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### Examining the Gothic Revival within Architecture

From the time in history when the Industrial Revolution felt staggering and overwhelming, the Gothic Revival rose to try and bring the world back to a time when religion, design, and expression were at the forefront of importance. With elements that placed heavier meaning on the ideas of self-identity, the Gothic Revival aimed to recenter both the people as well as the architectural and artistic landscape of the time. In the coming assessment and breakdown of the revival, we will get to see some of the inner workings and concepts that served as the driving force behind the design process of the movement as well as architectural examples that will help to visually explain and express the aesthetics found all throughout it.



Palace of Westminster, London England, Built from 1840-1870



Strawberry Hill House, Twickenham London, Built from 1749-1776



Humewood Castle Estate, County Wicklow Ireland, Built from 1867-1870

Our analysis of the Gothic Revival first takes us to a man named Augustus Pugin. Pugin has been greatly described as the main instigator behind the revival of Gothic architecture within Europe, “Pugin was the chief begetter of the Revival in a meteoric career (he died aged only forty) that changed the face and mind of British architecture.” (Hill, 2009 pg.1) Despite his short time spent designing, his influence had a lasting effect on the direction of architecture for the next few decades. Pugin’s goal when it came to designing buildings, was to return to a time in the world before the influence of Industrial Revolution. This return to the past was also designed to bring people’s livelihoods and lifestyles along with it. He wanted the architecture to represent when faith had a greater influence on the people who followed it, “Pugin's passion was to redeem the ugly, industrializing, laissez-faire Britain of his day by restoring the fabric and values and faith of an idealized medieval England. His way to this goal was the revival of Gothic as the true Christian architecture.” (Hill, 2009 pg.1) Pugin had a deep connection with his faith, which lead to many of his projects focusing on churches and cathedrals. Hand crafted details and ornamentation where some of the most basic, yet important pieces of Pugin’s design process. Everything was designed to serve some form of purpose within his buildings, whether that be functional or decorative. His work attempted to stay true to its influential predecessors, that being the surviving architecture from the initial Gothic introduction. Nothing was to be left out or altered, that being the material used or the ornamentation that was applied, as Pugin wanted to remain as authentic as possible, “And indeed “Propriety” demanded that ornament should be lavish and even profuse according to the importance of the structure or object to be adorned: and what could be more important that the house of God?” (Tyack, 1996 pg. 3). The

upholding of standards that were used in the past is a major reason as to why the Gothic Revival holds such importance today.

Another greatly influential figure that we find within the Gothic Revival is John Ruskin. Like Pugin, Ruskin focused heavily on the importance of ornamentation and personal expression, “By representing details in terms of their artisans’ passionate and uncontainable individuality, Ruskin generates the effect of the liberatory, individualist subjectivity with which he animates details.” (Pradhan, 2022 pg. 720). One could describe Pugin as being more focused on the moral themes and ideas found within the Gothic Revival, while Ruskin emphasized more on the principle of design and aesthetic. In his book titled, “*The Seven Lamps of Architecture*,” Ruskin describes Gothic architecture as, “the vivid expression of the intellectual life concerned in their production.” (Pradhan, 2022 pg. 734). From this we can see that he does indeed value the importance of expression within the revival but focuses more so on the individual designer’s self-expression through the process of creating, making, and appreciating design. Ruskin also discusses the idea of, “Gothicness,” within his analysis of the Gothic design, saying that there is a degree to which certain design elements can be called Gothic, “[E]very building of the Gothic period differs in some important respect from every other; and many include features which, if they occurred in other buildings, would not be considered Gothic at all; so that all we have to reason upon is merely . . . a greater or less degree of *Gothicness* in each building we examine. And it is this Gothicness, —the character which, according as it is found more or less in a building, makes it more or less Gothic, —of which I want to define the nature.” (Pradhan, 2022 pg. 747). The idea of a perfect Gothic aesthetic is near impossible, as certain elements of its design aren’t as exclusive as other



elements. Instead, we can assess a buildings design and identify different design elements to determine if the build has enough Gothicness. Ruskin, in combination with Augustus Pugin, gives us a sound understanding of how we can now look at and evaluate different works from the Gothic Revival.

Our first architectural work that we will be looking at is The Palace of Westminster. Following, “The Great Fire”, in 1834, which burned down the old Palace of Westminster, a new Parliament building was needed to replace it. Sir Charles Barry and Augustus Pugin were two of the most influential figures in the design process in rebuilding the Palace of Westminster. When we look at the Palace of Westminster, we can see some of the tell-tale signs of Gothic architecture. The use of pointed arches, vertical lines, and immersive ornamentation are evident throughout its design. Flying buttresses even make an appearance in Westminster Hall, granted that it remained from the old House of Parliament from before the fire. Pugin’s love for ornamentation can be see throughout different parts of the building’s design, especially within the room called, The House of Lords. Here, we can see many design elements that draw heavy inspiration from well-known Gothic cathedrals. Quatrefoils, which have attachments to elements within religion, are found within the stained-glass windows and wall designs. The presence of quatrefoils links back to Pugin’s attachment to Christian architecture and value of religion within design. Another architectural design element that is reminiscent of cathedrals seen in the House of Lords is the presence of stained-glass windows that run the length of the room. The culmination of these design elements show how much influence and importance Gothic architecture had on the design process of Pugin. We can see that design elements found within the Palace of Westminster are supportive of Pugin’s dedication to

authentic work. Limestone was used as the primary material in the construction of the House of Parliament. This use of natural stone supports Pugin's claims of wanting to stay true to the architectural predecessors from before him. His work on the Palace of Westminster did not go unnoticed, with many even claiming that his work on the House of Parliament as being, "the archetypal symbol of London ever since." (Hill, 2009 pg. 1). The values found within the Gothic Revival can be seen in other famous examples of architecture from the 1700 and 1800's

Our next architectural work of art from the Gothic Revival that we will be looking at is Strawberry Hill House. With construction starting in 1749, Strawberry Hill is one of the first architectural works that came out of the Gothic Revival. The most credited person in its construction was Horace Walpole. In an article by Matthew Reeve, he describes Strawberry Hill as, "Emulating the stone construction of medieval Gothic architecture in plaster, wood and papier-mâché and incorporating medieval spolia in stained glass and other media, the interiors and their furnishings perform a series of formal and material transportations." (Reeve, 2013 pg. 1). This description provides no over-exaggeration, as we can see a well thought out and methodic creation within Strawberry Hill. With its spired towers, pointed arch windows, and use of quatrefoils, we could describe its exterior as having a substantial amount of Gothicism to it, in terms of John Ruskin's observation of Gothic architecture. One area where it appears to be lacking in at face value is the use of ornamentation. Strawberry Hill greatly makes up for this in its interior space. Within its walls we can find rib-vaulted ceilings, portal-like doorways, and hand carved wall ornamentation. During the design process, Walpole placed heavy consideration of the ideas of individual and personal enjoyment within the architecture that was to be used in Strawberry Hill, "This inherently subjective interpretative apparatus-which

locates pleasure within the individual rather than within the work of art-was manifestly central to Walpole's design and perception of architecture." (Reeve, 2013 pg. 8). Walpole's ideas when it comes to design directly correlates with John Ruskin's belief in the importance of self-expression found with design and enjoyment. Both wanted each person to have a unique experience when placed in front of ornament design. After viewing the interior spaces of Strawberry Hill, one could argue that Horace Walpole succeeded in his attempt to create a uniquely individual architectural work of art. The ornamentation found throughout the building is uniquely created to match each space it is applied to, leading to no two rooms looking nearly identical. From this piece of architecture, I believe that we can see one of the first great works of the Gothic Revival.

Our last piece of architecture we will be looking at is Humewood Castle in County Wicklow, Ireland. Built from 1867-1870 this masterpiece contains many wonderful examples of the ideas found within the Gothic Revival. The architect and designer tasked with creating the castle was William White. Despite going bankrupt due to cost disagreements after the completion of Humewood and essentially ending his career, White's work on the castle was still regarded as, "...one of the most astounding and fantastic castles of the Victorian Gothic style." (Horan, 2017 pg.2). When we take a look at the design elements throughout its exterior and interior, we can find lots of examples of Gothic structure and ornamentation. The exterior of the castle holds far less Gothicness than the interior. This does not mean it completely lacks Gothic design. Pointed arches, stained glass windows, and occasional embellishment of stone can be found through different parts of its exterior. Once we enter within its walls however, we find lots of Gothic elements. Since the building was designed to be a somewhat defensible and

secure structure, William White placed much more emphasis on the design of the interior space (Horan, 2017 pg.3). The use of rib vaults and pointed arches can be seen in many rooms of the building. Dressed in hand crafted organic ornamentation, these elements of its design radiates an identifiable relation to the Gothic style and appreciation. During a restoration process from 2012-2016, workers remarked that White's architectural design was uniquely its own, "In many instances, no precedent for some of White's innovations existed in other historic buildings." (Horan, 2017 pg. 4). This statement supports Ruskin's idea of personal self-expression and identity but take to a whole new level. White worked outside of the box during the design process of Humewood, to the extent that architecturally it was uniquely unlike anything else that existed at that time. Humewood in its entirety, can be seen as its own self-expressed work of art that valued the idea of individual enjoyment within its design. Thanks to the work of William White, we have been shown yet another perfect example of architecture from the Gothic Revival.

In a period of growing uniformity, the Gothic Revival served as a device to rejuvenate the ideas of design and expression. The perspectives of Augustus Pugin and John Ruskin gives us more context to the principles found within the revival. A return to the pureness found within religion, the expression of one's individual self, and the appreciate for tradition have been expressed in different ways throughout each of the three architectural works of art that we discussed. The influence that the Gothic Revival had is evident as the following large-scale movement of the mid to late 1800's, the arts and craft movement, was inspired and took lots of elements from it. It is safe to say that the works from the Gothic Revival have, and hopefully will, continue to inspire the world of art and design for many more years to come.



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