The Gothic, as we shall see, was a form of the historical novel fed by a growing appetite among the British public for representations of the historical past. But of course any text represents not only the past but its own time, since it derives from and implicitly comments on contemporary life and values regardless of its Bakhtinian “chronotope.” Nevertheless, literary texts are seldom simple reflections of the life of their times. As our discussion of the Marxist modes of literary historiography was designed to clarify, there are different ways of construing the ways texts function as productions of ideology, and contemporary non-Marxist ideological criticism (including but not restricted to modes that have been labeled “the new historicism”) has invented even more. This chapter considers some of these methodologies as they have been or might be applied to the Gothic novel, in the hope of evaluating which modes are likely to prove most productive.

Many of the studies to which I refer at the outset tend to follow Kenneth Burke rather than Louis Althusser. In other words, the text is seen as a symbolic action, in this case a displaced version of history, where the conflict is the same but the scene of the conflict is different. Burke’s formula begins: “Take some pervasive unresolved tension typical of a given social order (or of life in general). While maintaining the ‘thought’ of it in its overall importance, reduce it to terms of personal conflict (conflict between friends, or members of the same family)” (Language as Symbolic Action 94). This
CHAPTER 3

notion of literature as a displaced representation of history seems to me one of the strongest theoretical sources of what has been called the new historicism.¹

Like Michel Foucault, whose ideas also form part of the intellectual ground of the new historicism, Burke is often accused of having played fast and loose with the facts of history. For example, Burke once suggested in a lecture that the Ancient Mariner’s water snakes were symbols of Coleridge’s drug addiction, and when it was pointed out to him that “The Ancient Mariner” was written before Coleridge actually became addicted to laudanum, he claimed that in that case the poem must be prophesying Coleridge’s addiction and his attitudes toward it before the fact (Philosophy of Literary Form 71–73). Whether this claim strikes one as absurd or profound will determine one’s attitude toward Burke’s method. To me it does not seem absurd that conflicts have an incipient stage before they surface in the way Coleridge’s addiction did.

But whatever liberties Burke took with chronology, he always based his arguments on specific datable moments in history. In “Coriolanus and the Delights of Faction” (published originally in 1966), Burke argues that the conflict in Shakespeare’s Coriolanus is a displacement, a symbolic reworking, of the same social conflicts between Crown and Parliament that ultimately resulted in the English revolution.² It is hard to know how visible these conflicts would have been in 1609 to someone in Shakespeare’s social position. But at least there was an English revolution and we can say roughly when and where it occurred. Similarly with Burke’s reading of “Lycidas” as predicting Milton’s abandonment of poetry for prose in the civil war: whether or not Milton could have foreseen his activities at the time he wrote the elegy, we at least have a good idea when Milton did what.³

Some of those who wrote about the Gothic novel in this vein have not made their hypotheses as easy to substantiate or refute. When Ronald Paulson tells us that the Gothic novel is about “the tensions of the French Revolution,” or when Kate Ellis tells us that the Gothic is about feminine “ambivalence” about the gender construction of “separate spheres,” the historical movement that the Gothic is said to replicate is relatively vague and inchoate. The fall of the Bastille or the beheading of Louis XVI can be dated with precision, but it isn’t easy to say which classes of English men and women experienced what sort of tension as a result of the French Revolution. But complex as it was in event and in its reception abroad, the French Revolution is, comparatively speaking, a clear-cut event compared with the uneven and gradual transformation of the patriarchal household of the
Renaissance to the woman-centered home of the high Victorian period. To these causes any effects whatsoever can be ascribed with impunity.

With Burke, in other words, an ambiguous text is juxtaposed against a reasonably legible historical event. Here, though, an ambiguous text is read against an even vaguer movement in social history, and even the tropical relationship between the text and movement—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche—is hard to pin down.

In Paulson and Ellis—as in so much of the new historicism—we see the scratching of the allegorical itch. Since the days of Aquinas, texts have been thought to have literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical readings. And while the Scholastic method was supposed to have gone out in the Renaissance, modes of reading are hard to kill. In particular the romance has had a long-standing tradition of allegorical interpretation. Spenser's *Faerie Queene* demands being read in more than one sense, and although it is usually the moral sense that supplies a second level to the literal, in book 1 there is assuredly a historical allegory in operation. Sidney's *Arcadia*, though surely written for a sister's amusement on the literal level, sports in addition a political allegory (McCoy 1979). Behn's *Love Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister*, without any moral level, is a coded version of a contemporary scandal, a roman à clef.

But despite the time-hallowed license of allegorical readings of romance, we need to raise some questions about the limits that should be placed on this practice. Of the finding of likenesses there can be no end, because there are no two entities so disparate that resemblances cannot be found between them. The late Robert Marsh used to tell students who found desperate similarities between two texts that he could compare a boxcar with a Valencia orange. Obviously there can be no hard-and-fast rules for testing claims of analogy, suggestions that a fictional conflict is to be read as a coded version of a historical one. Like romans à clef, allegorical fictions can represent the historical world with varying sorts of infidelities and stylizations, and it would be most unlikely that the Gothic novel was a historical sport, unconnected with the major movements of its time.

Nevertheless, the Kantian categories of quantity, quality, relation, time, and space are not suspended for literary argumentation. And therefore, despite the notorious difficulty of proving a negative, we might justifiably be entitled to be at least mildly suspicious about a claim that a literary movement is a representation of a certain political or social chain of events under the following circumstances: when purported "cause" appears to have begun later than the "effect," or when the effect goes on for decades after the
proposed cause has ceased; or when a minor cause purportedly has major effects; or when the cause primarily affects one country, whereas the principal literary manifestation occurs in another; or when a very specific literary development is ascribed to a general cause that operates, at least at some level, all the time; or when a social transformation that would be expected to affect different classes or genders differently is purportedly represented in similar ways by all writers, regardless of their class or gender position. These are the sorts of problems that arise variously in Paulson and Ellis.

Along with a critique of the various allegories of histories that have offered to explicate the Gothic, this chapter presents a new version of the relations between the Gothic novel and the life of its own time. They represent a different methodology too. Instead of allegorizing history, my version is neo-Marxist, out of Raymond Williams and Pierre Macherey. That is to say, it takes the position that history is coded in literature as crystallized "forms of feeling." These forms may also be coded negatively rather than positively—for Macherey it's not the bumps but the holes that are significant. Instead of social ideology reproducing itself in literature, Macherey argues, contradictions appear in literature that echo gaps or inconsistencies in social ideology: they occur because writers are forced by the process of literary composition to visualize and imagine what social ideologies refuse to make visible. Macherey's theory thus gives the Kantian synthetic imagination some genuine social utility. His point is that the process of forming a mental conception, coherent and detailed, of the lives of others generates cognitive dissonances as the imagined worlds conflict with those of the false consciousness of contemporary ideology. Generally this is solved by truncating the imagined world and forcing it to fit the ideologically formed picture, but the procrustean process of taming what Keats called "the truth of imagination" leaves marks on the text—even if these are only gaps and inconsistencies that mirror those of contemporary ideology.

But my own hypotheses are vulnerable to the same sort of critique that I level against others. Possibly the greatest difficulty that confronts any Marxizing historian of literature is the fact that the sort of history that finds its way into literary texts—social history, economic history, the history of people's lives in the world—is so poorly understood. A few masters have begun to scratch the surface, to help us understand which modes of behavior, which values were universal, which regional, which class linked. But much valuable evidence has been forever lost, and much is yet to be uncovered. A bit of humility is decent therefore in any form of literary historiography that presumes to speak for a vanished or altered social order.
Paulson’s French Revolution

Ronald Paulson was led from his groundbreaking Hogarth studies to the revolutionary art of the last decades of the eighteenth century. Since he comes to the Gothic via Goya and Fuseli, it is clear that the narrative romance (as opposed to the development of Romantic painting) lies far from the center of his interests. On the one hand, Paulson has nothing major at stake in the characterization of the Gothic and can afford to be accurate and precise in his generalizations; on the other hand, it is always tempting to roll along the high priori road. As a result, his generalizations run a strange gamut between sober disclaimers and wild leaps at conclusions.

Paulson claims that “the gothic did in fact serve as a metaphor with which some contemporaries in England tried to understand what was happening across the channel in the 1790s” (Representations 217). Though he knows well that there is no evidence to “suggest that Ann Radcliffe or Monk Lewis was producing propaganda either for or against the French Revolution” (219), not in any conscious way, at least, Paulson goes on to suggest the contrary. He is searching for a relationship vaguer than conscious causality or even Marxist “reflection.” Ultimately Paulson makes the strongest claims for causation in terms of the audience, even though he never shows that any one person in the Gothic audience ever made such a connection.

I do not think there is any doubt that the popularity of gothic fiction in the 1790s and well into the nineteenth century was due in part to the widespread anxieties and fears in Europe aroused by the turmoil in France finding a kind of sublimation or catharsis in tales of darkness, confusion, blood and horror.

However, the gothic had existed from the 1760s onward. The castle as prison was already implicit in The Castle of Otranto and Radcliffe’s Castles of Athlyn and Dynbayne [sic] (1789), and it may have only been this image and this frame of mind that made the fall of the Bastille an automatic image of revolution for French as well as English writers. By the time The Mysteries of Udolpho appeared (1794), the castle, prison, tyrant and sensitive young girl could no longer be presented naively; they had all been familiarized and sophisticated by the events in France. (220–21)

We are talking about a particular development in the 1790s, a specific plot that was either at hand for writers to use in the light of the French Revolution, or was in some sense projected by the Revolution and borrowed by writers who may or may not have wished to express anything about the troubles in France. (224)

One of the difficulties for Paulson’s hypothesis that the Gothic novel was a
displacement of the French Revolution is the fact that so few of its practitioners were enthusiastic about that revolution. Most of the Gothic novelists, insofar as their politics can be identified, were conservatives or even reactionaries. Matthew Lewis was seated as a Whig member of Parliament, liberal but by no means a Jacobin, while Horace Walpole, William Beckford, Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, and Charles Robert Maturin were all conservatives. Paulson is aware of the fact that the real revolutionary sympathizers, the English Jacobins, wrote novels of reform like Bage's *Hemsprong* and Inchbald's *A Simple Story*, novels without a Gothic bone in their bodies. So the representation is a negative one: "The gothic tended to be the form adopted by those who were either against or merely intrigued by the Revolution, or by problems of freedom and compulsion" (227).

In that case the Gothic is a displaced portrait of the French Revolution seen as nightmare. That sounds more plausible, perhaps, except that the Gothic prisons portrayed belong not to the Third Estate but to representatives of the Old Regime—feudal rulers like Montoni or institutions like the Inquisition or some monastic order. And Gothic authors, from Radcliffe to Maturin, have tended to emphasize both the excitement and the beneficial results of the civil disorders that are displaced in fiction in time and space. The politics of the Gothic novel, by the very nature of the genre, tends to be antiestablishment, because the usual situation provoking terror is the abuse of power, be that power patriarchal or political. While often the result of the resolution of the novel is to restore a previously dethroned royal or ducal family—as in *The Castle of Otranto*, where Theodore is discovered to be the true heir—the secret heir most often comes apparently from the working or petit bourgeois classes. If we were to accept Paulson's notion that the Gothic was meant as a political metaphor by its writers, we have the unusual situation of authors working against their own beliefs. The likelihood is that it was nothing of the kind.

On the other hand, if the Gothic had been consciously used as a political metaphor by the readers, it is strange that there survives so little evidence of the fact, and even stranger that the countries in which the Gothic took hold most strongly (Germany and England) were politically the most conservative, while in France itself the Gothic novel was relatively unimportant as a literary genre till the middle of the nineteenth century.

But Paulson's most intractable problem is that the vogue of the Gothic began long before the French Revolution and extended long afterward. The usual dates for the Gothic are 1764 to 1825. This is from twenty-five years before the fall of the Bastille to thirty years after the guns of
Vendemaire. Because of the priority of the Gothic, Paulson has to imply that its characteristic imagery affected that of the revolution—as though the fall of the Bastille took hold in the French public mind because the Castle of Otranto had fallen in Walpole's novel. If this were so, there ought to be documentary evidence to that effect; since he provides none, he leaves it at a hint. If the Gothic novel was not the cause but the effect of the French Revolution, however, the question is why it went on so long after the revolution was over.

Paulson quotes the Marquis de Sade as saying that *The Monk* "was the inevitable result of the revolutionary shocks which all Europe had suffered." Actually Sade says this not just of *The Monk* but of the entire Gothic "species of writing." But the reason why the Gothic is the "necessary fruit" is that the widespread misery caused by the revolution had made the novel, in its previous versions, "as difficult to write as it was monotonous to read." The previous versions of the novel to which Sade alludes are the French versions of the sentimental novel, like Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* or Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality*. Sade's point is not that the revolution is being mirrored in the Gothic novel but that the idea of natural human benevolence and kindness had probably taken a shock from the violence of the revolution, while the strong sensations created by the revolution had raised the emotional stakes for the writer of fiction. This is a very different kind of issue, one that bears on the reception of the Gothic but not on its political content. The relation between the sentimental and the Gothic is discussed later in this chapter; my conclusions differ somewhat from Sade's.

**Ellis's Domestic Revolution**

A second book that explicates the Gothic novel as a displaced version of revolution is *The Contested Castle*, by Kate Ferguson Ellis. Ellis's book "investigates the relationship between these two epiphenomena of middle-class culture: the idealization of the home and the popularity of the Gothic. . . . Why did [Gothic novels] become so popular just at the time when women were becoming a significant part of the reading public? What in the culture created the demand for such fare, and what were its messages to readers?" (ix-x).

Her answer is that the Gothic novel comes out at a time of social transition, when the nineteenth-century doctrine of separate spheres (the home as woman's province, the outside world as man's) was coming into being.
Ostensibly designed to protect women from violence, the doctrine in effect imprisoned women in the home. Ellis sees the cultural work of the Gothic novel as "creating, in a segment of culture directed toward women, a resistance to an ideology that imprisons them even as it posits a sphere of safety for them. . . . Displacing their stories onto an imaginary past, its early practitioners appealed to their readers not by providing 'escape' but by encoding, in the language of aristocratic villains, haunted castles, and beleaguered heroines, a struggle to purge the home of license and lust and to establish it as a type of heaven on earth. To this end, they created a landscape in which a heroine could take initiative in shaping her own history" (xi–xii).

For Ellis, the Gothic not only symbolically represents the life of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century woman, it portrays her cruelest dilemma. By taking control of the castle, she can create an Eden, but only one that patriarchal culture has already set aside for her; she can make a heaven on earth, but at the price of becoming the "angel in the house." In her introduction, Ellis seems willing to dismiss the utopian vision at the heart of the female Gothic's happy ending as one more way of containing female subversion, but by the last chapter she has changed her mind, and she views the Gothic presentation of the "female subject, individual and inviolable" as making "available to women possibilities for action outside the code of female passivity and sublime helplessness" (221).

Ellis wisely attempts to give her discussion some material basis by an appeal to the specifics of social history. Sometimes the facts support her claims, but at other times they are merely confusing. When Ellis cites the threat of rape as one of the motivating factors leading to the doctrine of separate spheres, she posits an increase in both working-class rape and aristocratic rape ("The emergence of a waged labor force, which drew working women increasingly out of the home, made those women particularly vulnerable to assault and rape. . . . In 1753 Parliament was so concerned with the rape of rich heiresses as a way of forcing them into marriage that it . . . passed a law, the Hardwicke Act, 'for the better preventing of clandestine marriages'" [xi]). While both these movements were of appalling social violence, it is not clear how they can be usefully linked; they did not threaten the same class of person nor did they occur in the same era: female factory hands emerged as a class in the 1820s and 1830s, whereas the Hardwicke Act had been passed three-quarters of a century earlier.11 Furthermore, whatever one thinks about factory girls and heiresses, between 1700 and 1870, the most probable victim of sexual abuse—meaning enforced participation in sex tantamount to rape—was neither the heiress nor the factory worker but
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The domestic servant. And none of these social groups—servants, factory workers, or heiresses—included the middle-class woman, who was, by all accounts, the typical reader of the Gothic novel.

On the literary side, one must add that although the threat of rape comes up in almost every Gothic novel, it is hardly unique to the Gothic: we find it in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. The threat of rape to a servant girl (inside the home) governs the action in Pamela and Joseph Andrews, while the Hardwicke Act was passed to prevent the sort of violence chronicled in Clarissa (1747–48) and threatened against Sophia Western in Tom Jones (1749). Now there were indeed social changes that had made rape especially representable in novels of the Georgian era. For one thing, working-class servant girls who had been treated as property through the Renaissance now had a “virtue” to lose. For another, upper-middle-class women like Clarissa Harlowe (with plenty of money but without a guaranteed social position based on birth) were situated between the rock of patriarchal power accustomed to selling daughters to the highest bidder in the marriage market and the hard place of a growing individualistic ethos that sanctified marriage for love. As Raymond Williams points out, Richardson invests Clarissa’s virginity with a spiritual value as an emblem of “the integrity of the person and the soul” (64). Less fanatically, Fielding’s Sophia Western puts forth the doctrine of the mutual veto (the child over the parent’s choice, the parent over the child’s) to mediate between the conflicting ideologies of patriarchal power and filial freedom.

Ellis’s thesis is also weakened by her determination to read Gothic fiction—such as The Mysteries of Udolpho and The Italian—as exempla in which a woman “takes the initiative in shaping her own history.” Except for Cynthia Griffin Wolff, few readers from Radcliffe’s day to this have questioned the almost legendary passivity of the Gothic heroine. Ellis’s notion that Emily cleans the villains out of Udolpho would seem a peculiar interpretation. Ellis’s fantasy is current enough today, of course, in thrillers—such as Wait until Dark—in which a solitary woman, threatened by rapist/killers, manages to use her weakness and their overconfidence to defeat and destroy them. Major social changes lurk behind the difference between the contemporary fantasy that with courage and luck one can actively prevail over the violence bred by patriarchy, and the earlier passive fantasy—in Radcliffe’s Udolpho—that one day the castle doors will open, as though of their own accord, and one will walk out free.

The same sorts of doubts creep into any attempt to pin down the real framework of the “domestic revolution” that underlies Ellis’s central thesis.
Did the Victorian angel in the house exist as early as the Gothic novel? Were these separate spheres established as early as the 1790s to be represented in Radcliffe? It seems to me that there were really two different conceptions of the home working here and two different aesthetic representations of it.

The facts of social history are elusive, and it would take some new Lawrence Stone, more broadly and deeply read than I, to research the social history of gender in the nineteenth century, where Stone’s own massive treatise stopped. But let me put forward an alternative hypothesis that I think could be more easily supported by the data we currently have available.

1. To the extent that it is a response to a social problem of domestic life, the Gothic novel of Radcliffe (and of the Brontës) is a reflection of the power relations within a residual patriarchal form of family arrangement—one whose operations are sufficiently Gothic in the Harlowe family of *Clarissa*—in which the father rules and no one else really has a voice except to agree. This is by no means what was envisioned in the ideal mid-Victorian home of separate spheres. Indeed it was not even typical of the actual middle-class eighteenth-century home, which according to Lawrence Stone had since the Restoration become far more protective of “affective individualism,” the sense that each family member has the right within limits to pursue her or his ideal of personal happiness (Stone 655–58). The residually patriarchal families of the Harlowes or the Montonis essentially reflect the pattern of a feudal age. Its values may have been expounded after the Restoration (for example, in Lord Halifax’s 1702 *Advice to a Daughter*), but those values were under attack throughout the eighteenth century, and by the period of the Gothic novel they are being ridiculed by conservative satirists (Stone 281). The Gothic novelists represent these residual arrangements as those of south European cultures and of earlier centuries.

2. To the extent that it represents broader socioeconomic issues, the vogue of the Gothic seems to have roots in economic and social developments that were under way even while Richardson was at work. The social history of the latter half of the eighteenth century is dominated not by industrialization but by a much less dramatic though no less heralded agricultural revolution, which substituted easily planted and harvested root crops—such as turnips and potatoes—for labor-intensive grain on marginally arable land. The beneficial impact of this revolution was that it allowed a far higher proportion of farm animals to survive over the winter, and thus made possible the widespread consumption of the “roast beef of old England” that Hogarth painted at Calais Gate and of which Henry Fielding
sang. On the other side, it displaced agricultural workers from the land just as strongly as the ever-increasing encroachments of enclosure and the substitution of sheep farming for corn cultivation. This caused widespread unemployment across the English countryside, forced thousands of men and women to wander the lanes of England, and thereby created a vast market for casual employment that lowered wages and increased the numbers of domestic servants. We see the agricultural revolution directly in Oliver Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," which presents the depopulation of the countryside as creating an emptiness, a wasteland. The people had to go somewhere, though, and the widespread social results of this displacement appear in panoramic works like *Tom Jones* and *Roderick Random*, in which half of England seems to be wandering its roads or scraping a living (sometimes by begging) on the London pavements.

Over the long run, the factories of the industrial revolution were to create jobs that eliminated the labor surplus produced by the agricultural revolution, and a "servant problem" developed by the mid-nineteenth century that gradually worsened until servants, for all practical purposes, were things of the past. There were also short periods of labor shortage in the period before factory work took up the slack (e.g., during the Napoleonic Wars). But several generations passed between the two revolutions.

Meanwhile, one of the secondary social effects of the agricultural revolution was that the increased numbers of servants created increased leisure for upper-class and upper-middle-class women, who no longer had to help out with the household tasks. Women drifted toward a supervisory role with less and less active responsibility as a "housewife." This increased the amount of time for reading, hence the increased sales in fiction, particularly romantic fiction, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This is represented *within* the Gothic novel as a situation in which women (both Emily and her aunt, Madame Montoni) are devalued and terrorized, and in which their only *active* participation in life is roaming the haunted castle, feverishly checking out what secrets lie behind the black veil. It is interesting that contemporary with the Gothic we have a more realistic vision of the dangers of inanition in Austen's *Emma*, where the heroine's idleness combined with her great social power produces the egocentric mischief-making that threatens her own and others' happiness.

3. The changes caused by the industrial revolution produced changes in family life as well. In the seventeenth century it was unusual to work outside the home (or the agricultural land surrounding the home); around the mid-nineteenth century going out to work in a factory or office was common,
especially in urban areas. Starting around 1820 and well advanced by 1850, this change produced the revolution of which Kate Ellis speaks, the split between public and private areas of life. We see both the mythology and the underside of the myth in novels like *David Copperfield* and *Middlemarch* in the destructively inane activities of wives like Dora Copperfield and Rosamond Lydgate. But, theoretically, the husband works and rules outside the home in the sphere of public life, while the wife creates the defended fortress of the home, in which the husband can take his ease. Households became smaller; men and women did not live with their parents quite so much; the nuclear family became the more typical unit. It isn’t politically correct to say so, but this was probably genuinely empowering to the Victorian woman, who set the cultural tone for the private world in which art ideologically resided.  

It is my sense that the entrapment within the home implicit in the myth of the angel in the house had nothing much to do with the Gothic as such, and in fact occurred too late to affect the vogue of the Gothic proper. But it probably had a lot to do with the most popular of the successor forms taken by romance in the 1860s, the sensation novel, discussed at some length in chapter 6. This genre features plots that turn on either (1) exclusion from the home, as in *East Lynne* and *Enoch Arden* in which an adulterous wife, in the first case, and a shipwrecked husband, in the second, find that their spouses have remarried and created a new home within which they have no place; or (2) false homes based on deceit or crime (adultery as in Mrs. Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*; illegitimacy as in Wilkie Collins’s *No Name* and *The Woman in White*; murder as in *Armadale*). The character who shines out most strongly in the sensation novel is the female villain, no longer the transparently evil countess of Radcliffe’s *Italian* or the *âme damnée* of Lewis’s *Monk* but the smiler with the knife who conceals her villainy beneath the cloak of respectability. In this representation of domesticity it is precisely the safety, security, and coziness of the home that are threatened, threatened not so much by violence as by a false intimacy.  

This may be an oversimplified picture, but I think it may convey the general lines of the relationship between literature and the changing construction of gender more closely than Ellis has done. It takes account of the fact that any changes in the way a social situation is represented are generally going to lag behind what they represent as writers duplicate their parental homes as well as their marital ones. In general, changes in aesthetic ideology are going to follow rather than lead changes in the economy and the society.  

This is not Ellis’s view of history, of course. But Ellis may not care
whether she gets the history right because she is not really interested in history as such. She is far more interested in her own ideology than in those of the writers about whom she discourses. If one looks for it, the Gothic novel presents a discourse about an enormous range of family styles: patriarchal-traditional (the Frankensteins), matriarchal (the Vivaldis in Radcliffe's *The Italian* or Monçada's in *Melmoth the Wanderer*), dysfunctional (the Colwans in *Justified Sinner*), and structureless (Falkland's in *Caleb Williams*). The notion that all this variety winds up proving a single point suggests that there can have been only one point to make in the first place. Ellis reads both the fiction and history selectively, with a severe eye toward what proves her point. As with Foucault, her philosophic mentor, history is there only as a source of moral anecdotes proving—as history always does for Foucauldians—that good Enlightened intentions lead inevitably to greater confinement and misery, and that the discourse of freedom is always at the service of the throne of power. For Ellis, these anecdotes are there to illustrate the relation between timeless patriarchal power and literary representations, subversive discourses that always control, contain, and circumscribe the rebellion they embody.

**Toward Marxist Historiography: Gothic as a Mode of Ideological Production**

Ultimately the Burkean method of argument by historical analogy works no better than the evidence that can be presented. If an episode of literary history is to correspond convincingly with an episode of social or political history, the times and circumstances must coincide in some plausible way. With Ellis, the domestic revolution for which the Gothic novel was a metaphor seems not to have really gotten started until after the vogue of the Gothic itself. With Paulson's candidate, the French Revolution, the vogue of the Gothic seems to have begun before the fall of the Bastille and to have continued for nearly thirty years following the guns of Vendemaire. This is not to say that the Gothic novel was not influenced by current social and political events, but that the impact of those events had to be mediated in a considerably more complex way than Ellis or Paulson have suggested and had to be produced by broader and more general social forces.

But from the first it didn't really stand to reason that the vogue of the Gothic, regardless of the fact that *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was published the same year that Louis XVI was beheaded, was going to be the textual site of a
revolutionary operation. A revolution takes a revolutionary, or at least a world-historical, author capable of seizing a moment of history to force a permanent change in the way institutions or their discourses operate. A mind like Samuel Richardson's—oozy, hypocritical, praise-mad, canting, envious, concupiscent though it was—could take such a revolutionary stand in a way that writers like Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe could not.

In saying this, I am assuming that by now most people have bought into the ideas of Michael McKeon that the growth of the novel itself comes out of the watershed in the seventeenth century that called radically into question the identification of truth with the received opinions of authority and of virtue with rank within a hierarchal society. In contrast with that essentially feudal view were the skeptical vision that located truth within the personal experience and understanding of the individual and the middle-class view that located moral value with personal pleasure and social utility broadly conceived. The novel is thus not merely a symbol of the conflict between these two ideologies but its battleground.

In this broad social and political context, Richardson's first two novels are, as Terry Eagleton has suggested, a radical approach to the problem of birth and worth, since they insist on the impossibility of identifying moral value with aristocratic lineage. "Richardson's novels are not mere images of conflicts fought out on another terrain, representations of a history that happens elsewhere; they are themselves a material part of those struggles, pitched standards around which battle is joined, instruments which help to constitute social interests rather than lenses which reflect them. These novels are an agent, rather than a mere account, of the English bourgeois's attempt to wrest a degree of ideological hegemony from the aristocracy in the decades which follow the political settlement of 1688" (The Rape of Clarissa 4-5). Pamela, as Eagleton reminds us, was "a multi-media affair . . ., preached from the pulpit and quoted in the salons" (5). The stance it took—that a pious servant girl was not only theoretically as good as her sexually predatory master in the eyes of God, but worthy to be his wife and to take a lady's place in society—jarred Richardson's society into frenzied debate, even jarred the conservative Henry Fielding, via his spoofs and inversions of Pamela, into becoming the next great progressive novelist.16

The revolutionary moment into which Pamela struck fire in 1740 was not comparable to the one in 1764 when Walpole published The Castle of Otranto. And while the odd reactionary journalist might view Radcliffe as in league with the revolutionary regicides in France,17 the hostility to the Gothic novel in the 1790s (as we shall see in chapter 6) was primarily
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aesthetic rather than political. This is not to say that the Gothic was not a
vogue generated by its time and its concerns, or that the Gothic did not per­
form significant cultural work. We just need to be careful about what sort of
work it was doing. For the rest of the chapter, I would like to go into three
of the areas in which the Gothic novel was generated by the concerns and
needs of its time: (1) attitudes toward history, (2) attitudes toward suffering,
and (3) attitudes toward power.

Attitudes toward History

In some sense, everyone already knows that the Gothic romance was his­
torical in ways earlier genres of fiction generally were not. With certain
obvious exceptions—like Thomas Deloney’s *Thomas of Reading* or Daniel
Defoe’s *Journal of the Plague Year*—most prose narrative from the Tudor era
onward was set in the writer’s own time and place, and such pastiches on
history as had been occasionally produced earlier became increasingly rare
in the two decades after *Pamela*. But starting in the 1760s and continuing for
at least fifty years thereafter, romances based on history or at least set in the
past become a significant feature of English narrative. *The Castle of Otranto*
(1764) was one of these texts; others would include Thomas Leland’s
*Longsword, Earl of Salisbury* (1762), William Hutchinson’s *The Hermitage*
(1772), Clara Reeve’s *The Champion of Virtue* (1777, reprinted 1778 as *The
Old English Baron*), and *The Recess* (1783–85), by Sophia Lee. The Gothic
novel of Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin fits directly into this growing interest
in exciting and melodramatic narratives set in the remote past. All this is to
underline David Punter’s fertile suggestion that “the reason why it is so dif­
ficult to draw a line between Gothic fiction and historical fiction is that
Gothic itself seems to have been a mode of history, a way of perceiving an
obscure past and interpreting it” (59).

To say the Gothic novel is the historical novel at its stage of development
is to go against a long-standing critical tradition. Studies of the historical
novel begin with Scott, who seems to have sprung from nowhere.18 No one
would wish to deny that Scott was one of the great originals who shifted the
course of literary history; in chapters 4 and 5 new testimony to that view is
provided. But it is possible to lose sight of precisely what was original about
him—and to forget that his achievement was a development for which the
ground had been painstakingly prepared for half a century.19

The tradition I am going to be questioning in my Marxist approach to the
Gothic is the product of the reflection theory of the Marxist Georg Lukács. Lukács's master narrative has to begin with Scott because Scott arrives at what for Lukács is the right historical moment. In 1814 a new England is already politically victorious throughout Europe. The bourgeois revolution, so violent in France in the 1790s, is long past in England, and the country is becoming transformed socially by the industrial revolution. This age, in which the bourgeoisie are already politically empowered, already economically in the vanguard, is searching for an appropriate aesthetic form, one that will bring to self-consciousness the triumphant evolution of the emergent class. The taste and appetite for history is, for Lukács, a product of the bourgeois revolution, in which it is inevitable that "the idea of the nation becomes the property of the broadest masses" (25). Thus the historical novel will take over first in England, the most sociopolitically developed of the European nations, and the fashion and example of Scott will rapidly spread to France (Dumas, Balzac), Germany (Hauff, Fontane), and Russia (Tolstoy), as conditions permit (21–24).

Given his master narrative, Lukács had a vested interest in denying the relevance of any course of literary evolution leading up to Scott: to move the opening date of the English historical novel fifty years back to Leland and Walpole would spoil the pattern of political consolidation preceding the aesthetic embodiment of nationalism. Lukács to the contrary notwithstanding, the English fascination with medieval history and fictional versions of medieval history had begun around 1760. History had become one of the chief literary genres, while literature itself had become historical. Part of the impulse was indeed nationalistic. It isn't clear that "the idea of the nation" had by the 1760s become "the property of the broadest masses"—indeed it isn't clear that this had occurred by the time of Scott's Waverley either. But among the middle classes an enthusiasm for land and region had sprung up that surely has a great deal to do with the research of antiquaries like Richard Hurd (Letters on Chivalry and Romance [1762]) and Thomas Percy (Reliques of Ancient English Poetry [1765]).

Indeed, the national enthusiasm for matters medieval outran the ability to unearth the genuine article, and as a result manufacturing pseudomedieval texts became a cottage industry of the 1760s. The case of James MacPherson is classic: having whetted the enthusiasm of patriotic Scots through his Fragments of Ancient Poetry collected in the Highlands of Scotland, which he translated from the Erse (1760), MacPherson was led to create a medieval Scottish rival to Homer in Ossian, whose work he "translated" in Fingal (1762) and Temora (1763). Thomas Chatterton of Bristol imagined the monk Thomas
The Gothic in History

Rowley and tried to pass some of his work off as genuine with other medi­evalists such as Horace Walpole—with varying degrees of success—before his suicide in 1770.21

What may be behind all this is that the contested notions of “truth” and “virtue” that Michael McKeon felt were coming together in the 1740s had begun to diverge again in attitudes toward history in the latter half of the century among the medievalist antiquarians. For some, like Bernard de Fontenelle and Horace Walpole, the attraction of the Middle Ages was a superficia matter of taste without any deeper sympathy for its values. They valued its picturesque quality, its refreshing novelties of form against a stultifying Palladian regularity; a way of refreshing the neoclassical spirit without seriously challenging it. It was in a similar vein that the architects of Stowe and Stour Head had dropped decorative Gothic ruins and grottoes among the classical temples to Apollo and Diana.

On the other side were those for whom medievalism was not “a playful relaxation” but “at once a more intensely longed-for escape and a serious model of what ought to be.” According to Lionel Gossman, scholars like Joseph Ritson in England, Denis Diderot in France, and Johann Gottfried von Herder in Germany saw the medieval as “part of a more vigorously critical attitude to the society and civilization of the ancien régime as a whole”; in their hands “the Middle Ages became . . . a poetic and cultural myth directed against . . . absolutism and enlightened despotism” (Gossman 337). The division of attitudes runs right down the middle of certain individuals of the period: one thinks for example of the earlier Rousseau, for whom primitivism is primarily a playful pose, as opposed to the bitter Rousseau of the Discourses, for whom it is a remedy to the utter corruption of his society. This division of attitudes was typical of the late eighteenth-century British intelligentsia, and it informed not only the medieval historians of the latter eighteenth century—George Lord Lyttleton, Gilbert Stuart, John Pinkerton, and Sharon Turner—but also most other serious attempts to comprehend early English literature, like those of Samuel Johnson, Richard Hurd, and Thomas Warton.22

That the Middle Ages were the object of fascination simultaneously to a progressive “sans-culotte” like Ritson (Bronson 155) and to arch-conservatives like Walpole—and contemporaries of all the ideological stripes in between—seems paradoxical. The paradox can perhaps be resolved if we think of the last third of the eighteenth century as a period of rapid transition, in which the Enlightenment social compromises are under attack but no new system has yet found general acceptance. At such a time,
the Middle Ages became for people of all persuasions a medium of cultural work as an outlet for social fantasy. For the progressives, the Middle Ages are a time of the hegemony of the folk, whose voice sings to us in the ballads and the border minstrelsy. The Anglo-Saxons are often envisioned as a lost democracy or commonwealth, where the king reigns limited by the counsel of the fyrd, the people’s army. For the reactionaries, the Middle Ages are a time when the old order is unquestioned and unquestionable: where monarchs are absolute and despots need not even profess enlightenment. For both progressives and reactionaries, the embarrassing power of money and the moneyed interest—the emerging hegemonic class of rentier capitalists—can be conveniently ignored.

It is in the context of these contradictory ideological uses of medievalism in the latter part of the eighteenth century that we need to understand a text like *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Horace Walpole was, of course, one of the great British medievalists, but his standards of historical accuracy were not high, even for his own time. He even boasted of his ignorance: “I know nothing of barrows and Danish entrenchments, and Saxon barbarisms and Phoenician characters—in short, I know nothing of those ages that knew nothing.”23 There was even a strain of Augustan contempt for the rude manners of earlier times, when those manners could not be elided by the imagination. After inspecting John Pinkerton’s histories of medieval Scotland, Walpole sneered that he himself had “seldom wasted time on the origins of nations; unless for an opportunity of smiling at the gravity of the author; for absurdity and knavery compose almost all the anecdotes we have of them” (Peardon 144).

Walpole, like Thomas Warton, delighted in the Gothic taste, but unlike Warton (who insisted on keeping his medieval and modern cultural artifacts strictly separate), Walpole thought little of combining them. Thus in *Otranto* Walpole produced a mishmash of Enlightenment motivation with medieval detail, fabricating peculiar rituals and customs out of his baroque imagination, just as in his country house of Strawberry Hill he had begun his restoration by grafting battlements made of the very best papier-mâché onto a Palladian framework. If *The Castle of Otranto* has been interpreted psychologically as a Freudian fantasy of domination in which a son dubious about his legitimacy could symbolically defeat his overbearing father, Sir Robert Walpole, and acquire his own literary domain,24 Walpole took pains to distance the fantasy from himself and to attach it to history, though that relationship is also playfully factitious.25

The political structure of the text has it both ways too: it is simulta-
neously a revanchist restoration in which even the passing of four generations cannot keep the heir of Alonso from coming to his throne, and a progressive revolution that replaces the tyrannical royal family with a brave and intelligent shepherd boy. The entail of landed property is attacked through Manfred (whose warped feelings about his wife and daughter, whose hasty and cruel actions, are all driven by the need for a male heir) even as the supernatural manifestations insist even more literally and more violently on the same law of legitimate male inheritance. E. J. Clery—who sees the supernatural hand in the Gothic as an extension of the “invisible hand” of market capitalism—extends these contradictions to the realm of economics: “The concept of a harmonious identity of owner and property, self and object, takes on a demoniacal objective fatality which disrupts and dominates the lives of all the characters. The most important organizing structure in the narrative is the opposition between subject and object, between the characters with their desires, intentions and affections and the principle of property objectivised as the supernatural phenomena which obstruct their wishes at every turn” (74).

This is the sense in which the Gothic was, as Punter suggests, “a mode of history.” But this transitional period was informed by two conflicting modes of historiography, Enlightenment and Romantic. The former is typified by Thomas Leland’s *Longsword, Earl of Salisbury* (1762), published two years before *Otranto*. Leland was trying to make his historical sources, the *Mores Historiarum* of Roger of Wendover and the chronicle of Matthew of Paris, come alive for his contemporaries, and if the journalistic notices are any guide, he succeeded. Following the restrictions on literary probability in fiction proclaimed by Fielding, Leland stuck to probabilities, suppressing his historical sources’ reliance on the impossible and the marvelous. Leland’s novel is shaped not only by his antiquarian’s conception of history but also by the rationalistic historiography of Gibbon, Hume, and Robertson. Its reliance for plot materials and character types on the conventionalized sentimental melodrama of its own day unreflectively reproduces the dominant vision of history, in which progress is inscribed in changing manners and institutions, but in which the constant pattern is set by an unvarying human nature. Like Enlightenment history itself, Leland’s historical romance can “teach private virtue and correct public policy” based on exempla that cannot grow stale because they are based upon a pattern that is everywhere and always the same.

Romantic historiography presumes that human nature has evolved as well as dress and manners, and this vision is what we find in Sophia Lee’s
The Recess. To a contemporary reader, a summary of The Recess suggests a postmodern pastiche of history like Eco's Name of the Rose. The protagonists are twin sisters who discover themselves to be illegitimate daughters of Mary, Queen of Scots, by the duke of Norfolk. Matilda is secretly married to the earl of Leicester; her sister Ellinor becomes the lover of the earl of Essex. Both suffer in body and mind for their passions; in addition, Matilda's daughter gets involved with her cousin Prince Henry (the more intelligent and promising of James I's two sons) till she is poisoned by the mother of a rival in love.

The Recess carries the burden of a romantic version of history in one obvious sense—history is turned into romance, or even a soap opera—but it is also a parodic version, avant la lettre, of Hegel's idea of the World-Historical Individual whose will shapes the world. In The Recess, it is desire that re­shapes the world. For Lee, history is 100 percent personal: it is made in the bedroom, the nursery, the court banquet, rather than in the study, on the battlefield, or in the countinghouse. It may be too easy to patronize this way of understanding history. While educated readers may think today in terms of inexorable forces, most people, when they think of history at all, think about personalities, and the Hollywood historical epic (admired films, that is, from Birth of a Nation through Abe Lincoln in Illinois to Glory) has dealt in little else. Certainly Lee's contemporaries were not as sure as we might be that her vision of history was lacking in verisimilitude. Her reviewers divided down the middle on just that issue. While the English Review fulminated that "of all the kinds of disunion, the most ridiculous and contemptible . . . is that which forces into contact the historical and the fabulous," the Critical Review more soothingly opined that Lee's "near approaches to romance" occurred "without trespassing on probability" and "gratify the imagination without insult to the judgment."

Nevertheless, the appetite for the medieval that had been going on for a generation had populated it with people and institutions in the public mind, just as surely as the voyages of exploration of the sixteenth century had filled the blank spaces on the maps so that it was no longer possible to limn a dragon almost anywhere and annotate "Here be monsters." The monsters thus had to find an Otherwhen in which to operate. As a result, the Gothic novelists who followed Lee adopted the course of representing history vaguely, through atmosphere and period detail, hinting that the story told was a true-to-life narrative of an earlier time, while avoiding specific names, places, and dates that would make the story falsifiable against a historical record that through the efforts of the antiquarians was losing its dark corners.
Clara Reeve forthrightly set her *The Champion of Virtue* (1777) “in the minority of Henry the Sixth . . . when the renowned John Duke of Bedford was Regent of France, and Humphrey the good Duke of Gloucester was Protector of England.”28 However, once the story has been placed in one of the more chaotic stretches of the fifteenth century, when almost anything might happen, Reeve drops all specifics: except in the sentence quoted, no one known to history is even alluded to.29

The arch-creator of the Gothic romance, Ann Radcliffe, was neither an antiquary like Leland nor an unusually well-educated woman like Reeve and Lee. Without very much information on which to base a historical tale, Radcliffe usually avoided being overly particular. Her first novel, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), has an explicitly medieval setting, but period is set only by the weaponry and the architecture (the two Gothic castles of the title, complete with moats, portcullis, sally ports, and deep and complex dungeons). Radcliffe was devoted, not to the Middle Ages per se, but to the picturesque, and her medieval and Renaissance settings allow her to forge the descriptions of scenery and architecture at which she excelled. The reader suspects that the wife of wicked Baron Malcolm of Dunbayne, for example, is allowed to hail from Switzerland (surely an unlikely venue for a Highland chieftain’s consort) in order to allow Radcliffe to paint “one of those delightful vallies of the Swiss cantons” (*Castles* 143).

Radcliffe’s greatest success, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, is set in the interstices of history. It begins with a chronotopic annotation (“On the pleasant banks of the Garonne, in the province of Gascony, stood, in the year 1584, the chateau of Monsieur St. Aubert” [1]), but there is no reference to the historical events of the period, such as the momentous struggle in France in the mid-1580s, known as the “war of the three Henris,” between the king, Henri III; his overmighty subject the duc de Guise; and the Protestant heir to the French throne, the duc de Bourbon, later Henri IV. Rather than move the story into the paths of momentous events, Radcliffe steers clear of them, even assuring us that the military action that permanently ends Montoni’s hold on Udolpho occurs with such “celerity and ease” that it never finds “a place in any of the published records of that time” (*Udolpho* 522).

Radcliffe wants to place her story in an exotic locale and era but to avoid locating it with reference to historical movements and events. This contradictory tendency appears even more strongly, perhaps, in *The Italian*, which stresses yet vacates the historical veracity of the story. The story opens when an Englishman visiting the Convent of the Black Penitents in 1764 is given
by an Italian gentleman a manuscript based upon a sacramental confession (Italian 1). The circumstances seem to point to the authenticity and historicity of the tale to be unfolded, but they also point the other way. The year is that of the publication of Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (or of Radcliffe's own birth), and the claimed breach of the seal of the confession contradicts any Catholic doctrine. Few of her successors and imitators worked any harder at establishing the authenticity of their portraits.

The Gothic novel thus begins with *The Castle of Otranto* set in medieval history seen as a nightmare landscape where the probabilistic strictures of the present day are absent and where anything can happen, but—partly as a result of stimulating that interest in history—the Gothic soon finds the primitive past populated by genuine cultures and customs of its own. It is thus pushed out into a never-never land of vague otherness, elsewhere and elsewhen, where the drama of suffering can occur on its own terms.

**Attitudes toward Suffering**

The Gothic has been often considered an extension of the sentimental novel (typified by Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* [1771]), in that both attempt to extract the profoundest enjoyment from the representation of human misery. While the affective power and archetypal situations of the Gothic are different in a number of significant ways, the latter form originates in the sentimental and in many ways served a similar ideological function.

Janet Todd has defined sentimental literature as designed to arouse "pathos through conventional situations, stock familiar characters and rhetorical devices"; sentimentalism "reveals a belief in the appealing and aesthetic quality of virtue, displayed in a naughty world through a vague and potent distress. This distress is rarely deserved and is somehow in the nature of things... The distressed are natural victims, whose misery is demanded by their predicament as defenceless women, aged men, helpless infants or melancholic youths" (*Sensibility* 2–3). The response this is designed to call up in the reader, and does call up in the characters who function within the novels as surrogates for the reader, is sympathy, compassion, sorrow, tears. The focus of these texts is usually split between the subjects and the objects, those who demonstrate properly intense feeling and those who are the proper objects of that feeling.
The Man of Feeling is an episodic work recording the reactions of the eponymous hero, Mr. Harley, to scenes of misery like that of the young lady in Bedlam who has gone mad after the death of her lover:

She turned [her eyes] on Harley. "My Billy is no more!" said she, "do you weep for my Billy? Blessings on your tears! I would weep too, but my brain is dry; and it burns, it burns, it burns!"—She drew nearer to Harley.—"Be comforted, young Lady," said he, "your Billy is in heaven." "Is he, indeed? and shall we meet again? And shall that frightful man" (pointing to the keeper) not be there? Alas! I am grown naughty of late; I have almost forgotten to think of heaven: yet I pray sometimes, when I can, I pray; and sometimes I sing; when I am saddest, I sing. . . . I am a strange girl; but my heart is harmless: my poor heart! it will burst some day; feel how it beats." She press'd his hand to her bosom, then holding her head in the attitude of listening—"Hark! one, two, three! be quiet, thou little trembler; my Billy's is cold. . . ." She would have withdrawn her hand; Harley held it to his lips.—"I dare not stay longer; my head throbs sadly: farewell!" She walked with a hurried step to an apartment at some distance. Harley stood fixed in astonishment and pity! his friend gave money to the keeper.—Harley . . . put a couple of guineas into the man's hand: "Be kind to that unfortunate"—He burst into tears, and left them. (33-35)

The reader will detect a certain theatrical quality here, a self-conscious display of the superiority that comes from delicate feeling and virtuous action. At his most egotistically sublime, "the sensible man feels that he is an advanced type of being, of finer clay than the rest of the world, and though he pays for his superiority by weakness and anguish, he does not find the price too high, but regards with gentle scorn the low pleasures of the unthinking world" (Tompkins, Popular Novel 102). The display of sensibility was, as J. M. S. Tompkins found, "a modern quality; it was not found among the ancients but was the product of modern conditions. . . . the heroic . . . virtues might be dying out . . . but modern security, leisure and education had evolved a delicacy of sensation, a refinement of virtue, which the age found even more beautiful" (92–93).

In effect the mid-eighteenth century had witnessed a redefinition of the gentleman. In the seventeenth century the gentleman had been defined in terms of the aristocratic and martial virtues: he carried a sword to defend his honor with his heart's blood, and his politeness was the politesse of the soldier who realizes that his fellows demand the same deference he does. By the time of Mackenzie the seventeenth-century version of the gentleman
had been in effect redefined as a deviant: the rake or bully. The true gentleman was defined by his restraint\(^{33}\) rather than by his powers, and by feelings tender to the point of weakness.\(^{34}\)

This is a basic cultural shift\(^{35}\) and not merely a literary fashion, although the literature was a significant part of the cultural pattern, not just its reflection. The act of reading the texts of sensibility—sentimental novels like Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* and *Julia de Roubigné* (1777), or Thomas Bridges’s *Adventures of a Bank-Note* (1770–71) or Henry Brooke’s *Fool of Quality* (1764–70)—was a sort of spiritual training camp: it taught the reader the objects and forms of feeling and trained his or her responses. Texts of this sort were recommended from the pulpit by clergymen such as John Wesley as a way of reforming the reader.\(^{36}\)

During the period itself the class basis of the cult of the sentimental was deeply confusing. According to Janet Todd some eighteenth-century writers “saw sensibility as equalizing since it occurred in all ranks: at other times they considered it a property more or less exclusively of the higher and more genteel orders” (*Sensibility* 13).\(^{37}\) In fact, the reason for the confusion may in part have had to do with the fact that the development of sensibility was a crucial step in the evolution between aristocratic and bourgeois society. The reform in manners that exalted sensibility as the key quality of the gentleman opened the doors to genteel behavior to those on the fringes of the gentry. G. J. Barker-Benfield has argued that England had become “a mass consumer society” by 1750 as mercantile capitalism brought into the commercial capitals in quantity what had once been luxury goods by way of foodstuffs, liquors, and textiles. These consumer goods made it possible for the middle classes to ape easily the lifestyles of the aristocracy (xxv).\(^{38}\) The cult of sensibility was a way not only of reforming the aristocracy but of “getting the monied interest to make itself more mannerly” (146). This “self-fashioning” through the cult of sensibility would ultimately create the bourgeois society of the nineteenth century.

In his analysis of Sterne’s sentimentality, Robert Markley has put this social evolution in terms of a Marxist dialectic of class conflict.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, aristocratic and mercantile classes fought, intermarried, blurred, and redefined the always unstable demarcations between old wealth and new, country landholders and urban mercantilists. In this respect, sentimentality is not a simple indication of the “rise” of a monolithic bourgeois ideology but a register of the literary complexities arising from the
need to come to terms with class relations seemingly perpetually in turmoil. Sentimentality manifests the anxiety of a class-stratified society trying both to assert "traditional" values and to accommodate as "gentlemen" increasing numbers of economically—if not always politically—aggressive merchants, professionals, small landowners, and moneymen. In the case of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* Eagleton's "historical alliance" is effected only by the middle class's trying to outrefine the aristocracy by embracing the conservative biases of a hierarchical social system, and by actively demonstrating their claims to the same kind of innate, ahistorical moral authority that had been, for Shaftesbury, the exclusive preserve of the upper classes. (217)

Sentimentality allows the bourgeois to imitate the reformed aristocrat, but it is also implicitly hierarchical because the scene of sentiment, the tableau in which the person of sensibility confronts the pain and suffering of others and attempts to relieve it, is one that only works *de haut en bas*. And if suffering makes the poor visible to those well off, it makes them visible only as emblematic individuals, symbols of an underclass that as a class cannot and need not be changed. Yorick relieves the distresses of the poor but betrays "a generic lack of interest in the causes of poverty" (Markley 225).

This becomes a significant issue when we ask how the sentimental evolved into the Gothic. Here I recur to Janet Todd's remark that distress in the sentimental novel is that of "natural victims" the causes of whose victimization remain "vague." The vagueness is intentional. It has been a commonplace since Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926) that in the eighteenth century the poor were not God's creatures as they had been in the Middle Ages; instead it was accepted that the godly would succeed in this world as well as in the next and that there must be something wrong, spiritually, with those who did not succeed.

The point is that, so long as the general causes of poverty and other forms of misery were presumed to be vice, inquiring into those general causes would be a dangerous mistake: it would deprive the tableau of suffering of more than half its moral value were the sensible man (or woman) to be viewed as in sympathy with what was most usually produced by wickedness, intemperance, imprudence. It may not be an accident that at the time that the sentimental novel began to be parodied and to go out of fashion—the late 1770s—a book had appeared that implied that wealth and poverty were the result not of virtue and wickedness (as with Hogarth's industrious and idle apprentices) but the mechanical workings of an "invisible hand" of supply and demand: Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776).
I don’t want to relate Smith’s all powerful invisible hand to Walpole’s all too visible one in armor. My point is rather that Smith’s enormously influential vision of economic society was of a system that worked amorally, without heroes and villains, to produce its results. This meant, rationally, that the innocent victims one saw—and the poor in their millions that one did not see—were all produced by the same system that had rewarded with wealth and ease the man of sensibility. If one accepted this vision, the classic tableau of the sentimental novel became unviewable: What moral credit, what gentlemanly self-fashioning, could lie in assisting the poverty that had made one rich? In *Virtue in Distress*, R. F. Brissenden has suggested that the ultimate collapse of the cult of sensibility came out of the growing sense that widespread misery was a function of the proper working of the economic system.

One result was an attempt to avoid the spectacle of poverty and ruin completely and to seek desperately for what Mrs. Barbauld called a “new torture or nondescript calamity” that could re-create for sentimental fiction the tableau of pleasing distress. But after Adam Smith, the spectacle of distressed innocence required the complementary spectacle of guilt. To achieve that, one had to reinstate the villain that had been sidelined in sentimental fiction, a demonized version of the rake or the bully who had been demoted from the position of aristocratic hero. The insertion of the Bad Guy in effect created the Gothic novel of Radcliffe in place of the sentimental novel of Mackenzie. Generically the forms are related but distinct. As David Denby put it in his study of French sentimentalism, “The melodramatic and the Gothic are certainly inscribed as latent possibilities in sentimentalism: in contradistinction to sentimentalism they require, perhaps, an insistence on the threat to virtue posed by a strongly personified villain, or principle of villainy, and a heightening of the obfuscation of virtue by various narrative devices, namely peripety and deceit” (87).

But in the Gothic the principle of villainy was the old aristocratic principle: that of privilege, and the contradictory attitudes toward privilege in the ancien régime which went into the creation of the Gothic.

**Attitudes toward Power: The Unguarded Door**

In the last two sections, we have been working from a perspective that has been called “cultural materialism,” examining what Raymond Williams called the forms of feeling that are in solution within society and that
precipitate out into literature. To discuss the contradictory attitude of the Gothic romance toward the Old Regime, we need to adopt the theoretical method of Pierre Macherey. Macherey indeed devoted several pages of *A Theory of Literary Production* to an interpretation of a French forgery of Radcliffe, and his stray remarks are of interest as a contribution to the structuralist interpretation of the mystery story (27–29). But the issue I want to raise here comes out of Macherey's essay on Jules Verne, which has become a model for post-Althusserian criticism.

In "Jules Verne: The Faulty Narrative," Macherey shows how Verne's plans for his novels went awry. *The Mysterious Island*, for example, had originated in Verne's wish to rewrite *Robinson Crusoe* more rigorously by showing how castaways with a knowledge of science manage to re-create modern technology out of nothing within an empty land. But by introducing Nemo and the crew of his submarine to this plot, Verne subverts his own plan. The book implicitly acknowledges that there are no empty lands, merely ones whose aborigines are rendered invisible by imperialist ideology, and that technology cannot arise out of nothing but pure scientific knowledge but must in fact come out of a technological social organization. In this Macherey argues that the rifts in Verne's plot are there because of preexisting rifts in the ideology of bourgeois capitalism, and that the novel itself, as an aesthetic practice whose raw materials are ideology, tends to force these rifts wider as it foregrounds them by making them visible to the reader.\(^4\)

Applying this approach to the Gothic is not straightforward, since Macherey deals best with a single text and not an author's oeuvre, still less an entire genre. Nevertheless we must start somewhere, with a few individual exemplars, especially the ones that became models for later imitation. We should begin with *The Castle of Otranto*, which established virtually all the principal conventions—which later writers used more effectively—plus the much-imitated *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Melmoth the Wanderer*. And the central question is Macherey's: How do these novels function in the production of ideology? Specifically, how do they foreground the contradictions within current ideology?

Given the dates of the Gothic, it may be tempting to view the genre as concerned, in some covert fashion, with industrialization, but in fact the social changes caused by the machine age occurred later, and many of the writers were not in much contact with technological innovation, though they undoubtedly were aware of it. (It is not really until Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* that we find a piece of fiction that turns directly on what might be called the alienation of the technological worker from the product of his
Most Gothic novels are equally silent, apparently, on the great political issues of the day, and in fact they are usually set back in the past and far away—on the Continent.

But that may in fact be the key. The argument of the Gothic novel does not seem to reflect contemporary ideology but rather seems to hark back to a state earlier even than preindustrial capitalism. Indeed, the Gothic is nostalgic for the social order of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. It tends to present a rigidly feudal class structure typical of the sixteenth century or earlier and a religion (Catholicism) that had not been dominant in England for nearly two hundred years. Both Paulson and Ellis note this fact but do not seem to find it significant. It seems irrelevant to their arguments in which age their figurations of eighteenth-century conflicts were set, or what dress they wore. But why should the form not have its content? To use Macherey's terms, the point is that this apparent nostalgia for the feudal appears on the level of "reflection"; on the level of "figuration" the novels are about something very different. The major Gothic novels do not come out of one mold, of course, but I think there is something equivalent to Verne's Nemo functioning as a central rift within them. Macherey himself alludes vaguely to the Gothic theme of the inside and the outside (96). What I have in mind is something much more specific: let me call it the unguarded door.

Consider the situation of Emily in The Mysteries of Udolpho, trapped by her hideous aunt and her husband, the mysterious, domineering Montoni, within the walls of Castle Udolpho, her lover, Valancourt, outside, powerless to enter to save her. The reader spends three hundred pages participating anxiously in Emily's tergiversations, observing her ricocheting around the castle, fearing rape and murder at every noise, always looking for a way out until finally, in the ninth chapter of the third book, she and her fellow prisoner Du Pont, together with assorted servants, do little more than simply walk out into the Tuscan countryside. "Emily was so much astonished by this sudden departure," Radcliffe tells us, "that she scarcely dared to believe herself awake" (Udolpho 452). It is as though the castle had always been a dream prison.

The very same situation recurs twice in Melmoth the Wanderer, the novel that takes some of the devices of Radcliffian suspense to their emotional end points. It is hard to forget the enthrallment of Stanton in the madhouse, or of Moncada in the monastery. The latter, especially, spends harrowing nights trapped in a tunnel in an attempted escape with a parricide monk, who ultimately betrays him to the Inquisition. Maturin makes the reader concentrate intensely on the way men can be turned into caged animals, but
ultimately both Stanton and Monçada are released: Stanton is set free without any rational explanation, while Monçada, in a moment of tumult, finds himself temporarily unguarded, and with a sense of ease that comes as a severe anticlimax, escapes his torment as though it had never been real.\(^{46}\)

The origin of this pattern, as of so many others, can be found in *The Castle of Otranto*, can be found more than once, in fact. In chapter 1 Isabella escapes from enthrallment by Manfred of Otranto through the comically described inattention of her guards. And in chapter 3 the hero Theodore, under sentence of death, escapes in almost exactly the same way, when Manfred sends everyone who can be spared in pursuit of Isabella, and Theodore’s guards mistakenly assume that the order supersedes their previous duties. Matilda, Manfred’s daughter, informs Theodore that she has saved him, but her feat consists primarily in supplying the information that there is no one at all in the castle except the two of them.\(^ {47}\)

In an era that had produced the complex plot machinery of *Tom Jones*, the inattention to the means of these characters’ escape from their various imprisonments is striking. Surely if they wished, Walpole, Radcliffe, and Maturin could have invented elaborate machinery for delivering their respective victims of persecution as ingenious as Jacques Futrelle’s contrivances for delivering his detective from Cell 13. That they did not do so suggests that the prisons were unreal in the first place, prisons of the mind from which one finds oneself freed when one no longer considers oneself bound.

We can understand the historical significance of the Gothic novel while avoiding allegory entirely if we conceive of it as a production of ideology appropriate for the age of the French Revolution, an age in which the chains of feudal authority were snapped less by the violent fury of the people than by an equally sudden deflation of belief in the source of that authority. England, in what was surely less violent a manner and over a longer period than France, was experiencing the same crisis, in which the authority of the feudal aristocracy, based on tenure of land, gave way to the less centralized authority of the bourgeoisie, based on commerce and manufacturing. In both cases, however, the imagined hegemony of the ruling class proved to be a myth whose source of power was simply temporary inability to see it as myth. Ideology in one of Althusser’s senses—the structure that life in society gives to thought—turns into ideology in the other sense: false consciousness, palpably false and arbitrary. The dungeon door that had been imagined so solid and impassable turns out, upon inspection, to be open and unguarded; the autocratic authority of the prince turns out to conceal a
genuine power vacuum. From within the prison Prince Manfred or Signor Montoni seems to be omnipotent; from outside, he seems an incompetent and petty tyrant. And the Theodores and the Emilies, once imprisoned within the walls, eventually succeed legitimately to their estates.

I am not suggesting that Walpole, Radcliffe, and Maturin were revolutionaries—far from it. According to the biographical information we have, all three were almost as far from sympathy with Jacobinism as one could get. Nor do I think that there was any conscious encoding of politics in the Gothic novel. In fact, the Gothic was on the surface an evasion of contemporary politics and a repudiation of the radical use of political fiction by such writers as William Godwin and Robert Bage. So what I am talking about is the political unconscious and the role of literature in the "return of the repressed." However sincere the sympathy of the novelists with established authority, their plots invest the tyrants with a power so great and so absolute (as it is seen from within) that no mechanism can be found for circumventing it; it can be evaded only by treating it as a dream of oppression from which one happily wakes up.

In chapter 5 I develop the notion that the Gothic novel sits astride a major rift in aesthetic ideology, a shift away from reading for pleasure and instruction toward *aisthesis*, toward reading for imaginative play and escape. It cannot be a mere accident that the structure of suspense of the Gothic demands a more empathic identification of the reader with the protagonist, and it cannot be an accident that both the reader and the protagonist of the Gothic novel share an intense need to escape. In a sense the experience of the reader, however, is the obverse of the hero's; while the hero finds his or her prison a nightmare from which the unguarded door permits an apparently unlicensed escape from the imaginary into a less fraught and terrifying reality, the reader of the Gothic finds reality itself a prison of vacancy and seeks an escape into an imaginary closer to the world of desire.