the proletariat and the Gothic inversion and troubling of power. This means that the Gothic and Marxism are related ideas, and they relate because they are historically coincidental and derive from the same sources. What Marx describes in *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital* about the nature of production at his time is the result, which he acknowledges, of the industrialization of Europe. As he describes it, “At a certain stage of
development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing
relations of production or — this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms — with the
property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto” (Marx,
*Contribution*, 11). For continental Europe, especially Austria, Eastern Europe, and the Russian
Empire, this meant that the forces of feudalism would come into conflict with the new
industrialism, eventually leading to revolution. England faced a similar, if less eventually
revolutionary, conflict as the continent when during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the
previously dispersed and agrarian society transformed into an urbanized, mechanized society.
Friedrich Engels describes London in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England* as

A town […] where a man may wander for hours together without reaching the beginning
of the end, without meeting the slightest hint which could lead to the inference that there is
open country within reach […]. This colossal centralisation, this heaping together of two and a
half millions of human beings at one point, has multiplied the power of this two and a half
millions a hundredfold; has raised London to the commercial capital of the world… (68)

The Gothic and Marxism are both derivative of this historical moment, and though of
course they are not the sole derivative movements at the time that seek to interpolate with
power and oppression, their similarities are impressive and spring from the same root. One
can perceive the shared historical roots through an examination of the treatment of the
established power regime. Just as Marx sees the capitalist base and the levers of power within
capitalism as inherently oppressive and designed to keep the proletariat under the heel of the
ruling class, so too does the Gothic view established edifices of power as inherently corrupting
and as a source of “order” that masks a fundamental chaos.

It should not be thought, though, that this line of reasoning is meant to suggest that the
Gothic and Marxism inform one another in any meaningful way, or even speculate that the two
ideas might inform tangentially, though it is an interesting and unexplored possibility. Indeed,
Marx need never have read anything from the Gothic, while Brontë, Stoker, and Stevenson
need never have heard of Marx, much less read his work. Quite the contrary, a Marxist reading
of the Gothic would treat the genre – with its immersion in emotionalism, mysticism, and the
sublime – as a distracting indulgence of false consciousness. Georg Lukács discusses novel
forms from a Marxist perspective at length in *The Historical Novel* and *The Theory of the
Novel, pointing out some of the problems he sees with romance and really any non-realist cultural production. He writes

All the fragments [of the romantic] live only by the grace of the mood in which they are experienced, but the totality reveals the nothingness of this mood in terms of reflexion… the outside world and the interiority are too heterogeneous, too hostile to one another to be simultaneously affirmed… The only way left is to deny them both, and this merely renews and potentiates the fundamental danger of this type of novel; that of the form becoming dissolved in dreary pessimism. The purely artistic consequences of such a situation are inevitably, on the one hand, the disintegration of all secure and unconditional human values and the revelation of their ultimate nullity, and, on the other hand, the overall dominance of mood, that is to say of impotent sorrow over a world which is inessential in itself and which has only the ineffective, monotonous brilliance of a surface in process of decomposition. (Lukács, Theory, 118-9)

For Lukács, the unreal genres like romance – and by extension the Gothic – perpetuate the idea of a world in which the interior is more important than the real world: the passions of the actor having been given more prominence than the mechanisms of reality. For Marxism, understanding reality as it is forms the backbone for taking control in the present, hence the lionization of the Historical Novel and the rejection of Romanticism’s “reactionary glorification of the Middle Ages” (Lukács, Historical, 178). By contrast, in the romance and Gothic, “The past is stylized and idealized into the gigantic and barbaric out of romantic protest” (Lukács, Historical, 183).

The comparison is still useful, as I have said, since the Gothic and Marx have different goals with regards to power. Gothic would have it unmade, whereas Marx would have it transformed. The Marxist favors Realist novels because a “realistic” portrayal of history will equip the reader to understand history and the means for taking control of the present. A Gothic romance with its magic and fantasy does the opposite and seems to pollute the mind with the impossible. I would argue, though, that both Marx and Gothic seek a similar material change even if they are working at cross purposes in this particular. Marx will subvert power in order to take control of the levers of power, while the Gothic will subvert power for the sake of subverting power. Inasmuch as the Gothic is seeking a material change, it is doing so in order to reach a philosophical goal of social transformation and sees the material as an impediment. At that level, Gothic and Marxism are opposed, and yet since Gothic – unlike Marxism – has
yet to reach the stage after the revolution of power, the conflict is premature in my opinion. Up until the point that the aftermath of the destruction of power is resolved, Gothic and Marx have the same – short-term – goals.

A Marxist reading of Gothic is, however, somewhat outside the scope of this discussion. The argument at issue here is not that one ought to interpret the other, much less that one is causally related to the other, but instead that they share common historical sources. The Gothic discusses place and power in terms that echo Marxism even before Marxism becomes articulated because the cultural milieu that gave rise to Marxism also gave rise to the Gothic. The culture of the late eighteenth and nineteenth-century generated the Gothic and Marxism both as opposition mechanisms serving similar functions, and the difference between them is one of degree. Marxism resists capitalism primarily and sees political and social corruption as branches on that capitalist tree that may be dug up and replaced, whereas the Gothic envisions organized power as inherently corrupt. The Gothic is a frame for points of literary resistance, whereas Marxism of course functions as an entire coherent ideology focused on sweeping cultural, political, and foundational change.

This source that both the Gothic and Marxism share is the historical context of the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. Many socio-political problems, including the Industrial Revolution coming into conflict with the persistence of feudalism in much of Europe, produced the environment suitable for the development of Marxism and the Gothic. Again, though, this speaks to the ways in which England differed from the continent. The Gothic and Marx may be related ideas but the difference in scope and intensity is obvious. The Gothic begins in Britain while the much more intense Marxism springs up on the continent, and this difference is significant because it betokens a difference in culture. Gothic appears in England instead of Marxism, and at the same time England had succeeded in moving sufficiently far way from feudalism before the Industrial Revolution in ways that the Holy Roman Empire, Scandinavia, and of course Russia had not. Only France had done anything like creating a Marxist vision of the classless society after the French Revolution, but even that was tainted in the minds of many Europeans by the Reign of Terror, and it eventually collapsed under the weight of French imperialism. England, by contrast, had liberalized its economic structures to some degree by the nineteenth century and this progress, limited though it was, allowed for proto-
Marxist ideas to take a more muted form in literature instead of a fully developed ideological movement.

The history contemporary to the earliest Gothic writers contains many elements that could give rise to the development of certain proto-Marxist ideas by such writers as Walpole and Radcliffe. It would be difficult to claim that Walpole was Marxist or would have sympathized at all with Marx’s anti-capitalist and anti-class ideas. Walpole was a committed aristocrat, but his arguments for the decentralization of power may have been made without a clear idea about the trajectory that such ideas might take: namely, that if Monarchy can be said to be too centralized, then what differentiates the power of Oligarchy and Aristocracy? At that point in history it is not unreasonable to think that aristocrats, arguing for a transfer of power to the parliamentary nobility, would not imagine that their own arguments against the monarch could apply to themselves and presage peoples’ revolutions a century later. Walpole does not imply any dialogue with the poor or lower classes, preferring instead, like Roman senators, to view the aristocrat as a representative of the “people,” and consequently his criticism of power is necessarily different from Marx, who would not easily make a distinction between noble and king. Nevertheless, Walpole speaks to an anxiety over corruption at the centers of power, and this same argument is echoed by Marx who saw social and political power as oppressively constructed, though the two obviously disagreed on the remedy.

For the anxiety over the centralization of power, there can perhaps be no greater single event for Walpole than the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, a mere year before the publication of *The Castle of Otranto*. The Treaty, which ended the Seven Years War, effectively ended France as a colonial power and left Britain as the most powerful empire on Earth and led to the rise of the Second British Empire⁶. The American Revolution, followed quickly by the French Revolution, would have greatly shaken confidence in the centralization of British Imperial power in London. More than this, though, the British Empire was otherwise ripe for a Marxist movement and that nothing forceful materialized is an interesting accident of history. While England may have made some motion away from the feudalist modes of production that still largely gripped the continent in the eighteenth century, the function of the British Empire, especially beyond the shores of Britain itself, was harshly exploitative,

characterized by racism, slavery, war, and subjugation, and was so emblematic of some of the worst characters of Marxist demonology. And this exploitative framework did not go unnoticed by those under the yoke of British empire, as anti-imperial violence was widespread: revolutions and uprisings in India, Jamaica, Ireland, Michigan, the Hudson Valley, North Carolina, Mexico, and Surinam plagued the Empire. In fact, while Marx may have been critiquing capitalism in general, his critiques could easily have been aimed directly at the British Empire; the greatest organ of capitalism and imperialism of his century.

Again, though, while the British Empire was fully ripe for Marxist critique, there is still the difference in tone between Gothic and Marxism, even as anti-imperialist movements sprout up around the empire. This difference speaks to British culture and the nature of the writers producing Gothic fiction. This may be due to the fact that though British writers were more sensitive to social and political corruption and the destructive nature of organized power in their culture, their own status as productions of a capitalist base – the education and the trappings of class most especially – prevented them from fully appreciating or identifying with the scope of the destruction happening around them. Perhaps like the middle class Londoners, the Gothic writers “kept to the big thoroughfares, conscious that just behind the house-fronts to either side murmured a million hidden lives, but incurious as to their kind” (Sadleir 21).

Walpole, though wrestling with institutions of power, only really saw the issue in political terms, while Marx spoke to power in a much broader sense. Even so, it was not only their wealth and class – for Marx himself was wealthy and leisure class – that caused the British to react differently from Marx, but also the ideologies surrounding poverty and labor in England. For the continent, still largely feudal, serfdom was a divinely ordained place in society, and existing as it did as part of a providential design carried no real moral component. In England, by contrast, the now famous “protestant work ethic” was part of the new morality that had arisen in the eighteenth century that saw labor as glorifying God, and thus poverty, linked as it was to indolence and vice, ceased to be a holy state and became associated with wickedness. Even so, just as Marx attacked religiosity as a weapon of capitalism against the worker, so too did the Gothic, by manipulating the wealth and poverty of characters, subvert in a more subtle way the eighteenth century notion that this social stasis was just and providential.

The Gothic and Marxism develop within industrialization and the culture surrounding it informs both. What ties them together is the fundamental building block of institutionalized
power: the home. Home is historically important to both Marxism and the Gothic as people – the poor especially – during the Industrial Revolution move away from an agrarian lifestyle, away from ownership, and toward a wage-labor lifestyle in an urban setting, becoming unmoored from place and are turned into commodities of the land owning classes. When Marx and Engels are writing *The Communist Manifesto* in the mid nineteenth century, the population of England had abandoned agrarianism to an astonishing degree, leaving the countryside and moving to the cities to become laborers. Part of the basis for this increased urbanization is attributed to the Inclosure Act of 1801 and the General Inclosure Act of 1845, which allowed for the privatization of previously common lands in England in order to create larger, contiguous, fenced farms that were more productive than England’s traditional mosaic of smaller, unfenced farmlands. As the move to enclose farmland increased England’s agricultural output, it nearly wiped out the small agrarian way of life and sent farmers flocking from their homes to work in the factories. Because of this, the meaning of “home” is very much diminished for a large portion of European, and especially British, peoples in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but the edifices of power – removed as they are from the control of the worker – are meaningful places. Even functioning as they do in an aloof way, distanced in ways from the plight of the poor, Gothic novels often speak to this anxiety of home and ownership, focused as they so often are on theft and usurpation of property.

Within British Gothic literature, the Gothic and Marx again coincide through presentations of real spaces. Such criticism could have been dealt with in the realm of allegory and symbol entirely, but Gothic examples that deal with a physical space like London while at the same time communicating the confluence of power and ruin really ground the criticism in a way that intersects with the Marxist dialectic. A particularly “Gothic London” – in the sense that it juxtaposes power and ruin – from Marxist sources comes from Engels’ descriptions of London in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. He writes

> These slums are pretty equally arranged in all the great towns of England, the worst houses in the worst quarters of the towns; usually one- or two-storied cottages in long rows, perhaps with cellars used as dwellings, almost always irregularly built. These houses of three or four rooms and a kitchens form, throughout England, some parts of London excepted, the general dwellings of the working-class. The streets are generally unpaved, rough, dirty, filled with vegetable and animal refuse, without sewers or gutters, but supplied with foul, stagnant
pools instead. [...] In the immense tangle of streets, there are hundreds and thousands of alleys and courts lined with houses too bad for anyone to live in, who can still spend anything whatsoever upon a dwelling fit for human beings. Close to the splendid houses of the rich such a lurking-place of the bitterest poverty may often be found. (70-1)

The most horrific part for Engels, however, is not the place itself, but its use. He writes

And how the poverty of these unfortunates, among whom even thieves find nothing to steal, is exploited by the property-holding class in lawful ways! The abominable dwellings in Drury Lane, just mentioned, bring in the following rents [...] so that the starving occupants of Charles Street alone, pay the house-owners a yearly tribute of £2,000, and the 5,566 families above mentioned in Westminster, a yearly rent of £40,000. (72)

Engels touches on the Gothic in another way towards the beginning of his description of the Great Towns, echoing the way in which Gothic writers often – as in Dracula's London that enervates and enables destruction, or at Thrushcross Grange where the veneer of class and culture lead to the Lintons' downfall – will juxtapose civilization and ruin, painting civilization as the source of that ruin it is meant to guard against. Engels writes

After roaming the streets of the capital a day or two [...] after visiting the slums of the metropolis, one realizes for the first time that these Londoners have been forced to sacrifice the best qualities of their human nature, to bring to pass all the marvels of civilization which crowd their city; that a hundred powers which slumbered within them have remained inactive, have been suppressed in order that a few might be developed more fully and multiply through union with those of others. (67)

Even while physical places do not hold the same kind of power in Marxist iconography as they do for the Gothic, both ideas nevertheless describe related phenomena of self-destruction that inhabit “civilization.”

A particularly powerful example of Gothic place exists in Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, in which we see London in a way very similar to Engels' description, with a similar Gothic sense of systemic corruption. Here we see London as the corrupt power center, and as a very striking “duality in unity” that the Gothic Place is meant to convey across the genre. Sinner and saint, rich and poor, healthy and diseased, healer and killer; all are represented in truly Gothic fashion. In several places, Stevenson gives us London as a charming bustle with an “air of invitation, like rows of smiling saleswomen” full of “florid
charms,” “freshly painted shutters, well-polished brasses, and general cleanliness and gaiety of note” (3). Even so, this face of London, he notes, shines “out in contrast to its dingy neighbourhood” (3). This overlaying of poverty with prosperity echoes Engels’ description of the London slums in *The Condition of the Working Class*, where he says, “poverty often dwells in hidden alleys close to the palaces of the rich” (70). London existed very much in the way that Stevenson described. London was three parts jungle. Except for the residential and shopping areas hardly a district was really "public" in the sense that ordinary folk went to and fro. There was no knowing what kind of a queer patch you might strike, in what blind alley you might find yourself, to what embarrassment, insult, or even molestation you might be exposed. So the conventional middle class kept to the big thoroughfares, conscious that just behind the house-fronts to either side murmured a million hidden lives, but incurious as to their kind, and hardly aware that those who lived there were also London citizens. (Sadler 27)

And Reverend William Tuckniss describes London at the end of the nineteenth century as a place where the seeds of good and evil are brought to the highest state of maturity, and virtue and vice most rapidly developed, under the forcing influences that everywhere abound. London then may be considered as the grand central focus of operations, at once the emporium of crime and the palladium of Christianity. It is, in fact, the great arena of conflict between the powers of darkness and the ministry of heaven. It is here that they join issue in the most deadly proximity, and struggle for the vantage-ground. (xiv)

His description is apropos of the kind of struggle Stevenson gives us in *Jekyll and Hyde*, good and evil struggling within the unified form of Dr. Jekyll. And again, these characterizations of real places within the Gothic are illuminating because they pull the Gothic away from the cerebral contemplation of the Romantic and towards the corporeal and material criticism of Marx.

Even so, real presentations of place are of course not solely Gothic, and the presentation of a real space like London differs in the Gothic from, say, a Realist London because of the horror imparted to the place. Dickens, for example, mingled Realist and Gothic ideas in his various interpretations of London, and this blending of the real and the horrific sets his style apart from other Gothic Londons for this reading because of his optimism. That is to
say, in such horror-colored tales as *A Christmas Carol* (1843), which would depart from Realism into the Gothic, Dickens presents corruption much differently than Stoker or Stevenson: as a particular affliction on individuals instead of a systemic flaw of power. For Dickensian London, individual wrongs can be righted by correcting a single person or an institution, but for a truly Gothic London those wrongs are traits of the power centers themselves.

While the project here is deeper than this generic comparison between the Gothic and Marxism, but it should be clear what is not occurring. While place is a constitutive factor in understanding the Gothic, place does not appear with similar force or frequency in Marx or Engels’ writing. On the contrary, Marxism tends to vest ownership of society’s ills in the owner classes, “felonious landlords,” the “money lords,” the “factory lords,” the “ruling classes”7 – the people handling the levers of power, as opposed to the levers themselves – more often and more explicitly than the Gothic does. Marx described the misuse of power by the overclass in a speech he gave, “Address of the Land and Labour League to the Working Men and Women of Great Britain and Ireland,” which is emblematic of the way in which Marx and Engels described power usage, saying

All parties are agreed that the sufferings of the labouring poor were never more intense, and misery so widespread, nor the means of satisfying the wants of man ever so abundant as at present. This proves above all that the moral foundation of all civil government, “*that the welfare of the entire community is the highest law, and ought to be the aim and end of all civil legislation,*” has been utterly disregarded. Those who preside over the destinies of the nation have either wantonly neglected their primary duty while attending to the special interests of the rich to make them richer, or their social position, their education, their class prejudices have incapacitated them from doing their duty to the community at large or applying the proper remedies; in either case they have betrayed their trust. (Marx, *Marx/Engels Collected* Works Vol. 21, New York: International Publishers, 1985 (1869). 404)

Marx places blame for the ills of society squarely on the shoulders of its overseers. Even while Marx and Engels made passing mention of the factory and the workshop89 and the

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7 They rose a terrible commotion for the big loaf, the landlords became rampant, the money lords confounded, the factory lords rejoiced — their will was done — Protection received the *coup de grâce.* (Marx, Karl. “Address of the Land and Labour League to the Working Men and Women of Great Britain and Ireland” *Marx/Engels Collected* Works Vol. 21, New York: International Publishers, 1985 (1869). 401)

8 [The] workshop of the patriarchal master [is changed] into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of laborers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers (Marx, *Communist,* 227).
and the bank, they nevertheless treated these places as—at least by comparison to the
demonizing such places receive in the Gothic—morally neutral. In contrast to the Gothic, Marx
does not attack the place itself necessarily: merely its use. Likewise Marx does not want to
destroy power: just reorder it. In Marxist imagery, there is a call to retake these centers of
power and transform them, whereas in the Gothic they are immutable. The correlation with
Marx is to show that Gothic is more subversive than it is given credit for because it overlaps
Marx—which is widely acknowledged to be subversive—in so many ways. It may be so
subversive because it springs from a similar historicist root and—while not every movement
shared this reaction in the eighteenth century—Gothic and Marxism did.

Nevertheless, the Gothic Place does relate to Marxism in an interesting way: through
the Marxist articulation of power structures. The idea that place—what would seem to be just
the background setting of a story or an incidental genre device—is constitutive to an
understanding of the Gothic betokens a way of thinking in which not just the actors in a society,
but also the foundations of that society, play a part in social and political outcomes. In
Wuthering Heights, characters became evil and corrupt because of their proximity to the
Heights; in Jekyll and Hyde, Dr. Jekyll is able to be both murderer and healer because of the
dual nature of London; and in Otranto, the castle itself is the center of the narrative and
supernaturally drives the action. This soft “structural” determinism in turn foreshadows and
echoes Marxist ideas of Base and Superstructure. As mentioned earlier, Marx described this
materialism in A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, writing, “The totality of these
relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on
which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of
consciousness” (12). These forms of consciousness manifest, for Marx, in all the secondary
rituals of life—the epiphenomena—from society to nationality to religion to sexuality to
individual human conception of the self. Marx says of religion

The religious world is but the reflex of the real world. […] The religious reflex of the real
world can, in any case, only then finally vanish, when the practical relations of every-day life

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9 The guild-masters were pushed aside by the manufacturing middle class; division of labor between the different corporate
guilds vanished in the face of division of labor in each single workshop (Ibid.).
10 Every great city has one or more slums, where the working-class is crowded together. True, poverty often dwells in hidden
alleys close to the palaces of the rich. (Engels, Condition, 70)
offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellowmen and to Nature. (*Das Kapital*, 60-61)

Marxism envisions religion – and really most rituals of social interaction and control – as determined by the economic basis that underlies a culture. This kind of social determinism in Marx echoes of the kind of determinism surrounding the edifices of power in the Gothic: forces that are underlying, present but largely unseen, shaping the course of events. Their relationship is important because both highlight an underlying determinism caused by otherwise “invisible” forces, and both do so in an effort to interrogate and manipulate the underlying causes of social ruin. If there is one thing that definitely sets Marxism apart from the Gothic at this ideological juncture, it is that Marxism seems more optimistic about the ability of that underlying structure to change, whereas the Gothic often presents the edifices of power as seemingly immutable: an interesting paradox considering that these structures are also in a state of ruin.

For the Gothic, this connection between the base/superstructure binary and the Gothic Place, as well as the soft determinism represented by both, points to another cultural concurrence between the two ideas. It is significant that both these trains of thought developed in historically Protestant countries in cultural traditions that emphasized the divinely ordered universe. On the one hand, it seems as though the determinism of both the Gothic and Marxism could be in some sense derivative of the long line of theological justifications of the systems of power from Divine Right of Kings to Calvinist predestination. That is to say, the idea that there are forces beyond the strictly obvious working to determine social and political outcomes is clearly present in the Gothic and Marx and could derive from Protestantism. At the same time, though, Marxism and Gothic determinism are a secular rejection of that same Reformation theology: subverting it by revealing physical predestinating causes. This ties further into the physicality of the Gothic and Marx as they reject the spirituality of the Reformation: the edifice and the base are sources of ruin, and not some divine Author, which suggests alterability in predestination. The Gothic, like Marx, agitates more for material change as a resistance against this Reformation fixation on predestination. Likewise the Gothic makes use of the physical edifices of power and control as being a primary source of society’s destruction to articulate this agitation for revolutionary change. In addition to merely emphasizing the corporeality of the mechanisms of society’s destruction, the Gothic Place
acknowledges predestinating factors in society and yet suggests their changeability by making them corporeal. That is, unless we are to believe that within the Gothic the corrupted power structure is entirely fixed and the entire project is a Jeremiad lamentation on the cruel twist of destiny. Yet this cannot be borne out given the changeable nature of class and wealth surrounding place within the Gothic, even to destructive purposes. Both the Gothic and Marx, read as overlapping struggles against predestinating factors, can thus be seen as part of a protracted denouement of the Reformation.

It is an irony that the Gothic and Marxism, two ideological threads that would seek to interrogate and cast off the shackles of determinism, are themselves so determined by culture. Culture contributed to their creation, and so too did culture drive their development and their implementation over the course of the nineteenth century. As time passes, it could be said that the status of the power center in England improves somewhat as the political situations change. There are no more true monarchs after Victoria and the Empire begins to cede power to its dominions towards the end of her reign. In reality, though, the political is not the entire focus of the Gothic, as we have already seen that the specific targets for Gothic critique is, like that of Marxism, ever changing. Victoria may not have been consolidating political power towards the end of her reign, but her reign did represent a moral authority and consolidation of domestic power. Over the course of her long reign, Victoria’s monarchy transformed, becoming less political even while its social significance increased. The monarchy sought to differentiate itself from the scandals – sexual and financial – of the previous rulers which had damaged the credibility of the throne, and so Victoria’s reign emphasized morality, social virtue, and domesticity. Victoria, the “first Family Queen of the British throne” (Weisbrod 238), fostered the concept of the “family monarchy” which could appeal to the growing class of British bourgeoisie (Marshall 16). And just as Victoria’s throne lost political significance but gained astonishing cultural power, the intensification of Gothic critique is able to carry on even while the focus changes away from political edifices like castles and churches and towards social edifices like the City: no longer tied directly to political turmoil like Otranto, but still addressing social power. Dracula for example is not attacking a political edifice, but a social one: English manhood, emasculated by Victorian morality and powerful domesticity. And in Jekyll and Hyde one sees an attack on urbanity as a center of social control and destruction. Marxism at the same time intensifies by expanding the field of play for Marxist thought while fomenting
revolutionary change where it can, eventually culminating in the Bolshevik Revolution of Red October and the beginning of the Soviet Project in 1917. And the Bolshevik Revolution, as much as it ushered in a nominally Marxist society, was only possible because of the determining factors of history: the incidental failings of monarchism, imperialism, and capitalism. Marxism, like the Gothic, has a symbiotic relationship with history as well as, most significantly, the capitalist power base that it means to destroy.

The Gothic and Marxism are both products of their historical provenance and understanding the history and context of one can help inform an understanding of the other. Both express frustration about institutionalized power born from a cultural and political milieu that saw a shift in Europe over the organization of power and population. More importantly to this project, Gothic writers often express violence against the structure of political and social power through corrupted edifices of power, and this antagonism to organized power as a determining force in human behavior resonates with Marxist ideas of base and superstructure. Both discuss power as inherently corrupt: not merely fallen, but systemically and foundationally flawed. At the same time, while they share a similar cultural provenance, the differences between the Gothic and Marxism allow for an understanding of the cultural forces that led them to appear independently and uniquely. Furthermore, a reading of place as a corrupted locus of power and a constitutive element of Gothic fiction highlights the cultural determinism derived from Protestantism that informs an understanding of Marx, as both can be seen as an extended historical denouement of and a reaction against the Reformation. Finally, the Gothic Place, existing as both a corporeal location and as an allegorical device, highlights a call to action by taking control of predestinating elements: moving them out of the spiritual or metaphysical realm and into the physical where they become subject to human intervention. The confluence of power and ruin that the Gothic Place typically embodies thus serves a dual purpose. It at first reveals that there are foundational factors that manipulate human activity, or at the very least limit the scope of human activity. And even as it does this, the Gothic embodies these factors in a physical, mutable form, pushing back against the religious metaphysics of Providence and clearing a path for social action.
CONCLUSION

That the Gothic works to clear a space for social action may explain in part the continued relevance of the genre even after two hundred years. The beginnings of the genre are of course historically situated: the social and political context of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were as relevant to the generation of Gothic as they were to the generation of Marxism. And yet the genre, like Marx, is ahistorical inasmuch as its use transcends the framework from which it originally sprung. The Gothic has become a tool for specific political resistance across a range of contexts instead of merely a point in which particular social or moral codes are undermined. This transcendence – applicability beyond the eighteenth century, beyond Victorians, and beyond England – is the cause of the balkanization of Gothic into the myriad “sub-genres” cropping up today. Nearly any situation can be Gothicized: transported into a context of gloom and terror and decay and ruined power. In effect, this detachment from specifics makes it nearly impossible, as Botting said, “to discuss ‘the Gothic’ with any assurance” (1), because even the sacred originals like Walpole, Radcliffe, and Brontë become dealers in sub-genres of “the Gothic” which address their specific and historically instantiated issues. Nevertheless it is these originals that articulated the language within which other examples of the Gothic could be explored: through “pleasurable terror,” existential decay, binary inversion, supernaturalism, and the ruined centers of power.

The role of place as part of the Gothic and the attendant critique of institutionalized power that the Gothic Place brings with it also bears out beyond the original context. The Gothic Place – a physically and often supernaturally or existentially ruined edifice of power – is a constitutive element of the Gothic and beyond being mere setting it is purposeful. The place performs a vital function within the critique of power, grounding a Gothic narrative by having the story itself play out within the thing being critiqued: the haunted mansion, the crumbling castle, the darkened church, and so forth. Consequently, this reading of Gothic, and the use of the Gothic Place, can be applied to, and in fact ought to be applied to a range of works beyond the scope I have discussed here: the English eighteenth and nineteenth century. Inasmuch as the Gothic Place is constitutive of the genre, the critique of power that the Gothic Place embodies should to be extricable from any of the manifold offspring of the Gothic.
Discussion of contemporary eighteenth and nineteenth century manifestations of Gothic literature in Scotland and Ireland, continental Europe, and America could benefit from an interrogation of the Gothic Place, especially when contrasted with their British peers, considered the trailblazers of the genre writing at the same time. American author Charles Brockden Brown’s *Arthur Mervyn* (1799), for instance, over the course of Mervyn’s “biography” presents important places like the home and hospital – instead of points of agency or order – as confining and even deadly places where the epidemic of Yellow Fever turns cosmopolitan “civilization” – and the consequent concentration of populations in urban settings – into a means of human social and physical destruction. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Young Goodman Brown* (1835) gives the reader a situation in which civilization, the church, and the structure represented by the rigidly ordered village, are all a thin veneer to hide the rank corruption festering within. In Irish author Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872), the reader finds, as in *Dracula*, a noble house that has become a prison and a tomb as it comes under attack physically, socially, and sexually by the vampire girl Carmilla. For these stories, and many other non-British contemporary works besides, the Gothic Place both conceals and reveals ruin, which helps articulate a critique of the power embodied by these edifices. At the same time, each instance can be historicized to fully explore the ways in which that novel is critiquing power.

Of course the implications for the Gothic Place reach beyond contemporary geographical cousins to Walpole and Stevenson. Recent and modern instantiations of Gothic literature are the inheritors of this long and rich tradition. William Faulkner’s *A Rose for Emily* (1930), while seeming to follow the life of Emily Grierson, ends up following the life of her house, which at the beginning and the end of the novel is an “eyesore among eyesores” as it was left to collapse into decay by its tenant. Faulkner departs here from the eighteenth and nineteenth century inasmuch as the decay of the house is not exposing the ruin of landed nobility, but of an American kind of aristocracy: the danger of wealth and celebrity. Ira Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* (1967) the narrative of the devil child is only possible because of the inclusion of the gothic-style apartment – with its attendant “dark history” and the coven of witches – that the characters are living in. More recently Toni Morrison’s *Love* (2003) follows the lives of several characters all focused around the house at One Monarch Street, which has manifold ties to power – as a social center, as a formerly “white” structure, as an economic
center – and even explicitly ties itself back to the faux-medieval of the nineteenth century Gothic: a house that is “graceful, imposing, and [with a] peaked third-story roof [that] did suggest a church” (Morrison 19). The crumbling house serves as an argument in itself about organized power: in this case, exposing the dangers of appropriating the methods and mechanisms of the white oppressor class. Even the places in Gothic graphic novels like New York City in Seth McFarlane’s Spawn and Gotham City in D.C. Comics’ Batman can be interrogated through their uses of the Gothic city like we saw in Jekyll and Hyde’s London: a place of confluence between the greatest power and the greatest depravity. One sees political significance in the “modern” instantiations of Gothic detached from the political significance of the eighteenth century, of course, and yet the Gothic facilitates such resistance with little trouble.

The format here goes beyond just the literary, as many forms of critique do. Film is an obvious inheritor of the Gothic, especially considering the volume of books that get adapted for the screen, and can be criticized through the same lens I have provided for literature. The film adaptation of Stephen King’s The Green Mile (1999) focuses the gloomy and supernatural action almost entirely within the prison while Sony Pictures’ Underworld (2003) follows vampires and werewolves through the crumbling and abandoned underworld of a nighttime city. Many television shows also follow the Gothic model and similarly focus on the Gothic Place. For instance, Joss Whedon’s Buffy the Vampire Slayer can be interrogated through the lens of how the idyllic town of Sunnydale conceals the corruption and ruin betokened by the constant attacks by vampires, demons, zombies, and so forth, while the small archetypical southern town of HBO’s True Blood can be examined through much the same paradigm: a “normal” place concealing ruin as embodied by psychological and supernatural attacks. Further still afar, video games rooted in a Gothic provenance – Konami’s Silent Hill, Capcom’s Resident Evil, and Mythic’s Warhammer Online – can be discussed through their use of the Gothic Place and their deployment of it could be illustrative of the ways in which even these media critique power. Further, such explorations into interactive media and their critiques of power through the Gothic Place would be a fascinating study considering the unique interaction the author has with the audience through a video game, shedding some light on how an audience might receive and reappropriate these attacks on power.
There may be yet other modes of cultural production – just as surely as there are more and perhaps even better examples in literature, film, and new media than I have provided – that may be examined through the lens of the Gothic Place. That the Gothic is so malleable even while being consistent is a testament to its versatility. While the meaning and the target of resistance may change, the method is remarkably consistent. By locating the Gothic Place within a given work – be it in literature, film, graphic media, or even emerging computer media and technical cultures – one can locate a critical point of resistance, as well as refer to the broader meta-narrative of the Gothic: that of cyclical rise and ruin enabled by the concentration and institutionalization of power.


I was born in San Diego, California and lived many places across the United States before coming to rest in Vancouver Washington, which I have long considered my home. I have always had a love of words and language and storytelling, be in it books or in film or even occasionally narrative-heavy video games, and this love of stories is what largely led me to pursue English. I received my Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Washington State University in 2006, where I also received WSU’s Avery Writing Award for my discussion of Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* through the lens of the psychological landscape. This was probably the first instance in my discussion of space and place within narratives and my tendency to view a novel in these terms would continue, largely unacknowledged by me, until I actually began work on my Master’s thesis at Florida State University. When I finally began work on this project, it took me looking back on my body of academic writing up to that point to realize that I had not – as I assumed – been writing individual pieces in a vacuum. Quite the contrary, I had a definite thread running through my writing: a critique of the power of place in a narrative. I plan to graduate with a Master of Arts in Literature from Florida State University in 2009, and with this project finished I plan to continue my discussion of place and expand it into other media. In further academic pursuits, I will seek to answer questions of place and personal agency within that place in such media as film, the graphic novel, and emerging technical media and video games.