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Kevin I. Flotte
University of New Orleans, kiflotte@uno.edu

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Cognitive Castles: Place and *The Castle of Otranto*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in English

by

Kevin Flotte

B.A. University of New Orleans 2011

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Psychological and Historical Perspectives.....	4
Place and Cognitive Cultural Theory.....	6
A Cognitive Cultural Reading of Place in <i>The Castle of Otranto</i>	12
Bibliography.....	35
Vita.....	38

Introduction

Place in gothic horror has traditionally been studied through a combination of historical and psychological perspectives. These perspectives provide valuable insight, since they examine the historical origins and meanings of places, such as the medieval castle and the subterranean tunnel. However, the role of evolved human biology, as explored through such fields as cognitive science, environmental aesthetics, and environmental psychology, has not been connected to these studies of place. For example, authors of gothic capitalize on reader's perception that dark locations where sight is limited are negative, scary, and potentially dangerous, but human dependence on sight as the evolved primary means of human orientation has not been analyzed in connection to the literary representation of scary and potentially dangerous places. In addition, the human role in constructing place based on understandings, such as the shared mental material of common historical narratives and its connection to social learning as an evolved cognitive trait, has not been considered.

Tracing the development of the subversive and revolutionary elements of the gothic castle and their contrast to neoclassical ideals generates historical information about place that often informs the critical examination of texts. Evolutionary perspectives offer to connect the specific narratives of historical criticism with the adapted function of narrative thinking. Historical accounts help to satisfy the adapted need for creating meaning, which expedites decision-making and orientation for humans in complex and dynamic surroundings. Human dependence on narrative as an organizational structure that functions to include and exclude information mediates the perception of locations. For example, shared historical narratives inform the construction of the medieval castle in that the perceived excessive, emotional, and transgressive

qualities of place are linked to physical descriptions through these shared accounts. The association of physical, intellectual, and emotional content with the physical elements of an area allows for condensing enormous amounts of information into more easily handled units.

Furthermore, cognitive perspectives, such as the one presented by Nancy Easterlin in *A Biocultural Approach to Literary Theory and Interpretation*, show people to be as much a part of the environment as trees, water, mountains, and other natural phenomenon. Not only are people and other species a part of place, but people and their adapted human minds are intrinsically related to the representations of place in literature in that they also construct place based on evolved human needs. Moreover, human perception, cognition, and experience in construction or representation of environment are central to the conception of and mediation of the environment by the mind (Easterlin, *Biocultural* 93). Cognitive ecocriticism, environmental psychology, and biocultural literary theory inform the present thesis, which examines how the instances of place in *The Castle of Otranto* are created by the adapted human mind. I use the term “environment” to indicate the surrounds that exist independently of the human mind. The utilization of the term “place” follows that of cognitive science, environmental psychology, and biocultural literary theory and includes human predispositions and considerations of perception, cognition, and understanding. Easterlin cites Altman and Low who define place as “space given meaning through individual and group processes” (*Ecocriticism, Place Studies, and Colm Tóibín* 4). Horace Walpole builds the conceptual place of horror in *The Castle of Otranto* through the representation of the subterranean tunnel, the violence of Manfred, and the medieval castle as a

revolutionary place of superstition and emotion.

Place is not static, but rather is an ongoing process that can be both habituated or brought to our attention. Decreased response to repeated stimulus, or habituation, facilitates economically handling enormous amounts of information in familiar and otherwise disinteresting locations while offering the evolutionary benefits of directing focus to elements that endanger and threaten or otherwise draw interest. Habituation more efficiently distributes limited mental abilities through strategies aimed at disregarding familiar details within locations while allocating interest to dynamic, dangerous features. For example, the familiar details of one's home may go unnoticed day after day, but a strange noise or sudden unfamiliar movement will draw immediate attention. The continuous creation of place is accomplished through senses such as sight, hearing, or touch, as well as by emotional, intellectual, and evaluative judgments based on evolved needs. Adapted desires for social groups, resources, and safety, and aversion to places that lack these qualities, guide these judgements. In addition, as Rachel Kaplan and Stephen Kaplan have shown, people prefer locations that communicate these elements in a way that adheres to our means of understanding. Behavioral variations in people and nonhuman species and abrupt changes such as movement, sudden sounds, changes in light, or a gust of wind compel re-assessment and focus attention to our surroundings. Human relationships, both positive and negative, produce ongoing affective judgments and levels of attachment to locations that are instrumental to this process. Emotional ties to family, kin, friends and the ongoing assessment of these relationships is central to place as a process of attributing meaning as is the

physical information continuously gathered through our senses.

Section 2: Psychological and Historical Perspectives

The current criticism of gothic horror that focuses on place relies heavily on historical, psychological, or theoretical approaches. The dominant perspective of current psychological criticism is that the suspension of everyday rules in the inverted, uncanny, and distant worlds of the gothic castle creates spaces in which the psychological processes of the reader can be reflected back to them in a morally instructive way. Anna Jackson, for instance, argues that the dark cavernous hallways and subterranean spaces of *The Castle of Otranto* are psychologically representative of the interiority of the reader. Dark and internally winding, the gothic castle gives the impression of being isolated and cut off from the outside world. The castle allows for alienation, confusion, and the separation from society, convention, and law. Interior complexity and murkiness make possible the metaphorical association with the reader's own internal psychological processes. The secret tunnels, dark hallways, and hidden places create opportunities for unseen movement, undiscovered transgressions, and subversive social behavior.

A theme that arises from several of Fred Botting's and Jackson's works and from gothic criticism in general is that gothic texts from their beginnings have subverted rational society by releasing the irrational and emotional forces that are repressed in the individual and in society. Gothic elements produce uncanny places introducing the reader's desires and fears. These externalized fears and desires can then be dealt with in a psychologically healthy way. Gothic elements are “particularly apt for the metaphorical exploration of the vicissitudes of adolescent

identity” (Jackson 4). Horror renews, according to Botting, “a sense of self and social value: threatened with dissolution, the self, like the social limits which define it, reconstitutes its identity against the otherness and loss presented in the moment of fear”(9). The uncanny makes the familiar strange by blurring all boundaries and potential limits, which allows for social or personal change.

In “In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture,” Botting states that the gothic employs “a sense of discontinuity through inversion and distancing which allows for a perfected reflection”(4). Botting uses both historical and psychological perspectives in his criticism, analyzing the gothic's affect on readers while providing historical context, background, and analysis. Botting traces the meaning of the word “Gothic” from a derogatory term that “conjured up ideas of barbarous customs and practices, of superstition, ignorance, extravagant fancies and natural wildness”(22). Similarly, Walpole used the word gothic to signify the Germanic tribes who “opposed to all forms of tyranny and slavery, the warlike, Gothic tribes of northern Europe were popularly believed, to have brought down the Roman Empire” (Botting 5). The word brings with it the threat of destruction against the unifying forces of Neoclassical thought. “Gothic” is loaded with ideas of the emotional, barbaric and even the animalistic alternative to the civilized world of eighteenth century England. It is the chaotic and uncontrollable past threatening the order of society.

The psychological processes described by Jackson and Botting did not appear fully formed in their present state to be used as metaphorical material in literature, but are, rather, the

adapted results of evolutionary needs. New fields, such as environmental psychology as represented by the work of Kaplan and Kaplan and the work of cognitive literary theorists including Lisa Zunshine, Nancy Easterlin, Joseph Carroll, and Robert Storey, offer to build on these perspectives. The psychological and historical criticism of gothic horror, such as the work of Jackson and Botting, can be placed within an evolutionary context that acknowledges the adaptive qualities of the human mind. One such adapted need is people's dependence on continuous information to orient themselves within the environment. Gothic authors capitalize on the psychological responses to locations, such as fear, hesitation, and confusion, by presenting scenarios that frustrate the adapted need for information, such as dark tunnels in gothic horror novels, utilizing evolved psychological and emotional responses for metaphorical use in literature. Emotional and psychological responses depend on the degree to which an environment adheres to adapted needs, such as the need for resources, safety, information, and understanding. Literature and other cultural productions reflect these needs, but are not conscious representations of these underlying adapted pressures. Culture is not an isolated system that operates independently, removed from evolutionary and genetic pressures. Culture is, according to Joseph Carroll, the organizational means by which we deal with genetic dispositions. Depictions of place in literature are an expression of genetic pressures, and the adapted needs of those pressures, such as the psychological processes emphasized by Botting and Jackson.

Section 3: Place and Cognitive Cultural Theory

Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment that, initially, developed based on

political concerns about human environmental degradations. The ethically inflected origins of the field focused critical attention on human attitudes toward nonhuman nature. However, as ecocriticism has grown analysis of conceptualizations such as nature, culture, and place have gained importance. The human role in constructing these concepts leaves ecocritics attempting to balance human concerns with the political goals that were foundational to the field. Easterlin states that “Struggling with how to include human perspectives alongside ethical consciousness, some scholars have increasingly recognized that the notion of place is of central importance in conceptualization to the material world” (Ecocriticism, Place Studies, and Colm Tóibín 1). The quality of human relationships associated with physical locations influences attitudes, feelings, and attachments to certain areas. Recent research into human attachment to locations by place studies offers a path forward.

Nevertheless, current dominant notions of place in ecocriticism avoid the concept of place attachment. Lawrence Buell states that “[The construction of place] is the fraught relation between environment and emplacement. Devotees of place-attachment can easily fall into a sentimental environmental determinism”(66). “Emplacement” is a passively imagined term that does not allow for more than an invisible hand having planted someone or a group in a particular location without reason. The beneficial qualities of an individual location or the likelihood of occupation of a particular area are ignored by the emplacement concept. In addition, the adapted pressures that inform what people judge favorably or unfavorably is ignored because the concept of emplacement does not recognize that people actively seek out favorable locations. Easterlin

states that this view of place does not allow for the dynamic relationship between place and person.

The concern of ecocritics such as Buell is that the concept of place attachment will lead to conclusions that in the past were used to support racial theories, essentialist identities, harmful anti-immigration policies, and irresponsible use of resources. However, the aversion to place attachment leaves unexplained the fact that people are drawn to or feel attached to certain locations and avoid others individually or as groups. The place of an individual's birth or upbringing is particularly likely to be a preferred as are settings that provide resources, lack predators, and provide safety. In addition, the concept of evolutionary and adapted pressures on humans necessitates dynamic interaction and presence in an environment. Place as strictly a social construction imagines a non-adapted human being or group whose social being exists outside of evolutionary pressures. Emotional and intellectual attachment to place relies on evolved preferences for areas that offer the ability to control resources, lack predators, and provide safety. Further, locations that clearly demonstrate the desired information in a way that adheres to human predispositions for creating understanding are more likely to be valued.

Place as strictly a social construction would appear endlessly circular in that people would first have to be in a location in order to collectively generate a shared conception of place. According to Kaplan and Kaplan, environment is created with reference to an outside that is independent of the mind, but also must adhere to human limitations and adapted desires. Evolutionary perspectives require an outside, as well as accurate information about that external

reality, in order for evolution and the favorable survival outcomes of adaptation to occur. In addition, structurally adapted strategies of interpretation help individuals achieve some comprehension and cope with confusing scenarios and experiences. Kaplan and Kaplan argue that “If one has a way of relating what one experiences to an internal model, confusion is reduced. In effect, one must be able to tell oneself a story about it” (Cognition and Environment 132). As we struggle to make sense of the environment, adapted pressures guide what information we are able to gather as well as the type of information that we desire. How we know structurally limits what we know and guides what information we seek from the environment. The communicative process of writing, and the descriptions of place in that writing, adhere to internal models as the writer seeks to relay or transfer real or imaginary experiences through story-telling. Representations of environment, such as those in literature, that seek to transfer real or imagined information adhere to and are informed by real-world experiences of place and the adapted structures that guide these experiences. Human considerations such as cognitive maps and place preference help to create understanding and meaning in the environment.

Kaplan and Kaplan's *With People in Mind: Design and Management of Everyday Nature* divides the factors that lead to place preference based on two categories that emerged from studies on environmental preferences. The studies relied on participants looking at slides of different areas and ranking them on a scale of one to five. Participant rankings showed a great deal of consistency in areas that were viewed negatively and favorably. The conclusion of the

studies was that people preferred environments that adhered to their cognitively adapted desires for understanding and exploration. Participants ranked places that did not adhere to their adapted needs less favorably.

The first category, understanding, speaks to the degree to which people are able to make sense of their world. Understanding provides a sense of security as well as determining what information is able to be derived from a locale. The information is gained not only from the contents, but also from the organization of those elements in the location. Understanding indicates the degree to which information is successfully gathered and organized. People prefer environments that lend themselves to the adapted human needs for resources, safety, and orientation because these features provide understanding. For instance, large desolate expanses that lack basic necessities such food opportunities, water, and places to hide receive a negative reaction. In addition, disordered or overly complicated organization of a location may create a sense of fear, dislike, and disorientation. For example, a location where whiteout conditions created by a blizzard prevent or hinder information gathering receive negative evaluative judgements from subjects. Scenes with similar amounts of snow where landmarks are visible and create the ability to gather, orient, and order information received more favorable evaluative judgments. Disordered locations often produce negative reactions that are stronger than those that effectively communicate a lack of basic necessities.

Exploration is the second category that Kaplan and Kaplan identify as important for place preference. Exploration refers to the desire to expand horizons, seek more information, and

find new challenges. The degree of interest that a place generates is often tied to its suitability for exploration. Unique settings that offer the potential for new information and insight into the world display elements that are adaptively preferred. Places that show the potential for resources, favorable weather conditions, and a lack of predators gather more favorable responses than those places that lack these elements. The human species is heavily dependent on information for survival. Physical cues that hint at complexity and mystery suggest more of the information that we desire creating interest in that setting.

In addition to physical stimuli, emotions influence dynamic and evaluative constructions of place. The word place “is highly charged with human connotations, affective tone, and cultural factors with physical locations” (Easterlin, *BioCultural*. 111). Family, groups, and social relations inform the active process of creating and maintaining a connection to and an affinity for certain areas. For example, Easterlin argues that the strong ties to a particular setting begin with bonding between mother and child, child and family, child and his physical environment. The extension from caregiver to a particular area builds a connection from which attachment springs. The bonding between mother and child is only one instance that demonstrates the emotional ties developed for a location that meets adapted needs. Affective ties to a specific place that adequately meets needs for affection, sociality, and resources prevents members of the species from wandering off from favorable circumstances. Emotional attachment to an area informs an ongoing estimation that balances new locations and opportunities with the benefits of the known and familiar. Needs such as resources, safety, and sociality create partiality for settings that offer

these benefits and a negative judgment for those that lack these qualities. Human's status as both a wayfinding species capable of adapting to new environments and searching out new opportunities must be balanced with the human dependence on social groups and familiar locales.

SECTION 4: A Cognitive Cultural Reading of Place in *The Castle of Otranto*

Place in *The Castle of Otranto* functions through numerous means: reader's expectations and understandings of the medieval castle, naming and the conceptual function of language, Walpole's aesthetic statements, and the physical depictions of locations. The historical information communicated through the representation of the castle, the physical descriptions, and the characters each play a role in determining place in the novel. In addition, naming the castle, the novel's action being set in an ancient past, and the plot's struggle for power each affect the perception of physical locations. Walpole further develops place through the prefaces to the first and second editions as he provides a perspective through which to interpret the text. Cultural information lends greater context and understanding which helps to orient the reader. However, strategies such as the gothic tunnel, confusion, fear, ambiguity, and strangeness create disorientation and undercut the need for information about the environment.

ORIENTATION

Matthew Reeve asserts that “The gothic was for Walpole a lost past of political freedom and liberty” (413). Walpole first demonstrated his aesthetics with the faux medieval castle, Strawberry Hill. *The Castle of Otranto* is a literary extension of the aesthetic positioning of

Walpole's little castle in suburban London. The preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto* claimed authorship for Walpole and, also, introduces the aesthetic statements that Walpole wished to make in creating the novel. Walpole's aesthetic statement, that lies in the greater context of neoclassical ideals and aesthetic theories of the time, is rooted in place. Walpole viewed classical and neoclassical architecture and art representative of an oppressive political period that stifled creative and intellectual freedom. The setting of the novel is a carefully constructed aesthetic statement that loosens the boundaries of politics, place, past, and culture.

Walpole defines the novel, and the construction of place in the novel, by capitalizing on the shared mental material of the past. Utilizing conceptions that go beyond physical elements, Walpole's medieval castle communicates more than certain architectural features. Sexual, political, economic, and social circumstances create knowledge and judgements about the probability of behaviors, attitudes, and events. People's expectations are created not only by basic elements such as materials, shape, and size, but also by cultural information that lends greater context and understanding of place. Walpole's use of the medieval setting draws on the stories of the past that his culture shares. Structural adaptations, such as the reliance on narrative organization, achieve clarity and function not only to bring some information to the forefront, but also to discard information deemed unimportant, confusing, or nonessential. Kaplan and Kaplan argue that "To form a coherent pattern, a body of material must, in effect, tell a story. It must have connections leading from one part to the next. In this way sequence is established and a

structure created. And structure is, as we have seen, a powerful factor in the comprehension of information” (Cognition and Environment 184). The Catholic, Italian, and medieval past that Walpole employs creates place in the novel through accessing the shared expectations, understandings, and information of historical narratives about that particular time and place.

Walpole, in part, builds the novel's construction of place in the preface to the first edition. The shared narratives accessed through the use of historic and cultural material create expectations as they organize information, providing clarity. Medieval Italy was seen as a time and place ruled by superstition and emotion rather than by the logic and restraint that typified Neoclassical ideals. Walpole makes use of these materials through representing a location that psychologically and historically possessed these qualities. The uncivilized and barbaric setting allows for “selfish ambitions and sexual desires beyond the prescriptions of law and familial duty”(Botting 4). It is into this context that Walpole thrusts his novel by claiming, upon initial publication, that the novel was a medieval Italian manuscript, from Naples, that had been rediscovered in the home of an ancient Catholic family in Northern England. Walpole's fictional date of printing for the manuscript was 1529, and he claimed that the writing, if it occurred soon after the events of the novel were supposed to have happened, would have occurred between 1095 and 1243, positioning it between the first and last crusade (Walpole 59). He misled his initial readers to believe that the place of the novel was medieval Catholic Italy. Walpole's attribution of the novel to the fictitious Onuphio Muralto added credibility to the position that this was an ancient work that did not have to abide by the aesthetics of the day. Walpole, through

this misattribution, was doing more than denying his own authorship. He was building a conception of place that pervades the text.

The medieval setting exploits the evaluative response of Walpole's anticipated audience based on the shared historical narratives or stories about the past. Joseph Carroll argues that "Novelists select and organize their material for the purposes of generating an emotionally charged evaluative response, and readers become emotionally involved in stories, participate vicariously in the experiences depicted, and form personal opinions about the characters" (4). Walpole's use of the shared emotional responses to the medieval, Catholic, and distant world helps to guide and instruct his audience as they form opinions, vicariously participate, and choose which character with whom to identify. Dynamic elements that are in flux create a desire for a conclusion as the reader actively seeks to create meaning and understanding of the presented scenarios. Cognitive mastery of the world that surrounds us depends upon making judgments, and determining causation as well as the probability of events. Employing the gothic castle allowed Walpole to construct a place that capitalized of the perceived improbability of the ancient romances. The stress, violence, and animated past throws our senses into confusion and informs the reader that the regular rules do not apply. The castle is a place that allows for the blending of imaginative material of the distant past with the attempts to provide the realistic representations of the modern romances.

Walpole explains in the preface to the second edition that *The Castle of Otranto* is an attempt to apply Edmund Burke's aesthetic theories as they were espoused in *A Philosophical*

Inquiry. Burke seeks to combine the then fashionable idea of the sublime with the also fashionable eighteenth century focus on nature. Adam Phillips cites Boulton's assertion that "throughout the Enquiry Burke is principally concerned with the responses of the human mind to emotive objects and experiences"(xi). The focus is on natural phenomena to the exclusion of built environments and people as elements of that environment. Burke presents natural environments as something outside of the human subject that affect the human mind. In applying these concepts to the novel form, Walpole injects characters into the perceived environment. The text contains very little scenery outside of man-made built environment, since the majority of the text occurs within the castle. Walpole's novel presents the responses of the human mind to emotive objects in a built environment that includes people and culture as elements of that place. In *The Castle of Otranto*, place is informed not only by physical information, but also by cultural and historical narratives that combine subjective and objective understandings.

Cognitive mapping appears to be the bridge between the subjective understandings and emotional reactions to environment and objective traits of the environment. Kaplan and Kaplan assert that "The cognitive map thus appears to be a promising concept in the study of environmental cognition. Since a person's reactions to and feelings about an environment are as much a function of how that environment is known, of the model one has of it, as they are a function of the environment itself, this concept would seem to be a vital link between the physical world and subjective experience" (Cognition and Environment 6). Cognitive maps include both physical elements, such as is gathered through vision and hearing, as well as

nonphysical understandings, such as cultural, emotional and intellectual information bridging subjective and objective elements of a location. The shared cultural and historical understanding of the medieval past that Walpole utilizes as he creates place in *The Castle of Otranto* generate the subjective experience that allows for the superstitions, selfish ambitions, emotion, and excess of the novel. These shared histories are combined with physical elements, creating familiarity as well as understanding, confidence in assumptions and expectations, and orientation within an environment.

Kaplan and Kaplan employ the example of attempting to cross a stream by stepping on a series of stones. Initially, the person hesitantly steps on the first stone, looks around, balances precariously, cautiously puts their foot on the next stone while applying a little weight, draws their foot back, tries it again, and slowly transfers all of their weight to the next stone gradually crossing the stream. Several attempts later, the person quickly and confidently strides across the stones and crosses the stream without hesitation (3). Initially, the lack of information and familiarity with the circumstances creates fear and hesitation. Experience, information, and familiarity in this simple example lead to greater success and greater mastery of the place dependent circumstances.

Navigating complex and dynamic places that include human social interaction is far more complicated than simply gathering information about whether the stone will tip over or where one should place their foot. Competing motivations, possible threats, friends and foes, socially acceptable behavior, reproductive opportunities, and resource opportunities complicate the

challenge to master dynamic environments. Group conventions, rules, hierarchies, and boundaries add to the complexity of successfully navigating socially informed places. The cognitive map is the means of condensing immense amounts of subjective and objective information as we attempt to make strange and unknown environments into mastered and familiar ones in which successful outcomes such as reproduction or survival occur. Cognitive maps are the accumulation of information and experience that a person possesses of a particular setting. This information about a setting can be physical, emotional, intellectual, or cultural.

In addition to shared understandings, aesthetic responses, and vicarious attachment to characters, language also clarifies and creates meaning and expectations of place. Easterlin states that “language serves a paradoxical function in relation to conceptualization” (102). Language provides an ability to label and communicate with enough precision to be useful while being general enough to allow for variation and functionality. For example, the precise details of my understanding of a medieval castle may not be exactly the same as someone else's, but the term communicates enough general information to facilitate communication and understanding. This information creates an ability to predict behavior and feel confident in those predictions. Naming something operates in this fashion. Labeling, through the use of names, creates possibilities, limitations, and expectations. For example, naming and defining a place as a medieval Italian castle prevents the expectation that the characters will have cell phones, but allows for the existence of a supernatural curse, situates the church in an authoritative role, and permits transgressive behavior that is mentally constructed as part of an ancient past.

Naming the castle the Castle of Otranto directs the reader to imaginatively construct the place of the novel as a single, defined whole. The castle as an organizational unit serves as a single entity in which subversive, sexually deviant, excessive and emotional rules and understandings apply. Labels facilitate conceptualizations that inform predictive judgements about behavior and human interactions. For example, the comprehension and expectation created by the connection of the castle's title to the power dynamics of the precariously situated Manfred, who attempts to hold onto a position that he wrongfully inhabits, constructs the castle as a place of potential hostility and violence. The concept of the medieval castle includes superstitions that allow for not only the existence of the curse but the expectation of its presence. In addition, the dark and dangerous castle and subterranean labyrinth are conceptually positioned in opposition to the morally upright, safe, and calm church which creates the perceived safety or danger that these locations communicate. Isabella's vulnerability, which is influenced by her gender and class within the turbulent power dynamics of the castle, shapes an emotional evaluative judgment for the reader who vicariously participates and actively creates meaning. Place-dependent intellectual and emotional expectations inform evaluative judgments within the general conception of the medieval castle. The likelihood of behaviors is judged through this framework as the process of place continuously orients within these understandings.

DISORIENTATION

Inducing disorientation, confusion, or fear through the subversion of the adapted need for information presents innately dangerous scenarios for a species whose survival has evolved to so

greatly depend on that information. Undermining the strategies and methods through which people gain mastery of their surroundings allows for literature to capitalize on people's negative psychological and emotional reactions to these scenarios. Further, settings that provoke a heightened urgency for orientation because of the existence of predators, an emotionally charged atmosphere, or a setting that does not provide adequate instruction offer the opportunity for reconsideration of rules, assumptions, and practices. Making the familiar strange and uncanny through disorientation exploits and overturns the strategies of familiarization that we have evolved to exhibit.

Walpole's utilization of Burke's concept of the sublime, the idea that shock and awe can lead to the transcendence of reason, correlates with adapted psychology. Walpole subverts evolved needs in order to create moments of fear, confusion, and disorientation in that surprises and the unexpected blunt the effectiveness of desired strategies for maintaining orientation. Botting asserts that "Natural and artistic objects were seen to evoke emotional effects like terror and wonder which marked an indistinct sense of an immensity that exceeded human comprehension and elevated human sensibility"(24). The formation of indistinct and murky scenarios to invoke the unknown and incomprehensible hinges on undercutting the ongoing process of constructing meaning. Walpole's use of the sublime demonstrates place as an continuous process that combines physical elements with emotional and subjective judgements. Representations that disorient and produce emotional reactions like terror rely on subverting adapted desires for information and comprehension and the control that these elements provide.

The limited perspective of a single character allows for a scarcity of information that grants Walpole the ability to create his moments of terror and awe. These moments are dependent on the relative knowledge and lack of information of a particular character in a specific place. The reader follows at different times Isabella, Frederick, and Manfred, vicariously participating in the novel. Mentally engaging with a character is a place-dependent activity. For example, participating with Isabella is contextually dependent on becoming mentally involved in the relational position between the character and the understanding of place in the gothic tunnel. Empathy that is gained through participation with Isabella and the experience of her vulnerability focuses attention on the gendered, political, and social practices that lead to her susceptible position. In addition, the reader follows Frederick into Hippolita's bedroom, sharing the expectation that the figure that will turn around will be Hippolita. The mechanics of the scene are dependent upon vicariously participating in Frederick's specific position behind the figure seeing robes but not the face of the figure. The skeleton slowly turns revealing the information that produces terror and subverts Frederick's power through the threat that it presents. Walpole achieves disorientation through character-specific understandings or lack of understandings within the scene.

Roderick McGillis' "The Night Side of Nature: Gothic Spaces, Fearful Time" asserts that gothic fiction "is a genre that seeks to disorient us" (227). The use of disorientation acts as a means of disturbing or over turning rules and conventions and, also, for the blurring of social and individual boundaries. Confusion works against our adapted need for understanding, since we

actively and dynamically seek those elements that allow for the formation of meaning and comprehension of the environment. The blurring of context-dependent customs and behaviors disorients through the frustration of the methods that facilitate familiarity. Upsetting understood rules, through disorientation, presents scenarios that call for reconsideration of conventions as we attempt to re-establish comprehension and establish functional predictive expectations. Muddled atmospheres provide disordered information that hinders insight and the beneficial qualities of anticipation.

The curse identifies the castle as a site of potential hostility and conflict by bringing the ownership of the castle into question. The curse states “*That the Castle and Lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown to large to inhabit it*” (Walpole 73). The mysterious and somewhat vague nature of the curse works against the adapted need to identify threats and create understanding and predictive expectations. The strangeness and confusing nature of the curse does not prevent people from believing this to be the reason for the abrupt wedding. Walpole explains that “It was difficult to make any sense of this prophecy; and still less easy to conceive what it had to do with the marriage in question. Yet these mysteries, or contradictions, did not make the populace adhere the less to their opinion” (73). Complication of familiar settings and events signals that something may be wrong and the existence of multiple potential outcomes subverts anticipatory strategies and makes the future unknown. In addition, supernatural content such as the curse undermines attempts to achieve certainty through the command of rules and the delineation of behavioral boundaries. Places in

conflict are more dynamic and fluid, preventing the ability to create familiarity that leads to cognitive mastery of the environment. Generated uneasiness based on doubt and ambiguity increases the desire for effective rules that offer to guide behavior and actions. Discordance between the curse and the pending marriage brings into focus the possible ineffectiveness of assumptions tied to the presented circumstances because of the created unfamiliarity.

Conrad's death by an unusual means, being crushed by a giant supernatural helmet, generates an environment of turmoil and fear. The words "terror," "amazement," "horror," "confusion," and "spectacle" are used to describe the scene as Manfred, Hippolita, and the crowd attempt to make sense of the circumstances of Conrad's death on his wedding day. Manfred is disorientated as "The horror of the spectacle, the ignorance of all around how this misfortune happened, and above all, the tremendous phænomenon before him, took away the prince's speech" (75). The inability to assign causation to the unfolding events generates alarm and confusion. The emotionally charged scene establishes an increased desire for information because expectations are thwarted leading to the need for a new basis of interpretation. Hippolita is "more dead than alive" (75) as she is brought to her chamber. The elevated emotional state and lack of information obscure the interpretive basis upon which to make evaluate judgements about potentially advantageous behaviors. Commotion and the disordered nature of the scene prevent confidence in assumptions and predictive strategies about the circumstances.

Walpole brings into focus the subjects of marriage, inheritance, and the role of women through scenes in which the environment surrounding the presentation of these issues does not

behave in a way that the reader expects. The unpredictable environment disrupts the ability to create understanding and make predictions about the benefits of behavior and the existence of threats in a particular location. Unanticipated events interrupt and subvert the traditionally joyful moment of marriage and its accompanied inheritance of place. “But what a sight for a father's eyes!- He beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionate quantity of black feathers” (Walpole 74). Size, movement, and the strange content of an enormous supernatural helmet create the unusual situation that functions to disorient, as does Conrad's emotionally charged and sudden death.

The disruption of context dependent-events such as the wedding allows Walpole to subvert the assumptions associated with those circumstances such as marriage, inheritance, and the role of women. Disturbance of expected sequences of events and behaviors generates an awareness of attitudes to which we have become habituated. Details of the dynamics involved, which may be obscured due to familiarity, are illuminated through reassessment of the situation. A violent and unpredictable construction of place creates an emotional framework from which judgements about the other content can be made. The ill-fated and hastily arranged marriage is thwarted by a cursed castle that seeks to return the castle to its rightful heir. Manfred's legitimacy and with it any justification of his behaviors is undermined in the opposed and hostile construction of place. Isabella's lack of agency, marriage, and the practices associated with inheritance are called into question in this place of violence. The tacit agreement that comes with

a successfully performed and happy wedding is disrupted by the cursed castle whose violent and unpredictable construction allows for the shifting of the negative emotional response to the wedding, inheritance, and the role of women.

Place is dependent not only on physical elements and emotional content, but also on the existence of humans and other species within that location. Threatening persons add the element of social instability and potential harm to the dynamic assessment of a location. Manfred's presence introduces terror, unpredictability, and violence to the setting. Adaptive pressures to avoid threats and the possibility of bodily harm lead to a negative evaluative judgement of place. Walpole states that "The spectators, who as little comprehended the cause of the prince's fury as all the rest they had seen, were at a loss to unravel this new circumstance"(76). Manfred's sudden outbursts and violent behavior create a hostile environment, but the lack of a clear reason for his behavior also adds ambiguity and fear to the construction of place. Uncertainty and a lack of information leads to an inability to produce predictive strategies and create understanding. The adapted structures whose function is to construct meaning are deprived of the necessary information desired to make predictions and create expectations in aid of survival in a specific location. Expectations and information allow people to generate an advantageous and stable relationship to their surroundings.

Manfred is depicted in a personally unstable relationship to his environment. The status that Manfred initially enjoys within his social world is threatened through the existence of the curse and his lack of an heir. It is under this threat that he is driven to the transgressive,

ambitious, violent, and erratic actions that dynamically define his relationship to the nonhuman and human elements of the novel. Manfred's unpredictable behavior is a reflection of and a reaction to his precarious position. His initial status as a prince is determined by the beneficial qualities conferred upon him by his relationship to the environment as the recipient of socially, historically, economically and politically generated structures that situate him in a position of control. The resources, safety, and authority of his position make the defense of this position an adapted desire. Manfred is not a passively “emplaced” character, but rather a character that is in dynamic interaction with a hostile and threatening environment that jeopardizes his favorable relationship to his surroundings. Manfred's attempted victimization of Isabella is directly related to his attempt to control resources, solidify procreation, protect his status among the human and nonhuman elements of the story, and maintain his beneficial place in the social order of the novel.

The multigenerational fight for the castle that begins with Manfred's ancestors is not over a generic environment, but rather for a location with attributes that are uniquely valuable to people. Human predispositions for safety, social standing, and resources that the castle offers determine the desirability of the location. Social, economic, and political organization of the distribution of resources and status determine that the castle is of a certain value and is worth fighting over. This is a dynamic rather than static relationship. Manfred's loss of an heir, the threat to his social standing, and the potential for bodily harm presented by Conrad's violent death at the hands of a supernatural force present a dynamic and deteriorating relationship to his

surroundings. In addition, a castle in Italy, while still economically valuable today, does not convey the same political and social benefits that it did in medieval times. The relationship to be gained between an individual and environment has fundamentally changed in reference to the ownership of a castle. Manfred's relationship to his surroundings and his status in his human relationships is threatened by the contested nature of the castle. Manfred's potential loss is a socially, politically, and historically specific interrelation between identity, place, and his surroundings. Manfred is fighting against circumstances in which his relations to the environment are dynamically transforming for the worse.

The supernatural force that contests Manfred's position thwarts, disrupts, and prevents his attempts to solidify his favorable status in the environment. Manfred's chase of Isabella through the castle is momentarily interrupted by the painting of his grandfather sighing and leaving its frame. The panel quitting its casement is another instance of Walpole applying Burke's aesthetics to create shock and terror in an effort to transcend reason. Terror and the sublime in this instance rely on disorder and confusion in order to frustrate the biological imperative to create meaning and understanding about place. Walpole blends disorder and confusion with the gothic theme of the sins of the father being revisited upon the son. Limited information creates confusion as the sensationalistic event occurs while also guiding interpretive strategies to focus on the location dependent past that returns in the form of the grandfather's ghost. Walpole connects the genealogical and place-dependent structures to the adaptively significant trait of movement, which focuses attention on the inheritance issues at stake in the novel.

Locomotion is an adaptively important feature because the ability to recognize movement quickly and have our attention drawn to that movement is a survival trait that has been selected for. Things in our immediate environment that move pose a far greater danger for survival than things that don't move. Walpole unwittingly applies this attribute of evolution to grant importance to things that he seeks to highlight because of their social and communicative content. Issues of inheritance and transgressive sexual behavior are given priority since they possess the traits that we have evolved to view as important. Fredric is warned to stay away from Matilda as “the figure, turning slowly round, discovered to Frederic the fleshless jaws and empty sockets of a skeleton, wrapt in a hermit's cowl” (Walpole 157). Information about predators, threats, and the general surround is subverted by surprises and features that do not fit into our understandings as we cognitively organize and deal with information about our surroundings. The animated skeleton subverts Frederic's power in a way that normal rules, that function to support that power, can not. Building on the subversive elements of the castle, the giant helmet, and the supernatural force already presented in the novel, the skeleton allows for the opposition to accepted attitudes by transcending the expectations of place and through its status as a threat. The evolved need for information requires bringing the skeleton into comprehension and the adaptively important trait of locomotion increases the urgency for this material.

The tunnel creates disorientation because it deprives the senses of the information that the adapted human mind has evolved to desire. The labyrinth demonstrates place as a dynamic and ongoing process rather than something that is static. Walpole states that “An awful silence

reigned throughout those subterranean regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which grating on the rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness” (82). Isabella is struck with terror upon entering the confounding circumstances. Darkness, silence, and incomplete auditory clues such as the wind rustling the hinges lead to Isabella's inability to identify threats, establish an ordered understanding of her surroundings, and orient herself within her environment. Elements such as darkness, confusion, fear, and threats of bodily harm disorient as Isabella moves through the tunnel. Easterlin argues that sometimes “place cannot be located, because weather and cataclysm obliterate all other dimensions of the nature construct. To be without places is to lose one's bearings, to be an inherently orienting organism bereft of orientation” (*Biocultural* 137). Instead of weather or cataclysm, the subterranean tunnel uses darkness and other depriving elements to capitalize on negative emotional and psychological reactions. Elements of place and environment that lend themselves to human wayfinding and orientation are preferred by the adapted human mind. Biology and evolution dictate not only the necessity of orientation through information, but also the means by which humans orient themselves within an environment.

Sight is the primary evolved biological means of orientation within an environment. Visual information is central to the literary representations of place, reflecting biological reality for the species. The gothic tunnel exploits the aversion to places that frustrate the biological mandate for orientation through the deprivation of auditory and visual information. Isabella's instance of greatest vulnerability is also the moment when she is able to gather the least amount

of information about her circumstances. In the tunnel, Isabella is “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, and far from tranquil knowing she was within reach of somebody, she knew not whom, who for some cause seemed concealed thereabouts, all these thoughts crowded on her distracted mind, and she was ready to sink under her apprehensions (83). Isabella's disorientation is connected to the emotional reactions to the placelessness that she suffers. Her physical isolation from human others is connected to her psychological isolation. Manfred's pursuit and her inability to gather information about this threat dispossess Isabella of the adapted means of creating favorable survival outcomes.

Easterlin argues that “Isolated and vulnerable characters typically suffer placelessness-perceived or real threats from a potentially inimical environment that are the counterpart to psychic vulnerability” (137). Isabella's seclusion in the tunnel from physically identifiable elements of place through darkness and silence as well as the perceived distance and isolation from other people in the tunnel allows for the metaphorical association with emotionally similar psychological states. Her sudden vulnerability is a result of the changes in her social and familial relationships that transform her surroundings into a threat to her well being. Manfred, a human actor in the environment, dislodges her from a place of relative safety and creates the alarming position that she has to negotiate as he chases her. She is alone as she attempts to travel between the now-threatening castle and promised safety of the church. Deprived of the safety of a group, her evolved methods of gathering material, sight and sound for instance, are subverted leaving

her at a loss for information to guide her decisions. The lack of physical cues indicating the presence of friendly group members creates distance which can be associated with emotional distance and alienation. Adaptively unfavorable feelings of alienation, emotional seclusion, and vulnerability are aptly associated with representations of placelessness resulting from elements that deprive the senses of all or some of the information utilized to create place. Insecure mental and emotional states can be correlated to insecure physical states through the construction of place. Representations of being alone and vulnerable remove the physical markers of social groups allowing for the loosening of clearly delineated boundaries.

In addition to the lack of sight, silence or incomplete auditory clues further disorient, confuse, and create fear. Hearing is another evolved method of gathering information about human surroundings. Isabella struggled in the tunnel to create meaning about her surroundings as “She trod as softly as impatience would give her leave, yet frequently she stopped and listened to hear if she was followed. In one of those moments she thought she heard a sigh. She shuddered, and recoiled a few paces”(83). A lack of accurate information limits Isabella's ability to adopt behaviors that facilitate confident navigation of the complex and dynamic circumstances. Fear and hesitation result from this inability to construct meaning. Walpole's communication of fear and confusion relies on biological facts of people's evolution. Sudden sounds draw our attention and necessitate the re-evaluation of place. Representations of place that are inimical to this function lead to the undesirable position of attempting to create meaning out of incomplete or inaccurate information. Isabella attempts to interpret the sounds that she hears, such as footsteps

or voices, in terms of her position within the tunnel. The subversion of her efforts to create an accurate perception of her environment reinforces her vulnerable position within the vicissitudes of the novel.

Manfred's pursuit of Isabella initiated the gothic trope of the chase through a subterranean tunnel. Walpole's tunnel challenges the way that his characters, and his readers, dynamically comprehend and experience place. The physical elements are an important part of the labyrinth's disorientating affect, but, in the hands of an author, the amount and types of information given become important. Botting asserts that "Earlier in the eighteenth century, in writings by Smollett, Pope, and Fielding, the labyrinth or maze was used as a figure signifying the complexity and variety of society which remained, none the less, unified. In Gothic romances, however, it came to be associated with fear, confusion, and alienation: it was a site of darkness, horror, and desire"(80-81). The once-unifying place of complexity is transformed through its representation as possessing qualities to which we feel aversion. Walpole's tunnel isn't empty, but rather filled with winds, darkness, threats, and chases. Isabella experiences disorientation and incomplete information as her senses are unable to create knowledge about her surroundings. The lack of information is presented within the context of a threat, Manfred's pursuit, which lends itself to the production of terror that Walpole seeks in his use of Burke's concept of the sublime.

The novel ends with the frequently repeated destruction of the gothic castle as order is restored, inheritance issues are settled, and the conflict is resolved. The locational complications, conflicts, and power struggles disappear with the crumbling of the castle. Manfred's uncertain

relationship within his environment is reconciled because he decisively loses his position and leaves for the calm of the convent with Hippolita. Manfred's once rebellious attitude is subdued as he repents, re-establishing the imagined cosmic hierarchy. Manfred no longer poses a threat and Theodore is declared the true heir to Otranto by the ghost of Alfonso who ascends to heaven and is removed from the location. The place of subversive gendered, social, and political behavior crumbles to the ground restoring clarity, understanding, and certainty. The mystery of the curse is realized, bringing a close to the supernatural instability between place and characters that defined the novel. The collapsing castle restores traditional structures and brings readers and characters back to conventions of realism, reason, and morality.

Gothic horror formulaically restores place-based order at the denouement of the story. Dark labyrinths, ruinous castles, ancient curses, and dark villains populate gothic horror with gloom and mystery only to see reason reasserted in the end. Traditional powers in the form of church, family, and marriage replace socially and politically destructive elements. The mysterious and unpredictable events come to a conclusion restoring the normative structures and rules that have been undermined throughout the text. For instance, Ann Radcliffe initiated rational supernaturalism, which explains supernatural elements and clarifies the disorienting and threatening features. Radcliffe reasserts certainty in the rationalistic world view after capitalizing on gothic ambiguity to question boundaries and limitations. Later horror works such as Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" employ the haunted house instead of the castle, but still follow the pattern of the climatic architectural collapse at the hands of a supernatural force.

In addition to the destruction of the house or castle, gothic works often renegotiate the relations between human and nonhuman entities by banishing the subversive supernatural elements at the end of the story. The ending of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* purges the supernatural elements from the house as Heathcliff and Catherine haunt the moors, but not the house. Cathy and Hareton's marriage and inheritance resolve the power dynamics that created the place of violence, hostility, and opposition. Balance, reason, and harmony cleanse the environment of transgressive and subversive material as familiar expectations and orientation return.

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Vita

Kevin Flotte was born and raised in New Orleans. He received his Bachelors degree in English from The University of New Orleans in 2011. Kevin's research interests include British Romanticism, gothic horror, and evolutionary approaches to literature. He has spoken on gothic horror at The Popular Cultural Association of the South in New Orleans, La. and the Hawaiian International Humanities Conference in Honolulu, HI.