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Caroline Winter

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"Some Fatal Secret": Mortmain in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*

Caroline Winter
University of Victoria

In Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Matilda spends hours gazing at a portrait of a knight, Alfonso the Good. She explains to her maid, "[…] some how or other my destiny is linked with something relating to him. […] I am sure there is some fatal secret at bottom."[1] The "fatal secret" is just one of many tropes present in the novel that came to define the genre of "terror fiction" or, as it is now more commonly known, the Gothic novel. Frederick Frank argues that, as a "prototype" for the Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* "furnishes a symbolic glossary for evoking dread, for arousing pleasure in the irrational and for establishing an iconography of an unholy and malignant cosmos governed only by absurd forces."[2] One of these "absurd forces" is the notion of property and the laws surrounding it. Questions about what constitutes property and what it means to own it were subjects of widespread public debate throughout the eighteenth century, a debate in which Gothic literature had a powerful voice.[3] The uncertainty surrounding the changing economy and the tensions resulting from it are manifested in the novel's depiction of a Gothic

1. Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. Michael Gamer (London; New York: Penguin, 2001), 37–38.

2. Frederick S. Frank, "Proto-Gothicism: the Infernal Iconography of Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*." *Orbis Litterarum* 41, no. 3 (1986): 199–212, 201.

3. Gary Kelly. "General Introduction." *Varieties of Female Gothic*, ed. Kelly (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2002), xxxi. Kelly points out that writing Gothic novels enabled women in particular to participate in public debates about social, cultural, and economic issues, debates from which they were otherwise excluded. Many Gothic fictions by women focus on these issues in relation to property.

world, an imaginative landscape dominated by a haunted castle and founded on a fatal secret. This paper examines how the novel uses the "symbolic glossary" of the Gothic to interrogate issues of property, arguing that supernatural forces at work in the novel embody economic ideas: dead hands keeping a grip on their property from beyond the grave.

The haunted castle is one of the most ubiquitous symbols in Walpole's "symbolic glossary." Indeed, castles are omitted from Ann Tracy's index to Gothic motifs in *The Gothic Novel, 1790–1830* because, as she notes, "Castles, […] are so pervasive a device that no purpose can be served by the recitation of two hundred novels that have them."[4] The haunted castle is rich with interpretive possibilities and is variously read as a symbol of the female body, as feminized space, and as a symbol of England's feudal past.[5] This paper, however, reads the castle as a material object—a piece of real estate that can be inherited, bought, and sold—in order to focus on the economic ideas at the core of *The Castle of Otranto*. The field of political economy emerged out of the same cultural and historical moment as the Gothic—Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was published just twelve years after *The Castle of Otranto*—and the notion of property is central to both.[6] Issues surrounding property were particularly contentious in late–eighteenth-century Britain, as Paul Langford explains in *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689–1798*. Property law was complex and

4. Ann B. Tracy, *The Gothic Novel, 1790–1830: Plot Summaries and Index to Motifs* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981), 195.

5. See, for example, Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Claire Kahane, "Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity," *Centennial Review* 24, no. 1 (1980): 43–64; and David Punter, "Scottish and Irish Gothic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 105–24.

6. The intersections between Smith's writings and the Gothic are beyond the scope of this paper, but are addressed elsewhere, particularly in relation to Smith's metaphor of the invisible hand. See, for example, Stefan Andriopoulos, "The Invisible Hand: Supernatural Agency in Political Economy and the Gothic Novel," *English Literary History* 66, no. 3, (1999): 739–58; Jakob Tanner, "The Conspiracy of the Invisible Hand: Anonymous Market Mechanisms and Dark Powers," *New German Critique* 103, Dark Powers: Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in History and Literature (2008), 51–64; and Eleanor Courtemanche, *The "Invisible Hand" and British Fiction, 1818–1860: Adam Smith, Political Economy, and the Genre of Realism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

often self-contradictory, as it sought to reconcile legal regulations with laws of custom as applied to different types of ownership. The complex of ideas surrounding property law was wide-ranging, covering slavery, marriage, and the property of one's person; intellectual property and copyright; public versus private property and enclosure; and legitimacy and inheritance. Legitimacy concerns not only the legalities of primogeniture and strict settlement, which were themselves complex, but also questions about the very source of legitimacy. As Langford explains, some believed property to be divinely granted, while others located the source of authority in the less exalted sphere of social, political, and economic convention.[7] Ownership of land had, since the Revolution of 1688, taken the place of royal lineage as a source of power.[8] Modes of ownership that preserved the economic and political dominance of the aristocracy based on land ownership, such as inheritance by blood, were increasingly challenged by a rising bourgeoisie and their new money, which could buy the land, estates, and trappings that formerly distinguished different ranks and classes. This complex of laws and ideas surrounding property, particularly the "respect which attended property" is central to what Langford calls the "mental landscape of the eighteenth-century."[9]

The "mental landscape" that Langford describes is dotted with haunted castles, inhabited with what most critics of the Gothic agree to be spectres of the past. Robert Miles, for instance, argues that "the dead hand of the past" is the "ruling metaphor" of the Gothic.[10] This haunting past is a gothic history ambivalently imagined as an idealized, proud chivalric tradition and as a barbaric and unenlightened dark age. A particular kind of past is haunting the castle of Otranto, though: an economic one, embodied in the ghost of its previous owner, Alfonso the Good. This haunting by a previous owner evokes another "dead hand" metaphor: mortmain. Mortmain is a legal term that refers to inalienable property rights—the possession of property for

7. Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689–1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 2.

8. See E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762–1800* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 73 and Langford, *Public Life*, v.

9. Langford, *Public Life*, 1.

10. Robert Miles, "The Gothic," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*, ed. David Scott Kastan, 2006.

perpetuity—and is usually associated with institutional land ownership, such as the ownership of land by the church.[11] Mortmain is thus a synecdoche for the owner's will, a figurative manifestation of it that is codified in law. As Miles points out, Thomas Paine uses mortmain as a metaphor for Edmund Burke's notion of chivalry in *Rights of Man*, arguing against "the authority of the dead over the rights and freedom of the living."[12] This problem of misplaced authority is central in *The Castle of Otranto*, written almost 30 years before Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and Paine's *Rights of Man*: a dead hand—a thing—is claiming authority over living people by holding onto its property. When the novel begins, the castle is in Manfred's possession: he inherited it from his father, who inherited it from Ricardo, a former chamberlain of Alfonso the Good. An ominous prophecy holds "*That the castle and lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it*,"[13] and as the novel unfolds, of course, the prophecy comes to pass.

Critics generally read the supernatural forces in the novel—including Alfonso's ghost and a spectral hermit that tells Frederic to assert his claim to the property—as restorative or conservative, since the enactment of the prophecy results in Otranto reverting to the possession of Alfonso's rightful heir by blood, Theodore.[14] Stefan Andriopoulos describes the function of the supernatural in *Otranto* as restoring "genealogical equilibrium,"[15] for example, and Susan Chaplin, Ruth Anolik, and E. J. Clery describe it as righting a wrong: "correct[ing] a

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11. Although this paper is primarily concerned with the metaphorical nature of the legal term, it is worth noting that legislation surrounding mortmain changed during the period in which *The Castle of Otranto* is set (the early sixteenth century) and in the period just before the novel was published. These legislative changes suggest an ongoing debate about the nature of property ownership. See Gareth H. Jones, *History of the Law of Charity, 1532–1827* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), Chapter 7.

12. Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution* (London: J. S. Jordan, 1791), 10. See Miles's discussion of Paine's use of the mortmain metaphor in "Political Gothic Fiction," in *Romantic Gothic: an Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Angela Wright and Dale Townshend (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 129–46.

13. Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 17.

14. See, for example, Frank, "Proto-Gothicism" and Andriopoulos, "The Invisible Hand."

15. Andriopoulos, "The Invisible Hand," 743.

lapse in the rightful possession of property."[16] This correction is complicated by what Anolik calls the "slippery" nature of property ownership in the novel and the unjust nature of the supernatural forces which, as Clery points out, subvert the purported moral of the story: "*the sins of fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation*," a moral that even the novel's pretend editor cannot condone.[17] This paper problematizes readings of the supernatural forces as restorative. Although technically Alfonso's bloodline is restored, this restoration comes at a devastating cost. Theodore is raised from obscurity to greatness, from a peasant to the lord of Otranto, but his ending is not a happy one. He has no ambition to own the property, and by the time he takes possession of the castle, it is in ruins. Moreover, although Theodore is Alfonso's rightful heir, the bloodline ends with him: his union with Isabella unites the ancestors of Alfonso, but there is no sense of continuation or possibility in the end of the novel, and no suggestion that Theodore will beget heirs of his own. Theodore unites with Isabella only to pine for Matilda. If the supernatural forces in the novel restore the proper line of inheritance, why does the novel end this way? The answer lies in the fatal secret.

Although most readings of *Otranto* view Ricardo's murder of Alfonso as the event that inspires the prophecy, the true source of the prophecy is the secret deal that Ricardo makes with St. Nicholas. Manfred's confession of Ricardo's crimes exposes his grandfather's usurpation of the castle: "Ricardo, my grandfather, was his [Alfonso's] chamberlain — I would draw a veil over my ancestor's crimes — but it is in vain: Alfonso died by poison. A fictitious will declared Ricardo his heir."[18] Since Frederic has already accused Manfred of this crime, this part of the confession is not surprising. But Manfred also reveals that after the murder, Ricardo was on his way back to Otranto when he nearly died in a storm. Filled with mortal fear, Ricardo struck a bargain with St. Nicholas:

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16. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 71. See Ruth Bienstock Anolik, *Property and Power in English Gothic Literature* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2016), 16 and Susan Chaplin, "Spectres of Law in *The Castle of Otranto*," *Romanticism* 12, no. 3 (2007): 177–88.

17. Anolik, *Property and Power*, 17; Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 72; Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 6–7.

18. Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 99.

> Haunted by his guilt, he vowed to saint Nicholas to found a church and two convents if he lived to reach Otranto. The sacrifice was accepted: the saint appeared to him in a dream, and promised that Ricardo's posterity should reign in Otranto until the rightful owner should be grown too large to inhabit the castle, and as long as issue-male from Ricardo's loins should remain to enjoy it.[19]

By entering this contract, Ricardo preserves his own life and secures the property to himself and his heirs for a finite yet undetermined length of time. The contract also legitimizes Ricardo's fraudulent claim to the property, which, as Manfred learns, comes at a horrible cost. Although it is Alfonso's hand that holds the castle's bannister, it was Ricardo's that (metaphorically, at least) signed the contract, and Ricardo's will that controls Manfred's fate. At first, the language of the contract seems familiar: it uses terms such as "rightful owner" and "issue-male," for example. Less familiar is the reference to the "rightful owner" being "grown too large to inhabit the castle": its meaning becomes clear only when the giant helmet appears, indicating that the rightful owner's largeness is literal rather than figurative. Conrad is about to marry Isabella, thereby promising a new generation of issue-male to satisfy the secret contract, when he is suddenly squashed by a giant helmet that falls from the sky, an enlarged and ghostly—yet unquestionably material—helmet from a statue of Alfonso. This helmet is a sign that the prophecy is being realized: it signifies the return of the rightful owner, who is quite literally too large for the castle, and ensures the end of Ricardo's bloodline by killing Conrad.[20] What's more, the helmet signifies that the prophecy is not mere superstition but a manifestation of the contract in supernatural form. Given the fairly quotidian terms of the contract, this manifestation seems strange, until we remember that through this contract, St. Nicholas legitimized Ricardo's spurious claim and thus naturalized his unnatural crime against Alfonso's bloodline. In entering the contract, then, Ricardo

19. Ibid.

20. This murder of the innocent Conrad supports the idea that the supernatural forces in the novel are vindictive and malevolent rather than restorative. This is in contrast to the generally benevolent ghosts in the Gothic novels that follow. In Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron*, for example, the virtuous Edmund does not fear ghosts, but his persecutors do. See Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron*, ed. James Trainer and James Watt (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

contracted a moral debt against the property, deferring payment for his crimes of murder, forgery, and usurpation. Manfred inherits his grandfather's material property as well as this moral debt, which becomes due on Conrad's wedding day.

Like the Gothic villains that follow in Manfred's footsteps, Manfred is haunted by debt, both moral and material. Indeed, it is the debts of his fathers—not their sins—for which Manfred is destined to pay. Desperate to forestall the prophecy and retain ownership of Otranto, Manfred hatches a plot to divorce his wife Hippolita and marry Isabella in order to produce more male heirs. He begins to act on this plot immediately after Conrad's death by threatening Isabella with rape. As she tries to get away from him, the portrait of Ricardo on the wall behind her comes to life, and the figure steps out of the frame. Manfred attempts to speak to the spectre, reproaching it for contracting this debt:

> Do I dream? cried Manfred returning, or are the devils themselves in league against me? Speak, infernal spectre! Or, if thou art my grandsire, why dost thou too conspire against thy wretched descendent, who too dearly pays for—[21]

The ghost cuts him off with a sigh, but not before Manfred reveals that he resents his ancestor for the burden—the debt—that he has inherited, and that he thinks of this burden in explicitly economic terms: he laments that he "too dearly pays for" the secret that he is forced to keep. Later, Manfred repeats this lament over the body of his daughter Matilda, whom he has just stabbed to death. Manfred says, "Alfonso died by poison. A fictitious will declared Ricardo his heir. His crimes pursued him — yet he lost no Conrad, no Matilda! I pay the price of usurpation for all!"[22] The death of Manfred's children is stipulated in the prophecy only indirectly, as it states that there should be no "issue-male from Ricardo's loins" to inherit the property.[23] What seems a simple reference to primogeniture is thus revealed to be a mortal threat. If Ricardo's deal with St. Nicholas involves him contracting a moral debt, a debt that Manfred is doomed to pay, Ricardo's deal with St. Nicholas amounts to a kind of usury, in which Conrad and Matilda's

21. Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 25.
22. Ibid., 99.
23. Ibid.

lives are collected as a premium on the moral loan. The contract between Ricardo and St. Nicholas prevents the restoration of Alfonso's bloodline by killing Matilda, whom Theodore would have married. Such a restoration would be forward-looking, ensuring the continuation of Alfonso's bloodline—and his continued grip on the property—into the future, while also legitimizing Manfred's claim. Manfred confronts a literal dead hand, though, one that steals from the present in order to recompense the past. There can be no future for Manfred's line because Ricardo stole that future to pay for his temporary redemption and lived the rest of his life on borrowed time.

The price that Manfred pays for the crimes of his grandfather is moral as well as material. His incestuous designs on Isabella emphasize the unnaturalness of Manfred's determination to produce a male heir. Chaplin argues that the threat of an incestuous union between Manfred and Isabella is the primary source of anxiety in the novel because it would mean "compromising the principle of paternal Law" upon which rests the system of inheritance by blood.[24] Indeed, Manfred's interest in Isabella is purely economic: he never hints at desiring her sexually and values her only as a medium through which to produce heirs that would maintain his claim to the property. Manfred's incestuous desire is thus very different than that which Walpole depicts in his drama *The Mysterious Mother*, in which the Countess's desire for her late husband results in an incestuous liaison with her own son.[25] Isabella's reaction to Manfred's proposal suggests that whatever his motivation, his incestuous intentions are equally horrible: her disgust prompts her iconic flight through the passages under the castle to the safety of the adjacent convent, even though she is "half-dead with fright and horror."[26] Manfred's desperation seems to blind him to the immorality of his plan. Or, at least, the moral cost of rape and incest does not outweigh the potential material gains.

In the world of the Gothic, incest is the greatest natural evil, the most taboo act. But Manfred is guilty of other unnatural feelings, too: those he bears to his wife and children. He is willing, after all, to shame

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24. Chaplin, "Spectres of Law," 187.

25. Horace Walpole, "*The Mysterious Mother. A Tragedy*," in *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story and the Mysterious Mother: A Tragedy*, ed. Frederick S. Frank (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2011), 167–256.

26. Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 24.

his wife by divorcing her. His desperation similarly transforms what were feelings of "partial fondness"[27] for Conrad during his life into unnatural indifference upon his death:

> 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 proportionable quantity of black feathers.
>
> The horror of the spectacle, the ignorance of all around how this misfortune had happened, and above all, the tremendous phœnomenon before him, took away the prince's speech. Yet his silence lasted longer than even grief could occasion. He fixed his eyes on what he wished in vain to believe a vision; and seemed less attentive to his loss, than buried in meditation on the stupendous object that had occasioned it. He touched, he examined the fatal casque; nor could even the bleeding mangled remains of the young prince divert the eyes of Manfred from the portent before him.[28]

Manfred's fondness for Conrad seems contingent on his being alive, the vessel of the family's bloodline. Conrad's bloody, squashed corpse raises no emotion in his father, but the helmet does. As the portent of the prophecy coming to pass, the helmet is a source of dread, a manifestation of his impending dispossession.

Manfred's dread of dispossession also causes him to murder his daughter. Despite his incestuous designs on Isabella and his unnatural indifference toward Matilda, Manfred is initially innocent of any crimes. Believing Matilda to be Isabella in a tryst with Theodore, though, a tryst that could muddy the lineage of the heirs he still plans to father through her, Manfred is driven into a frenzy, "a frame of mind capable of the most fatal excesses."[29] Without confirming the identity of the woman, Manfred attacks, "drawing his dagger, and plunging it over her shoulder into the bosom of the person that spoke."[30] This crime transforms Manfred from a tyrant into something even worse. Theodore calls him a "Savage, inhuman monster," and Manfred calls

27. Ibid., 19.
28. Ibid., 18–19.
29. Ibid., 94.
30. Ibid., 95.

himself a "Murderous monster."[31] Manfred's dread of dispossession—of the dead hand—therefore makes him monstrous and inhuman.

The sensational and supernatural elements in *The Castle of Otranto* drew criticism from its first readers and reviewers,[32] but the supernatural has a function beyond mere sensation; it makes possible the literalization of the economic ideas that the novel explores. The spectral suit of armour is the most striking example of this, as disembodied pieces of it repossess the castle. A giant foot and leg move as if the body that inhabits them were standing up,[33] suggesting a body rising from the grave. A massive armoured hand grips the bannister of the main staircase, a spectral manifestation of Alfonso's mortmain-like claim to the property.[34] Frederic arrives with Alfonso's giant sword as a token of his claim's legitimacy.[35] And, of course, the huge helmet signals the prophecy's coming to pass. The supernatural thus literalizes mortmain as both a metaphor—the hand that grips the bannister—and as law—the spectre of St. Nicholas who holds Ricardo's contract.

The clash between symbolic and material modes of legitimacy in the novel is highlighted by the nature of the competing claims to the castle. Clery identifies the key conflict in the novel as between the characters and "the principle of property objectivised as the supernatural phenomena which obstruct their wishes at every turn."[36] Chaplin identifies a different conflict, that between the sacred and the

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31. Ibid., 95, 96.

32. For example, in Reeve's Preface to the second edition of *The Old English Baron*, her rewriting of *The Castle of Otranto*, she critiques the excess of that novel's supernatural spectacle, writing that the improbable occurrences "destroy the work of imagination, and, instead of attention, excite laughter." Reeve, *The Old English Baron*, 3.

33. Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 32.

34. Walpole's account of the inception of *Otranto* in a dream supports the claim that mortmain is central to the novel. He describes the dream, which includes a ghostly hand, in a letter to Rev. William Cole: "[…] I had thought myself in an ancient castle […] and that on the uppermost bannister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour." Walpole to Rev. W. Cole, Strawberry Hill, 9 March 1765, in *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with the Rev. William Cole*, ed. W. S. Lewis and A. Dayle Wallace, vol. 1 (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1937), 88. See also Michael Gamer's discussion of this dream in his introduction to the novel. Michael Gamer, introduction to *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole (London; New York: Penguin, 2001), xiii–xxxv, xxiv.

35. Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 58.

36. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 74.

abject, the lawful and the unlawful, arguing that Manfred's inability to work within the novel's "symbolic economy" is his downfall.[37] There are some logistical problems with Manfred's plan to beget an heir by Isabella, after all. For instance, such an heir would take nine months to be born, and would be as likely to be female—and thus of no use to Manfred—as to be male. But the greater problem, as Chaplin argues, is that Manfred is trying to find a material solution to a symbolic problem. No matter how many heirs he produces, he cannot loosen Alfonso's grip on the property, the inalienable right to the property granted through the bloodline, captured in the symbolism of the family tree.[38] Although Ricardo's claim to the property was originally based on a forged will, the family's continued possession of the estate legitimizes this claim.[39] Frederic is, as far as anyone knows at the beginning of the novel, Alfonso's closest heir by blood, and his claim is backed by supernatural authority: the mysterious hermit who leads him to the sword. Theodore's claim to the property is particularly interesting because it, like Frederic's, is based on blood: he is the secret but legitimate grandson of Alfonso, whose grandmother died after being captured by corsairs. Although Theodore does not initially have the same supernatural authority behind his claim, he proves himself to be Alfonso's moral heir, displaying the same courtesy and honour that, we assume, earned his ancestor the epithet of Alfonso the Good. In tension in the novel, then, are competing modes of ownership: Alfonso's and Theodore's claims based on blood, Manfred's claim based on possession, and Ricardo's contract with St. Nicholas. The truly destructive force, though, is the dead hand, which demands fulfilment of the secret contract even though this means the destruction of the estate; the dead hand is thus a manifestation of the problem that Paine would articulate 30 years later: a thing from the past that asserts its rights over living people, with disastrous consequences.

As the prototypical Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* provides more than a collection of tropes; it also originates the thematic concerns that permeate Gothic fiction. The centrality of economic themes in the novel could be read as a product of Walpole's personal history;

37. Chaplin, "Spectres of Law," 179.
38. Ibid., 182.
39. Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 56.

his father's legacy included the inception of the National Debt, after all. But the novel's engagement in the public debate surrounding property is not unique. Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* is also concerned with negotiating different modes of ownership, for example. In Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the villainous Montoni is driven by greed: he persecutes Emily, the heroine, in order to extort her property.[40] In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff's revenge on Edgar Linton is an economic one: his triumph is becoming the legal owner of the Linton estate. Economic concerns are common, of course, in Romantic fiction, and not unique to the Gothic, but the extent to which economic ideas and problems shape the imaginative landscape of the Gothic is only beginning to be explored. In *The Literature of Terror*, David Punter notes that the Gothic is a response to the emerging capitalist economy.[41] More recently, Gary Kelly identifies "rightful ownership of property" as one of the "leading elements" of the Gothic,[42] and Ruth Anolik argues that the Gothic grapples with the notion that property is "inherently unpossessable."[43] But as this paper shows, the Gothic's engagement with economic ideas is not just thematic: the supernatural "claptrap" that *Otranto* is best remembered for provides discursive tools for imaginatively working through problems and questions surrounding the economic revolution of the Romantic period. In the Gothic world, mortmain is manifested as a giant spectral hand, a legal contract is transformed into a mysterious prophecy, and a backdoor deal is imagined as a fatal secret.

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40. Mary Poovey and Clery both discuss Emily's economic persecution by Montoni. See Mary Poovey, "Ideology and 'the Mysteries of Udolpho'," *Criticism* 21, no. 4 (1979): 307–30, and Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, Chapter 8.

41. David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions From 1765 to the Present Day* (Essex; New York: Longman, 1996), 112.

42. Gary Kelly, "General Introduction," in *Varieties of Female Gothic*, ed. Kelly (London: Pickering & Chatto Ltd, 2002), xi–lx, xix.

43. Anolik, *Property and Power*, 4.