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# **Gormenghast and the Gothic Edifice**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of

Master of Arts  
in  
English Literature

at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

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2003

## Abstract

The Gothic genre is most commonly defined according to a diverse range of character types, themes, and devices of plot, mood, and setting, and this diffusion has made its application as a unified description a contentious one. This thesis develops a cohesive vocabulary for describing Gothic literature, and applies that vocabulary to a series of novels whose categorization has proven controversial, due to the ambiguities of the popular perception of the Gothic genre.

Derived from a close reading of four iconic Gothic texts – Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” – and from various perspectives of Gothic criticism I argue that the archetypal setting of Gothic works, the edifice, plays a central role in Gothic literature through its role in creating the fundamental Gothic properties of verticality, interiority, and pastness.

I then argue that Peake’s Gormenghast series – comprising *Titus Groan*, *Gormenghast*, and *Titus Alone* – demonstrates in the first two novels this centrality of the edifice to Gothic literature and in the third novel the fact that the physical edifice is not a compulsory component of Gothic literature, but rather acts solely as the most effective expression of the underlying Gothic properties and the point whereby they interrelate. Furthermore, I demonstrate that these properties are applicable not only to the works of the genre itself, but to the critical perspectives that are used to explain it.

## Acknowledgements

*“Il n’y a de long ouvrage que celui qu’on n’ose pas commencer.*

*Il devient cauchemar.” ~ Charles Baudelaire*

I’d like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Jenny Lawn, for her continued attention and encouragement throughout the formation of this thesis. For their sustained assistance, I would also like to thank the faculties of the School of English and Media Studies and the School of Language Studies at Massey University

The support (both in terms of morale and in a more tangible sense) of my family – my father and mother, Don and Jill Ellis, and siblings Gareth, Siska, Morgan, and Frazer – and friends – Cath, Chris, David, Greg, Jeremy, Mike, and Mike – has proven incalculably helpful, and without it I doubt the conclusion would ever have been reached.

For listening and offering commentary, I wish to gratefully acknowledge Helen Cain and Tamsyn Knight, and special thanks go out to Ian Johnson and Siobhan Lehnhard, whose interest in Peake and hauntings respectively inspired me in the first place.



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## Introduction

Few words in the history of the English language have undergone such a metamorphosis as the term “Gothic.” The word has its genesis in reference to a particular Germanic tribe – the Goths, one of the many tribes that invaded what is now western Europe in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries – and also served as the name of its now-extinct language. Towards the end of the seventeenth century the word had by association become a term describing anything Germanic, and then anything medieval. It was used to describe something as generally barbaric, uncivilised, or crude, a shift that was much like the connotations attached to the name of another Germanic tribe, the Vandals.

John Dryden uses the word in this sense in his 1695 essay “A Parallel of Poetry and Painting,” decrying “the Gothic manner, and the barbarous ornaments” (146). In the seventeenth and eighteenth century “Gothic” was increasingly used as a pejorative term, meant to mark something originating in the ideals of the Medieval “dark” ages, with all the connotations of archaic savagery that accompanied them. Specifically, it was used in opposition to a sense of Classical perfection, which the Goths were thought to have corrupted with the downfall of the Roman Empire, a view that Dryden also propagated, in “An Essay of Dramatic Poesy” in 1668: “by the inundation of the Goths and Vandals into Italy, new languages were introduced, and barbarously mingled with the Latin” (51).

This term in the eighteenth century came to be explicitly associated with architecture, particularly with buildings that used pointed arches, towers, buttresses, and other apparatus of Medieval design that emphasized the height of a structure over the standard neoclassical long, low approach to building. The use of the label “Gothic” to describe this style of architecture was intended to disparage; it was inferred that the revival of Medieval style was “built upon destruction, a vandalism against proper morals, taste, and

the achievements of civilization” (Weissberg 104), in short, against Classical perfection and its neoclassical extension.

The use of the term was not restricted to architecture, however; it came to be associated with all the aspects of the so-called “Gothic Revival” of the eighteenth century. This revival was a movement built upon the Romantic resurrection of an idealized past independent of the authority of the Classical “golden age,” a “rebellion against a constraining neoclassical aesthetic ideal of order and unity, in order to recover a suppressed primitive and barbaric imaginative freedom” (Kilgour 3). This rebellion found its primary outlets in the fields of architecture, archaeology, and literature (Smith 50). Each of these disciplines became engaged in some way with a conflation of the historical and the innovative, a new form constructed with some historical legitimacy. The literary branch of this revival, like the architectural and archaeological, was involved explicitly with the old – decaying castles, decrepit ruins, ancient traditions, feudal rulers, and ancestral hauntings – and yet it also represented attempts to form a new style of narrative form free from Classical confines. The collocation of the oxymoronic terms “Gothic” (with its connotations of primitivism and the medieval) and “novel” (from the Latin *novus*, “new”) represents a “desire to identify conflicting impulses: both towards newness, novelty, originality, and towards a return to nature and revival of the past” (Kilgour 17-18) that was present throughout the Gothic Revival.

The appearance of a specific Gothic literature can be traced back to the novel *The Castle of Otranto*, written by Horace Walpole and published in 1765. When Walpole first published *The Castle of Otranto* he presented it as the translation of a fifteenth century manuscript, and subtitled it “A Gothick Story” (Sage 81), marking the first time the word had been associated directly with the literary novel. Maurice Levy suggests that “What he [Walpole] had in mind when he described his *Castle of Otranto* as a ‘Gothic Story’, is not quite clear. Possibly nothing more than a concern for historical accuracy, and the desire to excuse his recourse to supernatural agents” (1). “Gothic” was here used to describe fiction in the

same way that it was used to describe architecture, denoting a historical relic of the barbaric and superstitious Middle Ages in opposition to Classical reason. This association can be seen in another influential Gothic novel: Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), which is often ascribed the position of having popularized the Gothic novel, evident through the innumerable imitations that followed its publication. Here the word "Gothic" is used seventeen times. The vast majority of these references are architectural adjectives: "an extensive Gothic hall" (1: 231); "a lofty Gothic arch" (1: 292); "[a fortress] in the heavy Saxon-Gothic style, with enormous round towers" (2: 278). There is also a movement, however, from historical to atmospheric description. The word is used not to express the historical aspects of the architecture, but rather the emotions it incites: "the Gothic magnificence of Udolpho" (1: 249); "the Gothic gloom of the surrounding buildings" (2: 98). The term "Gothic" had moved fully beyond a simple historical reference and an unadorned architectural description, into describing an atmosphere particular to works of the progenitors of Gothic literature.

Following the influential genesis of Walpole's novel and benefiting from the popularisation of Radcliffe's, a multitude of works now categorized as Gothic appeared for approximately the next one hundred and thirty years, of which the best known English examples are William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), M. G. Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1831), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822) and James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), although not strictly Gothic as some define the term, illustrate many of the atmospheric properties of the tradition and were likely influenced by it. The Gothic also featured in the short story format, in England primarily through Sheridan Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly* (1872) and in the United States of America in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, amongst others.

The term had become firmly associated with a particular style of narrative in a particular literary period, but it was to be expanded much further. The range of texts falling under the gothic canopy has been expanded. Gothic motifs have recently been identified in authors as diverse as Kafka (Hyde 132), Melville (Lee 161), and Twain (Fiedler 134); in postcolonial fiction (Newman 171) and New Zealand film (Conrich 80). Some Gothic critics lament this diffusion, particularly Levy, who “mourn[s] the radical evolution, over the last two or three decades, of a word dear to my heart and which I hate to say has been seriously damaged by the blind, ruthless, chaotic proliferation of meaning which accompanies the progress of history” (1). Others have acknowledged that, although the “original” eighteenth century Gothic genre has long since passed, the ideas and tropes that it explored have become a staple of many different modern texts, and the term can now be applied much more widely than to just the initial canon. Indeed, the primary concerns of the Gothic have manifested in a surprising array of contemporary works.

The eighteenth and nineteenth century works have enough in common to warrant their categorization as Gothic, and later texts manifest particular patterns that are described as Gothic. Specifically, these patterns are based on a particular style of narrative. Gothic literature is often described as fiction that “develops a brooding atmosphere of gloom and terror, represents events which are uncanny or macabre or melodramatically violent, and often deals with aberrant psychological states” (Abrams 78). In more detail, Gothic literature is described as manifesting a range of quite particular narrative ingredients. There is often an oppressed heroine, a tyrannical villain, and/or a melancholy hero. The supernatural often appears in the form of ghosts, vampires, spectral doubles, animated paintings, portraits, and mirrors, although these sometimes “turned out to have natural explanations” (Abrams 78). The Gothic environment is one composed of dungeons, prisons, subterranean labyrinths, secret doors and passages, and physical and psychological isolation. Themes such as a sense of the unreal, dreams, madness, and terror endlessly reoccur. The plots of Gothic stories revolve around mysteries, often hidden and/or

terrible ancestries. In short, a Gothic work is described according to a range of narrative criteria that, together, create a particular atmospheric impression.

Although it is easy to recognise such criteria as congruently Gothic, it is not so simple to create a generalisation through which such criteria can be summarized. One aspect of Gothic literature that has often been identified as a significant part of the genre returns to two of the term's earlier uses: to describe something from the past, and specifically to describe architecture. In nearly every eighteenth century Gothic text there is a manifestation of an ancient edifice in some form. Ancestral estates, antiquated castles, monasteries, towers, cathedrals, and abbeys all dominate Gothic literature. Although nearly all works of fiction feature architectural settings it is primarily in Gothic literature that these settings take a part in the events and ideas of the work to the extent that they do in Gothic. They influence the characters' actions, abilities, and psychological states, they dictate the conditions of the plots and create the very atmosphere that is used to describe Gothic literature in general. In some Gothic works they even take on something akin to individual character. It is under the panoply of the edifice that the genre is able to take shape, and the influence of the edifice creates and colours of all the narrative criteria of Gothic literature.

The relationship between Gothic architecture and Gothic literature is well-documented in Warren Smith's *Architecture in English Fiction* (1934). It is perhaps most obvious in the biographies of two of the first Gothic authors: Horace Walpole and William Beckford. Both attempted construction of remarkable Gothic edifices for their own habitation, mirroring the edifices that dominate their novels. Both Walpole's castle, known as Strawberry Hill, and Beckford's, called Fonthill Abbey, have been compared to their literary Gothic edifices, in David MacKinney's "The Castle of my Ancestors: Horace Walpole and Strawberry Hill" (1990) and Fred Botting's *Gothic* (1996, 59) respectively. Two of the most influential Gothic authors, Walpole and Radcliffe, named their texts after the featured edifices: *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* respectively.



Mario Praz, in his introduction to the collection *Three Gothic Novels* (1968), identifies another important link between Gothic architecture and Gothic literature, this time an indirect one. The Italian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi, in 1745, produced a series of etchings entitled *Carceri D'Invenzione* ("Imaginary Prisons"), featuring a collection of fictional interiors roughly based on the ruins of classical Rome. Classical architecture was here made Gothic through its own disintegration, a refutation of the "perfection" of the Classical form. Praz cites the possibility that images from this work may have directly inspired the opening scene of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, in which a prince is crushed under a giant helmet (17), and he goes on to quote Beckford and De Quincey ruminating on the *Carceri* openly (18-19). The association of, and influence between, the endless, vacuous, ruinous labyrinths of Piranesi with the prison-edifices of Walpole, Beckford, and De Quincey reinforces the links between Gothic architecture and Gothic literature.

Within Gothic texts the edifice figures as more than a setting. The Gothic is centrally concerned with spatial divisions, in particular with the existence and atmosphere of "closed space," not only as a physical feature but as a temporal and psychological presence that defines the genre:

At the heart of the literature of terror lies one ruling symbol. It manifests itself in haunted buildings, in labyrinths and prisons, catacombs and caves; in borders and frontiers, thresholds and walls; in the terror of the shuttered room and the protection of the magic circle; in the promise and dread of the closed door; in journeys of discovery, feats of transgression and flights from retribution. The world is defined in horror literature as *space* and, furthermore, as a *closed space*. (Aguirre 2)

The themes of Gothic literature, and its primary metaphors, circle recursively around this physical locus, endless returning to the power of the edifice to shape and define its other recurring patterns.

It is symptomatic of the transition of the definition of the word "Gothic" that considerable controversy has arisen over the labelling of a series of

books first published between 1946 and 1959: Mervyn Peake's so-called Gormenghast trilogy, comprising *Titus Groan* (1946), *Gormenghast* (1950), and *Titus Alone* (1959). Their first, and subsequent, reception has been a confused one, much concerned on both sides with the categorization of an extremely unusual series of books into a satisfactory genre. The series revolves around an enormous castle almost entirely secluded from any "outside" world: the eponymous castle Gormenghast. The characters engage in a series of intrigues, murders, rebellions, hauntings, seductions, and revolutions within this all-encompassing edifice.

Upon the first book's first appearance in England reviewers of *Titus Groan* began to associate the novel with the recognisable Gothic genre: "Unable to find its equivalent in literature, they tried to match it with something familiar. Because it was set in an old castle, the word 'Gothic' sprang to mind, and, without further consideration, *Titus Groan* was neatly and wrongly presented as 'a Gothic revival.'" (Watney, 130). This perception was exacerbated by the American release of *Titus Groan*, which deliberately employed the Gothic association as a marketing tool. The original American cover of October 1946 sports the subtitle 'A Gothic Novel' and a particularly histrionic illustration of a skeleton hand holding a candlestick, despite neither image having anything to do with the book itself.

Both the English and American reviewers found much in *Titus Groan* that they chose to describe as Gothic. John Watney reports the typical review titles: "'Chiaroscuro Grotesque' 'Gothic Day-dream' 'Fantasia' 'Old-Flavoured Tale of Castle Gormenghast' 'A tale of Deeds Done in a Non-existent Environment by Human Oddities'" (134). Malcolm Yorke cites the *Chicago Tribune* reviewer as saying "it is authentically Gothic despite the fact that it has no ghosts and no supernatural horrors of any kind, though crime and horrors of the dark souls abound in *Titus Groan*" (171) and the *Washington Star* recommending it "but only to those who have a Gothic taste for it" (172). In the *New Statesman* critic Henry Reed described the



novel as “long and Gothically detailed” (Batchelor 81). Despite this, some reviewers were uncertain about how *Titus Groan* related to Gothic literature. The *Hartford Courant* described it as “a hilarious parody of the Gothic novels,” further inquiring “but is it conscious or unconscious?” (Yorke 172); the *San Francisco Bulletin*, assuming that the Gothic subtitle was one intended by the author, noted that “this self-styled ‘gothic novel’ is about as strange a fruit as you’ve ever tasted” (Yorke 172).

Biographers of Peake have since dismissed any association of the novels with Gothic literature. Watney announced that upon being labelled as a Gothic novel “the novel’s true flavour was lost beneath the outpouring of well-intentioned but inaccurate praise. It was to be many years, and a new generation had to arise, before this misleading viewpoint was dispelled and the true nature of the novel was understood” (134), although he does not expand on why he considers this view inaccurate. Likewise, Yorke is quick to dismiss any link to Gothic literature:

This catch-all term can be applied to a fifth-century tribe, thirteenth-century French cathedrals, eighteenth-century English novels, the nineteenth-century paintings of Fuseli, twentieth-century horror films, a typeface and an extrovert style of dress and make-up. It has proved less than helpful in assessing Peake’s works and he always claimed never to have read anything by Walpole, Radcliffe, Beckford, Lewis, or any other of the ‘Gothic’ novelists satirized by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*. (171)

Yorke’s inference that it is necessary to read particular authors to be considered Gothic is as fallacious as the suggestion that the same literary research was necessary for the creators of “twentieth-century horror films,” but he is not unique in his dismissive assessment of the dissolution of the term “Gothic.” A similarly vituperative commentary was made by Stephen Fry, the actor who played Bellgrove in a recent BBC television adaptation of the series, in *The Art of Gormenghast* (2000):

Gothic means almost precisely nothing, it is as washed out as the anaemic face of its modern adherent. It certainly has nothing to do with Mervyn Peake, for all that the G-word is as permanently and

erroneously affixed to Gormenghast as a horned helmet is tiresomely and wrongly cartooned to the head of a Wagnerian soprano. Gothic attaches to Gormenghast because no one can think of a better description, and how we all love to describe. (10)

What these quotations suggest is not that an ambiguity exists in perceptions of the flavour of the Gormenghast series, but rather that there is a distinct ambiguity over what the term “Gothic” itself represents. Yorke and Fry see no associative unity in the term, and indeed consider the labelling of the series as Gothic purely detrimental. Their derision can be attributed to the fact that the Gothic has always been considered a “popular” genre, carrying both the positive (widespread and fashionable) and negative (populist as opposed to critically worthy of investigation) connotations that that entails. Yorke and Fry wish to avoid the series’ cataloguing because they believe it will act to the detriment of a measured consideration of the works. Nevertheless, the biographers’ suggestions that the expansion of the term has, for them, rendered it diffuse and inoperative begs the question: what sense of the term “Gothic” is being used by those who affirm its relationship to the Gormenghast series?

Crucially, it is the edifice itself that appears to lie at the centre of the definitions of the Gormenghast books. Michael Tolley ranks Gormenghast amongst *Otranto* and *Udolpho* when he notes that “the castle is indeed a place, like other Gothic structures, [. . .] built to contain strange rooms or even cells” (163). David Punter alludes to the series in a discussion of Gothic edifices: “the idea of the castle not as a site of fear but as the parasite of an enjoyment whose sources are unknown, whose limits are figured, like Gormenghast, as unbounded” (“Ceremonial” 44). The castle is certainly a central influence on the Gormenghast novels: a rambling, all-encompassing edifice, it bears down on every character and every action in the series to a degree almost uniquely prominent amongst Gothic works.

It is the proposal of this thesis that the edifice is central to a coherent description of Gothic literature, and that the key association between the

Gormenghast books and the Gothic is the appearance and effects of just such an edifice.

Part One examines critical perspectives on the edifice in the English Gothic tradition using examples from four significant Gothic texts, with particular reference to how the premises and themes of Gothic literature are centred directly or indirectly on the physical, temporal, and psychological properties of the edifice. Part One focuses on four primary Gothic sources that have been deemed iconic, that is, that they represent major trends in Gothic literature.

Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* is widely recognised as spearheading the genre, and establishing most of the dominant themes in Gothic literature: "To most readers interested in gothic fiction, Horace Walpole is known as the father of the genre. His *Castle of Otranto* is recognized as the progenitor of the novels that dominated the imaginations of followers of popular fiction for almost three-quarters of a century after its appearance" (Spector 83). In this novel the attempts of Manfred, lord of Otranto, to impose his will on Isabella, the daughter of a marquis, are thwarted by various supernatural occurrences brought on by an ancient prophecy, and by Theodore, the rightful successor to the leadership of the domain.

Of the English Gothic authors, the next most influential is Ann Radcliffe, whose Gothic romances spawned numerous derivatives and imitators, even being parodied by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and Thomas Love Peacock in *Nightmare Abbey* (1818): "Radcliffe must be regarded as the center of the Gothic tradition, if only for the central place she held in the minds of critics and writers alike during the flood tide of Gothic romance" (DeLamotte 10). Of her seven novels, the most influential was *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. As in *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* involves the attempts of a tyrannical dictator, here the Count Montoni, to marry the heroine Emily within his fortress-castle Udolpho. The novel contains many hints of the supernatural, but by the end of the work they are explained away rationally. Once more a hero

is present, but just like the hero in *The Castle of Otranto* Valancourt is passive and ultimately flavourless compared to the brazenly tyrannical personality of Montoni.

Of the many Gothic short stories of Edgar Allan Poe, his most famous are all intimately involved with the Gothic edifice: “The Pit and the Pendulum” (1843), “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843), and “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) all involve enclosures of a decidedly Gothic nature: “Short fiction allowed Poe his greatest successes, however, and from first to last in that form his bonds with Gothicism are unmistakable” (Fisher 175). Of these works, Part One utilizes “The Fall of the House of Usher,” as it offers an extensive microcosm of the Gothic tropes of enclosure, control, and live burial. In this story, a visitor to the castle-estate of the family Usher is present for the horrific revelation that the last male heir has accidentally buried his sister alive; she returns at the conclusion of the work to terrify the remaining inhabitants.

The female’s place in Gothic literature is a significant one, and although most Gothic works obliquely refer to the gendered nature of enclosures in Gothic fiction Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) most candidly explores this avenue. “The Yellow Wallpaper” charts the descent of the narrator into madness while her concerned but dictatorial husband and physician John keeps her contained in an American colonial mansion. Amongst her hallucinations over the yellowish wallpaper of her room-prison a range of Gothic motifs appear – the ghost, the double, the cell, and the interior – and through them the story explores the place of the woman in the Gothic interior.

The four example texts, therefore, encompass both English and American Gothic, the novel and the short story form, and the male and female author. They are foundational (*The Castle of Otranto*), influential (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*), microcosmical (“The Fall of the House of Usher”) and gendered (“The Yellow Wallpaper”) examples of Gothic literature.

Part One is divided into two chapters, structured according to the structure of the Gothic edifice. At its most rudimentary level, the enclosed space of Gothic literature is structured in two ways: vertically and horizontally. Vertically there is “above” and “below”; horizontally there is “inside” and “outside.” Both chapters serve to consider the “ingredients” of Gothic literature under the light of the Gothic edifice, demonstrating that the compatibility of such components arises through their relationship to the encompassing edifice under these structures.

Chapter One deals with the edifice’s physical and social structure, aligned in a vertical, or stratified, direction. Considered vertically, there are two thematically significant sections of the edifice, arranged above or below the standard living space of an orthodox habitation. Above there is a tower, peak, attic, or upper storey, not always physically but metaphorically a locus of control usually associated with an autocrat and all that he (for the autocrat is invariably male) represents: power and knowledge. Enclosed spaces here are often either the habitat of the tyrant or the prison where he exerts complete control over anyone so incarcerated. Below is the base of the edifice, a basement, labyrinth, or network of tunnels that serve both to confound and to deliver the oppressed inhabitants. Examples of this include the basements of Otranto, which are “hollowed into several intricate cloisters; and it was not easy for one under so much anxiety to find the door that opened into the cavern [. . .] that long labyrinth of darkness” (61), and the deep recesses of the Castle Udolpho, about which the servant Annette exclaims: “this is such a strange rambling place! I have been lost in it already” (1: 234). Here both are maze-prisons, easy to enter and difficult to navigate, but given the right opportunity Otranto can also function as an escape to sanctuary: “she recollected a subterraneous passage which led from the vaults of the castle to the church of Saint Nicholas” (61).

Chapter Two considers those aspects of the edifice relating to its horizontal arrangements. When spatialized in this fashion the Gothic edifice is a structural oddity. Gothic is primarily concerned with interiors: with edges,



boundaries, walls, veils, caskets and tombs, trap-doors, sliding panels, and other methods of demarcation (DeLamotte 19). A Gothic edifice appearing in Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* displays this fixation, there manifested in "the solid and heavy mass of a Moorish fortress, no light playing between its impermeable walls, - the image of power, dark, isolated, impenetrable" (34). While there are several examples of movements to the exterior world in Gothic fiction, nearly all significant dramatic developments occur inside. When there is a transition of any kind, it is from one section of the edifice to another, or from one edifice to another. Vathek leaves his five palaces of Samarah only to end up incarcerated in the Halls of Eblis; Emily travels from the halcyon château in La Vallée to Udolpho and back again. Gothic literature is very much concerned with "interiority, the 'within'" (Sedgwick 20) at the expense of any significant exterior action or exposition. This interiority, like the stratification of the edifice considered vertically, acts as more than a physical structure; it influences the psychology of the characters and the psychological atmosphere of the Gothic text. Also introduced in Chapter Two is a third element of the Gothic edifice: pastness. The psychological atmosphere of the Gothic novel is induced not only by the physical but also by the temporal characteristics of the edifice, as expressed in the curiously ahistorical interference of the past in the events and characters of the narrative present.

Having established a core description of Gothic literature, Part Two applies this analysis to Mervyn Peake's three Gormenghast books in order to determine the correlations between the Gormenghast trilogy and the Gothic, and to consider the implications of these novels for Gothic literature in general. Chapter Three deals with the physical structure of Gormenghast castle and its place in the first two novels, *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, according to the patterns of verticality, interiority, and pastness established in Part One. Chapter Four deals with *Titus Alone*, a work significantly different from the first two novels in that the edifice of Gormenghast does not physically appear once in the narrative. This divergence is revelatory, cutting to the foundation of what the edifice is in

Gothic literature, and what implications this has for a consideration of that genre and the critical reception of it. In *Titus Alone* the edifice does not act via a physical presence but instead appears as a generative concept, inducing a Gothic atmosphere as much by its absence as by its attendance.

The primary components of Gothic literature are significant in that Gothic literature is perpetually returning to them, as obsessively as the characters do. Gothic fiction resurrects the pattern Gothic and performs it as a ceremony. As David Punter suggests:

The ceremony always points past and beyond, behind itself; it signifies, even in its superflux of meaning, the absence of whatever it was that preceded the ceremonial. Similarly, ceremonial speaks of repetition: a repetition without which the ceremony is not a ceremony, a repetition which also serves through the very force of its stability to invoke a past which has always already vanished. Ceremonial as reminder, as a gesture towards what is absent, as a site that is perennially haunted by all that it is not. ("Ceremonial" 38)

The edifice exists as a generative concept in that its defining characteristics – verticality, interiority, and pastness – produce the Gothic effect regardless of whether the building itself is present or not. This thesis, in its description of Gothic literature, also performs a Gothic ceremony; it returns time and again to the basic forms and protocols of the genre in the hope of constructing a cohesive edifice from its historical ruins.

## Part One – Gothic

### Chapter One – Verticality

Within Gothic literature many correlations can be made between the physical structure of the Gothic edifice and the social structure of the archetypal Gothic characters that reside or are trapped within it. Such correlations have often been used by Gothic critics and theorists to relate Gothic literature to the concerns of eighteenth century – and later – society in terms of gender issues and class politics, with the Gothic edifice taking a central role in such analyses. This chapter examines these investigations with particular reference to the effects that the edifice has on the conventional Gothic characters, in order to determine what narrative and characterisation qualities are generally associated with the term “Gothic” and how the edifice plays such a central role in creating and sustaining these qualities.

The primary characters of the traditional Gothic novel are succinctly summarized by Maggie Kilgour as “the Miltonically satanic hero or fallen angel, [. . .] the bland hero who will inevitably turn out to be the rightful heir, [and] the selfless victimised heroine” (18). Such character archetypes are well represented in two of the first Gothic novels. In Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* Manfred, the lord of Otranto, acts as the satanic hero (for purposes of differentiation from the “bland” hero this character is referred to here as the villain), Isabella as the victimised heroine, and Theodore the rightful heir and hero. In Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Montoni is the villain, Emily the heroine, and Valancourt the hero. The terms “villain,” “heroine,” and “hero” are used cautiously as a shorthand for these character archetypes; such simplifications become increasingly artificial and indistinct as the Gothic genre developed.

In both *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, as in much of Gothic literature, the interpersonal dynamic of the villain and the



heroine serves as the underlying conflict of the narrative: the male villain imprisons the female heroine within the edifice in an attempt to impose his will – in these examples dynastic marriage – upon her, and she resists. Through his intrigues the male villain is inadvertently the agent of his own demise, and upon the removal of his power – through abdication in the case of Manfred, or death in the case of Montoni – the hero is able to step in and adopt the released mantle of authority, typically marrying the heroine as he does so. The Gothic edifice, site of these intrigues, is intimately involved in each of these characters and plot machinations.

The Gothic villain, the autocrat and tyrant, the despot, the Faustian egotist: all are used to describe the antagonists in Gothic literature. Manfred and Montoni, and the equivalents in other Gothic texts, are selfish, vicious, and absolutely powerful, versions of an “ambiguous, egocentric self-destructive antihero” (Day 16). They are Gothic autocrats who “usurp rightful heirs, [and] rob reputable families of property and reputation while threatening the honour of their wives and orphaned daughters” (Botting 4). Typically the plots that the villain engages in revolve around some form of appropriated ancestral inheritance. Manfred is lord of Otranto because his grandfather murdered the lawful heir Alfonso, and his primary concern is the continuation of his line through marriage to Isabella. Montoni attempts to take control of Emily’s inheritance by “removing her to his secluded castle, because he could there with more probability of success attempt to terrify her into obedience” (1: 227). The influence that the Gothic villains assert can also be likened to paternal power, as Manfred does when he attempts to take the place of his deceased son Conrad as Isabella’s husband: “nothing but a parent’s authority shall take her hence. I am her parent, cried Manfred, and demand her” (83). Caught between the two masculine roles of father and husband, the distinctive mark of the Gothic villain is this blend of patriarchal and conjugal authority.

The Gothic villain’s primary characteristics are power and selfishness, and it is the edifice that builds and powers these characteristics. Kilgour

states that the castle in “its isolation is a sign of the total power of its ruler who, far from social restraints, is able to exercise his own will. It is a private space where the freedom of uncontrolled individualism is destructive” (119). Moreover, reflecting the patriarchal/conjugal authority of the villain, this individualism is androcentric: “In the Gothic novels of the eighteenth century, however, this power over the inside space, the authority of *walten* [German: roughly, “to preside over”], was not given to women. Women rather suffered as the victims and captives of their male and often foreign persecutors” (Weissberg 105). Manfred’s power within Otranto is near-absolute “after locking the gates of the castle, in which he suffered none but his domestics to remain” (56), and in this isolation his destructive urges know no curbing, as Isabella observes: “She condemned her rash flight, which had thus exposed her to his rage in a place where her cries were not likely to draw any body to her assistance” (61). Montoni is likewise the absolute authority, power, and personality of his castle: “[Emily] saw herself in a castle inhabited by vice and violence, seated beyond the reach of law or justice, and in the power of a man whose perseverance was equal to every occasion, and in whom passions, of which revenge was not the weakest, entirely supplied the place of principles” (2: 105). The isolation of the castle means that the villain’s power is not curbed by the external standards of society, and in his selfishness and individual desire he becomes an autocrat.

It is also, however, the autocracy produced by the excessive isolation of the edifice that proves to be the villain’s downfall. The tyrant is guilty of a “fatal over-reaching” (Stoddart 113) that leads to his own torment and ultimately ruin: “The hero, who seeks to dominate his world and acts out the role of sadist, is also inflicting pain and suffering on himself, as all of his actions lead to his own destruction” (Day 19). Montoni’s final fate is triggered by the tremendous excesses that the edifice allows him to take:

His depredations having exceeded their usual limits, and reached an extent at which neither the timidity of the then commercial senate of Venice, nor their hope of his occasional assistance, would permit them to connive, - the same effort, it was resolved, should complete

the suppression of his power and the correction of his outrages. (2: 192)

When the spectre of Alfonso – the former rightful owner of the edifice – erupts out of the castle Otranto, “the walls of the castle [. . .] were thrown down with a mighty force, and the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude, appeared in the centre of the ruins” (145), it is not only the stronghold that is destroyed but also Manfred’s strong hold on the other characters: he abdicates without qualm immediately after. The Gothic villain holds power only so long as he is able to retain control over the edifice.

The villain’s tyrannical and malicious authority is not only facilitated by the edifice, it is in the eyes of many theorists roughly synonymous with the edifice. Botting states that in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* “The castle appears as a figure of power, tyranny and malevolence” (68). When Emily approaches Udolpho for the first time, she notes that the castle “seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all who dared to invade its solitary reign” (1: 230). Eugenia DeLamotte adds that “The Castle of Udolpho – solitary, powerful, attractive, ruined – expresses Montoni’s personality in a similar way. His will impinges on Emily in the very atmosphere of the castle” (31). The edifice, like the villain, is a sovereign power: both tower over the characters and the novel.

In contrast to the villain the Gothic heroine of *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is described as “well-bred, passive, and respectable” (Day 16); standing in contrast to the active villain the heroine only reacts. Resisting or fleeing from his domination are the only activities that she can engage in. Isabella surmises that “Delay might give him time to reflect on the horrid measures he had conceived, or produce some circumstance in her favour, if she could for that night at least avoid his odious purpose” (61). The heroine is described as primarily “selfless” (Kilgour 18), standing in contrast to the villain’s ultimate selfishness and egotism. Where the villain acts as the individualistic violator, the heroine desires “nothing more than to return to the conventional world” (Day 17),

the conventional world being one free from the power of the oppressive despot. In order to escape from the villain, the Gothic heroine escapes to the area of the edifice that is not under the villain's immediate control: the subterranean labyrinths below and beneath the towering edifice. Isabella finds "several intricate cloisters" (61), a "long labyrinth of darkness" (61) under the castle Otranto, to which she flees once Manfred's intentions are revealed; Emily fears that she might "lose herself in the intricacies of the castle" (1: 262) as she wanders alone in the convoluted passages of Udolpho. The convolutions and intricacies of the labyrinth grant her sanctuary, and the heroine uses these areas to escape the power and control of the villain.

The labyrinth beneath to which she retreats is, however, an ambiguous location. It may be through the complex corridors that the heroine flees, but when pursued by the villain it can act, like the rest of the edifice, as an isolating prison. Isabella becomes lost in the passages, "Alone in so dismal a place, her mind imprinted with all the terrible events of the day, hopeless of escaping, expecting every moment the arrival of Manfred" (62). Emily "wandered about through other passage and galleries, till at length, frightened by their intricacies and desolation, she called aloud for assistance: but they were beyond the hearing of the servants, who were on the other side of the castle" (1: 235). The passages bring isolation and fear as much as they offer the chance of salvation. When Emily examines her quarters in Udolpho for the first time she discovers two exits: one that can be locked from within, and one that can be locked from the outside only. It is a succinct combination of two of the primary fears associated with the edifice: "the experience of being at the same time cut off, hemmed in, and in danger of being broken in on by some outside force" (DeLamotte 18). The heroine is afraid both of the isolation of the edifice and the male owner's control over it, and therefore over her.

The edifice exerts control over the heroine, and the villain exerts control over the edifice, but just as the edifice can be likened to the villain in this equation it can be likened to the heroine. The Gothic villain imposes on

the heroine by imposing on the edifice. His claims of ownership of the edifice are often as spurious as his claims on the heroine. Manfred owns Otranto because of his grandfather's treachery, and has retained control instead of alternate claimants from Vicenza because he, "his father, and grandfather, had been too powerful for the house of Vicenza to displace them" (95). Isabella is the heiress of Vicenza; upon the disappearance of her father Manfred "bribed the guardians of the lady Isabella to deliver her up to him" (95) in an effort to "unite the claims of the two houses" (95) by attempting to marry Isabella, first to his son, and following his son's death to himself. Taking possession of the heroine is directly equated with taking full possession of the edifice. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Montoni attempts to take possession of Emily's ancestral home, but he also tries to take possession of Emily. She misinterprets Montoni's discussions of a marriage proposal for a conversation concerning her home property (1: 119-202); she is in effect become another estate to be bartered. As Ann Tracey comments, "The struggle to acquire, not become, property, like the quest for a home and stability, is perennial" (106-7). The villain's power may be reflected in the edifice, but it is usurped and interposed, and that usurpation is echoed in his attempts to interpose on the heroine. The villain owns the edifice, but the heroine is the edifice to be owned.

Thus, there are two contradictory associations: of villain and controlling edifice, and of heroine and controlled edifice. This ambiguity has become a focus for many alternative thematic and critical views of Gothic literature and the place of the edifice. One approach has divided the edifice physically to represent the divisions of the characters within it. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), examine the linguistic organization of structural metaphors relating to physical space. The distinction between metaphors related to "up / above" and "down / below" suggests that said metaphors "have a basis in our physical and cultural experience" (14), and that certain metaphors are consistently and systematically associated with one direction or the other. Of the ten examples that Lakoff and Johnson cite, four are particularly



pertinent to a view of the relationship in Gothic literature: “up” is associated with the conscious, “down” with the unconscious (15); “up” is consistently metaphorically linked with having control, “down” with being subject to control (15); high status is “up,” whereas low status is “down” (16); the rational is “up,” the emotional is “down” (17). This metaphorical bifurcation has some correspondence to the structural and gender divisions of the Gothic edifice. The looming edifice, locus of the male tyrant-villain’s power, can be associated with the conscious, high status, subversively rational world he attempts to impose. The labyrinth of the lowest sections of the edifice, site of the female victim’s retreat, can be associated with the subconscious, low status, “emotional” world on which the autocrat is attempting to impose control.

An example of this bifurcation can be seen in the treatment of height and the edifice as sublime in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Initially the mountains that play a key role in the geography of the novel are so described: “the long mountain vista, sublime beyond anything that Emily had ever imagined” (1: 42); “this landscape, with the surrounding Alps, did indeed present a perfect picture of the lovely and the sublime – of ‘beauty sleeping in the lap of horror’ ” (1: 56); “the Alps, seen at some distance, began to appear in all their awful sublimity” (1: 174); “she saw only images of gloomy grandeur, or of dreadful sublimity” (1: 228). While the mountains play a more complex role in the novel than as just an edifice-substitute, when Emily first encounters Udolpho she notes that “the Gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object” (1: 230). The sublime is used in this sense to imply the quality of creating awe through a combination of wonder and apprehension, but the sublimity of the mountains and the edifice is primarily created by their physical properties, specifically their extreme height (“Gothic greatness”), the sense that they tower over – and overpower – the heroine. Kilgour describes the sublime as “the experiences of forces beyond one’s control” (199), an emotional reaction that is metaphorically linked to the heroine’s reaction to the villain and his overpowering dominance.

In contrast, the labyrinthine passages at the base of the edifice are not under the total control of the villain. Manfred, pursuing Isabella, is faced with a door that he “would have forcibly burst open” (60), interposing on the heroine just as he has interposed on the edifice, but instead finds “that it resisted his utmost efforts” (60). The heroine may fear that the villain will find her, but the maze-like passages nevertheless enable a surfeit of fears to surface. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the greatest terrors that Emily undergoes are not real but imagined, such as the discovery of what she supposes to be a corpse behind a veil in a lost gallery. Fuelled by the emotions excited by the labyrinth – “an emotion of melancholy awe awakened all its powers, as she walked through rooms obscure and desolate, where not footsteps had passed probably for many years” (1: 252) – Emily is raised to an acute state of terror, which culminates in her fainting, dropping “senseless on the floor” (1: 252). Just as the height of the castle inspires awe, its depths inspire the sensations of fear and terror.

What the contrast between the heights and the depths of the edifice reveals is an underlying stratification of the standard Gothic arrangement. The physical state of the edifice, particularly its vertical components (of “above” and “below”), becomes roughly equivalent to the social hierarchy of its inhabitants: those that dominate are above, those dominated are below. The rational is elevated, the irrational is subsumed. The gothic edifice is stratified vertically: in the physical and metaphorical senses it displays the property of “Verticality.”

The division described by verticality has proven fertile ground for Gothic theorists in terms of how class and gender politics in the eighteenth century are reflected in Gothic writing: the physical and thematic stratification exhibits the properties of the social and gender stratification that was a concern of contemporaneous Gothic works.

DeLamotte generalises the edifice and the Gothic villain to a politicised state: the edifice “tends to depersonalise the threat of violence, diffusing the titanic, villainous personality into something even larger – and more

obscure. [...] the menacing darkness of his castle represents – in the plural and in the abstract – the ‘forces’ of violence itself” (16); the villain therefore becomes “an embodiment of larger forces in another sense: mammoth social institutions whose power transcends that of any individual” (17). It is the height of the edifice that inspires this association: it is “larger,” “mammoth;” it “transcends.” In the eighteenth century context which produced the first Gothic novels this politicised state of the edifice can be seen as an expression of the concerns of the time. William Godwin’s 1793 text *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness* is characterised by Botting as a “radical and rationalist attack on forms of government riddled with relics of a feudal past in the shape of monarchy, courts and inherited wealth” (93), a governmental system that exhibited the “extinction of feudal economic power and its strange persistence at a superstructural level” (94). According to Botting’s interpretation, Godwin presented aristocratic power as “an illusion, a phantom of a barbaric and superstitious past that lingers, forcefully, in the present” (94). The similarities between this political fear and the dominion of the villain and his edifice are clear; Manfred and Montoni are archetypal representations of the tensions existing in the social structure of the time, and the edifice is the metaphor for the archaic political structures (of feudal control and dynastic marriage) that they seek to impose on the present.

The patriarchal/conjugal power of the villain and the persecuted and controlled nature of the heroine can also be seen as a metaphor for the status of women in society, both in the eighteenth century and beyond. The branch of Gothic criticism that specializes in these issues has by many theorists been defined as “female Gothic”: “In the genre Ellen Moers has recently called ‘female Gothic,’ for instance, heroines who characteristically inhabit mysteriously intricate or uncomfortably stifling houses are often seen as captured, fettered, trapped, even buried alive” (Gilbert and Gubar 83). The key point of female Gothic criticism is the observation that “the Gothic novel became the fantasy space in which to explore women’s roles” (Weissberg 106), or in other words that “reality is



worse than fiction or, rather, that for women reality is gothic" (Kilgour 82). This perspective is also tied to matters of the edifice; here it acts as a metaphor for the concerns of female interior space.

Female Gothic criticism is highlighted by concerns about how the domestic situation of women was echoed in Gothic: "by cloaking familiar images of domesticity in gothic forms, it enables us to see that the home is a prison, in which the helpless female is at the mercy of ominous patriarchal authorities" (Kilgour 9). In their influential study *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) Gilbert and Gubar examine this predicament in terms of the female, and specifically the female Gothic author, drawing a direct analogy with the plight of the Gothic heroine: "Literally, women [. . .] were imprisoned in their homes, their father's houses [. . .]. Figuratively, such women were, as we have seen, locked into male texts, texts from which they could escape only through ingenuity and indirection" (83). The edifice retains its association with the patriarchal power of the villain, although here it is symbolic of and facilitates specific social institutions that beset the female Gothic authors.

The affiliation between mysterious Gothic castles and ordinary domestic space is made explicit in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." In this story, the feudal tyrant is transformed into a husband and physician, the Gothic castle into a country estate, the prison into a bedroom, the virtuous heroine into an infirm wife, and the labyrinths of the edifice into a "traditional" domestic interior. The narrator, diagnosed by her physician husband John as suffering from a "temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency" (29-30), is taken to a "colonial mansion, a hereditary estate" (29) to recuperate; this edifice is already an agent of the structures of the past ("colonial," "hereditary"), and it is according to the narrator similar to "a haunted house" (29), although she quickly dismisses such "romantic felicity" (29).

The narrator makes several suggestions concerning her condition and its treatment, but her husband John dismisses every one: he "hardly lets me

stir without special direction" (31). His authority is ancestral in a different fashion to that of Manfred and Montoni: John has the authority of the husband, passed down from father to son, but also the authority of medical tradition inherited from teacher to student. Just as in other Gothic texts, this is an sovereignty that knows no refutation: "If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one [. . .] what is one to do?" (29-30). Furthermore, it is a pattern that the only other male character corresponds exactly to: "My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing" (30). The are high-standing, rational, and in control, and by contrast this relegates the narrator to the position of being low-status, irrational and emotional, and without control.

The narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is contained in the domestic expression of a Gothic existence, an existence predicated by Mary Shelley's mother Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), "in which female nature has been artificially constructed in such a way so that women are trapped in illusions of ideology which prevent them from recognising the gothic reality of their lot" (Kilgour 76). The narrator is relegated to this position against her will: she is placed there by John, who instructs her to "use [her] will and self-control and not let any silly fancies run away with [her]" (39), although he does not heed the perfectly rational suggestions that she makes: "I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wish he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia" (38). The medical tradition to which John prescribes is extended to the patriarchal system of society; just as John "scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures" (29) his tradition subsumes female emotion as an inconvenient irrelevancy. The result of this is a self-fulfilling prophecy: the narrator goes mad, imagining that the yellow wallpaper that decorates her barred prison-bedroom houses another woman. The "illusions of ideology" that Kilgour suggests are here represented by the wallpaper itself: it is indicative of one of the only parts

of the domestic realm that the woman is supposed to have control over: decorating the interior. As DeLamotte states,

‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ could almost be an allegory of the way the female Gothickist uses mystery to mediate between her anger at domestic ideology and her need to believe in it. For the narrator, a woman excluded from the mysteries of masculine knowledge [. . .], compensates by making her own wallpaper, symbol of her domestic confinement, into a mystery that she must then decipher. Her obsessive concentration on the wallpaper is both a desperate attempt to validate the ideology that limits women’s proper sphere of knowledge to the mysteries of interior decorating and a way for her to inscribe her own mystery – the angry, Hidden Other Woman inside her – on the walls of her domestic prison. (191)

The narrator, however, does not even truly have control over the wallpaper: “At first he meant to repaper the room, but afterwards he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies” (33). As it is the wallpaper that becomes the focus of her psychosis, here it is the suppression that triggers her descent. Ultimately, the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” comes to identify with the spectral double she imagines in the wall, finally stating that she herself has “got out at last” (50). This conclusion highlights the apparent contradiction concerning the representation of the edifice as both imposing and imposed form: the narrator begins by being haunted by the edifice and ends by identifying with it.

The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is trapped between an uneasy need to validate orthodox ideology and a reaction to its suppressive nature. Such a tension also existed in the first Gothic works. Norman Holland and Leona Sherman identified “the pervasive ‘status quo’ feeling we have in reading gothic” (286), and have suggested that the conclusion of the Gothic romance is not a refutation of male ideals but an affirmation of them in a more passive form, specifically in the “bland hero.” Where the villain acts as the tyrannical extreme of male influence, the hero acts

as the acceptable alternative. The hero in Gothic contrasts clearly with the strong personality of the archetypal Gothic villain: “the Gothic fantasy lacks an effective hero, a character who through his own efforts can resolve the mystery and put an end to horror” (Day 50-51). The hero instead passively survives the events of the novel to reach the resolution relatively unscathed, and takes possession of the heroine and the edifice thereafter. Isabella is married off to the hero Theodore; Emily weds Valancourt and returns to her paternal edifice in La Vallée, the supernatural intrigues that surrounded her explained away rationally. Here “the gothic appears to be a transgressive rebellion against norms which yet ends up reinstating them” (Kilgour 8). The heroine in Gothic literature travels from a space in which she has no control to one in which she still has no control but does not find objectionable; she has exchanged the unwanted advances of the villain for the wanted advances of the “rightful heir.” Theodore in *The Castle of Otranto* is the “correct” successor to the estates of Otranto, through his ultimate sire Alfonso, and Isabella is still property, as her father “Frederick offered his daughter to the new prince [Theodore]” (148) just as he earlier “consented to bestow Isabella on him [Manfred]” (132). The power of the male has not been altered, it has merely been accommodated and become acceptable, affirmed and validated.

This style of Gothic resolution is, however, an uneasy one. Robert Kiely observes that Gothic novels “have troubled and unsatisfactory endings” (252). With the rationalising conclusion of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* “we find ourselves becoming sceptical, not so much of the ghosts as of the explanations” (Kiely 80). *The Castle of Otranto* ends not with a happy conclusion but with a sort of curse; Isabella, married to Theodore, is required to “forever indulge the melancholy that had taken possession of his soul” (148). In later Gothic literature a rational resolution – a “return to normal” – is completely removed: at the conclusion of “The Yellow Wallpaper” the narrator remains insane, for example, and does not settle back into even a semblance of normalcy. Instead she is left in her room,

frenetically decrying the male text that her husband has tried to impose upon her.

In another later Gothic text – Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” – the resolution is likewise unrestricted. In this short story, a visitor to the Usher castle meets the owner, Roderick Usher, and his pseudo-heroine sister Madeline. Madeline appears to die, and Roderick entombs her in the family vault at the base of the edifice. She is not dead, however, and returns from her live burial to frighten her brother to death as she expires herself. There is no return to standard ideology here, and there is also another departure from the Gothic archetypes as they have been established: the merging of the Gothic villain and the indifferent Gothic hero into a single character. The consequent composite is a protagonist/antagonist that is still selfish and self-absorbed, but also tormented and melancholy. Roderick Usher is a lacklustre villain, plagued by doubts and fears and having nothing like the passionate malice or deliberate malice of Manfred or Montoni, likened instead to “the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium” (152). The resolution (standard) and the character (the hero) that were major features of early Gothic are unsatisfying in the earlier works and completely absent in the later works, highlighting the conflict between uneasy affirmations of ideology – which disappeared as the genre progressed – and the underlying incarceration by that ideology.

For DeLamotte the contradiction lies with the domestic ideologies that both incarcerate females and validate female space. For Gilbert and Gubar the conflict is internalised, and the validation – as the later developments of Gothic demonstrate – is an uneasy one because the internal space in which the female is trapped is symbolic not only of patriarchal imprisonment but also of the female’s own womb, in which “the confinement of pregnancy replicates the confinement of society” (89) and “the woman writer who perceives the implications of the house / body equation must unconsciously realise that such a trope does not ‘place’ her in a glass coffin, it transforms her into a version of the glass coffin herself”



(89). The penetrative male imposition on the edifice in this analysis is an obvious metaphor. The fear of the heroine (and by Gilbert and Gubar's association the female author) is also, however, that "she has been imprisoned within her own alien and loathsome body" (89), both imposed on by the male villain and imposed on by the social and narrative objectification of her existence as an edifice. The attribution of matters of female space exclusively to female authors is however a restrictive one, as the initiator and many of the practitioners of Gothic literature were male, but Gilbert and Gubar nevertheless offer yet another critical reconciliation of the associations concerning the edifice.

The social and gendered aspects of Gothic fiction as expressed in the relationships the characters have to the edifice are both viable alternative perspectives: neither contradicts the conclusions of the other. It is constructive, however, to attempt an examination of the perspectives on a more unified level, in the hope of finding an explanation that can encompass both viewpoints. Holland and Sherman, in the influential study "Gothic Possibilities" (1977), suggest that the edifice in Gothic literature operates not with a specific function but as a "physical space which will accept many different projections of unconscious material" (282), becoming "all the possibilities of a parent or a body. It can threaten, resist, love, or confine, but in all these actions, it stands as a total environment" (283). The edifice according to Gilbert and Gubar, for example, is given meaning through projections of the female reader of Gothic:

A gothic novel combines the heroine's fantasies about the castle with her fears that her body will be violated. The novel thus makes it possible for literents [readers] to interpret body by means of castle and castle by means of body, but it does not force us to do so nor does it fix the terms in which the two of us will do it. (281-282)

Holland and Sherman go on to project their own understandings and expectations onto the Gothic edifice, although they do not attempt to explain the reasons why the edifice, and specifically the Gothic edifice, is so supportive of this projection.

George Haggerty, in *Gothic Fiction / Gothic Form* (1989), offers a potential explanation, hearkening back to the Gothic novel as a reaction against a neoclassical form. Haggerty suggests that Walpole, in writing *The Castle of Otranto*, was reacting specifically against the narrative strictures of the eighteenth century trend in novels: “Walpole brought into focus both the seeming limitations of the novel form as it emerged in the eighteenth century and the terms under which those limitations were to be overcome” (3). For the “emerging concept of novelistic realism” (3) Haggerty refers to the description given by Elizabeth Napier in *The Failure of Gothic* (1987) – “a tendency towards moral and structural stabilizing characteristic of much previous eighteenth-century fiction” (5) – that sharply contrasts with the Gothic fiction that Walpole began: dream-like, fragmentary, supernatural, and morally unstable. The uneasy nature of all attempts at narrative conclusiveness in Gothic is one manifestation of this departure: Haggerty suggests that the (comparatively easy) resolution of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is on the part of Radcliffe a “refusal to take the formal implications of her material seriously” (22), the formal implications that Radcliffe refuses being the Gothic desire for a departure from conventional sensibilities.

The departure from earlier forms of the emerging concept of the novel was predicated in other works of the time, most notably Edmund Burke’s 1757 essay *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Burke suggested that “The imagination mediates between and joins the inner self with the external world” (Engell 71), what Haggerty calls giving “objective substance to the private and subjective” (7). The sublime as it appears in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is a prime example of this: the objective nature of the edifice’s height induces the emotions of those who observe it. Burke was suggesting that “A ‘sublime’ response to the external world is more than a private experience [. . .] it is an experience that can be communicated and shared” (Haggerty 8). The “affective nature of Gothic fiction” (Haggerty 4) is therefore an attempt at communicating this response.

Setting as exemplified by the Gothic edifice became the “metaphor for internal states” (Haggerty 93), giving “private experience external manifestation” (Haggerty 7). The physically-stratified structure of the edifice is reflected in the social stratification of its inhabitants along the lines of verticality. The interpretation that Haggerty provides also offers a way to united alternative critical perspectives along this axis. The edifice evokes a particular emotional response in the Gothic characters, creating and facilitating the heroine, villain, and the hero/villain. It achieves the same result for the Gothic reader, who was perusing a genre that had as “its primary formal aim [. . .] the emotional and psychological involvement of the reader” (18). Whereas most fiction can be said to engage the reader’s involvement, the Gothic work is specifically keyed to act as a psychological mirror of the reader. Haggerty refers to Robert Hume’s article “Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel” (1969), which suggests that Gothic literature operates on a more affective level than contemporaneous texts, displaying “a considerable amount of concern for *interior* mental processes” (283). In advancing the “psychological interest” (283) of the reader, the affective nature of Gothic fiction enables the imprinting of the various social and gendered concerns identified by the Gothic theorists onto the basic psychological “structure” – physical and social verticality – of the work, and in fact because of that affective nature the Gothic works are designed to do just that: “Gothic fiction is structured so as to heighten this multiplicity of interpretive possibilities” (Haggerty 10). The underlying structure of the Gothic fiction facilitates the theories that the Gothic critics develop from it because, due to its affective nature, this is what it is designed to do.

The edifice in Gothic literature can be divided according to lines of vertical stratification: it displays the property of verticality. In some cases this is physical, but in all cases it is metaphorically associated with social stratification. The Gothic characters as well as the reader of Gothic and the Gothic theorist are able to imprint their own concerns and anxieties onto this stratification, and it is a stratification that is furthermore associated with the properties of the edifice at every stage and on every



level. Just as the Gothic edifice can be associated with or placed in opposition to the characters of the Gothic work, Gothic fiction itself can express and facilitate many different impressions and interpretations.

## Chapter Two – Interiority and Pastness

Gothic literature is engineered to induce a psychological and emotional response in the characters, the readers, and the critics, and the edifice acts as the primary facilitator of this effect. As Holland and Sherman point out, however, there is nothing inherently (or automatically) emotional about the setting of Gothic literature: “Castles do not convey terror the way bottles pour wine” (279). It is therefore not just the appearance of the edifice in Gothic that induces the appropriate reaction, but rather the way that this setting is presented and used. The Gothic work is marked by “not just a particular setting but a particular *use* of setting” (Haggerty 11). The use of setting in Gothic literature is one that emphasises particular aspects of the edifice at different levels. On a wider level the plots and characters of Gothic are bound to a structure of verticality, as Chapter One demonstrates. The influence of the edifice can also be seen in the closer details of Gothic works, however, in the spatial and temporal construction of atmosphere induced in the novels.

The taxonomy of devices that contribute to the Gothic atmosphere are comprised of both physical and thematic elements. The following aspects are those most often cited as distinctly Gothic: absence, in the form of silence, darkness, and emptiness; submergence, in the form of enclosure, atmospheric “weight,” and live burial; demarcation, in the form of external and internal isolation, and the creation and transgression of boundaries; questions of identity, in the form of spectral doubles and individual insanity; and questions of reality, in the form of dream-narratives, ghosts, and evocations of the “unreal.”

Eve Sedgwick, in the influential *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, suggests that all these devices display significant congruency: “There is in these novels a large, important group of quite specific conventions – structural and thematic [. . .] – that share a particular spatial model” (12). This congruency is based specifically on the Gothic treatment of the

edifice's inside space, which Sedgwick terms "interiority, the 'within'" (20). The use of darkness and silence, the weight of the internal atmosphere, the creation and abuse of boundaries, and many of the other Gothic devices are products of the spatialisation of the edifice that Sedgwick classifies under interiority.

The interiority of the edifice, however, is not a purely physical creation. Corresponding to the physical and thematic structure of the edifice is an associated historical, or temporal, aspect. Leslie Fiedler identifies this temporal aspect: "The gothic for the first time felt the *pastness* of the past" (129). Such a pastness can contribute significantly to an understanding of Sedgwick's spatial model, and together they offer a cohesive portrait of Gothic devices.

The temporal structure of the edifice is a clear one: architecture is a symbol of the past that interferes with the present. The past in which the Gothic edifice is founded is a past that is perpetually repeating and interfering. Ghosts of past inhabitants feature prominently in the texts. The dead are frequently rising from their graves, literally as ghosts (such as the spectres of Alfonso and Manfred's grandfather) or the buried-alive (Roderick Usher's sister, returning from the deep crypt), or figuratively as images (the wax corpse that Emily discovers) or memories (the inferred previous inhabitants of the narrator's room in "The Yellow Wallpaper"). Figuratively, the resurrection of the past, in terms of inheritance and secret histories, is also a staple Gothic trope. *The Castle of Otranto* ends in the deposal of Manfred and the reinstatement of Theodore after the revelation that he is the rightful heir from his father Jerome; *The Mysteries of Udolpho* ends with the succession of Emily to her father's estates in La Vallée. As D. B. Morris identifies, "the past interpenetrates the present time, as if events were never entirely the unique and unrepeated product of human choices but rather the replication of an unknown or buried pattern" (304).

The past that interferes, however, is not a simple progression of previous values into the present, a kind of narrative conservatism. Whereas “the historical novel effects a momentary union between past and present” the Gothic, “in contrast, embodies, and even glorifies, the alienation of the individual from history” (Day 33). It is not progressive; in contrast to “real” history Gothic history does not maintain a clear boundary between the past and the present; rather, Gothic history has the feel of unchanging cyclical perpetuation. This past is not a setting but an atmosphere, linked intimately with the atmosphere of the interior that surrounds the characters, for, as Emily broadly states, “all old mansions are haunted” (2: 162). History does not underlie the characters so much as it haunts them. It comes in cycles, where Conrad’s death and Manfred’s ultimate punishment are described in Walpole’s preface as an example of the rule that “*the sins of fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation*” (41). It interferes with present events, as the various spectral body-parts of Alfonso interfere with Manfred’s fell ambitions in Otranto. Fiedler’s “pastness” (129) is not a historical past but an ahistorical past, and “The creation of the Gothic fantasy world is an assertion of the existence of a timeless reality outside history” (Day 32) rather than a simple chronological re-placement. The Gothic setting is not concerned with the specifics of the past so much as it is with its effect as an expression of pastness in general as a concept to be appropriated.

In “The Fall of the House of Usher” Edgar Allan Poe explicitly brings this concept of pastness into association with the Gothic edifice. The narrator enters the House of Usher, an enormous estate half-ruined by its extreme age: “Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great” (150). It is a stronghold of pastness, and yet “all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of individual stones” (150). The dilapidation and decay of the mansion, coupled with its unnatural deferral of collapse, perfectly characterises the combination of the ancient feeling and yet ahistorical suspension of the

Gothic edifice. It emanates a tone of perpetual pastness, just as the narrator notes:

about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity – an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the grey wall, and the silent tarn [. . .] sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued. (150)

The edifice emanates the atmosphere of a perpetual relic from a decaying past.

The atmosphere of pastness is closely linked with the standard devices and conventions of Gothic literature. One obvious example is of the frequent convention of live burial. In “The Fall of the House of Usher” Roderick describes time itself as a buried thing, in a story – “The Haunted Palace” – itself imbedded within the narrative: it is “the old time entombed” (156). His sister Madeline is buried in the family vault, which “had been so long unopened that our torches, half smothered in its oppressive atmosphere, gave us little opportunity for investigation” (158). Days later, increasingly paranoid and fearful that she has been buried alive, Roderick exclaims “We have put her living in the tomb!” (162). Following his subsequent cry of “Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door” (163) she is revealed risen from the crypt and collapses into her brother’s arms, dying and as she does killing him by fright. The imprisoned past rises up to involve itself with the affairs of the narrative present, bringing with it all the atmospheric terror of the buried-alive.

In *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and “The Yellow Wallpaper” the trope that is best associated with live burial is imprisonment. As Sedgwick notes, the concepts of entombment and incarceration are thematically allied: the language of the captive is similar to the language of live burial, and both link with the concept of pastness, as “Time within the cell [. . .] continues at a pace incommensurable with the pace of time outside” (129). Conrad, Manfred’s son in *The Castle of Otranto*, is “almost buried under an enormous helmet” (52), and while this

is not a live burial Manfred soon imprisons Theodore under the same object: “he would have the magician [. . .] kept prisoner under the helmet itself” (55). Emily, after being contained in “her chamber, which was in a remote part of the castle” (1: 238) is shocked into unconsciousness by the discovery of what she thinks is a dead body imprisoned within a veiled alcove in a lost gallery (1: 252); it later turns out to be nothing more than a wax sculpture of a former inhabitant (2: 334). The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” has bars on the windows of the bedroom inside which she is enclosed, although they are ostensibly “barred for little children” (32), the former occupants. Soon she is haunted by a spectral figure she imagines is trapped behind bars within the wallpaper: “it becomes bars! The outside pattern, I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be” (42). Burial alive, like imprisonment, “derives much of its horror not from the buried person’s loss of outside activities (that would be the horror of dead burial), but from the continuation of a parallel activity that is suddenly redundant” (Sedgwick 20). Within the edifice historical repetition and irrelevancy, and imprisonment and live burial, all prevent any escape from the snares of pastness.

The artwork of Piranesi’s *Carceri D’Invenzione*, as demonstrated in the Introduction so influential on the early Gothic authors, offers a clear picture of this pervasive atmosphere. Architecture here is a prison, acknowledged literally in the title’s “Carceri” – “prison” – and artistically in the style of the compositions. As Sedgwick notes:

it is impossible to organize the spaces in any of these prints into architectural space. Architecture delineates and places in relation to each other an inside and an outside. In *Carceri* it is impossible to construct in imagination the shell that would delimit this inside from a surrounding outside. Even so is the shell of a Radcliffeian castle impossible to imagine. (25-26)

The prison of Gothic literature is not one that restricts inside space, but one that elevates inside space to the point where it overcomes the possibility of an outside, creating Sedgwick’s interiority. Gothic prisons are not tight enclosed spaces but a version “emphasizing the spaciousness



and vacuity of the imprisoning environment" (Sedgwick 38), where movement is not limited but rather simply inconsequential. Enclosures "evoke a double terror associated with boundaries: the fear that the walls may have no opening; the fear that the cavernous space is limitless and that one will never find a wall" (DeLamotte 21). The Piranesian image of stairs spiralling ever upwards is used in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* as "the symbol of an anxiety which condensed the spirit of the Gothic tales" (Praz 20). Within the edifice the vacuity of the Gothic is emphasised by the use of devices that characterise absence: darkness (the dearth of light), and silence (the dearth of sound). Both absences create an atmosphere that profoundly affects the inhabitants. Emily experiences "a kind of breathless stillness" (1: 257); the interior space's "gloom and profound stillness awed her" (1: 224). The narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" notes "the intense darkness of the chamber" (159), and that "An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all" (151). Isabella experiences "An awful silence" (61) and a "long labyrinth of darkness" (61), and this is central to the creation of her psychological state, which is "most fully expressed in the objective terms Walpole has chose: We understand her terror specifically in terms of the cloisters, the darkness, and the awful silence" (Haggerty 17). Through the stasis of pastness history repeats itself. The labyrinth at the base of the edifice is a maze without light, sound, or exit; the tower above the edifice ascends ad infinitum, ever circling about the Gothic locus.

The atmosphere of interiority has a profound effect on the characters within the edifice. Any characters entering the Gothic world from an outside are absorbed and altered by the atmosphere of the edifice, their morals subsumed and their frame of mind taken within the Gothic structure. In *The Castle of Otranto* Isabella's father, the marquis of Vicenza, at first appears to be a champion and saviour, who proclaims that he has come "to make good his lord's claim against thee [Manfred], as he is a true knight, and thou an usurper and ravisher" (95). Soon, however, he is making deals with Manfred for both their marriages to each other's daughter. Emily, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, speaks of an infectious

darkness; she notes that “The gloom of the castle seemed to have spread its contagion even over the gay countenance of Cavigni” (1: 254). As Manuel Aguirre states, “the House of Usher [. . .] generates its own atmosphere” (125-126). Within the edifice, its occupant (and owner, and prisoner) Roderick Usher feels the touch of this atmosphere: “an influence which some peculiarities in the mere form and substance of his family mansion, had, by dint of long sufferance, he said, obtained over his spirit” (153). The visitor to the House of Usher falls under a similar shadow: “with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit” (148).

When “outsiders” enter the Gothic world it quickly becomes apparent that it can become a closed system, separated (divided) from normal time and space, and therefore when there is movement in this world it is not between this world and another, but solely “within.” All attempt at escape is a “Gothic flight, where branching corridors and circular passages transform forward movement into endless repetition” (Morris 307). Isabella, despite finding sanctuary in a church, is brought back to the castle Otranto. Both she and Emily avoid the imposition of matrimony from Manfred or Montoni, only to acquiesce to a more benign version at the end of the texts. Clearly separated from any alternative outside, the pastness of the edifice curses the characters to a kind of everlasting reduplication. Morris characterises the plot of *The Castle of Otranto* in just this fashion:

Situations and events seem fated to generate exact or nearly exact facsimiles, which necessarily raise questions both about their own status and about the world in which such unlikely duplications occur. Manfred [. . .] three times imprisons the mysterious stranger Theodore, and three times Theodore escapes to return and defy him [. . .] twice Theodore comes to the aid of Isabella as she twice flees from Manfred. There are two separate and equally improbable recognition scenes reuniting grown children with long-lost parents. (303-304)

The events are doubled; so are the characters. Manfred attempts to stand in for his deceased son Conrad. The marquis of Vicenza becomes another Manfred. Manfred kills his daughter Matilda thinking her to be Isabella; Isabella promptly replaces Matilda in Theodore's affections. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Emily has not one suitor but four; the unwelcome Counts Montoni and Morano, and the acquiescent suitors Valancourt and Du Pont. The narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" creates an imaginary double within the prison-like wallpaper; she eventually comes to believe that she actually is this alter ego. The edifice seemingly becomes hermetically sealed against outside intrusion, so that the plots, characters and themes echo repeatedly within as the perpetuated expressions of pastness.

While it may appear that this hermetic sealing and the repetition therein makes the interior a homogeneous amorphous whole, where any one element is interchangeable for another with little equivocation between, the boundaries inside the edifice are just as important as those between the edifice and the outside world. Boundaries within the edifice are crucial Gothic devices, "the very stage properties of Gothic romance: veils, masks, cowls, precipices, black palls, trap doors, sliding panels, prison walls, castle ramparts" (DeLamotte 19). Aside from the obvious incarceration boundaries that Manfred, Montoni, and John use to isolate their captives – the physical confines of the edifice – there are many such notable segregating objects: the veil that prevents Emily from viewing the wax corpse in the gallery; the doors that protect and threaten the security of Emily's bedchamber; the bars in the wallpaper that the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" imagines separates her from her spectral double; the secret doorway that Isabella uses to flee Manfred's dominance; the doorway through which Roderick Usher's sister falls after rising from her coffin and vault. Unlike the demarcations that divide the Gothic interior from the outside world, however, there are not immutable, impermeable and impervious barriers. These barriers are arbitrary, can be crossed, and – most importantly – can be transgressed.

The interior thresholds of the Gothic edifice are not inconsequential lines that the characters cross at will and without qualm; as DeLamotte notes: “to mark the transition between these worlds, gothic narratives linger for a moment at the dividing line between them, evoking what Lévy calls ‘anxieties of the threshold’” (20). Recurrently in Gothic texts when crossing barriers there is a moment, or several moments, of hesitation and vacillation. Isabella, at the secret door that should enable her to escape Manfred, “hesitated whether she should proceed” (62), part of over three pages’ worth of debate (61-63) over what she fears more, Manfred behind or the unknown route ahead. The body of Madeline Usher, before it falls through the doorway onto Roderick, “for a moment [. . .] remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold” (163). Emily, wandering the castle Udolpho, approaches the notorious gallery with considerable reluctance: “Emily passed on with faltering steps; and having paused a moment at the door before she attempted to open it, she then hastily entered the chamber” (1: 252). Once she encounters the veiled “corpse” and resolves to uncover the mystery, “she paused again, and then with a timid hand lifted the veil” (1: 252). The next time that Emily travels the halls of Udolpho and hears a lamenting voice behind a closed door, she stays for some time on the boundary, “afraid to open the door, and unwilling to leave it” (1: 262). Afraid of both the threats behind and the mysteries ahead, the heroine is here trapped not in a physical prison but a psychological one. Despite this she always crosses the threshold, as Radcliffe notably comments: “a terror of this nature, as it occupies and expands the mind, and elevates it to high expectation, is purely sublime, and leads us by a kind of fascination, to seek even the object from which we appear to shrink” (1: 252). The anxieties of the threshold may give pause, but they are always eventually traversed.

Many beings in Gothic literature are boundary-crossers. The spectres of *The Castle of Otranto*, Madeline Usher of “The Fall of the House of Usher,” the presumed-dead Countess Montoni of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and the vampires of other Gothic texts span the obvious boundary between the living and the dead. They also undermine physical limits: “Ghosts and

other supernatural beings defy both physical boundaries and the boundaries whereby daylight reason distinguishes one thing from another. The tomb cannot contain them; they cross the border between the living and the dead; notoriously, they walk through walls" (DeLamotte 21). Madeline escapes her coffin and the iron door of the crypt; the imago behind "The Yellow Wallpaper" is able to "creep around as I please!" (49). In Gothic literature

the physical and metaphorical boundaries that one ordinarily depends on prove unstable, elusive, ineffective, nonexistent. A secret panel opens in the solid wall; the bed curtains move; a door gives way; the dead come to life; portraits leave their frames; a brother murders his sister; events that should have an end seem endless. (DeLamotte 22)

What these events emphasize is the vagueness and dissolution of boundaries, the destabilization of conventional existence which is fundamental to the Gothic world.

Nowhere is this destabilization more obvious than in the activities of the Gothic villain. The contravention of boundaries, particularly by conflict or violence, is a fundamental activity for the villain, who is perpetually "cursed by a rebellious impulse to test and transgress human social and ethical constraints" (Stoddart 113). Manfred proclaims that "heaven nor hell shall impede my designs" (59), just as he attempts to marry himself off to his late son's intended and his own surrogate daughter, Isabella, a deed approaching the transgressive act of incest in its disruption of familial relationships and necessary separations. A very similar action takes place in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, as Montoni goes from marrying Emily's aunt to trying to betroth Emily to a friend to trying to marry her himself. The hints of incest in Gothic literature – echoed further in the unusual relationship between Roderick and his sister in "The Fall of the House of Usher" – is another coherent device under the canopy of interiority, as "incest is symbolic of the closure of the human world" (Aguirre 95), a further boundary between the Gothic and external existence.



The egocentric desires of the villains ultimately do not serve to further their designs, however, but only to hasten their downfalls; the Gothic world,

like a black hole in space, allows no energy to escape, but traps it in a closed system. Action can never be progressive, only circular; whatever the protagonist tries to do, his actions must result in his own disintegration. [. . .] The Gothic protagonist achieves only the illusion of meaningful action, for every movement is in fact the same movement: a downward spiral to destruction. (Day 44)

The ultimate result of Manfred's schemes is his murder of his own daughter Matilda, and the destruction of the Castle of Otranto by the spectre of Alfonso; Montoni is tried and convicted for his own excesses and also his role in hiding the assassin Orsino. With the boundaries to the "outside" world hermetically sealed through the edifice's alienation from natural time and space the villain's transgressions can only be internal ones. As Sedgwick points out, the real "depths" of human horror are not in the dark chambers of the edifice but "in the very breach of the imprisoning wall" (13) that separates them, whether that wall is physical or societal.

The Gothic world is one sealed from an external existence. It is often a fantastic world, the supernatural phenomena of *The Castle of Otranto* being a prime example. As Fiedler observes, "There is a place in men's lives where pictures do in fact bleed, ghosts gibber and shriek, maidens run forever through mysterious landscapes from nameless foes; that place is, of course, the world of dreams and of the repressed guilts and fears that motivate them" (132). William Patrick Day makes this association a necessary component of Gothic terror, "the Gothic narrative takes as its model the dream, nightmare, or hallucination. Such modes have as part of their essential quality a pervading strangeness and fragmentation, a sense of the familiar rendered bizarre" (43). According to Punter the repetition and futility of the work's action, forever circling an inexorable Gothic locus, is best reflected in real life through the dream: "we were here two centuries ago in Otranto or Udolpho; we visit here, of course, each night in a series of acts of folly, in a series of obsessional repetitions, repeating



dreams" ("Ceremonial" 42). Walpole even claimed that the kernel of his novel came from a dream: "I waked one morning in the beginning of last June from a dream, of which all I could recover was, that I thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head like mine filled with Gothic story) [. . .] in the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate" (Praz 17).

The likening of the Gothic to a dreamscape, what DeLamotte calls "the 'oneiric' quality of the Gothic world" (13), is present in the texts themselves: the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" states that her situation "is like a bad dream" (41); the atmosphere of the House of Usher is described as "an utter depression of the soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium" (148); once Emily leaves Udolpho "Montoni and his castle had all vanished from her mind, like the frightful vision of a necromancer" (2: 115). The mention of a necromancer – one who raises the dead – very much fits with the pastness aspect of the dream, as a sort of unreal state of the past that haunts the present. In dreams the boundary between what is possible and what is impossible is dissolved; so too in Gothic literature the appearance – or often solely the possibility, as Emily's servant states: "I can almost believe in giants again, and such-like, for this is just like one of their castles" (1: 234) – of undermining the boundary between fiction and reality is frequently present: "the world of the Gothic fantasy is an imitation of the world of the dream, the hallucination, in which that which is real and that which is imaginary fade into one" (Day 30-31).

In the spatial thematics of Sedgwick, however, the pervasive atmosphere of the dream is just another aspect of all that is termed "the within" – incarceration, entombment, live burial – "the oppressiveness of this space, the ego's sense of being under it as if underground or under water, is a profound affinity with the Gothic tradition. The almost inextricable association of depth with sleep and dreams is further reminiscent of the Gothic" (38). This sense of depth, further more, "is not formally or topographically differentiated from its surroundings; instead, one of its

functions is finally to undermine the sense of inside and outside, the centeredness of the 'self' (27).

The fragmentation of the "centeredness" of the self is most effectively demonstrated in Gothic works where the self does actually encounter another form that is apparently part of it: the Gothic double. Such a double can manifest in several different forms, such as the alter-ego, the face in the portrait or the mirror, the ancestral spectre, or the doppelgänger. For Botting the double signifies "the alienation of the human subject from the culture and language in which s/he was located," adding that "these devices increasingly destabilised the boundaries between psyche and reality, opening up an indeterminate zone in which the differences between fantasy and actuality were no longer secure" (11-12). "The Yellow Wallpaper" goes furthest into this conjuration of the double; the narrator progressively projects "lame uncertain curves" (32) into the wallpaper that "suddenly commit suicide – plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions" (32), then "absurd, unblinking eyes" (35) (already the wallpaper is watching the narrator as the narrator is watching the paper; the double has been created), then "a strange, provoking, formless, sort of figure that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design" (36), then "a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern" (39). Eventually the double that the narrator imagines overwhelms her, destroying the boundary between herself and her double just as she tears down the wallpaper that she believes divides them, triumphantly announcing that "I've got out at last [. . .]. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (50). The ultimate boundary that Gothic literature transgresses is the boundary of the walls between what is self and what is not.

The fragmentation of identity apparent in the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is, according to the critics who take a psychological approach, a direct result of the pressures of the interior atmosphere. DeLamotte describes the Gothic atmosphere as "claustrophobic [. . .] pressing in on

the solitary individual who tries, despite it, to keep a distinct selfhood intact" (31). Day notes that "The Gothic atmosphere mirrors the collapse of the self, for just as the self is fragmented into a doubled identity, it loses its ability to place itself in relation to an objective world" (28).

Roderick Usher explicitly manifests the pressure of interiority. He begins by painting images "over which his elaborate fancy brooded" (154). The narrator describes these as somehow growing, "touch by touch, into vagueness at which I shuddered the more thrillingly, because I shuddered knowing not why" (154). Roderick doubles his thoughts onto the canvas, for "If ever a mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher" (154). His feverish paintings eventually resolve into a concrete image for the observer/narrator, portraying the "interior of an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth, white and without interruption or device. Certain accessory points of the design served well to convey the idea that this excavation lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth" (154). It is an expression of the inescapable "within," for "no outlet was observed in any portion of its vast extent" (154). It is a crypt, burying the observer alive. Usher soon descends into further wild fancies, supposing that the castle itself has a mind: "The conditions of the sentience had been here, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones" (156-157). He begins to believe in the castle as the primary influence on his own personality, describing the sentience as "that silent, yet importunate and terrible influence which for centuries had moulded the destinies of his family, and which made *him* what I now saw him – what he was" (157). Roderick's identity becomes indistinct, intermingling with that of his position as head of the dynasty, and the location of the dynasty itself. As the narrator himself describes: "the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the 'House of Usher' – an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who wed it, both the family and the family mansion" (149). Finally, "the House of Usher is the man is the building is the family is the title, all to itself" (Aguirre 125).

The atmosphere of interiority and the psychological effect it has on the inhabitants appears to be particularly conducive to a psychoanalytical interpretation of the Gothic. Walpole's own description of *The Castle of Otranto* as having its genesis as a dream-fragment reinforces the coherency of the critical perspective: "Walpole located its origin in subconscious forces beyond his control, thus sowing the seeds for later psychoanalytical readings" (Kilgour 22). The pastness of the Gothic adds to that viewpoint, displaying the "psychoanalytical critics' contention that the gothic reflects the return of the repressed, in which subconscious psychic energy bursts out from the restraints of the conscious ego" (Kilgour 3). All the manifestations of the past that return to haunt the Gothic characters are merely metaphors for the "return of the repressed." The Gothic work becomes a psychological portrait of the self, the descent to the depths of the edifice becomes a metaphor for a descent to the dark regions of the soul, the pressure of the interior atmosphere creates the fragmentation and dissolution of personal identity, and the rise of the past to interfere with the present becomes a return of repressed or forgotten memories.

As Kilgour notes, however, a psychoanalytical reading of Gothic does not so much demonstrate that it explains Gothic but rather that it is explained by Gothic. The pastness that the Gothic work demonstrates does not display such a congruency with psychoanalysis because that is the primary concern of the Gothic, but rather because "psychoanalysis is itself a gothic, necromantic form, that resurrects our psychic pasts" (220). Under this inversion, "Rather than being a tool for explaining the gothic, then, psychoanalysis is a late gothic story which has emerged to help explain a twentieth-century experience of paradoxical detachment from and fear of others and the past" (221).

This inversion reflects the reprioritisation of Chapter One, that rather than explaining Gothic, this critical impression can be explained by Gothic. Here, the systems of interiority and pastness display remarkable cohesion that has enabled a critical interpretation to be imprinted upon it, but the

cohesion of the interior and the haunting past does not require the critical interpretation to be unified.

The devices of Gothic display significant coherency. Together they induce an interior atmosphere of the “within” particular to the edifices of Gothic literature. This interiority, coupled with the temporal component of pastness and the social and thematic formations of verticality prove to be central to creating psychological reactions in the characters, readers, and critics. The unifying element of the factors of verticality, interiority, and pastness is the Gothic edifice itself. From the silence, darkness, and emptiness of its interior to the isolating and fragmenting power of its borders and boundaries to the haunting influence of an ahistorical past to the vertical stratification of its inhabitants, the edifice acts as the physical, temporal, and psychological centrepiece of the Gothic work.

That the edifice acts as the centrepiece, however, does not imply that it is a compulsory element of Gothic literature. Verticality, interiority, and pastness are the core factors in a description of a text as Gothic, and the consideration of the Gormenghast series in Part Two demonstrates that, while the edifice is the most effective and efficient way to present these factors, it is not the only way.

## Part Two – Gormenghast

### Chapter Three – *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*

The structure of Gothic literature is one that corresponds closely with the structure of the Gothic edifice that is its foremost setting. The characters, plots, and devices of the genre can be encapsulated under three basic categories: verticality, in which the social structure of the edifice's inhabitants is one ruled by a stratified tyranny; interiority, in which the edifice acts as a total environment that incarcerates its prisoners and induces Gothic reactions in the characters and the readers; and pastness, in which the spectres of past deeds and misdeeds return to haunt the present, and time within the edifice is dislocated accordingly.

The first two novels of Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast trilogy, *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, feature a central edifice – the castle-city Gormenghast – much as the Gothic works discussed in Part One do. By comparing the presentation of Gormenghast castle with the constructions of previous novels and short stories and the features that they use a cohesive picture of the Gothic nature of the Gormenghast trilogy can be ascertained. The centrality of the edifice in the first two Gormenghast novels cuts across the Gothic categories introduced in Part One: the Gormenghast edifice clearly displays manifestations of verticality, interiority, and pastness. The edifice in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, however, is prominent to an extent greater than in other Gothic novels; it becomes almost the central character of the series. Because of this, the Gormenghast series offers a unique opportunity to examine the relationship between Gothic literature and the Gothic edifice.

If Gormenghast castle is examined in the context of the Gothic propensity for verticality established in Chapter One, a number of congruencies can be found. The seat of the castle's dominion is the imposing Tower of Flints, which "arose in scarred and lofty sovereignty over all the towers of Gormenghast" (TG 202). Beneath, the halls of the castle are extensive and



labyrinthine, a “labyrinth of stone corridors” (*TG* 41) that is “Endless, interwoven, and numberless” (*GG* 159). Sepulchrave’s library, the seat of his reason and intellect, like the rest of the castle is under the influence of the Tower of Flints; its shadow “fell across his library at morning always” (*TG* 395). Sepulchrave is nominally the head of the entire realm, but does not exert any control over the inhabitants of the edifice. The true authority of Gormenghast is the Master of Ritual, who dictates to the Earl and all his subjects the tenets of custom that order their lives. Barquentine, the second Master of Ritual, has as the single decoration of his bedroom a painting of the Tower of Flints (*GG* 162); one of his first prescribed rituals is for Sepulchrave to ascend and descend the Tower of Flints three times (*TG* 329). Just as the title “the House of Usher” is related to both the man Roderick Usher and the estate he inhabits, Barquentine disassociates the actuality of Sepulchrave from his title as Earl, “his veneration for the Earl (as a descendant of the original line) disassociating itself from his feelings about the man himself” (*TG* 448). Neither Barquentine nor his predecessor Sourdust abuse their positions of authority, however; it falls to the youth Steerpike to assert the kind of selfish control afforded to Gothic villains.

Steerpike, as his name suggests, desires to steer the towering structure of ritual in Gormenghast. He shares many traits with the archetypal Gothic villain, although he does not begin as a tyrant but rather as a prisoner himself. Escaping from Flay, Steerpike naturally heads upwards, towards the locus of control that he desires: the rooftops. The information he gains while travelling the upper bounds of the castle transfers to him the power of knowledge; his first thought is “What use could it be put to?” (*TG* 130). As Clarice later states, “I like roofs [. . .] they are on top of the houses they cover, and Cora and I like being over the tops of things because we love power” (*TG* 216). Steerpike soon demonstrates this power: leaving the rooftop he enters the private attic of the Earl’s daughter, Fuchsia. Fuchsia is a forlorn child whose attic is a private space where she can indulge in her imagination, her “attic of make-believe, where she would watch her mind’s companions advancing or retreating across the dusty floor” (*TG* 80). It is,

to her, “a world undesecrate” (*TG* 68), which Steerpike desecrates by his presence.

When Steerpike enters this space he intrudes upon her personal, secret world. Fuchsia no longer owns the attic; for her “It was no longer inviolate – secret – mysterious” (*TG* 270-271). Just like a Gothic villain, Steerpike is one who transgresses boundaries. His entry into the attic is the first of many such movements. Steerpike picks locks (*TG* 262) and bores holes through doors (*TG* 263); it is he who locks the door of the library to trap the inhabitants (*TG* 310) and later the door of the twins’ chamber to seal their doom (*GG* 260). He is likened to a ghost, an enigma, an apparition (*TG* 334), able to cross and control the boundaries and demarcations of the castle at will. He even establishes as a kind of inverted tower a spying chimney, which has “a series of little shining mirrors that held the terminal reflections of what was going on in those rooms which, one above the other, flanked the high chimney-like funnel” (*GG* 15). After murdering Barquentine – by pulling him out a window boundary and into the moat – Steerpike does become the Master of Rituals, fulfilling the Gothic villain ambition to “hold within his own hands the reins, despotic or otherwise, of supreme authority” (*GG* 257), to be seen as “a kind of god” (*GG* 304). In a novel whose only other mention of divinity is that of the castle itself – “To doubt the sacred stones was to profane the godhead” (*GG* 267) – this is a telling ambition. He immediately conspires to abuse his position to endanger the titular head of the castle, Titus, by creating duties for Titus “which would be both galling and, on occasion, sufficiently hazardous for there to always be the outside chance of the young Earl coming to grief” (*GG* 349). Even here he aims to use the heights of the edifice as his tool, or weapon, “deliberately weakening and undermining certain cat-walks that stretched along the upper walls of the castle” (*GG* 349), and then sending Titus to parade along them.

There are many similarities between Steerpike and the stereotypical Gothic villain. Steerpike manipulates characters just as he manipulates boundaries: he manages to convince the twins Cora and Clarice to burn

down the library of Gormenghast and, to ensure their silence, he subsequently convinces them that a plague has taken hold of the castle and “protects” them by locking them in a distant apartment. The twins, however, rebel, and attempt to kill Steerpike with a trap set at the entrance to their cell that only he controls. He avoids the trap, locks them in, and they, like the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” descend into insanity: “behind the locked doors of this place of incarceration the Twins had languished, their brains losing what grip they had, their madness mounting” (GG 302). Contrasting with these madwomen is Fuchsia, the prime example of the Gothic heroine in the Gormenghast books. Unlike Steerpike’s “entirely cerebral [. . .] approach” (TG 163), his cold application of reason, Fuchsia is an emotional and child-like fifteen-year-old. Her room is her creative realm; like Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* she allows her imagination to run riot whilst within. Fuchsia is a passive character very similar to the Gothic heroines; she is pursued by Steerpike as a means to further control the castle, his wooing amounting to an ambition to put Fuchsia “in his power” (GG 349), his relation with her “but a step towards mastery” (GG 349). His control over her is his control over the castle, and Fuchsia herself conjures up this association:

It seemed as though it were her own self, her own body, at which she gazed and which lay so intimately upon the skyline. Gormenghast. The long, notched outline of her home. It was now his background. It was a screen of walls and towers pocked with windows. He stood against it, an intruder, imposing himself, so vividly, so solidly, against her world, his head overtopping the loftiest of its towers. (TG 273)

The edifice as a metaphor for the heroine, the transgression of boundaries (“the screen,” “the intruder”), and Steerpike’s towering authority (“overtopping”) are all invoked in this passage, conspicuously matching the patterns of the Gothic villain and heroine.

At this point *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* appear to have much in common with the patterns of Gothic verticality, with the overpowering villain and the edifice-bound heroine. The heroine, however, is not the only character to be likened to the edifice metaphorically. In fact,

practically every character is described in architectural terms, or associated directly with the castle itself. The cleaning servants in the kitchen are so inbred as to resemble the walls that they scrub: “The eyes were there, small and flat as coins, and the colour of the walls themselves, as though during the long hours of professional staring the grey stone had at last reflected itself indelibly once and for all” (*TG* 28). Sepulchrave’s wife Gertrude has hair that is frequently likened to a structure: “the countess [. . .] seems to have grown tired of her hair, the edifice being left unfinished as though some fitful architect had died before the completion of a bizarre edifice” (*TG* 370). The doctor, Prunesquallor, “belonged to Gormenghast, as much as the Tower itself” (*TG* 72); when Flay is banished by Gertrude “she was aware of having uprooted a part of Gormenghast, as though from an accustomed skyline of towers one had been broken down” (*TG* 414). The relationship between these characters and their location is reciprocal: Flay considers that “In his banishment he had felt the isolation of a severed hand” (*TG* 414). Sepulchrave also thinks of Gormenghast as an extension of his body: “To have asked him of his feelings for his ancestral home would be like asking him of his feelings were towards his own hand or his own throat” (*TG* 62). The castle Gormenghast is itself described as a character: it has a kind of pulse (*TG* 22), it can sleep (*TG* 478), its breath “could be felt in forgotten corridors” (*TG* 196). It has a backbone (*TG* 442), a face (*TG* 418), a “gaunt anatomy” (*GG* 293). It is likened to a creature with “limbs spread” (*TG* 413), a giant (*GG* 451), and a monster (*GG* 359). As Steerpike notes, “there was always this consciousness beneath the surface” (*GG* 304).

Steerpike is the sole character to be positioned in opposition to the castle Gormenghast. He is never associated with the edifice, but rather placed in contrast, “pitting himself against Gormenghast” (*GG* 273). He is like a predator or vampire, and the castle is the victim “on whose body he fed” (*GG* 256). He is an illness of the castle (*GG* 340), or a “deadly poison in the castle’s body” (*GG* 300). Steerpike is the Gothic villain who seeks to interpose his own law on the usurped edifice, affirming the power relations and metaphors of verticality as he does so.

The overall mood of the Gormenghast trilogy is a peculiar one. The names of characters – Prunesquallor, Slagg, Swelter, Sourdust, Sepulchrave – are extremely unorthodox, variously described as “appear[ing] to belong to the Gothic comedy of Peacock [. . .] or eighteenth century satire” (Kennedy 352) or suited “for Dickens or for a comic children’s story” (Burgess 10-11). The events of the novels, considered as independent incidents, can likewise appear as comic: the popping knees of Flay and the nurse Nanny Slagg’s incessant self-pitying babble; Flay and Swelter using the somnambulating Earl as a human shield in their fight to the death; a professor who denies that worldly pain exists dies after having his extensive beard set alight by a sceptical student. The mood is, however, more so one of serious absurdity akin to the outlandish events of *The Castle of Otranto*. Happenings such as the crushing of Manfred’s son underneath a gigantic helmet are there accepted with complete earnestness and gravity. Peake consciously acknowledges this tendency within the texts: certain events are described as appealing to a character’s “sense of the dramatic, the appropriate and the ridiculous” (TG 302). Correspondingly, in *Gormenghast* the surreal rituals of Titus’s tenth birthday have a seriousness belying their superficial absurdity: “although a strong strain of the ridiculous ran through everything, this was not the dominant impression” (GG 331). Anthony Burgess, in an introductory essay to *Titus Groan*, proclaims, “The whole book is a gesture only too well aware that it goes too far; there is a certain built-in self-mockery [. . .]. We are asked to accept conventions that it is impossible to take seriously, but within those conventions the blood is genuinely moved or chilled” (12).

Ronald Binns notes in “Situating Gormenghast” (1979) that Peake was “temperamentally inclined to the Gothic” (23); Rosemary Jackson in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* that the Gormenghast novels are full of “Gothic motifs” (163). The author Anthony Burgess attributes the Gothic mood of *Titus Groan* specifically to the setting – “the mood is not one of easy laughter or even of airy fantasy: the ponderous architectural quality holds everything down, and we have to take the characters very seriously, despite their names” (11) – and describes the novels as



containing a “Self-indulgence in ‘Gothic’ atmosphere” (13). The atmosphere is the aspect of the trilogy most often identified as being distinctly Gothic, and accordingly it very closely corresponds with the devices that Sedgwick lists.

The atmosphere within Gormenghast is at first sight one defined primarily by its absences. Within the edifice there is a dearth of illumination, sound, and movement. In Gormenghast “the darkness was omnipresent” (*TG* 419), and inhabitants perceive “the insistent silence of the place” (*TG* 262). The atmosphere is characterised as “the void, the abactinal absences of all things” (*TG* 419). These surroundings, however, are not identified by a straightforward deficiency. Here, “The atmosphere had become a physical sensation” (*GG* 223), and furthermore, “the sense of oppression which the darkness had ushered in had more than a material explanation” (*GG* 262). Despite its absences, the interior of Gormenghast is described as having both a tangible physical and psychological presence.

These absences, naturally, are not exclusive. There is movement; there is sound; there is light. There could not be a novel without them. These positives, however, stand not in stark contrast to the absences but are instead suffused with their general ambience. *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* are often described in visual terms, as a “chiaroscuro” (Watney 134), or play of shadows and light. Inside Gormenghast light is present, but it is made into something quite different to mundane sunlight by the influence of the surrounding structure:

There was no ray of light to indicate that there was any outer world. What luminosity there was was uniform, a kind of dusk that had nothing to do with daylight. A self-contained thing, bred in the halls and corridors, something that seeped forth from the walls and floors and ceilings. (*GG* 180)

The atmosphere of Gormenghast is likened to a sort of formless sentient beast, and that beast a direct product of the physical edifice. The absences of the castle-complex contribute to this general impression. The lack of motion animates the atmosphere, resulting in an “atmosphere alive and



made palpable by the torpor of the air" (*TG* 418). Correspondingly, the dearth of noise is "a silence that knew of itself – that was charged, conscious" (*GG* 324).

The "charged" atmosphere is an extension of a general sense of interiority. Peake emphasizes this in many instances. The stifling quietude is "a stillness that was more complete, a silence that lay *within*" (*TG* 497). The chiaroscuro effect is a product of containment: "*within* the walls not even the light changed" (*TG* 497). The walls of the edifice act as an impermeable barrier, constricting the atmosphere inside: "the world had been swathed away from the westering sun as though with bandages, layer upon layer, until the air was stifled" (*GG* 262). There is a sense of an incredible burden, a prodigious weight, pressing down. The silence is "like a deadweight" (*GG* 376); the air is "still, as though paralysed by its own weight" (*TG* 497). In general, there is a "ponderous architectural quality" (*TG* 15) that holds every inhabitant down under the "oppressive weight of masonry" (*TG* 202). The inner sensation is shaped by the overwhelming presence of the articles of containment: the walls, roofs, and floors.

As Sedgwick notes, however, the Gothic interiority atmosphere is not one of a small confined space. Instead, the standard model emphasizes the "spaciousness and vacuity of the imprisoning environment" (38), and in this also Gormenghast follows the Gothic pattern. The weight that creates the interior atmosphere is the "weight of emptiness" (*GG* 341), the feeling is of the "heavy yet far away" (*GG* 343). Indeed, "Distance was everywhere – the sense of far-away – of detachment" (*TG* 413). The weight is paradoxically created by absence; what it produces is not an intimate proximity but an isolating remoteness. The absences of noise in this empty space are "hollow silences" (*GG* 181), and in their hollowness they create the typically Gothic impression of fear and isolation: "The very extent of the hollow expanses, the uncharted labyrinth that made, as it were, the silence visible, was something to raise the hairs upon the neck of any but those long used to loneliness" (*GG* 298). Silence is tangible; a baffling amalgamation of negative ("silence") and positive ("visible") that

corresponds to the combination of crushing weight and harrowing void. In the darkness the interior, much like the chamber of indeterminable size in Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum," can be both gravely close and bewilderingly spacious: "the candle flame, after a short, abortive leap into the red air, grovelled for a moment in its cup of liquid wax and expired. The little red box of a room had become, according to one's fancy, either a little black box or a tract of dread, imponderable space" (GG 80). Like all Gothic interiors, the physical devices of Gormenghast exert an affective influence.

The Gothic fears of submergence and live burial are both present, at first metaphorically and then literally as the novels progress. Initially it is the homogeneity of the Gothic labyrinth of the lower regions of Gormenghast that threatens, like the dark caverns of Kaf in *Vathek*, the prospect of the perpetual monotony of the deceased: "The walls on either side were featureless, the ceiling also. Not so much as a cobweb gave interest to the barren surfaces" (GG 181), provoking the trapped inhabitant, in this case Titus, to wonder "I know that there is a north, south, east and west. But I don't know which is which. Aren't there any other directions?" (GG 181). At the conclusion of both *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* there are incidents of literal live burial; Earl Sepulchrave in his madness takes the body of Swelter into the Tower of Flints, where both are devoured by owls within the prison-like enclosure. The twins Cora and Clarice, after failing to murder their incarcerator Steerpike, are locked in a distant room by him to starve to death. The banished servant Flay, wandering the forgotten corridors, hears the dying laughter of the twins through a wall, and attempts to find a way around it via the tangled corridors of the edifice's labyrinthine foundations, to "discover if he could, some clue to what lay on the other side of the wall" (GG 301). He is unsuccessful, as he is "unable to comprehend the tortuous character of the architecture," his "questings through those same mazes of masonry that he had searched by daylight were fruitless" (GG 301). Flay cannot resolve the mystery of the identities of the buried individuals, who, consistent with prematurely-interred Gothic characters, go insane before perishing.

This live burial is analogous to the general atmosphere of the edifice's internal space; "the oppressiveness of this space, the ego's sense of being under it as if underground or under water" (Sedgwick 38) is present in the Gormenghast novels in both cases. The fear of being underground matches the dread of live burial; submergence is also present, both figuratively and literally. At first the atmosphere of submergence is descriptive only, where "the air, through some peculiar trick of the light, [. . .] had something of an underwater feeling about it" (GG 70), and "The unearthly lull that had descended upon Gormenghast had not failed to affect so imaginative and highly strung a nature as Fuchsia's [. . .] [Steerpike] could see Fuchsia, as she walked in a transparent world, far below the surface" (GG 343). Doctor Prunesquallor likewise has a dream-vision of Fuchsia drowning (GG 343). Both of these allusions to complete immersion are soon to be made literal. In a biblical-scale deluge water rises around Gormenghast castle until its lower reaches are completely engulfed; the ambience present in the edifice since the opening chapters is fully realised, and appropriately it is in this water that Fuchsia falls and drowns (GG 454), a victim of the overwhelming Gothic atmosphere.

Sedgwick's interiority has a psychological influence on the characters of the novels. A description of the atmosphere of the Gormenghast novels frequently makes use of the term "unreality": events have "the unreality of a dream" (TG 135), even those "of major importance had about them a sense of unreality" (GG 338). For each person this unreality is personalized and also associated with the established atmosphere of immersion: "The sense of unreality in each individual was different; different in intensity, in quality, and in duration, according to the temperaments of all who were submerged" (GG 340). It is likened to a dream-like state, "a sense of unreality such as he had experienced during his recovery from his faint again pervaded him" (TG 152), and as Sedgwick states: "The almost inextricable association of depth with sleep and dreams is further reminiscent of the Gothic" (38). The vast proportion of the narrative of *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* seem to be buried in a kind of unreal dream-like atmosphere. When Flay discovers Swelter's murderous

intentions he “began to lose contact with the reality of what he saw and his brain to drift into a dream” (TG 210). Action still takes place – the mad earl sleep-walks through Flay and Swelter’s final battle, and his sister Cora moves “with the slow gesture of a somnambulist” (TG 385) – but this is action subdued by the dream-like atmosphere. As Steerpike navigates the under-passages of the castle he “wandered round corners with a dream-like motion” (GG 377). Sepulchrae is submerged in “the miasma of his waking dreams” (TG 296). The act of reading the series can become equally dream-like, as Michael Tolley notes: “Reading the *Titus* trilogy is like experiencing a series of dreams, in which details appear through an obsessive sharpness of observation, yet the whole structure remains vague but meaningful” (153).

Burial is likewise associated with a dream-like state. At Sourdust’s burial Fuchsia “felt a surge of unreality rising in her. Perhaps the whole thing was a dream” (TG 339). On the burial of her husband Keda “could not understand the burying, nor that life could cease to be. It was all a dream” (TG 194). In many instances characters hypothesize that they are in fact dreaming – “Perhaps the whole thing was a dream” (TG 339); “Perhaps he was in a dream” (GG 486) – and even when they are aware that this is not literally so they cannot escape the all-pervasive oneiric atmosphere: “He knew that it was no dream, but he had no power to over-ride the dream-like nature of it all” (GG 410).

The creation of the Gothic atmosphere of Peake’s novels explicitly and persistently originates in the treatment of boundaries, another significant device for the creation of interiority. The edifice is made an island at the end of *Gormenghast* by a massive flood, and this complete isolation is anticipated throughout the two texts. Initially it is abstract. Gormenghast is metaphorically “the great stone island of the Groans” (TG 414); divided by “the rough margins of the castle life – margins irregular as the coastline of a squall-rent island” (GG 14), it is “as though the castle were an island of maroons set in desolate water beyond all trade-routes” (GG 99). The boundaries of the edifice are “High, sinister walls, like the walls of

wharves, or dungeons for the damned, lifted into the watery air or swept in prodigious arcs of ruthless stone" (*GG* 25). The metaphors of imprisonment ("dungeons"), boundaries ("the walls of wharves"), submergence ("the watery air"), and hollow space ("prodigious arcs") are united under a personified edifice ("ruthless stone").

The edifice is isolated in a number of ways, each reminiscent of the extreme separation of the Gothic castle. In one instance all points of egress are blocked by snow, "For a month or more the castle was snowbound. A number of the doors that opened on the outside world had been broken by the piled up weight. Of those that stood the strain, none were usable" (*GG* 295), and in another Gormenghast is isolated by cloud: "There was a white mist in the air and the tops of the towers appeared to be floating" (*GG* 387). When the final submersion comes the prison has become a literal isolate system: "This gaunt asylum [. . .] had become an island. Gormenghast was marooned" (*GG* 429). The boundaries of the castle are the impermeable boundaries of a Gothic edifice. The isolation of Gormenghast is complete; as C. N. Manlove notes, "our reality is simply never mentioned" (217). Not once in the novels is reference made to any actual physical location outside of the castle and its immediate surrounds. There are no trade-routes, no countries, no alternatives. The isolation is the isolation of the Gothic world.

As Manlove also comments, the boundaries within the edifice function as isolating objects also: "Isolation is a primary characteristic of the people of Gormenghast, isolation not only from the outside world but from one another" (221). The community of Gormenghast is not a community in the true sense of the word, but a collection of individuals united only by their common differences. The twins Cora and Clarice remain isolated in their quarters for so long that when they do venture out "they were suspicious of everyone and of everything" (*TG* 109). When Gertrude enquires "Where have you been since then?" (*TG* 113) the twins reply with "We've been in the south wing all the time" (*TG* 113), "all the time" in this case being approximately one and a half decades. The poet of Gormenghast sings to



himself a lamentation about isolation, noting that "Lingering has become so lonely / As I linger all alone!" (TG 141). These isolations, however, are frequently entirely voluntary, such as the scholarly isolation of Doctor Prunesquallor: "Prunesquallor was in his study [. . .] To his sister, Irma, it was a room in which her brother barricaded himself whenever she wished to talk to him about anything important. Once within and the door locked, the chain up and the windows bolted, there was very little she could do save beat upon the door" (GG 28). For the curator of the Hall of Bright Carvings whose experiences bookend the narrative of *Titus Groan*, "His, then, was an ideal existence, living alone day and night in a long loft" (TG 18). Fuchsia's aforementioned "attic of make-believe" (TG 80) is an area that she can imagine herself remaining in perpetually: "I'm leaning on the present window-sill and later on when I'm older I will lean on this window-sill again. Over and over again" (TG 82), a reaction to her earlier invective, "How I *hate* people!" (TG 52).

Even when the physical segregation of the characters within the castle is temporarily removed the boundaries remain a psychological influence, as if each character were dreaming a separate and personal dream of an exclusive interior. In the few instances in which they are required to gather together they are invariably lost in their own private worlds. Crossing a courtyard, "Lord Sepulchrave walked with slow strides, his head bowed. Fuchsia mouched. Doctor Prunesquallor minced. The twins propelled themselves forward vacantly. Flay spidered his path. Swelter wallowed his" (TG 122), each movement a particular and individual one with no reference to the others. At a ceremonial breakfast each attendee loses him or herself in a state of dream-like introspection, their thoughts presented stream-of-consciousness style in the chapter titled "The Reveries" (TG 392-402). Even when the physical boundaries are not present, the characters are isolated within their own divergent minds.

The boundaries that surround the characters are often voluntary ones. Rather than the physical edifice isolating them from each another, each character separates themselves from the others, and the surrounding



edifice adapts to echo and enhance this isolation. On an “all but forgotten landing high in the southern wing” (GG 49) there is “a landing taken over for many a decade by succeeding generations of dove-grey mice, peculiarly small creatures, little larger than the joint of a finger and indigenous to this southern wing, for they were never seen elsewhere” (GG 49). Like the atmosphere inside Roderick Usher’s library, the human characters of Gormenghast are equally created by and suffuse into their surroundings. Sepulchra’s “dejection infected the air about him and diffused its illness upon every side. All things in the long room absorbed his melancholia” (TG 204). The vacuous twins have a similar influence: “Their presence and the presence of their few belongings seemed to have no effect upon the sense of emptiness. Rather, their presence seemed to reinforce the vacancy of their solitude” (GG 256). The inhabitants of the castle are just as powerless to effect a change to this environment as the narrator of “The Fall of the House of Usher” is: there is “a veil [. . .] over all things. A veil that no-one could tear away” (GG 340). The atmosphere is akin to a boundary that none of the inhabitants can breach.

The physical boundaries within Gormenghast are not completely impenetrable. However, when they are breached, they often act as a bottleneck through which any observation or interaction is tightly constricted. This is acknowledged in the title of Tolley’s essay “Grotesque Imaginings: Peeking Through Keyholes” (1999), which notes several instances of characters “peering through a hole at a more private reality” (158). The isolated realities of the inhabitants of the castle can only be partially observed. Throughout the novels observations are limited by keyholes, spy-holes, and small windows. The first encounter in *Titus Groan* occurs when, hearing a noise, Rottcodd peers through a keyhole to discover “within three inches of his keyholed eye, an eye which was *not* his, being not only of a different colour [. . .] but being, which is more convincing, on the other side of the door” (TG 19). Steerpike’s narrow chimney of mirrors is an obvious restricted view; it is possible that this was inspired by an early demonstration of Flay’s spy-hole, a “small round hole in the panelling” (TG 47) which the servant uses to observe his master.

With a typical Gothic respect for portraits this hole is behind a gallery picture; to disguise one of his later mirror-holes behind a painting of a horse and rider Steerpike “had not only cut a couple of holes in the canvas immediately beneath the frame where its shadow lay [. . .] but he had cut away the rider’s buttons, the pupils of his eyes as well as those of the horse’s” (GG 16). Flay discovers Swelter’s intent to kill him by spying him late at night through a window (TG 208); Irma Prunesquallor and her brother communicate through the keyhole of a door (TG 299-300). Even minor characters follow this motif. The students in Gormenghast’s schoolroom use a window to watch out for incoming teachers: “It was dark with grime, but a small circle the size of a coin was kept transparent and through this spy-hole [the student look-out] could command a view of the corridor outside” (GG 109). When Titus is placed in a fort-dungeon the warder observes him by “peering through a keyhole the size of a table-spoon” (GG 158). Titus’s relation to the keyhole effect is different. For him, it is not observation but life that is dependent on, and yet restricted by, the bottleneck. During the library conflagration the child Titus is held against a keyhole to breathe (TG 309-310); when he is imprisoned his sister “had found an obscure and narrow window through which she passed what cakes and fruit she could, to vary the adequate but uninteresting diet which the warder [. . .] prepared for his fledgeling-prisoner” (GG 147).

Interaction between the characters in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* is thus restricted by the physical and psychological boundaries created by the edifice. The atmosphere of the castle aids in the creation of this isolation: it imposes significant limits on communication, via the Gothic foundation of fear. The absences that comprise the castle’s atmosphere create fear: “there was something unique today about the emptiness. Something both close and insistent. And as he pondered he became aware of a sense of instability – a sensation almost of fear” (TG 500). The fear produced by atmospheric silences in these novels follows closely the tension of an anxiety of the threshold; it both repels and attracts: “he loathed this deathly, terrible silence [. . .] For it was as though he were being drawn

towards some dangerous place or person, and that he had no power to hold himself back. The mid-air thrill was now the thrill of Fear" (GG 132). The Gothic fear in turn renders the castle's inhabitants speechless, silent and paralysed: " 'No! No!' he cried to himself, but there was no sound" (GG 290). Cora and Clarice, terrified by a faux-spectre mimed by Steerpike, "could not scream. The twins could not scream. Their throats were contracted; their limbs had stiffened" (TG 478). Silence produces fear, and the fear it produces induces silence; the twins become virtually mute: "The Twins were keeping their mouths tightly shut [. . .] they had not spoken a word since Steerpike left them in their bedroom" (TG 490). Their fear prevents the twins from speaking out against their instigator, and it prevents them from any future interaction, bottlenecked or otherwise, with any other characters.

The Gothic motifs which *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* manifest create an atmosphere that is significantly congruent with the mood created by the coalescence of Gothic conventions in Sedgwick's *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. The castle Gormenghast is an absolutely isolated realm that is inhabited by a number of secluded individuals, each silenced by the weight of their surroundings and unable, or unwilling, to communicate with others. Individual isolation is rife, and where there are relations, they are often bottlenecked by the edifice's demarcations; normal interpersonal communication is nearly unheard of. The castle exists in a half-light dream-state analogous to being totally submerged in water. The sense of being "within" is omnipresent: personal stories are embedded within the overarching narrative, and characters are imprisoned or buried alive within the edifice's dense walls. The concept of anything outside the within is rendered not only impractical but also impossible. Even the possibility of an existence outside the bounds of the setting is non-existent. Like the Gothic novel, these motifs are bound under the all-covering influence of the edifice.

Gormenghast castle displays many of the characteristics of a distinctly Gothic edifice, both in vertical structure and in devices of the interior. The

temporal component, pastness, is also prominently featured. In Gothic literature the past has a role to play in the text; not as a passive precursor but as an active agent in the events of the narrative. In much Gothic literature this sense of an interfering past is literal, and personified in the guise of a haunting spirit: the ghost of Alfonso and Manfred's grandfather in *The Castle of Otranto*, for example. In other texts the past is more of an imagined one, and the haunting is performed in the minds of the fearful, gullible, or insane (as evinced in "The Fall of the House of Usher," *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and "The Yellow Wallpaper" respectively). Such hauntings are linked closely to the atmospherics of the texts; the so-called aura of "pastness" that arises when the history of a community or location, or a personal history, is disturbed, and in turn disturbs the inhabitants.

Gormenghast is rife with Gothic hauntings. Although the possibility of ghosts is considered credible by the lower strata of castle society – "the reality of the supernatural was taken for granted amongst the Dwellers" (TG 351) – this literal attribution is akin more to that of the superstitious servants of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, with no factual basis in the events of the novels. Nevertheless, Gormenghast is haunted. The opening chapter of *Gormenghast* makes an inventory of spirits. The ghosts in question are those of the characters who died in the first novel: Sepulchra, Sourdust, Swelter, and Keda. They are not presented as literal ghosts, but rather are "victims of violence who no longer influence the tenor of Gormenghast save by a deathless repercussion" (GG 8). Their influence is an after-effect of their violent deaths; "ripples are still widening in dark rings and a movement runs over the gooseflesh waters though the drowned stones lie still" (GG 8). The submersion metaphor so closely associated with the Gothic atmosphere is here writ large. The resistance to clear demarcations of time is explicit: "Is Time's cold scroll recoiling on itself until the dead years speak, or is it in the throb of *now* that the spectres wake and wander through the walls?" (GG 8).

The repercussions of the past echo into the present, and into the "present" novel, and here they can have a profound influence on the living characters

of the castle: "The initial few, who, dying, deserted the hub of the castle's life before Titus was three. The future hung on their activities" (*GG* 11). These metaphorical "ghosts" of the past shape the future through the ramifications of their histories, but the inhabitants of the present are also creations of these pasts: "Titus himself is meaningless without them, for in his infancy he fed [. . .] on their hazy outlines" (*GG* 11).

There are also living inhabitants that are likened to ghosts or attributed with ghost-like qualities. The most notable is the servant Flay, who, once exiled from the castle, circumambulates it in despair; he is, however, "so inextricably [. . .] woven into the skein of the castle's central life, that if ever a man was destined to fill in the gap of his own absence with his own ghost it is he" (*GG* 9). His ghost appears in the litany of deceased characters, principally because his "excommunication is a kind of death" (*GG* 9), and when Titus later exclaims to Flay "They told me you were dead" he responds with "No doubt of it" (*GG* 137). Like Flay, Keda also vacillates between being dead and being a sort of metaphorical, living ghost: "That she should be a ghost seems natural, for even when alive there was something intangible, distant and occult about her" (*GG* 10).

Sepulchrae is similarly spectral; his appearance as a ghost is inevitable from the time the library that is the centre of his existence is burnt down. As he leaves the conflagration he produces "a thin laugh like the laugh of a ghost" (*TG* 323), and in his final somnambulation to the Tower of Flints his appearance is that of a spectre: "He moved as though floating. A long cloak, reaching to his ankles gave no hint of legs beneath it" (*GG* 425). Sepulchrae could almost be seen to be floating on the liquid atmosphere of the castle here; he is a ghost because he is haunted by the events and the atmosphere of the castle. Fuchsia notes earlier that "her father has become possessed" (*TG* 366), and when Flay curtly states that "Lordship's mad" (*TG* 369), it is this assessment that she gives to the situation: "He's ill [. . .] that's all. His library's been burned. His beautiful library; and he's become ill. But he's not mad" (*TG* 369). Haunted and possessed by the events of the past, Sepulchrae eventually gives in to delusions and dies,



becoming himself one of the ghosts of the past that taint the narrative that follows. Fuchsia is affected by this spirit; she develops a “Fear of the unearthly, the ghastly – for she had been face to face with it – the fear of madness” (*TG* 458). Sepulchre makes the transition from haunted to haunter, his influence existing beyond his death to touch the characters that remain.

Like Sepulchre, Cora and Clarice have an influence beyond their deaths. When Steerpike enters their death-chamber he is nearly killed by a trap – a swinging axe – that they have set prior to their own demises, and it is the ensuing discovery of their bodies by Flay, Prunesquallor, and Titus that is Steerpike’s final downfall. When he is confronted by the trio, Steerpike knows that “His future was ruptured. His years of self-advancement and intricate planning were as though they had never been” (*GG* 385). His ruin is brought about by his own past misdeeds, by his own past returning to haunt his present status.

Steerpike is likened to a ghost on numerous occasions. He moves “as silently as a ghost” (*TG* 152). Flay “had retired as from a ghost, sullenly, glancing over his shoulder at the dapper enigma [. . .]. In Mr Flay’s mind the boy Steerpike was something of an apparition” (*TG* 334). Steerpike’s transgression of boundaries is similar to that of an incorporeal ghost; he travels from “haunt to haunt” (*GG* 442). At the conclusion of *Titus Groan* Steerpike executes a notable performance in order to silence his conspirators in the library burning. Having stolen the skull of Sourdust – burnt to death in the blaze – he creates a ersatz ghost using that remnant of past offences and a white sheet, and promptly frightens the Twins into absolute, abject silence:

The twins were the colour of the sheet. Their mouths were wide open and their screams tore inwards at their bowels for lack of natural vent. They had become congealed with an icy horror [. . .]. They could not even cling more closely together, for their limbs were weighted with cold stone. (*TG* 479)



The appearance of a counterfeit ghost produces in Cora and Clarice a reaction of silence, stasis, fear, and weight pressing down, a significant echo of the general Gothic atmosphere produced by interiority.

The hauntings in the texts are appreciably congruent with the general atmosphere that has been established. The metaphor can be consistently extended to the haunted nature of Gormenghast: those enveloped in the Gothic atmosphere are “drowned in it, and walked like ghosts. Their own voices, when they spoke, appeared to be coming to them from far away” (*GG* 340). The atmosphere is likened to being submerged, haunting and being haunted, and the impenetrable sense of omnipresent distance. Characters are haunted by their past, “In after years Mr Flay was almost daily startled to remembrance of what now ensued. It returned in the way that dreams recur, suddenly and unsolicited. The memory was always unearthly” (*TG* 439), and in this the congruency between pastness, dream, and the feeling of the supernatural that comes with being haunted is made clear.

The suffusing aura of pastness surrounds the characters, expressed through the multitude of spirits that metaphorically haunt their every action. Within Gormenghast, “whose voice is endlessness of endlessness” (*TG* 113), there is no definitive demise, no tidy end to a character or his or her actions. Instead, ghosts of the past – the “ghost of time” (*GG* 169) – haunt everyone. Of all the ghosts that haunt present actions in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, however, one stands out as the primary influence on the characters. This revenant is “the dead letter of the castle’s law” (*GG* 266). Gormenghast is ruled by an indisputable adherence to a collection of laws and rituals that are not merely passive and benign traditions handed down from previous generations but a significant force and shaping factor in the lives of the castle and its inhabitants. The rituals are products of an otherwise-forgotten past that “haunt” the present, and it is under their influence that the most symptomatic Gothic ideas present themselves in the novels.

The rituals of Gormenghast are a series of practices that, to a greater or lesser extent, bind the inhabitants of the castle to particular traditional activities. The characters most influenced by the dictates of ritual are those of the upper classes, who are obligated to follow particular routines, as dictated by the Master of Ritual from enormous tomes:

The left hand pages were headed with the date and in the first of the three books this was followed by a list of the activities to be performed hour by hour during the day by his lordship. The exact times; the garments to be worn for each occasion and the symbolic gestures to be used. (*TG* 66)

Throughout the novels particular set-pieces are established that are entirely the domain of ritual: Titus's Christening, the presentation of the Bright Carvings, the Great Gathering in the library, the Earling ceremony, and so forth. Although some of these ceremonies have a historical source for their existence – the service that makes Titus the Earling is identical to one performed after the disappearance of the fourteenth Earl of Groan, several hundred years ago (*TG* 493) – for the most part there is no justification nor reasoning for the activities that are required: "It was not certain what significance the ceremony held, for unfortunately the records were lost, but the formality was no less sacred for being unintelligible" (*TG* 295). The key word here is "sacred;" there is no mention of specific religion in the novels (although rites such as the Christening have an obviously Christian slant), but the rituals of Gormenghast are imbued with all the solemnity and formality of a religious sacrament. In Gormenghast, the sole deity is "the sacred spirit of tradition" (*TG* 67), the practices of the past passed down to the castle's inheritors, an inexorable dictation from forgotten ancestors. The invocation of a "spirit" of tradition here echoes the spectral haunting that is so fundamentally a part of the Gothic tradition: the characters are under the command of the observances of lifeless generations via the "dead letter of the castle law" (*GG* 266), the suffusing influence of pastness the primary dictation.

This metaphorical haunting is an expression of the spirit of pastness analogous to other Gothic hauntings. The interfering ancestry of the "laws

of the place of his [Titus's] fathers" (*TG* 229) holds the castle in a form of stasis, as is often insisted by the characters: from Flay, "No change, Rottcodd. No change!" (*TG* 23), and Gertrude, "there must be no ending at all" (*TG* 399); "There is never any difference" (*GG* 390). Sepulchrave, despite being the titular leader, passively accepts this perpetual pastness, as Steerpike notes: "who has the undisputed control over Gormenghast? Who is it who, having this authority, makes no use of it but allows the great traditions of the castle to drift [. . .]?" (*TG* 256). He uses the rituals as "a relief and a relative escape from himself" (*TG* 205), also displaying the passive torment and melancholia of Roderick Usher. Sepulchrave gives himself over completely to the rituals; he is possessed by them as if by a ghost.

Sourdust, and after his death Barquentine, are the instructors of ritual, and in this position become embodiments of it themselves: "The sound of his approaching crutch became a sign for feverish activity, and trepidation. It was as though a hard, intractable letter of the Groan law were approaching – the iron letter of tradition" (*TG* 332). Barquentine, as was seen in the title of "The Fall of the House of Usher," detaches the title of Groan from the actual human holding that name: "his veneration for the Earl (as a descendant of the original line) disassociating itself from his feelings about the man himself" (*TG* 448). Again, Sepulchrave is denied a personal identity in favour of the faculties of his past, his ancestors, and the traditions that encompass him.

Titus Groan, Sepulchrave's successor, is also presented as an embodiment of the past, as an agent of its perpetuation. He is described when twelve days old as having an "ancientness" (*TG* 115), and at his Christening is indoctrinated into the laws of the castle in the most literal way possible. Titus is enclosed in the Book of the Law, as Sourdust intones: "the pages that are heavy with words shall be bent in and over him, so that he is engulfed in the sere Text encircled with the Profound, and is as one with the inviolable Law" (*TG* 116). He is engulfed, a word that conjures images of submersion, and of imprisonment, in an absolute environment;

metaphorically, he is immersed in the Gothic atmosphere and the dictates of the perpetuated past. As Steerpike notes: “They want to imprison us and make us fit into their schemes, and taunt us, and make us work for them. All the old are like that” (*TG* 340). The prison of tradition and ritual is at the heart of *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, and the various struggles against those ghosts of the past is the fundamental driving force in the novels.

These struggles begin with Titus at the Christening; encompassed in the symbolic text, he promptly tears a page of the “inviolable” Law. Titus acts in counterpoint to the direct person-embodies-tradition decree of the Christening ceremony, and Barquentine continues his profound dissociation of person with title, and the law of that title, in Titus to compensate for this: “The old man was aware of only one virtue – Obedience to Tradition. The destiny of the Groans. The law of Gormenghast. No individual Groan of flesh and blood could awake in him this loyalty he felt for ‘Groan’ the abstraction – the symbol” (*TG* 452). The title, and the Rituals associated with that title, are distanced from the human bearing it by Titus also; following his being made Earl he observes that “As the Earl of Gormenghast he could never be alone. He could only be lonely. Even to lose himself was to be lost with that other child, that symbol, that phantom, the seventy-seventh Earl of Gormenghast who hovered at his elbow” (*GG* 332-333). Crucially, Titus is here haunted by that abstract spectre of the past tradition, and because Titus is intended to be the embodiment of that tradition the spectre is a double. Once more the congruency of Gothic tropes of hauntings, doubles, and pastness returns.

Barquentine’s “fanaticism of his loyalty to the House of Groan had far outstripped his interest or concern for the living – the members of the Line itself” (*GG* 159). Within this ceremonial abstraction is a deeper abstraction, once again echoing “The Fall of the House of Usher.” The “House of Groan” completes the equation through its association of Ritual

with physical structure. Titus, as part of the ritual of the Earling, receives this intonation:

and will forever hold in sacred trust the castle of his fathers and the domain adhering thereto. That he will in letter and in spirit defend it in every way against the incursions of alien worlds. That he will observe its sacred rites, honour its crest, and in due time instil into the first male of his loins, reverence for its every stone until among his fathers he has added, in the tomb, his link to the unending chain of Groans. (*TG* 493)

The rites are designed to perpetuate the patriarchal inheritance of the castle and its laws, the spirit of “his fathers” propagated through him to create a timeless “unending” adherence to Ritual and tradition that excludes any alternative external reality (“the incursions of alien worlds”). The religious nature of this rite is obvious: it is a “sacred trust” with “sacred rites.” Significantly, it calls for “reverence for [Gormenghast’s] every stone.” This reflects a most profound congruity: that of Ritual, quasi-religious tradition, and the edifice. Titus’ adherence to the Ritual that surrounds him is always directly equated with the castle that surrounds him. At his Christening Sourdust proclaims: “I do adjure you hold each cold stone sacred that clings to these, your grey ancestral walls [. . .] I do adjure you hold the tenets sacred that ramify the creeds of Gormenghast. I dedicate you to your father’s castle” (*TG* 123). Flay later charges the same: “You are a Groan of the blood [. . .] You must not fail the Stones” (*GG* 143). When an act is performed by the Countess, it is “in the name of the Stones” (*GG* 485), the invocation equivalent to an oath. It is noted that “to doubt the sacred stones was to profane the Godhead” (*GG* 267). The Ritual is the religion of the castle, and it is embodied dually in the public identity and title of its heir and in the edifice that surrounds him. Both these embodiments are considered the same, encapsulated in the title “the House of Groan.” Titus, in his role as “the Groan inheritor” is “Gormenghast’s untarnished child-shaped mirror” (*TG* 112). He is intended to be the symbol of Ritual, the slave of Ritual, and in that capacity also acts as the symbol of Gormenghast castle and all that it represents: the perpetuation of the past into the present and future.



Sepulchrave acknowledges the connotations of this situation with a pun in his reverie: “there shall be no ending and the grey stones will stand for always and the high towers for always” (*TG* 402). The Stones of Gormenghast castle will both endure in perpetuity (“stand” in the sense of something remaining), and symbolise that perpetuity (“stand for” in the sense of representation). The castle is a symbol of the Rituals; Gormenghast wall is a “symbol of endlessness, of changelessness, of power, of austerity and of protection” (*TG* 239), words that could be used equally to describe the Rituals and the edifice. The Rituals are a creation of a forgotten past, they are “a symbol of something the significance of which had long been lost to the records” (*GG* 176), but pivotally, it is a past which haunts the characters, embodied in the edifice itself.

The future of the House of Groan, the people, is one determined by the House of Groan, the structure. Much of Sepulchrave’s melancholy arises from “the terror that with *him* the line of Groan should perish. That he had failed the castle of his forebears” (*TG* 296). He is haunted by his obligations to the edifice and the traditions that it represents. Appropriately, it is the edifice that is part of Sepulchrave’s final demise: sealing himself in the Tower of Flints, he is consumed by owls. The rest of the House of Groan – Sepulchrave’s relatives – are also ultimately victims of the edifice. His sisters Cora and Clarice are locked in their forgotten apartment by Steerpike, and die of starvation in its confines. Fuchsia, standing on a windowsill and contemplating suicide, “slipped and clutching at the face of the wall at her side found nothing to grasp, so that she fell, striking her dark head on the sill as she passed, and was already unconscious before the water received her, and drowned her at its ease” (*GG* 454). In all cases, to have Groan blood is to die, directly or indirectly, due to the edifice.

The central narrative of *Gormenghast* is that of the struggle the heir and child-Earl Titus has against his heritage and therefore against the castle. In this struggle he comes into contact with Steerpike, who, having



progressively dispatched both Masters of Ritual, has become the arbiter of the execution of rituals. The two ambitions at play – rebellion, and domination – are preluded early in the novels. Titus, upon first perceiving his place within the Rituals, resists: “The future lay before him with its endless ritual and pedantry, but something beat in his throat and he rebelled” (*GG* 99). Early in *Titus Groan* Steerpike “foresaw himself in control of men” (*TG* 224), and his ultimate ambition

was, when he had gained sufficient knowledge of the observances, to take over the ceremonial side of the castle’s life, and, in being the only authority in the minutiae of the law (for Barquentine was to be liquidated), to alter to his own ends such tenets as held him back from ultimate power. (*GG* 163-164)

Steerpike is not in opposition to the Rituals, he seeks to manipulate them for his own gain as he manipulates the boundaries of Gormenghast. Where he once ascended to the topmost regions of the literal edifice, he tries to rise to a position of highest authority in the social structure of the castle: “he is still climbing, not now across the back of Gormenghast but up the spiral staircase of its soul” (*GG* 14). Steerpike’s conflict with the castle arises from the fact that rather than having a respect for, and being a servant to, Ritual he seeks to manipulate it for his own ends. Barquentine himself describes him as “an unbeliever” (*GG* 274) when he discovers Steerpike’s true motives. It is not against this that Titus rebels, however: he comes into conflict not with Steerpike the unbeliever, but with Steerpike as executor, as architect of his incarceration. Steerpike is “the arch-symbol of all the authority and repression which he loathed” (*GG* 310), and Titus defies his position in the social structure of the castle (and in fact his presence in the castle) by defying him.

Titus’ rebellion against Ritual is expressed by his rebellion against Steerpike. According to the congruencies of concepts of structure in the novels, therefore, his rebellion is against the edifice itself. The Rituals haunt the inhabitants of Gormenghast just as the perpetual pastness does, and just as the pervasive sense of the interior does. Titus seeks to remove himself from the “prison” of Ritual, from the strictures of ancestral

responsibility, from the enveloping environment that he finds himself in: "He had craved for a kind of freedom disconnected from the life of his ancient home – his heritage – his birthright" (GG 506). It is worth noting that in seeking to dissociate himself from his status as the apex of the House of Groan he is also attempting to escape the stratified nature of his position, "He was Titus, perhaps, if words were needed – but he was no more than that – oh no, not Gormenghast, not the seventy-seventh [Earl], not the House of Groan" (GG 487), and correspondingly from the castle that is the physical representation of "the House of Groan."

The social structure of *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* is one matching the general stratification of other Gothic texts. There is always tradition, the practices of the past, at the zenith: in *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* this is pseudo-feudalism; in "The Fall of the House of Usher" it is a more personal history; in "The Yellow Wallpaper" it is the masculine authoritative dictate. If there is a villain, he manipulates the tradition to his own ends, as Manfred, Montoni, John, and Steerpike do. If there is a heroine, she is pressured by this tradition, as Isabella, Emily, the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper," and Fuchsia Groan are. If there is a melancholic hero at the "head" of the household, he suffers under the burden of tradition and is haunted by this past, as Roderick Usher is, and as Titus Groan is. The atmosphere of submersion, of interiority, in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* is one matching the general submersion in other Gothic texts. This is always a sense of all-pervasive enclosure, of the suffusion of an isolated and isolating oneiric system, as is felt in the castles of Otranto and Udolpho, in the manor-house of the Ushers, in the colonial mansion of *The Yellow Wallpaper's* narrator, and in the edifice Gormenghast. *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* are expressly and undeniably Gothic.

Titus' struggle against the edifice of tradition, however, appears to offer a significant inversion of the standard Gothic pattern. Titus is a passive hero, hardly engaging in any positive activity throughout the novels, but in the conclusion of *Gormenghast* he fights Steerpike in single combat. He

does not do so as a Gothic hero seeking to regain an appropriated ancestral right over the edifice by defeating the villain who has usurped it. Instead, Titus fights Steerpike as a symbol of the ancestry of the edifice that he wishes to give up. Titus struggles against the confines of Ritual and against the edifice itself, and ultimately against his own mixed emotions of loyalty to his environment and a desire to escape it: “the growing and feverish longing to escape from all that was meant by Gormenghast, and the ineradicable, irrational pride in his lineage, and the love, as deep as the hate, which he felt, unwittingly, for the least of the cold stones of his loveless home” (*GG* 438). Titus fights Steerpike for his own reasons, not those of the castle. His mother believes that he opposes an “unbeliever”: “Gormenghast will be avenged. The castle’s heart is sound. You have surprised me” (*GG* 458). For her, Titus is the embodiment of the heart of the castle. Titus, however, responds with “I did not do it for Gormenghast” (*GG* 458). He fights Steerpike as an agent of the repression of Ritual and the edifice:

I do not care if it was rebellion against the Stones – most of all it was theft, cruelty and murder. What do I care for the symbolism of it all? What do I care if the castle’s heart is sound or not? I don’t want to be sound anyway! Anybody can be sound if they’re always doing what they’re told (*GG* 459).

Titus makes his separation from Gormenghast absolute after defeating Steerpike and re-establishing right order in the castle. He disowns Gormenghast, and leaves the castle, attempting to shrug off the pervasive structures of the edifice. He tries to escape the control of his ancestry, “Was he the Earl of Gormenghast? Was he the seventy-seventh? No, [. . .] He was the First” (*GG* 488), and consequently the control of the edifice: “Not a stone of the castle would own him from the moment he turned his back” (*GG* 508).

As Titus Groan departs from Gormenghast, his mother’s voice follows with a dire prediction: “‘There is nowhere else,’ it said. ‘You will only tread a circle, Titus Groan. There’s not a road, not a track, but it will lead you home. For everything comes to Gormenghast.’” (*GG* 510). Titus himself

acknowledges some fear related to this possibility: “the world that he picture beyond the secret skyline – the world of nowhere and everywhere was necessarily based upon Gormenghast. But he knew that there would be a difference” (GG 506). It is this difference that haunts Titus; in another inversion from the standard Gothic pattern he is “Haunted by the thought of this other kind of world which was able to exist without Gormenghast” (GG 507). The final line of *Gormenghast* reads: “Titus rode out of his world” (GG 511). The departure here is not just intended to be from a location but from the entire mass of the Ritual of his past, the interior, and the stratified existence of the castle. Rather than becoming consumed by the edifice, as the Gothic villains (and his family) are, rather than becoming subsumed by the edifice and infected with its melancholy, as the Gothic heroes are, Titus is departing from the entire structure of the Gothic edifice. Such an attempt runs contrary to the all-pervasive and inexorable atmosphere of the edifice, as Gertrude’s final pronouncement implies, but Titus suggests hope that there is some possibility of true escape.

This hope of departure offers the strongest counterpoint to the proposition of the thesis that the entire Gormenghast series is truly Gothic. If the edifice is central to Gothic literature, Titus’ departure from Gormenghast is potentially a departure from Gothic literature. If verticality, interiority, and pastness are only invoked by the presence of the edifice in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* then its removal offers the possibility that the third Gormenghast novel is not Gothic. It also, however, offers the possibility that Gothic literature is dependent on something more fundamental than simply the physical presence of the edifice, and this possibility is confirmed in Chapter Four.

## Chapter Four – *Titus Alone*

As illustrated in Part One, the edifice is central to Gothic literature. It is central in terms of its effect on characters (how they rule and are ruled by their surroundings), plots (the intrigues regarding the manipulation and usurpation of the edifice), and individual devices (absence, submergence, demarcation, and so forth). The edifice is also central to Gothic criticism, adopting a prominent position in discussion of class- and gender-politics, psychoanalytical criticism, and affective / psychological approaches. In all these associations the properties of the edifice can be generalised to three broad categories: verticality (relating to the power-relations of the inhabitants and the central concerns of Gothic plots); interiority (relating to the specific and cohesive physical characteristics of the interior space of the edifice); and pastness (relating to the distinctive temporal characteristics of the Gothic work). As demonstrated in Chapter Three, the castle Gormenghast plays a central role in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, and in doing so also establishes a fundamental influence over the characters, plots, and devices of the novels that is entirely consistent with the effects of the Gothic edifice.

*Titus Alone* is significantly different to the first two Gormenghast novels. The Gormenghast edifice has been removed: Titus has departed from his domain and entered into an alternative world. This world is a modern world, with cars and scientists and progressive technology. The possibility is that with the removal of the physical edifice the stratification and submersion of verticality and interiority may also become absent, and that with the movement to an avant-garde context the aura of pastness may also become suppressed. The possibility is that the third novel signals a departure from the Gothic world.

The Gormenghast of the first two novels is a closed world, without reference or knowledge of any exterior or alternative. There is no awareness of an existence outside of the bounds of the castle, and it follows



that there must be no awareness of the castle's existence in those areas outside of its boundaries: "it is not in Gormenghast's nature to be known outside its borders; that if it were, its integrity, its own sheerly self-sufficient identity would become blurred" (Manlove 250). When Titus moves himself from Gormenghast to this alien world his initial reaction is incredulity; being a product of the edifice he has difficulty accepting the fact that there is a domain that does not hold the same fear and reverence he has for his home: "How was it that they were so self-sufficient [. . .] having no knowledge of Gormenghast, which was of course the heart of everything?" (TA 28-29); "he suffered [. . .] resentment that this alien realm should be able to exist in a world that appeared to have no reference to his home and which seemed, in fact, supremely self-sufficient" (TA 32). This absolute rift between the world he has come from and the world he is in is later confirmed when Titus tries to send a message to his mother: "I have written to her. But every time my letters are returned. Address unknown" (TA 86). What arises from this division is the central concern of the third novel: what relationship there can be between the two utterly separate worlds of Gormenghast and the elsewhere of *Titus Alone*. As Titus desperately inquires: "These worlds; these realms – could they *both* be true? Were there no bridges?" (TA 32).

The impression that Gormenghast has on the characters of the third novel is initially unvarying: "Gormenghast" is a meaningless word, corrupted, parodied, and twisted, and certainly not the name of a physical place: "young Titus here (Lord of somewhere or other – with an altogether most unlikely name) [. . .] the Earl of Gorgon-paste or whatever he calls himself" (TA 59); "Gorgon-blast" (TA 60); "your so-called Gormenghast" (TA 144). Titus is brought to a courtroom to be put on trial for vagrancy, and there the existence of Gormenghast is continuously called into question. The alternative that many prefer is that Titus is lying, delusional, or just insane. He is described as "hailing from Gorgonblast, or some such improbably place [. . .]. It is quite clear in my mind that this young man is suffering from delusions of grandeur" (TA 84). His hereditary title, according to the magistrate, "belongs to another age" (TA 86), and he is



therefore asked whether the castle is merely a fiction or a dream-hallucination: "Do you dream at night? Have you lapses of memory? Are you a poet? Or is it all, in fact, an elaborate joke?" (TA 86). Titus' response, a cry of "a joke? Oh, God!" (TA 86) convinces the court not of Gormenghast but only of his lunacy: "It was the voice of someone quite convinced of his own truth – the truth in his head" (TA 86). Even those who count themselves as allies or sympathisers of Titus's situation question the existence of the castle: one wonders "Who were those people he spoke of? This inner world? Those memories? Were they true? Was he a liar – a cunning child? Some kind of wild misfit? Or was he mad?" (TA 90); another describes Gormenghast as a "crepuscular myth" (TA 107). What is curious about these parodic external assessments of Gormenghast is that they are notably consistent with the Gothic qualities of the castle itself: it is a memory or a dream-vision, a shadowy ("crepuscular") fiction, a remnant of the past ("another age"), and Titus himself is the sole mad inhabitant, isolated by his inimitable experience. The reaction to Gormenghast is precisely the reaction one would expect from an outsider regarding the Gothic edifice.

Titus's own descriptions of Gormenghast also follow the Gothic pattern: it is "something half real; something half dream" (TA 10); removed from its physical presence, to Titus "the ruins of Gormenghast were afloat in a haze of time and space" (TA 32). When asked to describe the castle, Titus offers as an explanation the nature of Gormenghast's interiority, highlighting both its vast interior and its sharply demarcated borders: "It spreads in all directions. There is no end to it. Yet it seems to me now to have boundaries" (TA 85). It is "a kind of jail" (TA 86), and "A place of ritual" (TA 86), two judgements that are equated in Titus's description.

Titus left Gormenghast primarily to escape from the jail of Ritual, something that he connects with the physical presence of the edifice. In *Titus Alone* this becomes a distrust of any kind of responsibility or emotional connection. Every time Titus establishes an emotional tie of some kind – with Juno, Black Rose, and Muzzlehatch – he identifies it as

an attachment that must be avoided; as he tells Muzzlehatch: "I want to get away from you [. . .] From you and everyone. I want to start again" (TA 143). This exclusion is self-identified as an extension of his escape from Gormenghast: "Had he not the courage or the loyalty to hold fast to his friends? [. . .] Perhaps not. He had, after all, deserted his home" (TA 143). Gormenghast is not, however, solely the jail from which he has escaped. It is also his past and the architect of his personality. When asked by the magistrate "what is Gormenghast? What does it mean?" (TA 77), he responds: "You might just as well ask me what is this hand of mine?" (TA 77). In trying to escape from the strictures of Gormenghast he is trying to disassociate himself from his own community, producing a distinct feeling of perfidy – "he had wounded the castle, wounded the very stones of his home; wounded his mother" (TA 28) – and in fleeing from his would-be friends he feels something similar, "a sense of both shame and liberation" (TA 102). Gormenghast may be "something half real; something half dream" (TA 10) but it is also "half of his heart; half of himself" (TA 10). Tanya Gardiner-Scott describes this dilemma: "What he does not realize is that his whole perception of himself is bound up in the Castle" (22). His background is an essential component of his personality and identity, and in trying to escape it totally he is ultimately trying to escape himself, with all the pain, doubt, guilt, and fragmentation that that engenders.

It is evident that Titus's movement over the conclusion of *Gormenghast* and into *Titus Alone* is principally a movement away from his former life and responsibilities rather than towards any outside ideal. The world that he enters is, however, not distinct from Gormenghast but rather yet another instrument of the Gothic patterns. Even the narrative at times echoes that of the previous novels. The first significant landmark Titus encounters is a large city. It is to his mind very different from Gormenghast – "so far removed from the buildings he had known" (TA 31) – and yet it is dominated by "one gigantic edifice out-topping all the rest" (TA 32). Titus ascends to the high regions of the city (although not as far as the central edifice), and finds himself wandering a wide roofscape made of glass skylights much as Steerpike does at the beginning of *Titus Groan*.

This rooftop grants Titus some of the abilities afforded Steerpike, notably to observe unseen the rooms that lie beneath: “when the twilight came and the shadows withered he was able to steal to and fro across the wide glass roofscape and see what was going on in the rooms below” (*TA* 37). Echoing Steerpike’s calamitous plunge from the upper echelons of Gormenghast society – a fall that Titus dreams later, “where, tumbling from a tower, a skewbald beast fell headlong” (*TA* 97) – Titus falls through a skylight window (*TA* 50). The Gothic patterns of the previous novels are not broken, rather they are transformed to correspond to this new setting.

The name of the edifice that is central to this city is later revealed to be “the Factory,” and becomes a symbol of the authority that is exerted in the novels by the vilified (although scarcely present) scientists; it is “an evil edifice” (*TA* 168). Titus is consistently persecuted by authorities from the edifice, most notably in the courtroom trial. After his fall Titus is arrested and “kept prisoner for the best part of the day, the time being punctuated by visits from the Law and the Police” (*TA* 63), his incarcerations both literal and figurative in Gormenghast by agents of edificial authority repeated prominently here. The cell to which he is transferred displays much the same atmosphere as the under-realm of Gormenghast. Titus is

Woken out of his sleep to find himself in a prison – and then to hear a knocking in the darkness – and then to be faced with something phantasmagoric – a stone, apparently alive, raising itself in secret in order to survey the supine vaults – all this and the depth of his homesickness – what could all this lead to but a lightness in the head? (*TA* 71)

The dream-likeness (“woken out of his sleep”), gloom (“darkness”), unreality (“something phantasmagoric”), architectural personification (“a stone, apparently alive”), concealment (“in secret”), and intimations of psychological fatigue (“a lightness in the head”) are all deeply reminiscent of the labyrinth below. It transpires that the flagstone is being raised by another inhabitant of the prison, a psychotic inmate named Old Crime who is able to traverse the prison’s boundaries as well as any Gothic villain. Old Crime names the jail the Honeycomb, a name evocative of a multi-celled

labyrinth, and further reinforces this when he describes it as “a prison [. . .] a world within a world” (TA 72). The world in which Titus finds himself, then, is one that is still governed by verticality that he sought to escape.

The Honeycomb reflects many of the characteristics of the Gothic interior. Following his trial, Titus escapes to another distinctly “interior” area: guided by Muzzlehatch, he escapes “Down into an order of darkness” (TA 109), to an underground region named the Under-River due to its placement beneath a surface watercourse. Here, as in the Honeycomb, the aspects of the interior re-manifest: “For all the noise of water overhead, there was silence also. For all the murk there were the shreds of light. For all the jostling and squalor, there were also the great spaces and a profound withdrawal” (TA 110). Silence, darkness, empty space, and isolation return; it is “a world of sound and silence stitched together [. . .] a secret world” (TA 111), filled with “Something that travelled from region to region until the air was filled as though with a soundless sound like a giant bellowing behind a sound-proof wall of glass, or the yelling of a chordless throat” (TA 131). Titus is physically isolated in the Honeycomb and the Under-River. He is once more submersed in the Gothic atmosphere of the interior.

When not in a physical interior Titus’s isolation remains, albeit as the isolation of an alien whose place of origin and therefore sanity is constantly called into question by those representatives of authority and the Law. Additionally, Titus deliberately isolates himself from others by avoiding all emotional ties. Manlove phrases this in a very curious and distinctly Gothic fashion: “Possessed already by Gormenghast, he cannot let himself be possessed by others” (251). Emotional attachment is presented in *Titus Alone* as a kind of haunting. Titus encounters several potential allies who develop emotional attachments to him, but Titus is instead haunted by the edifice. The quasi-maternal figure Juno, in love with Titus, wonders whether she is “in love with something as mysterious and elusive as a ghost” (TA 89). Muzzlehatch, in love with Juno, is “filled with a ghost. The ghost of Juno” (TA 151). Titus, as Manlove notes, is

haunted by Gormenghast. He dreams of it – “the aftermath of a dream remaining like remorse, though he could remember nothing of it save that it was Gormenghast again” (TA 11) – and he oscillates between loathing and longing for the castle: “he yearned suddenly for his home, for the bad of it no less than for the good of it” (TA 68-69). It is still an essential part of his identity:

written across his young features was something not so young; something as ancient as the stones of his home. Something uncompromising [. . .] a primordial love for his birth-place, a love which survived and grew, for all that he had left his home, for all that he was a traitor, burned in him with a ferocity that he could not understand. (TA 130)

The removal of Titus from Gormenghast has not, and cannot, remove all traces of Gormenghast from Titus.

John Batchelor notes that one of the alternative titles considered for the third volume was “Titus Haunted” (125), and Titus is indeed haunted throughout *Titus Alone* by a single concern: the edifice that he has deserted. In the conclusion of the novel the madness that Titus is accused of repeatedly begins to infect his own thoughts: he begins to question the reality of the edifice that created him. Initially he carries a single shard of flint from the Tower of Flints to remind him of Gormenghast: “It was his only anchor. It was, for him, in microcosm, his home” (TA 21). He likens himself to it, as a chip of stone off the primary peak of the edifice, but as he begins to doubt the existence of the castle this becomes a question: “He was a part of something bigger than himself. He was a chip of stone, but where was the mountain from which it had broken away? [. . .] Where was his home?” (TA 102). Titus loses the flint, throwing it at a mechanical flying eye – a spy of the scientists – and with the loss he exclaims “Without my flint I am lost ... even more lost than before. For I have nothing else to prove where I come from, or that I ever had a native land” (TA 105). From this point on Titus is haunted by the possibility that his edifice does not actually exist, that he is actually insane; he succumbs to the possibility that others raise, now that he has “Nothing to convince myself that it is not a



dream" (TA 105). At the conclusion of *Titus Alone* this haunting of the absent edifice, and Titus's own fears of the possibility that the edifice is not real, come to a horrific termination.

Titus, overwrought with various encounters, is tended back to health by a young woman named Cheeta. She is the daughter of one of the aforementioned scientists, and in listening to one of his feverish rants – "in a language made almost foreign by the number of places and of people; words she had never heard of, with one out-topping all ... Gormenghast" (TA 162) – becomes fascinated with the outlandish nature of his origin. She recognises that, as Batchelor states, "In this confusing world Titus's recollection of Gormenghast has become his only certainty, the one fixed pole by which his sense of identity remains intact" (127-128):

‘Gormenghast.’ That was the core and gist of it. At first Cheeta could make nothing of it, but gradually in between the feverish repetition of the word, were names and phrases that slowly fell into place and made for her some kind of picture [. . .] a layer of people and happenings, that twisted about, inverted themselves, moved in spirals, yet were nevertheless consistent within their own confines [. . .] above all, of an underlying calm. A calm built upon a rock-like certainty and belief in some immemorial tradition. (TA 162)

Titus spurns Cheeta, and she soon becomes resentful of the security that the memory of Gormenghast provides him – "she hated him. Hated his self-sufficiency" (TA 183) – a feeling that curiously echoes Titus' own earlier resentment of this world's self-sufficiency independent of Gormenghast. Cheeta is nevertheless aware of the guilt that he feels about abandoning the castle and the doubts that he has about its very existence, and resolves to use these weaknesses against him in a very Gothic fashion. She plans to create a replica of Gormenghast and its inhabitants derived from Titus's own fevered memories, in the hope that upon first sighting it she "would see a shadow cross his face ... almost as though he were reminded of another world: a world he had deserted" (TA 209). The edifice that she erects – the "*Black House*" (TA 202) – is a deliberate distortion of Gormenghast, a gruesome and spectral double of that edifice.



Titus is haunted by Gormenghast, his past. In a world that is defined by Titus by the absence of Gormenghast, Cheeta seeks to introduce a double of the castle and its inhabitants to torment him for his guilt and doubts. A haunting past, horrific doubles, and the return of the edifice: the Gothic patterns that Titus has sought to escape from are once more reoccurring.

Cheeta's intention is to create "the forlorn decay of centuries, which, were Titus to set his eyes upon it, could not fail to remind him of the dark clime he had thought to toss off like a cloak from his shoulders, but which he now knew he had no power to divest" (TA 213). What she does create is something that mimics the vertical properties of the edifice well, as it "appeared to contradict itself, for, looked at from *one* angle, it appeared to resemble a small tower, yet from another it seemed more like a pulpit, or a throne" (TA 219); the tower, pulpit, and throne all conjuring images of the authority of the edifice. Titus enters the Black House, and before him are displayed a range of imitators, deliberately mimicking the inhabitants of Gormenghast. The Gothic atmosphere is predominant: not only are they doubles, within a doubled edifice, but they are also ghostly "apparitions" (TA 224) of the past. Titus wonders at this dream-like Gothic reincarnation of the past: "Had he travelled through time or space or both to reach this recrudescence of times gone by? Was he dreaming?" (TA 226). The questions that he has about the existence of Gormenghast come to a head, and he is filled with a terror, "not of Cheeta herself nor of any human being, but of doubt. The *doubt* of his own existence; for where was he? [. . .] Alone with nothing to touch. Even the flint from the tall tower was lost" (TA 227-228). Titus's identity and therefore his sanity are questioned and undermined by this ambiguity, raising the possibility of madness:

Were there a 'Gormenghast', then surely this mockery of his mother must humble and torture him, reminding him of his Abdication, and of all the ritual he so loved and loathed. If, on the other hand there were no such place, and the whole thing a concoction of his mind, then, mortified by this exposure of his secret love, the boy would surely break. (TA 233)

The onslaught of doubles that surrounds Titus includes both the living inhabitants of his edifice and those – like Steerpike, his sister, and father, and aunts – of the dead, an allusion to the Gothic return from the grave. In Titus “Something began to give way in his brain. Something lost faith in itself” (*TA* 235), brought on by the apparent resurrection of his guilty past. Titus has not escaped the Gothic atmosphere and the Gothic edifice. They return to haunt him.

The questions that Titus has regarding the existence of his identity represent the apex of the doubts that have been assailing him throughout the novel. Although doubts about the existence of Gormenghast are expressed by several characters, there is a general impression that Titus brings something different with him: the self-sufficiency that Cheeta despises him for having, the desperate belief that he has in the castle of his origin. He is “a youth with an air about him: carrying over his shoulders a private world like a cloak” (*TA* 89); others observe that “Behind him whenever he stood, or slept, were the legions of Gormenghast ... tier upon cloudy tier” (*TA* 189). While Titus questions his belief in the existence of Gormenghast, other characters begin to develop faith in it. When in the Under-River Titus encounters a collection of forgotten academics, one of whom – Crabcalf – sleeps on a pile of his published but unread life works. After Titus escapes from the subterranean labyrinth they begin “wondering [...] about that boy” (*TA* 177), one noting that “He sticks in my mind” (*TA* 177). They pursue him out of the Under-River, and Crabcalf begs Titus to take a copy of his epic back to Gormenghast. The work contains Crabcalf’s identity, as he says it contains “Everything I know of life and death” (*TA* 186), and he believes in Titus’s stated identity as a child of Gormenghast in the hope that he will believe in Crabcalf’s: he tells Titus “you need us [...] we believe you to be what you say you are” (*TA* 187). He sees himself as a kindred spirit to Titus, “I thought as you did” (*TA* 187), and what he offers is an exchange of faith. He sees the solidity in Titus’s belief that he desires in his own.

Crabcalf and the other Under-River academics are not the only characters to find faith in Titus and in Gormenghast. Muzzlehatch, one of the most distinctive characters in the novel, owns a large collection of animals in a zoo. Muzzlehatch, like Crabcalf, sees Titus as “Rather like a form of me” (TA 65), and when his zoo is destroyed by some unnamed weapon of the ruling scientists Muzzlehatch latches on to Titus as the redeemer of his own identity. He seeks to find faith in Titus’s faith: “Everything lost, except to find the lost realm of Gormenghast. And then to guide young Titus to his home. But why? And what to prove? Only to prove the boy was not a madman” (TA 158). Juno seeks Titus also, as she explains: “I want Titus for another reason ... just as I want Muzzlehatch and others I have cared for in the past. The past. Yes, that is it. I need my past again. Without it I am nothing” (TA 212). Titus has become the focus of the belief others have in their own pasts, and in their own identities.

At the conclusion of *Titus Alone*, it is the faith of the Under-River academics, Muzzlehatch, and Juno that saves Titus. They converge upon the Black House at the point of his haunting, and rescue him, although Muzzlehatch is killed in the process. They cannot offer him proof of his past but they can support his faith with their own. As is noted, “there is loyalty in dreams, and beauty in madness” (TA 245), and Titus’s allies have loyalty to him regardless of whether he is dreaming, or mad, because it supports their own identities. Muzzlehatch’s dying words are “God bless you and your Gormenghast” (TA 254). Following the escape from the haunting edifice Titus retains the doubt that has plagued him throughout the novel. Wondering still “Perhaps it is all a figment of my brain” (TA 259), he leaves behind his friends and wanders in a nameless wilderness, seeking some final proof of Gormenghast. *Titus Alone* has become, in the words of Phillip Redpath, “the quest to refind Gormenghast” (70).

Eventually, Titus encounters a rock that he knows is a part of Gormenghast mountain, and hears a round of gunfire that confirms that he has returned home: “There it lay behind the boulder; the immemorial ritual of his home. It was the dawn salvo. It boomed for him, for the

seventy-seventh Earl, Titus Groan, Lord of Gormenghast, *wherever* he might be" (TA 262). Faced with final proof of the existence of Gormenghast, however, Titus promptly turns around and leaves once more, and "With every pace he drew away from Gormenghast Mountain, and from everything that belonged to his home" (TA 263). It is assured that "He had no longer any need for home, for he carried his Gormenghast within him" (TA 262-263), but this is unconvincing, as Manlove notes: "Titus has doubted Gormenghast once; what stands against his doubting it again? We cannot feel that anything has happened to him that will stop him having to come back repeatedly for the rest of his life" (256). Instead, what it ultimately establishes is that, although Titus can move out of the edifice, the effect of the edifice can never be removed from Titus. When away from Gormenghast he desires nothing so much as to return, and upon being able to return, he desires nothing so much as to leave.

The Gothic properties of *Titus Alone* are clear, albeit altered, elements of the themes and atmosphere of the first two novels. In *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* the edifice represents the rule of law, incarceration within a tradition, and physical and social isolation within an unreal, dream-like, dark, cavernous, and silent interior. In *Titus Alone*, Titus's relationship to the edifice is redefined, or clarified. The Gormenghast edifice is still the defining symbol of all the oppression he wishes to avoid, but it is also an inalienable part of Titus's past and therefore of the identity he presents to the world. Gormenghast returns in the third novel, not as a physical presence but as a psychological pressure on Titus's mind, a past that returns to haunt him, firstly through his guilt and doubt, and then through an actual double of the edifice and its spectral inhabitants.

Even here, allegedly outside the world of Gormenghast, aspects of a Gothic edifice reoccur in fragmented forms. The rule of Tradition is replaced by the impersonal rule of courtroom law empowered by scientists of the Factory edifice. The court is reminiscent of Gormenghast; while in the dock Titus was reminded "of something half forgotten [. . .] of a cold kingdom" (76). As Peake's wife Maeve Gilmore rhetorically asks of the

“outside” world of *Titus Alone*: “what he saw, was it any less repressive than the credo of the castle?” (Yorke 297). Like the law of Gormenghast, the court has a temporal component: it is the law of the elderly. The courtroom is filled with “A group of elderly men” (80), the judge himself is “Ancient, wrinkled” (77), and believes of himself that “He was a symbol. He was the Law” (81). If the judge is symbolic of authority, then authority outside Gormenghast is redolent of authority within Gormenghast: in both cases it is the authority of the past, the authority of precedent and tradition.

The pastness of Gothic works is an integral part of interiority. *Titus Alone* demonstrates that it is also a crucial factor of verticality. The authority structure of all Gothic works, from *The Castle of Otranto* to the Gormenghast series, is predominated by the authority the past exerts on the present. Early Gothic contains intimations of recurrent feudalism, the political structures of the past returning to haunt the present. “The Yellow Wallpaper” marks the gendered aspect of that past, that it is the haunting of masculine precedent and traditional mandate that touches the present narrative.

In *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* authority is located in the “timeless” ritual of an indeterminate past, without any overt marker to locate the era of the setting but with the implicit assumption that “since Gormenghast lacked modern technology, science, arts or politics then the Groans ruled a medieval society” (Yorke 296). *Titus Alone* moves the series into a much more modern setting, and likewise advances out of the Gothic edifice of Gormenghast. In the third Gormenghast novel the authority of the modern age is not so different from the times that preceded it; the bureaucracy of modern law supplants the tyranny of feudalism, and the underlying Gothic forms remain. The concerns of Gothic are not bound to the historical context of post-Feudalism England or the gender politics of female interior space; they adapt to fit the matters of the day. In this way, both Peake’s view of progress and the Gothic view of history perpetually

look backwards and before, to the forms of the past that can never be fully eluded.

In moving the series out of the edifice that so dominated the first two novels, *Titus Alone* also demonstrates that the verticality, interiority, and pastness that dominate *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* are not exclusive to the edifice. The verticality of the law's overarching dominion and the dungeon's labyrinthine confines is retained; the isolation and atmosphere of interiority is at times both physical and psychological. The pastness of the edifice remains, and it is the edifice itself that haunts the protagonist as a spectral double. Deprived of the cohesiveness of a single edifice, there is a multiplicity of fragmented Gothic forms, and the only way Titus is able to view them is through the lens of his memory and experience of Gormenghast. Instead of being the only way to express the Gothic, the edifice becomes the most apt expression of the underlying themes, and it is the themes – of verticality, interiority, and pastness – that generate the surface manifestations of Gothic literature.



## Conclusion

It is demonstrated in Part One that the edifice is a comprehensive progenitor of most “surface” aspects of Gothic literature, from physical characteristics (towers; prisons; labyrinths; live burial), to conditions of plot (tyrannical oppression by some dominant force facilitated by the edifice; secret ancestries tied to the edifice), to aspects of Gothic characters (boundary-crossers, spectral doubles, haunting influences), to aspects of Gothic atmosphere (unreality; dream-narratives; madness), and that these aspects can be categorised as relating to the verticality and interiority of the edifice. The verticality and interiority are, furthermore, intimately connected with the aura of pastness that haunts Gothic characters.

The importance of the edifice is that it facilitates the Gothic haunting from the past. That haunting from the past can occur in many ways: as an actual spectre from a secret heritage (as in *The Castle of Otranto*), a tyrannical overlord using birthright to impose himself (*The Castle of Otranto*; *The Mysteries of Udolpho*), the psychological haunting of past actions (“The Fall of the House of Usher”), or the dictates of authority and historical dogma (“The Yellow Wallpaper”). The verticality and interiority of the edifice are important to Gothic literature in that they facilitate the Gothic hauntings of pastness. Verticality implies the powerlessness of characters against the control of something more commanding, something that exerts authority – often being able to control or move between the boundaries of the edifice – that haunts the other characters. Interiority makes such hauntings inescapable, through the isolation of the characters and their submersion in a total environment that carries so many aspects of the past: as a half-remembered dream or unreal memory. *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* demonstrate Gothic haunting by making its fundamental aspects equal to the edifice: Titus is trapped within the twin structures of the tradition of the past and the edifice that is a construction of that past. *Titus Alone* transfers the Gothic haunting from the agents and manifestations of the past and the edifice to the past and the edifice

themselves: Titus is haunted by his memory of and relationship to the edifice rather than (as in the previous novels) the edifice merely facilitating the Gothic haunting.

The edifice is important to Gothic literature in that it facilitates the figurative and literal hauntings that are at its core. It can be removed, but the aspects of the edifice that induce and buttress the Gothic haunting – interiority and verticality – are retained. This offers a cohesive portrait of all Gothic literature: the exterior elements that are perpetually associated with Gothic are so closely bound that a number of them can be removed without undermining the coherency of the whole. The edifice is only a dominant Gothic concept in that it offers the most succinct expression of the underlying patterns of verticality and interiority, as they make possible the haunting from the past; it can be removed but its properties extend beyond a physical border.

The Gothic genre is therefore eminently transposable, in that it is unbound by constraints of historical period, setting, or details, rather offering a solid pattern of tropes that can be freely adapted wherever necessary. The Gormenghast series demonstrates both alternatives: the first two novels demonstrate that the Gothic verticality, interiority, and pastness are effectively evoked by the presence of a Gothic edifice, and the third novel demonstrates that it is not a compulsory factor in their induction.

The consequences of this conclusion are significant for critical considerations of what is defined as Gothic literature. Under such a model, it is possible to describe a work as Gothic that relies on surface aspects quite different from the standard “haunted house” pattern, as long as they retain the conceptual structures of verticality, interiority, and pastness. In Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851), for example, there is no structure that could be designated a Gothic edifice, but the Gothic patterns usually produced by the edifice are constructed out of other materials. For interiority, the isolation of the edifice becomes the isolation of being on a ship out on the open ocean, and the atmospheric submergence becomes

the literal submergence in that ocean at the novel's conclusion. For verticality, the tyrannical lord of the edifice becomes the autocratic captain of a whaling ship. The haunting apparition that transcends boundaries becomes a ghostly-pale whale, and the spectral double is realised in the demonic Fedallah. Ahab is haunted by his memories of the white whale, and this haunting pastness becomes his downfall just as it does to Roderick Usher. It is the properties of the edifice rather than the edifice itself that produces a Gothic work.

The edifice is not essential to a work being described as Gothic. It is nevertheless the most effective and expedient way to evoke the verticality, interiority, and hauntings of the Gothic text, and for this reason remains a significant component of Gothic literature. This is best demonstrated by considering the opening to Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959):

No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and Katydid are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone. (3)

Even in the first paragraph of this novel the bulk of Gothic patterns are able to be evoked: questions of sanity ("sanely"), dream-states ("to dream"), "darkness within," "silence," isolation ("whatever walked there, walked alone"), personification of surroundings ("Hill House, not sane"), boundaries ("floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut"), interiority ("within"), intimations of verticality ("walls continued upright"), and even a sort of perpetual pastness ("it had stood for eighty years and might stand for eighty more"). The Gothic edifice is important in that it facilitates the figurative and literal hauntings that are central to Gothic literature.

So central is the pattern of haunting and the resuscitation of the past to Gothic literature that the critical theorists referenced in Part One have adopted it as a description of the Gothic nature of their own approaches, and of the relationship that Gothic haunting has to most critical applications, both to the genre and in general. Kilgour inverts psychoanalysis in this way, describing it as a “a gothic, necromantic form, that resurrects our psychic pasts” (220); other critical approaches can be identified as operating in a very similar fashion. Gilbert and Gubar’s description of gender relations suggests that the Gothic offers a portrait of the place of all women in society, not solely those incarcerated in an edifice within a Gothic novel: they are “haunted” by the constraints of masculine dicta and masculine spaces. The political class interest and anxiety over persisting crypto-feudalism is the concern that the structures of the past reoccur in and taint the present. Kilgour inverts literary criticism in the same fashion, suggesting that in its analysis of aspects of the past literary criticism has in Gothic been given an “ancestor for our current obsessive self-criticism and self-scrutiny of past and present motives” (222). In all these cases there is a significant inversion of the forms of Gothic criticism; rather than being used to explain and illuminate Gothic, the patterns of Gothic are used to explain and illuminate Gothic criticism.

Punter notes one final extension of Gothic haunting: the relationship between haunted present and authoritative past is a strong analogy for the act of reading and writing itself. Gothic is “the paradigm of all fiction, all textuality” (*Pathologies* 1), in that any text is the creation of the past, and is simultaneously haunted by past texts. As noted by Jodey Castricano in “Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida’s Ghost Writing” (9), writing can act from beyond the grave, and its influence as a precedent is one that resurrects the past in which it was created. In these analogies there is a radical re-centring of Gothic literature: the hauntings facilitated by the edifice offer a cohesive portrait of the structure of all critical concerns. Rather than explaining the power of the edifice, they are explained by it.

The particular pattern of Gothic literature – of an inescapable past that haunts and is resurrected by the present – is one that is eminently applicable to a wide range of surface patterns. The Gormenghast series suggests an explanation for this. Titus is haunted by his past, but this past is grounded in the complete setting that he originates from. In *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* Titus is haunted by the demands of his heritage, by the past from which he seeks to escape. In *Titus Alone*, the act of remembering Gormenghast ensures that Titus will continue to be haunted by its influence, because the influence of setting is as inescapable as one's own history. Personal and institutional histories influence everyone in a way that is strongly reminiscent of this Gothic haunting: it is a palpable and inescapable (interior) environment that is not entirely under the inhabitants' control, instead being stratified (vertically) with the spectres of the past dominating. The relationship evoked by Gothic literature and by Gothic criticism is that between the haunting past and the influenced present, whether that past be historical, social, institutional, or psychological. The Gothic haunting is the influence of history and setting, and this influence is ultimately inescapable because the present is a construction and extension of it. Like the Gothic edifice, the passages have already been constructed, and it is the fate of the inhabitants to wander forever within the Gothic interior.

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