

DRAFT: Visiting Strawberry Hill: Horace Walpole's Gothic Historiography

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The 'antiquarian' attitude is not an imperfect approximation to something else—which would be the maturity of scientific, professionalised historiography. It is a specific, lived relationship to the past, and deserves to be treated on its own terms.¹

Halfway up the central stairwell at Strawberry Hill is an alcove roughly the size of an adult man. Today, it contains only a light-bulb and a layer of dust, but during the last thirty years of Horace Walpole's life it held the largest single piece of gothic antiquity in a collection of gothic artifacts famous for its range and variety. The recent transfer of Walpole's sprawling neo-gothic villa from St. Mary's University College to the

¹ "But what are these terms?" Stephen Bann asks. It will be the work of this paper to rediscover antiquarianism—Walpole's antiquarianism—not simply as a failed attempt to achieve a mature or scientific historiography, but as a consistent project with an integral poetics all its own.

I am indebted to Bann's thoughts, which will turn up explicitly nowhere else in this paper, but which serve here as a manifesto as much as an epigraph. See Bann, *The Clothing of Clio*, especially 77-92, and Bann, "Clio in Part: On Antiquarianism and the Historical Fragment," in *The Inventions of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 100-21, here 102.

Strawberry Hill Trust has provided an unprecedented level of access to scholars, and has returned the house to one of its functions; Walpole built it to be toured, and, under the guidance and research of resident scholars Anna Chalcraft and Judith Viscardi, it is once again an object of the tourist industry. But if my experience is at all representative, visiting Strawberry Hill as it now stands is as much an experience of absence as of presence. Without the collection of objects for which it was famous, the house feels empty, a collection of alcoves without objects, walls without paintings, and cabinets without curiosities. Despite the Trust's best efforts to supply reproductions, replicas, and period artifacts, and despite the surprising survival of the house itself against the work of time, Strawberry Hill can nevertheless feel a bit insubstantial. All these niches, gaps, shelves, and secret spaces, for what? Surely not to display a few contemporary engravings and a handful of period chairs?

The difference between Strawberry Hill as it was and Strawberry Hill as it is can be felt in the scholarship which has sprung up around it. Take, for example, two books. Chalcraft and Viscardi's *Visiting Strawberry Hill* (2005), among the earliest returns of the new scholarly access to Walpole's villa, provides a compelling argument about the order in which Horace Walpole intended his rooms to be toured, and remarks on their internal "themes," color-schemes, external views, and so forth. But placed up against Walpole's own published *Description of the Villa* (1774, 1784), which was, as a number of critics have observed,² a handlist for visitors experiencing the tour of the house during

² Chalcraft and Viscardi among them, who argue in *Visiting Strawberry Hill*

(Wimbledon: Chalcraft and Viscardi, 2005), that the copy of Walpole's *Description* at the

Walpole's lifetime, *Visiting Strawberry Hill* is surprisingly barren of precisely the antiquities which Strawberry Hill was designed to display. Walpole's own descriptions of his house are remarkable less for their interest in space, which he assumes the reader is in, than for their obsession over the objects one would presumably be consulting during the visit. The disparity between Chalcraft and Viscardi's interest in space and Walpole's in objects is of course a reflection of the diaspora of Walpoliana following the celebrated, or, if you like, infamous, estate sale of 1842, which saw virtually all of Walpole's collection sold and scattered.³ But the point is that while Chalcraft and Viscardi's study is impressive as an anatomy of a house—the kind of house which could be “listed” by the Historic Buildings and Monument Commission—Walpole's *Description* is the record of a museum, a house flexible to meet the demands of the objects he accrued. Visiting Strawberry Hill therefore reminds us that it is important to consider Walpole's fragments of the gothic past in the context of their one-time display, and the one-time display in the

library of Eton college served as a handlist for Walpole's servants who led the tours of the house.

³ Walpole's collection has been largely reassembled in Farmington, Connecticut, thanks to the tireless efforts of latter-day arch-Walpolean Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis. Visiting the Lewis Walpole Library is an experience of displacement all its own—a vast archive with an uncertain referent, and not only because Strawberry Hill is on the other side of the Atlantic. A review of Lewis's wonderful biographies of Walpole reveals an extraordinary investment—and even entanglement—with their topic. See especially Lewis's *Collector's Progress* (New York: Knopf, 1946), an experiment in biography as autobiography, and vice-versa.

context of the fragments it contained. In the economy of Strawberry Hill, house and antiquities together tell a story that neither can tell apart.

This essay is an experiment in reassembling the villa and its collection. The years surrounding the completion of Strawberry Hill were Walpole's most productive; the 1760's was the decade in which Walpole edited his four-volume *Anecdotes on Painting In England*, researched and composed his *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of Richard III*, and wrote his most famous piece—*The Castle of Otranto*—all while maintaining his copious circle of correspondence and aggressively expanding his collection of antiquities.⁴ But his largest and most visible project was certainly the house itself, what Walpole called his own “little gothic castle” but later would come to call his “Otranto.”⁵ Built after the irregular style of the perpendicular Gothic, Strawberry Hill participated in the Gothic revival which formed the most significant aesthetic alternative to the symmetries of neoclassical architecture. It was also an opportunity to display Walpole's own collection of cultural and historical artifacts. Substantially complete by 1763 but expanded over the next decade, Strawberry Hill had been conceived and built only partly as a human habitation; it was designed at least as much with an eye to displaying the collection of antiquities he was concurrently procuring. As Lord Holland noted in his *Anecdotes of Walpole*, Strawberry Hill was “a catacomb, or at best a

⁴ This is to say nothing of his miscellaneous pieces including his *Memoirs of the Reign of King George III*, the continued operation of his printing press, and his political work.

⁵ *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis, 48 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937-1983), 20:111 and 1:243. References are to this edition, cited as C.

museum, rather than a habitation,” a kind of museological experiment extended over twenty-two rooms on two levels.⁶ And so it is no coincidence that the 1760’s was both the period of Walpole’s most extensive work on Strawberry Hill and his most sustained antiquarian research; the two projects were branches of a single historical interest.

Walpole’s relationship to his collection, like the rest of his public work, is throughout paradoxical—a tension which in part has caused a number of critics to dismiss the eclecticism of Walpole’s collection, his work, and maybe himself, as “camp,” or “kitsch.”⁷ Such readings, however, which map latter-day categories onto projects which it will be my concern, in part, to historicize, blind us to one of the most important thematic tropes of Walpole’s self-invention. Walpole’s *Anecdotes*, for example, were explicitly only the editorial work of putting together, in moments of leisure, notes compiled by someone else; his *Historic Doubts*, which he considered his most important

⁶ Henry Richard Vassall, Third Lord Holland, *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party 1807-1821 with Some Miscellaneous Reminiscences*, ed. Lord Stavordale (London, 1905), 309.

⁷ Timothy Mowl’s *Horace Walpole: the Great Outsider* (London: John Murray, 1996) is exemplary in this regard. So is Susan Sontag’s cameo—and somewhat oracular—mention of Strawberry Hill (as “patronizing nature”) in her celebrated 1964 essay “Notes on ‘Camp.’” Camp, according to Sontag’s definition, is “disengaged, depoliticized—or at least apolitical.” As I will argue here, Walpole’s collection was anything but apolitical. The “Notes on ‘Camp’” appear in *The Partisan Review* (1964) and again in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1966), 275-292, here 280. The job of “rescuing” Walpole has in any case already been undertaken by Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis in *Rescuing Horace Walpole* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

historical monograph, was “a mere matter of curiosity and speculation”;⁸ and *The Castle of Otranto* was only “the imperfect recollection of a dream... begun and finished in less than two months” (C, 28:6). His collection, though it contained (for instance) “the largest and finest... collection of miniatures and enamels... in the country,” was also only “an assemblage of curious trifles.”⁹ And Strawberry Hill, which Walpole intended to be a pattern of true Gothic taste, a materials-book of ornament, and a stage for his particular fragments of history, was (in his words) nevertheless merely the “paper Fabric” of an “insignificant man,” a “toy” and a “plaything” (D, i; C, 20:127). While Walpole established his reputation on his major intellectual undertakings, he was also concerned to distance himself from them. In a letter to Thomas Gray Walpole admitted that “it would be affected... to say I am indifferent to fame. I certainly am not, but I am indifferent to almost anything I have done to acquire it” (C, 14:167). Part of Walpole’s fame was in fact exactly this paradoxical indifference, his cultivated and public disdain for the “trifles” he most anxiously acquired, built, edited, and wrote.

If we are to believe Walpole’s claims, then, he never seemed to be trying very hard. Walpole’s casual treatment of his own most important work has been noted by a number of critics, but none so well as James Watt, who insists that it was a conscious strategy of public position-taking; Walpole’s strategy of public disownership was a

⁸ Horace Walpole, *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard the Third* in *The Works of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford*, 5 vols. (London: 1798), 2:110.

References are to this edition, cited as *HD*.

⁹ Walpole, *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole* (Strawberry Hill: Thomas Kirgate, 1784), iii. References are to this edition, cited as *D*.

deliberate effort to stake out and rigorously to defend an aristocratic position in which he was only the gentleman collector of the various objects which were brought to his view.¹⁰ And it should be noticed that this kind of casual disdain for order was historically part of an aesthetic of aristocratic collecting, not to mention writing, which Walpole was, in part, imitating. Objects in such a collection were accrued less according to their exemplarity than to the wonder they were individually capable of producing; aristocratic collections of this early modern sort were in fact arranged in such a way as to maximize the seeming dissimilarity of the objects they contained.¹¹ English collections in this principally Continental tradition display an especially marked interest in “strange objects” and “fabled specimens,” in representing the known world by sheer mass of “queer foreign

¹⁰ James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 12-41.

¹¹ Laura Laurencich-Minelli identifies two organizing principles in this sort of collection—“repeating macrosymmetry,” or the collecting in one place by theme, and “alternate microsymmetry,” in which “items of similar appearance are never displayed next to one another but invariably alternate with other, dissimilar objects.” “Museography and Ethnographical Collections in Bologna During the 16th and 17th Centuries” in Oliver Impey and Arthur Macgregor, *The Origins of Museums* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1985), 19. Also see Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750* (New York: Zone, 1998), especially 109-134 and 303-368; and Arthur Macgregor, “The Cabinet of Curiosities in Seventeenth-Century Britain,” also in Impey and Macgregor, *Origins*.

objects.”¹² Accounts of such cabinets accordingly tend to emphasize the “particular,” “surprising,” “incomparable,” and “extravagant” objects they contained, for it was the purpose of such an arrangement to draw attention to the extraordinary details of the individual object, rather than its categorical or phylogenetic exemplarity.¹³

Walpole, at least at first glance, seems to have imagined his collection according to a similar aesthetic; he owned things which were remarkable less for their exemplarity than for their rarity. He records trading, for example, “a medaliuncino of Alexander Severus, which is unique, for the *unique*st thing in the world, a silver bell for an inkstand, made by Benvenuto Cellini” (C, 23:383). The superlative is of course absurd—a thing either is unique or it isn’t—but the comparison is instructive because it indicates one of the constitutive aesthetics of objects which he found collectable: their contrasting qualities or inflections of uniqueness. The medaliuncino of Alexander Severus is unique because it is the only one of its kind, but it is valuable because it can be placed with other contemporary medals as part of a serial history, even to reimagine a history through the images which it displays. John Evelyn and Joseph Addison were just two relatively

¹² Macgregor, “Cabinet of Curiosities,” 149-51. Also see Michael Hunter’s “The Cabinet Institutionalized: The Royal Society’s ‘Repository’ and its Background” in Impey and Macgregor, *Origins*, 159-68, 160.

¹³ These representative adjectives I take from John Evelyn’s account of his visit to Pierre Morin’s cabinet. *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. E.S. De Beer, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1955), 2:133-34, 3.33. For a more general discussion, see Krzysztof Pomian’s *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800*, Elizabeth Wiles-Portier, trans. (Polity: Cambridge, 1990), 75-78.

recent collectors who collected medals for exactly this purpose.¹⁴ Walpole, however, values the inkstand more—indeed, he signifies this by trading the medal for the inkstand—because it can't be serialized. If it tells a story, it is purely the history of the object itself. Other objects in his collection, which have nothing else in common, are in this one regard similar: the spurs worn by William III (for example) at the Battle of the Boyne, “the eagle found in the gardens of Boccapadugli,” the model for the bust of King Henry VII's tomb—the list goes on. Each of these objects is less interesting for what it can teach us about a type or series of things than it is as a unique object with its own historical associations. And so Strawberry Hill was filled with objects that insisted on their own incommensurability, with things which have nothing in common except their resistance to comparison; the relative “uniqueness” of these objects is the paradoxical index of their relative non-indexability.

Walpole's sort of collecting was therefore exactly against the kind of order summoned up by the medal history of Alexander Severus. Indeed, this aesthetic of particularity, Walpole's delight in disorder, was what he came to mean by “gothic.” In one sense—the sense which Walpole would have inherited—the “Gothic” was what was “congenial to our old gothic constitution,” a kind of traditional liberty which, according to the argument of such constitutional conservatives as William Whitehead, was in danger of being eclipsed by recent government innovations. Whitehead's appeal is to a “democratic Saxonism” which predates the Norman conquest; British liberty, according

¹⁴ See John Evelyn's *Numismata: A Discourse of Medals Antient and Modern* (London, 1697) and Joseph Addison's *Dialogues Upon the Usefulness of Ancient Medals* (London, 1726, rpt. New York: Garland, 1976). Also see Pomian, 81-85.

to this widely-adopted strain of thought, is ultimately a legacy of the Gothic tribes by way of the aboriginal Saxons, a legacy consisting, now in David Hume's words, of the "free constitutions then established, however impaired by the encroachments of succeeding princes, [which] still preserve an air of independence and legal administration."¹⁵

Contemporary political rights, according to this "Gothic" way of thinking, depended upon a belief in an essentially unbroken chain of governmental authority descending from the Gothic Saxons to the Gothic present. The Gothic, at least according to this strain of thought, was therefore less a historical period or culture than a way of thinking and writing about the political present; it was a mode of deploying (or maybe manufacturing)

¹⁵ David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688*, 8 vols. (London, 1767), 1:212. Hume notes that the Saxons' "manners and customs were wholly German; and the same picture of a fierce and bold liberty, which is drawn by the masterly pencil of Tacitus, will apply to these founders of the English government" (1:213). Such a view of the historical indebtedness of the present implies a particularly conservative form of history-writing, a narrative of enlightenment which, as Markman Ellis has it, "preserved elements of the simple and barbarous gothic system of government, while at the same time revising and refining the laws for a modern and politer era." Markman Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 25. Ellis's study owes a debt to John Samson's, "Politics Gothicized: The Conway Incident and *The Castle of Otranto*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 10.3 (1986): 145-158.

a historical legacy by way of sustaining and justifying a set of relatively liberal, and loosely Whiggish, practices.¹⁶

This kind of Gothicism was part of a broader trend of Enlightenment thought exemplified by Hume, Burke, Blackstone and (later) Macaulay—a vision of history less interested in the “accidents” of history than in rediscovering, at every point, a ubiquitous and gradual progression from “darkness” to “light.” But Walpole’s Gothicism was the Gothicism of an antiquarian, and while it therefore shared a certain reverence for—or at least concern about—the institutions of medieval antiquity, his interest was in the scandal of the Gothic left-over, the bits of interpretable antiquity which turn up in the present day. Though involved in the defense of English liberties, Walpole cared less about a notional constitution than he about verifiable objects of medieval antiquity—what had come to be called “Gothic” more generally—which still remained in various states of ruin and disrepair in the countryside of England and Wales. In fact, he was interested in these objects partly because of their potential to contradict the merely textual narratives of enlightenment historiography; his Gothicism was interested in individual objects in what he found or considered to be their own terms, often as they violated the textual or traditional histories of early Enlightenment historians. Consequently, the aesthetic of the

¹⁶ The need for the conservative strain of history is especially pressing because the appeal to the “gothic constitution” conceals a paradoxical gap, the absence of any physical or material “constitution”—i.e. a foundational document—apart from the accrued and traditional rights and habits which formed British constitutional practice. The best study of the British constitution remains J. G. A. Pocock’s *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

Gothic Revival, at least as Walpole practiced it, was in one critic's words "inimical" to a Gothic tradition founded around the interpretation of a "constitution" which could be found nowhere except in the traditions and habits of contemporary political practice.¹⁷

Whatever else it did, Walpole's collection of unique items signals a distrust in systematized undertakings, in histories arranged under a single vision of historical progress. The disorder of gothic fragments as he found them produced a collection which was necessarily heterogeneous; heterogeneity was its chief resource and attraction, not least because it provided an aesthetic alternative to the high order of public projects.¹⁸ What Walpole liked about it is what he called its "want of symmetry," "variety," "charming irregularity," and even "liberty of taste" (C, 20:127). And, as I will be arguing, his collecting and his own historiographic experiments were of a piece. The

¹⁷ Robert John Smith, *The Gothic Bequest: Medieval Institutions in British Thought 1688-1863* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 112. On the meaning of "Gothic," see: Smith, *The Gothic Bequest*, and Samuel Klinger, *The Goths in England: A Study in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952). On the Gothic Revival, see Charles Eastlake, *A History of the Gothic Revival* (1872); Michael McCarthy, *The Origins of the Gothic Revival* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 1-86. Walpole, McCarthy writes, was unlike his contemporaries inasmuch as he was "interested in introducing historicism into the gothic revival" (1).

¹⁸ See also Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 17. Watt's sense that Walpole "paid little attention towards assimilating his miscellaneous 'trumpery' within a historical or social-historical framework" slightly misreads, I argue, a deliberate attempt to refuse the kind of inherited "frameworks" Walpole's contemporaries tended to produce.

disorder of the historical field as Walpole saw it throws the weight of history back on the interpretation of the individual object in its own historical career. If a historical narrative emerges—and it is the work of Walpole’s most mature antiquarian research to ensure that it does—that new narrative won’t simply repeat the sorts of histories handed between historians. Rather, it will have the kind of materiality which develops when historians become silent, when objects are allowed to speak for themselves.¹⁹

I’d like to begin the major work of this investigation with a turn to Walpole’s best-known work, *The Castle of Otranto*, partly because (as will become clear) *Otranto* was an experiment in the organization and display of gothic artifacts which extends, and in some ways anticipates, ongoing work at Strawberry Hill. The plot of *The Castle of Otranto*, subtitled “A Gothic Story,”²⁰ turns on the legacy of the House of Manfred, the “prince” of Otranto who is prince because of an ancient regicide, the murder of the martyr-king Alfonso the Good. Two generations in the prehistory of Walpole’s tale King Alfonso has gone on crusade and died under mysterious circumstances. He was (we will learn) in fact murdered by his chamberlain, and his will—a forgery—has named the chamberlain as his successor. The story itself begins two generations after the regicide, with the return of the rightful heir to Otranto, but this isn’t what begins the action, for

¹⁹ Or *seem to be* allowed to speak for themselves, for, as I will demonstrate, the “materiality” of Walpole’s history-writing is a crafted narrative effect.

²⁰ In the first edition of 1765, *The Castle of Otranto* was subtitled “A Story”; in the second and subsequent editions, also beginning in 1765, it bore the subtitle “A Gothic Story.”

nobody, least of all the heir himself, knows who he is.²¹ Young Theodore, grandson to Alfonso, evinces the kinds of graceful deportment which might tip us off as readers, but he himself believes that he is a peasant, and so does everybody else. Indeed, according to the official history of the will, which is the version of history sponsored by the state, there was no heir, and so there is no particular reason to believe that Theodore is anything other than what he appears to be. The heir of Alfonso, if he is to be revealed, will consequently have to be revealed despite the historical fact that no such heir exists, and despite the fact that the holder of the throne has an elaborate narrative mechanism proving his legitimacy.

The Castle of Otranto was originally published as though it were a found object, a sort of antiquarian “find” in the “library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England.”²² This is a tale with a tale of its own, of having been lost and found again, turned up, as it were, when nobody was looking for it. And its plot is likewise propelled entirely through the agency of things, through the turning-up of antiquarian objects which

²¹ Walpole may have gleaned this touch from his research on Perkin Warbeck for his *Historic Doubts*; Warbeck claimed to be the rightful heir to the throne occupied by Henry VII, and Walpole set out to prove it. See for example John Ford’s *Perkin Warbeck* (1632), which dramatizes not just the confusion and surprise over Warbeck’s turning-up, but, also, Warbeck’s own ignorance of his real lineage.

²² Walpole, “Preface to the First Edition” of *The Castle of Otranto* in *Works*, 2:1.

References to this and *The Castle of Otranto* are to this edition, cited as *CO*.

suggest their own revolutionary counterhistories.²³ Things seem to remember histories which people have forgotten; they of themselves disturb Manfred's dynastic legacy. Accordingly, the action is precipitated by the spectacular turning-up of a giant helmet which looks precisely like the head of a statue of Alfonso, and which, as its first (but not last) action, demolishes Manfred's textual history of legitimate inheritance in a particularly thing-like way; it smashes Manfred's only heir. Things don't end here, of course; the action of the tale is driven by a series of increasingly legible antiquarian objects—pieces of armor, a portrait come to life, a scimitar with an encoded message, a skeleton in a monk's cowl, and so on—each of which sheds light, more emphatically than the last, upon the regicide that Manfred continues to deny. Each of these objects, it is true, is in some way supernatural: the helmet, magnified to hundreds of times human size, falls from the sky and crushes Manfred's son Conrad, a portrait of Manfred's grandfather—the regicide himself—comes to life and stalks the gallery. But it is telling that the characters of Otranto initially respond to each object as an antiquity—a helmet, a portrait—and only later as a giant helmet, or a moving portrait. The supernatural may in fact only be a way of figuring the inhuman capacity of historical things to turn up on their own. And so what begins as the story of a Prince perpetuating his dynasty through his son instead becomes a story of a helmet, a portrait, a suit of armor. The Gothic, it seems, is what happens when things crowd out human history.

²³ E. J. Clery puts it this way: "A helmet, a mere thing, has usurped the plot, has become the subject, the moving force of the narrative, to the bewilderment of the characters. The helmet 'knows' the plot in a way they, and the readers, do not." Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction: 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 77.

It is in his *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of Richard III* that Walpole works out the stakes and ethics of practical historiography, of history-making as it, itself, makes history. Most histories, Walpole insists, are written by people without first-hand knowledge or evidence; such histories are moreover, like Manfred's history of his own dynasty, generally untrustworthy because politically motivated. Walpole cites, as an example, Sir Thomas More's history of England. More's *History*, far from being "material," is instead "imaginary," written "as he wrote his *Utopia*; to amuse his leisure and exercise his fancy." More has, Walpole claims, "embroidered a paltry canvas... with a flowing design as his imagination suggested the colours" (*HD*, 2:121). The problem is that More had no immediate knowledge of the events he records; what's more, his history was written under the reign of Henry VII for the honor of the House of Lancaster. The portrait of Richard III which More sketches out is therefore far from being an authentic account, and the deformities of body and mind which it records should consequently be read as part of a public relations campaign designed to make Henry VII "appear in a kind of amiable light" (*HD*, 2:109). And since, as Walpole elaborately establishes, all histories of Richard III are ultimately founded on More's, to write a history of Richard III is to be implicated in a sustained political project of British majesty which King Henry VII himself inaugurated. Shakespeare's *Richard III*, as one example of many, becomes only another Lancastrian propaganda piece designed in part to honor the House of Tudor. Walpole calls Shakespeare's play "a tragedy of imagination," and if we follow Shakespeare in imagining Richard's "crook-back," then we are implicated in a Lancastrian propaganda scheme, as well.²⁴

²⁴ More describes Richard III this way: "little of stature, ill fetured of limmes, croke

The kind of history-telling that triggers and sustains the action of *The Castle of Otranto*—a history told by things—is the kind of history which Walpole offers as an alternative; instead of the state historiography of More’s Lancastrian set-piece, Walpole offers what he calls “material” history (*HD*, 2:120). This is Walpole’s word, to which his

backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right, hard fauoured of visage.” More, *History of King Richard the Third*, in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester, 14 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 2:7. More’s description, which Walpole contested throughout his antiquarian researches, is repeated in the third part of Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* and again in *Richard III*, thereby proving (according to Walpole) that the Elizabethan stage perpetuated the “Lancastrian prejudices” which propped up the house of Tudor. But while Walpole finds *Richard III* to be problematic as a historical document, he offers up an alternative partly as a precedent for his own historiographic practices. *The Winter’s Tale* (he calls it *The Winter Evening’s Tale*), far from participating in the Lancastrian project of history-making, articulates the convictions which underpin the kind of history-writing Walpole himself practiced. And while the details of Walpole’s reading might seem strained—he insists that *The Winter’s Tale* is an “indirect apology for Anne Boleyn”—what attracted Walpole to *The Winter’s Tale* in the first place is almost certainly the gothic history-telling which its “general pattern” puts on display. This play, which stages its most important scene in a gallery, and in which a statue comes to life to correct mistakes of the past, is Shakespeare’s most “gothic” play. It is also, therefore, “in reality a second part of Henry the Eighth,” a sort of correction or *sub rosa* retraction of the Lancastrian history staged in *Richard III*. See *HD*, 2:172-73.

Historic Doubts repeatedly returns. A “material” history, as Walpole theorizes it, begins with a new look at the sometimes (but not always) recently uncovered things of antiquarian concern. Accordingly, the *Historic Doubts* begins with an “authentic monument lately come to light,” and builds its argument from “instruments,” “singular curiosities,” “authentic rolls,” and so forth (*HD*, 2:134, 2:109). “Truth,” Walpole opines, “is the sole merit of most antiquities” (*C*, 16:234), and so the trick is to let these antiquities speak for themselves—or at least seem to speak for themselves—even when the stories they tell are inconvenient. We are to look, Walpole insists, to “material” facts, even if that means “losing our history” or “our historians.” Of course, what this means is that while the enlightenment aesthetic implies a conservative form of history-writing, Walpole’s material historiography is incessantly radical; he wasn’t (as he put it) “*for* Richard III” so much as he was “*against* those historians.”²⁵ His *Historic Doubts* establishes itself as an instrument against polemical historiography generally, against textual histories which distort or reinvent their objects as part of a political agenda. It can be somewhat difficult to imagine a sustainable history which could be built up out of such a counter-methodical method. Nor is it clear that Walpole would have wanted such an extended history. But the extraordinary power and appeal of Walpole’s document is attested by its first French translator. King Louis XVI spent his last days working

²⁵ As Walpole insisted, in a characteristically self-effacing gesture, “if I am prejudiced, as I probably am, it is *against* those historians, not *for* Richard III”; he would much later remark that, in any case, Richard III was the only king who he had ever even remotely defended. Walpole, *Correspondence*, 15.176.

through Walpole's *Historic Doubts* while listening to the proclamations of the National Convention and, ultimately, awaiting the guillotine.²⁶

The central resource of Walpole's material doubts on the life and reign of Richard III is a document which demonstrates that the young Edward V was scheduled to appear at Richard III's coronation; this is important because the chief crime which More attributed to Richard Duke of Gloucester was the murder of his two nephews, the elder of whom was this same Edward. This evidentiary document is "the coronation roll itself"; its key clue is the elaborated description of a certain material artifact, a suit of clothes. It is by far the most extensive description in the *Historic Doubts*, and deserves quoting at length:

To Lord Edward, son of late king Edward the fourth, for his apparel and array, that is to say, a short gowne made of two yards and three quarters of crymsy clothe of gold, lyned with two yards $\frac{3}{4}$ of blac velvet, a long gowne made of vi yards of crymsyn cloth of gold lynned with six yards of green damask, a shorte gowne made of two yards $\frac{3}{4}$ of purpell velvett lyned with two yards $\frac{3}{4}$ of green damask, a doublett and a stomacher made of two yards of blac satin, &c. besides two foot cloths, a bonet of purple velvet, nine horse harness, and nine saddle houses (housings) of blue velvet, gilt spurs, with many other rich articles, and magnificent apparel for his henchmen or pages. (*HD*, 2:146)

²⁶ *Regne Richard III, ou doutes historiques*, transl. Louis XVI (Paris, 1800). The "much worked-over manuscript" is in the Lewis Walpole Library. See Lewis, *Rescuing Horace Walpole*, 198.

This is the stuff of textual history only in a very special sense—textual because textile, the material stuff of material history. The weight of description alone serves to summon up the body of the heir apparent to attest to the falsity of More’s historical narrative. As Walpole puts it, and in the way that clothing was more than just bodily vestment, but composed and invested authority, this was not the pomp of a prisoner, but the body of the king himself.²⁷ And, as Walpole laconically points out, if Edward V was scheduled to appear in the pomp of a king, he could hardly have been dead. Hardly the monster which More imagines, Richard III might therefore best be seen as an ambitious but essentially faithful regent. And so in answer to the “paltry canvas” which More has himself “embroidered,” Walpole offers a rich historical material which he claims simply to have found, accidentally, in the historical archive.²⁸

²⁷ See also Peter Stallybrass, “Worn Worlds: Clothes and Identity on the Renaissance Stage,” in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Stallybrass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁸ The nature of this document was disputed in a series of pamphlets and counter-pamphlets issued by Walpole and the President of the London Society of Antiquaries, Jeremiah Milles. It is a sign of the amount of weight that Walpole put on material documents that when his interpretation of this “authentic monument” collapsed, his argument collapsed with it. See Milles, “Observations on the Wardrobe Account for the Year 1483,” *Archaeologia* (1770): 1:361-83. Also see Robert Masters, “Some Remarks on Mr Walpole’s *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard the Third*,” *Archaeologia* (1771): 2:198-215.

Walpole's coronation roll, and the cloth which it inventories, is like the cloth of a thousand yards, a mythical object which turns up in different shapes in Walpole's letters and dreams—a roll “on which were painted all the kings and queens of the universe, and which cloth was lapped up in the kernel of a nut” (*C*, 24:16). The fantasy is that the smallest object can, of itself, unfold into an entire history. But this coronation roll and the clothes it describes aren't of course any more material than the history of Sir Thomas More and King Henry VII which suppresses that roll. Nor are histories necessarily materially true—that is, true to the historical artifacts of which history is composed—just because they depend on descriptions of clothes or armor, or even clothes or armor (or other historical artifacts) themselves.²⁹ Rather, both the clothes and the history are materially true partly because Walpole wasn't looking for them, because, as he establishes in their provenance, the document was “mentioned” to him “by the lord bishop of Carlyle.”³⁰ A historian who is on the lookout for evidence to fit his pet project is likely to misread the materials of the historical archive. But the historian who allows countervailing evidentiary materials to turn up serendipitously, without looking for them,

²⁹ Walpole nevertheless partly scaffolds his argument with observations upon the physical document itself. Unlike other documents composed on paper, the coronation roll was “written on vellum”; it is “uncommonly fair, accurate, and ample,” and so forth, all of which observations stand, for Walpole, as further clues to the history it tells (*HD*, 2:146).

³⁰ “This singular curiosity was first mentioned to me by the lord bishop of Carlisle. Mr. Astle lent me an extract of it, with other usual assistances; and Mr. Chamberlain of the great wardrobe obliged me with the perusal of the original” (*HD*, 146n).

is capable of producing a history which is materially true precisely because of this disinterestedness.³¹ Such a history happens at the confluence of “accident and sagacity”³²; the material historian is the one who is always ready to be “shocked,” “surprised,” or “astonished” by the “new materials” that “time brings to light.” The proof of their veracity is the same as the proof of their “materiality” in Walpole’s special sense. It is an effect of the kind of astonishment that Walpole cultivated in his “Gothic Story”; materiality, in this sense, is the effect of gothic surprise.

We might hear an echo of the major tropes of Enlightenment historiography here—the tendency of things to “come to light” localizes the broader Enlightenment faith in a historical progress, a grand sweep of cultural illumination. As Walpole puts it, reducing his approach to a series of hypothetical questions, “If time brings new materials

³¹ Serendipity is a word of Walpole’s invention, coined from a technique he discovered while reading *The Three Princes of Serendip*, an Oriental tale itself of uncertain provenance—not unlike *Otranto*—describing the travels and surprising discoveries of three expatriate princes. By far the best discussion of its publication history is Theodore G. Remer’s “History of the *Peregrinaggio*” in *Serendipity and the Three Princes*, ed. Remer (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1965), 35-49. There are a number of lengthy studies of the history of this historical word, including Robert K. Merton and Elinor Barber’s remarkable *The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity*; Merton and Barber’s Shandean study of the history of the word itself was composed over almost fifty years, and only finally posthumously in print with Princeton University Press (Princeton, 2004).

³² Looking for evidence makes the serendipitous find impossible, for, Walpole informs us, “nothing you *are* looking for” qualifies (*C*, 20:407-8).

to light, if facts and dates confute historians, what does it signify that we have been for two or three hundred years under an error? Does antiquity consecrate darkness?" (*HD*, 2:111) Walpole's material counterhistories are working within and against the very tropes of Enlightenment historiographic praxis. Like his contemporary historians, Walpole demonstrated a faith in historical progress—towards more liberal forms of government, trade, arts and culture; the inevitable progress of history is from "dark periods" of "barbarity" towards "polish" and "light" (*HD*, 2:105-110). But unlike contemporary historians—Hume in particular—Walpole expects the burden of Enlightenment to fall not on thinkers but on things, not on historians but on the independent trajectories of historically significant antiquities. Not so much the clean and well-lighted place of Enlightenment rationality, Walpole's present was crisscrossed and sometimes traumatized by objects of the historical past. Something like this kind of fidelity to the objects of history is what Walpole attempted in his *Historic Doubts*; it is a history of anachronism that locates narratives of Enlightenment not in the long duration of time but in the individual coming to light of politically and personally resonant antiquities.

This sort of "coming to light," this progress of objects on their own from darkness to illumination, and the corollary progress of letters from "interested lies" to "material" history, organizes the *Historic Doubts* no more than it organizes *The Castle of Otranto*. *Otranto*, that is, dramatizes a series of scenes of exactly this kind of serendipitous illumination; helmet, glove, suit of armor, sword, and so forth, each serially come to light in Otranto, in spite of the fact—or even because of the fact—that nobody was looking for

them, and nobody particularly wanted them when they had got them.³³ As Manfred says about the counterhistory which finally ends his reign—the discovery of the ancient regicide—the “horrors of these days, the vision we have but now seen, all corroborate thy evidence beyond a thousand parchments” (*CO*, 2:90). The shock, astonishment, surprise, or even “horror” that antiquities inspire is the proof of their veracity—a proof which trumps the merely “parchment” histories which might be assembled against them. What we have come to call the special quality of terror which characterizes gothic literature finds its source as the index of a counterhistorical truth; gothic terror is the special quality of realism that insists on its own irrational, and inconvenient, materiality.

The penultimate scene in *Otranto* assembles both the scattered images of the novel itself, and the tropes which govern Walpole’s antiquarian pursuits. The *membra*

³³ This is a general tendency of enlightenment inquisitiveness examined at length, and in relation to the gothic novel, in Terry Castle’s *The Female Thermometer: 18th-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). “The Freudian uncanny,” Castle writes, “is a function of *enlightenment*: it is that which confronts us, paradoxically, after a certain *light* has been cast. Freud quotes repeatedly (and famously) from the late eighteenth-century philosopher Schelling: everything is uncanny ‘which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light’” (7). Castle quotes Freud, “The ‘Uncanny,’” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth P, 1955), 17.241. Also see Michel Baridon’s “The Gothic Revival and the Theory of Knowledge,” in *Exhibited by Candlelight: Sources and Developments in the Gothic Tradition*, Valeria Tinkler-Villani and Peter Davidson, eds. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), 43-56.

disjecta of a great truth have been lurking around the castle for some time, turning up in bits of armor and skeletons; it is the work of this second-to-last scene to call up the body of the king which the fragments of history suggest, and to let that body speak for itself.

...a clap of thunder at that instant shook the castle to its foundations; the earth rocked, and the clank of more than mortal armour was heard behind. Frederic and Jerome thought the last day was at hand. The latter, forcing Theodore along with them, rushed into the court. The moment Theodore appeared, the walls of the castle behind Manfred were thrown down with a mighty force, and the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude, appeared in the centre of the ruins. Behold in Theodore the true heir of Alfonso! said the vision: and having pronounced those words, accompanied by a clap of thunder, it ascended solemnly towards Heaven, where the clouds parting asunder, the form of saint Nicholas was seen, and receiving Alfonso's shade, they were soon wrapt from mortal eyes in a blaze of glory. (*CO*, 2:88)

This is, as one critic observes, “an unusually physical phantom”³⁴; it is material in the way that Walpole’s “visions” were unusually material. When Walpole, after all, writes that he desires to retire to his “visions,” he habitually means “old castles, old pictures, old histories” (*C*, 10:192). His imaginations were produced by the materials of history, were

³⁴ E. J. Clery, *Supernatural Fiction*, 72.

often, in fact, the materials of history themselves.³⁵ Here, just such a material historical artifact, the armor of Alfonso, turns up, anachronistically, in the narrative present to disrupt the histories which have sprung up to maintain Manfred's dynasty. It speaks on its own, without human intervention, and, as it turns out, without anyone really desiring it to speak, least of all Theodore, who doesn't seem to want to be a king. And it quite literally "comes to light," from the dark, warrenlike spaces of the castle and into the "blaze of glory" above.³⁶ It is performing exactly what Walpole would expect of an

³⁵ Jürgen Klein, in his intricate meditations on Walpole's Gothicism, insists that "it makes sense to assume that in Walpole's works dream and reality stand in opposition to each other if, and only if, the external world constitutes the factual." He cites George Haggerty's earlier essay "Fact and Fancy in the Gothic Novel" [*Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 39 (1985): 379-91] in support of this claim. But I think both Klein and Haggerty would agree that Walpole's dreams—what Klein calls "the architecture of the mind"—were fantastic because of, and in light of, their factual content. It is the turning-up of neglected and forgotten facts that has the most powerful fantasmic potential in Walpole's literary fancies. See Klein, "Architectures of the Mind: Horace Walpole's Distortions of Medieval Romance," in *Of Remembrance the Key: Medieval Literature and its Impact through the Ages*, ed. Uwe Böker (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 149-171, especially, 158.

³⁶ The gigantic size of Alfonso in his "more than mortal armour" may likewise thematize the scary and inhuman power of material and historical objects. See Jill Cambell, "'I am no Giant': Horace Walpole, Heterosexual Incest, and Love Among Men," *The Eighteenth Century* 39.3 (1998): 238-259. Cynthia Wall, suggests that reading *The Castle of Otranto*

antiquarian find—the material surprise which it produces is the proof of the history which it provides. Bertie Greatheed’s well-known illustration (Figure 1), which fleshes out the figure of Alfonso’s “more than mortal armour,” therefore captures the perfection of the antiquarian project, though he would have understood it as the moment of the gothic sublime.

Figure 1: The "form of Alfonso." Illustration by Bertie Greatheed.

The kind of history, then, which Walpole practiced in his antiquarian pursuits is the kind of history at work in *The Castle of Otranto*. As Isaac D’Israeli would later observe, Walpole “had recourse to the *marvelous* in imagination on the principle he had adopted the *paradoxical* in history.”³⁷ Both his imaginative and his historical work depended upon the same principle, the gothic effect of the unwanted or serendipitous turning-up. Antiquities emerge, and speak for themselves; the magnified armor of the murdered king Alfonso turns up and destroys, materially, the house of Manfred, or the coronation roll turns up and destroys, literally (but only literally), the house of Lancaster. True history, “material” history, is a gothic effect, just as the sublime of the gothic novel as a “cultural satire on the *disproportionable* relation between things and people reconciles some of its generic oddities.” Wall, *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006), 122. I suspect that Wall’s reading of *Otranto* as satire articulates a slightly displaced sense of Walpole’s insistence on the radical historical and political potential of objects.

³⁷ Isaac D’Israeli, “The Pains of Fastidious Egotism” in *The Calamities and Quarrels of Authors* (London, 1812), 45.

is the articulation of a certain vision of historical inevitability which is not at all a vision of rational Enlightenment progress; it is, rather, a kind of anaphoric carrying-back, the constant anachronistic demands of objects with intentions and histories of their own. The case of *Otranto*, allowing for chronological differences, is the case of the *Historic Doubts*. It was, Walpole suggested, “as if truth was doomed to emerge, though stifled for near three hundred years” (*HD*, 134).

Strawberry Hill puts Walpole’s narrative and historiographic convictions on display. It was, as I have suggested, built to be toured. An early letter to Horace Mann reveals some of the ways in which Walpole intended his house to be experienced; written in second-person, the letter narrates what he calls a “saunter,” linking set-piece “spots” with navigational instructions: “now you shall walk into the house,” “you come to the hall and staircase,” and so forth (*C*, 20:379-81).³⁸ It pauses at Strawberry Hill’s “chief

³⁸ Walpole writes: “Now you shall walk into the house. The bow-window below leads into a little parlour hung with a stone-colour Gothic paper and Jackson’s Venetian prints, which I could never endure while they pretended, infamous as they are, to be after Titian, &c., but when I gave them this air of barbarous bas-reliefs, they succeeded to a miracle: it is impossible at first sight not to conclude that they contain the history of Attila or Tottila, done about the very aera. From hence, under two gloomy arches, you come to the hall and staircase, which it is impossible to describe to you, as it is the most particular and chief beauty of the castle. Imagine the walls covered with (I call it paper, but it is really paper painted in perspective to represent) Gothic fretwork: the lightest Gothic balustrade to the staircase, adorned with antelopes (our supporters) bearing shields; lean windows

beauties”—principal among which was the staircase—and paints them in some detail, listing the chief antiquities at each location. But the secret, of course, is that this “saunter” is in fact a carefully controlled museum tour which stages a series of organized, historical scenes. The fact of an order at all is almost guaranteed by the arrangement of rooms and doors, which funnel visitors up through the staircase; but it is clinched by Walpole’s later *Description of Mr. Walpole’s Villa at Strawberry Hill*. The *Description* is a catalogue of Walpole’s belongings, displayed in their proper places; Walpole was, in his words, “recording [porcelain] on paper,” “given with a view to [its] future dispersion,” even while providing “a well attested . . . genealogy of the objects” which the house contained (*C*, 28:101); (*D*, ii). And attached to the description are a set of instructions for visitors, for Strawberry Hill had become a kind of curiosity of its own. The *Description* therefore organizes Strawberry Hill into a complicated but deliberate narrative experience, a series of framed and organized “spots” seen in a certain order, and it reproduces, almost exactly, the order of rooms as they are staged in Walpole’s letter to Mann.³⁹

fattened with rich saints in painted glass, and a vestibule open with three arches on the landing-place, and niches full of trophies of old coats of mail, Indian shields made of rhinoceros’s hides, broadswords, quivers, long bows, arrows, and spears—all *supposed* to be taken by Sir Terry Robsart in the holy wars.” (*C*, 20:379-81)

³⁹ See also Warren Hunting Smith’s discussion of Strawberry Hill in *Architecture in English Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), and Timothy Mowl’s in *Horace Walpole*.

“Every journey,” Wapole tells us, is to be “made through a succession of pictures”; it will exhibit as its “chief beauty . . . prospect and fortunate points of view.”⁴⁰ Perhaps the most important of these “spots” or “points of view” in the journey of the house is the central staircase, the “principal beauty” of the house in both Walpole’s letter to Mann and his tour-guide *Description*.⁴¹ Part of the historical attraction of Strawberry Hill, and its lingering critical interest, is Walpole’s claim that it “inspired” *The Castle of Otranto*, a claim reiterated in the introduction to Walpole’s *Description of the Villa* itself. And if Strawberry Hill inspired *Otranto*, this stairwell might be thought to be where that inspiration begins; Walpole claims to have had an “especially vivid dream” of a “gigantic hand in armour” on the upper banister of a great staircase—a scene reproduced in his “gothic story.”⁴² But it is also true that the novel informs the experience of the house,

⁴⁰ Horace Walpole, “On Modern Gardening,” in *Works*, 2:541. “Animated prospect,” writes Walpole, “is the theatre that will always be the most frequented.”

⁴¹ See, here, Chalcraft and Viscardi’s *Visiting Strawberry Hill* for a slightly revised sense of the tourist route through the house, which assembles a number of brief detours around the central experience and “principal beauty” of the staircase. Also see Brian Fothergill’s *The Strawberry Hill Set: Horace Walpole and His Circle* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 15-16, for an imagined reconstruction of this journey.

⁴² This dream (see *C*, 1:88) is one of the standard topoi of Walpolean—and Gothic—criticism. For comparisons of the dream to Strawberry Hill, see Frederick S. Frank’s “Appendix A” in his edition of Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto and the Mysterious Mother* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003), 280-87; Warren Hunting Smith, *Architecture in English Fiction* (New Haven: Yale, 1934), 34-41; R. W. Ketton-Cremer,

that the Gothic novel educates the visitor how to read the objects which were assembled there. This is partly because people visited Strawberry Hill with the knowledge that it was built by the author of *The Castle of Otranto*, but it is also at least in part a deliberate effect of the tour itself. Just before entering the staircase, the *Description* directs the visitor to contemplate “a gracefull and expressive drawing, done for a present to Mr. W. by Lavinia Bingham.” This drawing portrays “A young lady reading the Castle of Otranto to her companion” (*D*, 31). It is the last thing on tour before entering the landing to the staircase, and it organizes the impression that the stairwell produces. The staircase, the visitor will find, reproduces the scene of instructional exchange thematized in the drawing; the staircase reads, as it were, *The Castle of Otranto* to its viewer, framing a prospect which redeploys the major tropes of *Otranto* historiography.

Through a trick of the tour, the visitor enters the stairwell from the landing at the top of the first flight of steps. Below, and visible from the landing, is the “gloomy hall” which forms the entrance to the house. It is paved with gothic tiles and hung, floor and ceiling, with paper painted to resemble gothic stonework.⁴³ Above the hall and across

Horace Walpole, A Biography (New York: Longmans, 1940), 211, 216-17; and W. S. Lewis, “The Genesis of Strawberry Hill,” *Metropolitan Museum Studies* 5.1 (1934): 88-90. As Lewis puts it, “no study of Strawberry Hill is complete without mention of *The Castle of Otranto*” (88).

⁴³ The tour may have begun not in the hall but in the adjacent “Refectory or Great Parlor,” the “idiosyncratic gothic room” which itself uses “filtered and colored light” to produce a particularly “gothic” effect. See Chalcraft and Viscardi, *Visiting Strawberry Hill*, 8.

from the visitor is Walpole's "Armoury," an elaborate display of trappings mostly left over from Henry V's campaigns in France, including the arms of Sir Terry Robsart, who Walpole claimed as an ancestor. And beyond this, through the door at the top of the stairs is the magnificently lit main library where Walpole did the bulk of his historical and antiquarian work. Painted glass heightens the difference between gloom and illumination which the vertical stairwell would already throw into, as Walpole notes, a "chiaro scuro" relief.⁴⁴ Below is "gloom"—the hallway lit with two narrow windows of gothic glass displaying St. John and St. Francis.⁴⁵ Above, in contrast, is an "open vestibule of three gothic arches" "lighted by a window entirely of painted glass," a series of quatrefoil skylights, and a great, famous "gothic lanthorn of tin japanned... filled with

⁴⁴ Strawberry Hill demonstrates strong affinities with a school of English architecture just being developed by Robert Adam and, later, John Soane, which owes an intellectual debt to Italian traditions other than the Palladian architecture popularized by Inigo Jones. Paul Davies and David Hemsoll, in a suggestive paper on "Sanmicheli through British Eyes," [in *English Architecture Public and Private*, ed. John Bold and Edward Chaney (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), 121-134] identify a common interest in the kind of high vertical lighting patterns developed by Sanmicheli in the Pellegrini Chapel in Verona. Soane's drawings of the Pellegrini Chapel emphasize the sort of sharp shadows and large clerestory windows that Walpole developed in his stairwell. Walpole owned the first volume (in five parts) of Adam's three volume *Architecture* (1773).

⁴⁵ See John Carter's watercolor drawing of the Hall, now at the Lewis Walpole Library, reproduced in Anna Chalcraft and Judith Viscardi, *Strawberry Hill: Horace Walpole's Gothic Castle* (London: Francis Lincoln, 2007), 37.

painted glass.” The stairwell, in other words, stages and personalizes the central trope of Enlightenment historiography; the visitor stands at a moment between (as Walpole puts it in *Historic Doubts*) “barbarity” and “polish,” or (as Walpole puts it in his *Description*) “gloom” and “illumination,” and is free to view both where she has come from (in the gloomy hallway, below) and where she will be shortly (in the illuminated library, above).

Performing and localizing the gothic historiography of *Otranto* stood the most magnificent piece of large antiquity in the house—the object which the alcove on the stairwell was custom-built to display. Poised between the gloom of the hall and the illumination of the skylights stood one of Walpole’s proudest purchases, what Walpole believed to be the “armour of Francis Ist. king of France, of steel gilt, and covered with bas-reliefs in a fine taste” (*D*, 31).⁴⁶ This suit of armor was one of Walpole’s most significant acquisitions, which he records in passages to several of his correspondents. And it had a particular purpose; it was designed, Walpole wrote Horace Mann, to “make a great figure here at Otranto” (*C*, 1:243). Positioned in the middle of the ascent, between gothic gloom below and the “blaze of glory” above, the “great figure” reperforms the work of Alfonso’s “dilated... form” as a gothic artifact coming to light before one’s eyes. It narrativizes, that is, the kind of gothic history which Walpole practiced. The central landing is the viewpoint that unifies gloom and illumination under

⁴⁶ Walpole and his contemporaries believed this armor to have been produced by Benvenuto Cellini for Francis I, It should perhaps be mentioned that later conservators believe it to have been an eighteenth-century reproduction. See, for instance, Chalcraft and Viscardi, *Strawberry Hill*, 39-40, which adds that it “was the only large object in the Armoury, and probably the only one which would have reflected light.”

one organizing and history-making gaze which finds, as its central referent, Walpole's armor of Francis I. (Figure 2)

Figure 2: The Great Stairwell. The niche, containing the "great figure" of the armor of Francis I, is just visible in the upper left corner of the engraving.

"Up against" the armor of Francis I hung two portraits, side-by-side: a painting of Henry V and his children, followed by one of Henry VIII. These two pieces both are and are not part of the narrative of British majesty which their proximity suggests; they both tell and don't tell the history of the Lancastrians which they bookend. Walpole purchased these portraits together from "Mr. West's collection" in 1773, in order to join them "with my Marriages of Henry VI. and VII." He intended to "compose a suite of the House of Lancaster": Henrys V, VI, VII, and VIII, a kind of timeline of the period of his most concerted antiquarian interest (*C*, 1:305). The curious thing for a reader of Walpole's letters who might later visit Strawberry Hill is that this set—the "Lancastrian suite"—would have been very difficult to find while on tour. One might expect that Walpole would display together the set of portraits which he purchased in order to own together. But this would of course be exactly the opposite of Walpole's museological work; he seems, instead, to have purchased them together in order to have the privilege of displaying them *apart*. In the staircase, according to the *Description*, are his portraits of Henry V and Henry VIII, but the intermediary paintings themselves aren't here. Henry VII, arguably the most important piece in the set, is as far from the stairwell as possible, in the Great North Bedchamber. Walpole's portrait of Henry VI can only be seen in the Gallery. The arrangement fragments the history which the paintings might have been used to portray.

Close study of the first three paintings will indicate, again, according to Walpole, that they “were done by order of Henry 7th. in honour of the house of Lancaster” (*D*, 31). These paintings, themselves antiquities, are more than just innocent objects; they are themselves polemical acts of wishful historymaking commissioned by the person who himself stood to gain the most from the version of history they portray: King Henry VII. To display the full set of Henrys here, then, would be to retell a Lancastrian history that the pressure of the architectural tour works to disrupt. Lining up Henrys V through VIII would be to forget the long civil War of the Roses. It would be, likewise, to forget the story of Richard III which it was Walpole’s own principle antiquarian work to revisit. But in prying them out of the polemic which they were painted to produce, Walpole’s arrangement opens up the possibility of a radical, and material, counterhistory—the object on its own with its own story to tell. It should finally be mentioned that the portrait of Henry VIII is in fact a double portrait with Charles V; this double portrait, aside from silently concluding a story of English kingship, also carries us back to the suit of armor, for Francis I, the humanist King of France, considered Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and English King Henry VIII to be his chief political enemies. Francis I, according to the logic that the stairwell articulates, was a champion against the house of Lancaster in its last days, and a humanist King whose enlightened pursuits provided a model for Walpole’s own. These portraits, therefore, aren’t so much put with the armor as they are, in Walpole’s words, “up against” it; the Lancastrian suite is not so much composed as opposed by the figure of Francis I, whose armor, like the armor of Alfonso the Good, turns up as a material instrument against the polemical histories of kings.

The landing of Strawberry Hill's staircase is one of a series of anamorphic subject positions which seem (but only seem) to produce themselves spontaneously; architecture and ornament produce history as though on their own. Strawberry Hill is, in Anna Chalcraft's words, a work of "gothic indoctrination."⁴⁷ By standing in the correct places, the house presents history as Walpole saw it through his own eyes; the stairwell is only the most spectacular of a number of such views. This is a technique of history-telling remarked by Donald Preziosi in his study of John Soane, an early nineteenth-century antiquarian whose house and museum still stand at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Preziosi's study reveals a complicated trajectory among the seeming clutter of the collection on display at the Soane house, which shares some surprising similarities with the order in disorder of Strawberry Hill. The Soane Museum, Preziosi argues, works not through captions and supplementary texts, but instead by producing subjects out of the arrangement of objects; it puts visitors in places in which the objects seem to arrange themselves. Such a museum is best seen as "articulating the visual environment in such a way as to make of the Subject the site where meaning is produced and ideology enacted. The gaze and perspective of the subject here 'measure' all things."⁴⁸ Any museum, Preziosi insists, works this way, but the difference between Hans Sloane's British Museum⁴⁹ and the John

⁴⁷ Chalcraft and Viscardi, *Visiting*, 11.

⁴⁸ Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven: Yale, 1989), 178.

⁴⁹ Walpole was briefly named to the board of trustees charged with combining Hans Sloane's private collection with the Cotton and King's Libraries to form the nucleus of Britain's first public national museum. Sloane's vision of the world as arrangeable in

Soane House (despite the confusing similarity of their names) is very much like the difference between the Lancastrian and Walpolian historiographic practices I've been describing here. "In seeing Soane seeing," Preziosi records, "the visitor could learn to envision a new world out of the detritus of the old."⁵⁰ In seeing Walpole seeing, the visitor might learn to reevaluate the history which she had inherited.

tables, with engravings of typical specimens, wasn't Walpole's vision at all. As Walpole put it, he was the "guardian... of embryos and cockleshells," an interesting task for "anybody who loves hippopotamuses, sharks w/ one ear, and spiders as big as geese" (*C*, 20:358-59). If the natural historical collection is meant to discover—or to produce—a kind of order in the natural world, Walpole's letter means to do the opposite; it rearranges the specimens of a vision of zoological order into a heterogeneous list of self-similar objects.

⁵⁰ Preziosi's is among the most virtuosic, but not the first, studies of the tour of the Soane Museum. Donald Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003), 90. Also see John Elsner, "The House and Museum of Sir John Soane" in Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds. *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 155-76; Susan Feinberg Millenson, *Sir John Soane's Museum* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1987); H. Dorey, "Soane as a Collector," in Peter Thornton and Helen Dorey, eds., *A Miscellany of Objects from Sir John Soane's Museum* (London: Laurence King, 1992), 122-26; and Soane's own *Description of the House and Museum on the North Side of Lincoln's Inn Fields* (London, 1830). Also see Klein, "Architectures of the Mind," 165, for another treatment of affinities between the Soane house and Strawberry Hill.

If the extended, counterhistorical work of Strawberry Hill isn't clear, the architectural frontispiece of Walpole's *Description* makes unambiguous the connection between the resources of architectural display and Walpole's gothic-historical work; atop a gothic pediment with an alcove displaying what appears to be Walpole's own suit of Francis I's armor is the severed and decidedly dolorous head of Henry VII, neatly labeled (Figure 3). This is as close as Walpole gets to producing the kind of didactic history that the rest of Strawberry Hill tends to refuse; the head of Henry VII stands in as the icon of exactly the kind of linear State narrative which Strawberry Hill categorically declines. Walpole doesn't repeat the synchronic narratives of historical progress, depositing his reader in the present day. Everything in Strawberry Hill is anachronistic; everything turns up to disrupt these sorts of histories. Strawberry Hill is a vast and deliberately confused archive, a historical resource against the tenure of kings and magistrates. As such, Walpole's haphazardness, and even his clutter, is best seen as an elaborate strategy to produce, seemingly spontaneously, a serendipitous gothic counterhistory in answer to the monumental and carefully arranged histories of the emerging museum industry.

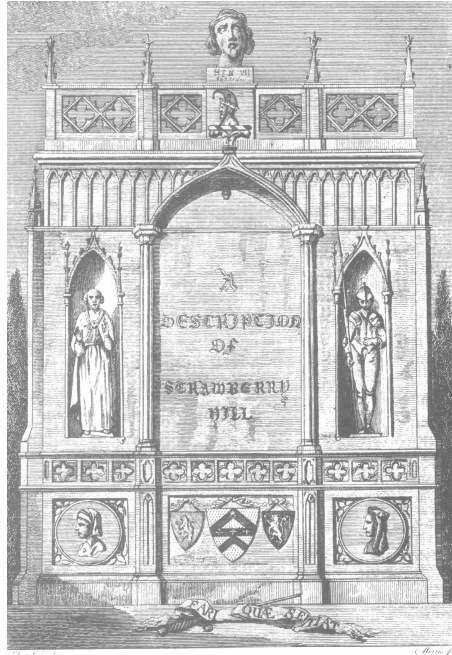


Figure 3: Frontispiece to *The Description of the Villa of Mr. Walpole*

Thomas Babington Macaulay, visiting Strawberry Hill just a few years before its collections were broken up, remarked upon the counter-historical work I have been sketching out here. Macaulay’s magisterial *History of England*, an instrument participating in the dominant tradition of history-writing, describes a grand arc of progress from “darkness” to “light” of which the Lancastrian legacy, and the Tudor dynasty which springs from it, forms an important part.⁵¹ As he puts it, “from the age of Henry the Third to the age of Elizabeth, England grew and flourished under a polity which contained the germ of our present institutions.” Not surprisingly, he is content to confine his historical remarks on King Richard III to the very brief observation that he “has generally been represented as a monster of depravity,” reproducing a textual tradition of “monstrous” representations which included exactly the tragedies of

⁵¹ Macaulay, *History of England from the Accession of James the Second*, ed. Charles Harding Firth, 6 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1913), 1:56, 1:30.

imagination dismissed by Walpole. Macaulay's interest is less in the stories that historical artifacts might tell—of, for example, Richard III himself—than in a “present institutions” and a “present constitution.”⁵² Walpole's historical studies, on the contrary, “are to the works of great historians,” Macaulay noted, as “Strawberry Hill is to the museum of Sir Hans Sloane.”⁵³ Sir Hans Sloane's British Museum was what Macaulay called “one of the glories of our country”; combined with the King's Library, it projected a more-or-less monolithic vision of British imperial solidarity.⁵⁴ The British Museum was, in this way, an articulation of the kind of Whig history—of gothic history of the conservative sort—which Macaulay himself helped to perfect. And seen against this tradition, Walpole's collection of heterogeneous fragments appears less like a professional, scientific historical undertaking than a perverse anomaly—which, of course, it is, and richly and deliberately so. In fact, it is this perverseness—the disordered clutter of fragments redolent in the aura of the Gothic past—which is missing from Strawberry

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1:35, 1:25.

⁵³ Macaulay, “Review of *Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford, to Sir Horace Mann*,” *Edinburgh Review* 58 (1833): 227-258.

⁵⁴ Macaulay, *History*, 6:2937. But see also Shawn Malley, “Shipping the Bull: Staging Assyria in the British Museum,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 26.1 (2004): 1-27; and Timothy Webb, “Appropriating the Stones: The ‘Elgin Marbles’ and English National Taste,” in Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush, eds., *Claiming the Stones, Naming the Bones: Cultural Property and the Negotiation of National and Ethnic Identity* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2002), 51-96 for recent reassessments of this relatively well-known critique.

Hill today, but it is also something like this counterhistorical perverseness which Walpole intended us to experience while visiting Strawberry Hill.