

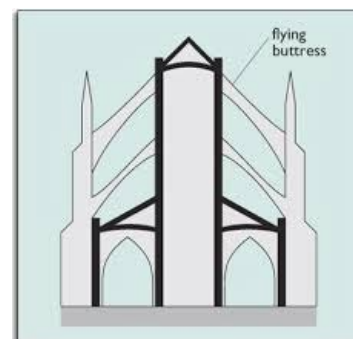
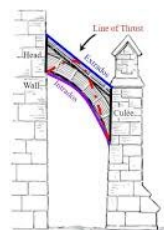
There is a risk with a monument. Beyond the demand of public display and taste, beyond the need for fitting selection of focus and site, there is the risk of imitation. It is one thing to honor a great accomplishment, to satisfy a debt of recognition, it is another to say, here is greatness, be like this, or worse, continue in this.

When I read William Faulkner I am ever mindful of the risk of imitation as it is seen in continuity. For tradition can become a shackle when it demands imitation. When the Jim Crow south spoke of preserving their culture in the Lost Cause, there was a sort of necrophilia. Faulkner implied such with his story, "A Rose for Emily." His most obvious example of how tradition and memory can be incarceration is the Rev. Gail Hightower in the novel *Light in August*. This risk of monumental history we will attend to shortly.

Here it is good if we consider the other risk, the risk of imitation that seeks to repeat the past, to mirror it as it were. In this mirroring, we lose the authenticity, we lose the light of truth and exchange it for falsity. The loss of truth, or better yet the lamp of truth in architecture, the loss of truth in the monument is best seen in the difference between Gothic and neo-Gothic architecture.

According to John Ruskin, the difference between Gothic and neo-Gothic was best understood by considering the use of steel. Steel changed the way weight is carried in a building. In essence it made the sky the limit. We can easily see this unbridled reach upward when we gaze at the skyscraper. Where the church spire was often the highest point in any building, now the rectangular glass structure soars far beyond it. There was a moment, or nearly a thousand years, where the Gothic cathedral and its use of the flying buttress achieved this difference. For centuries the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (Constantinople) was the grandest building, the highest edifice barring the pyramids, once the Gothic cathedral began to diffuse the weight of its roof and spires with the buttress, they became even more grand. Although there were other forms of achieving great heights, Brunelleschi's dome in Florence is a great example, the most common form was the Gothic and its simple system of buttressing weight.

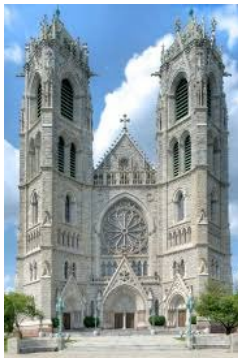
Here are some examples. Consider the buttress like an enormous prop, holding the walls of the cathedral upright.



This was the engineering wonder of the Gothic cathedral. With this the orient of the church changed from the earth to the heavens. Yet as John Ruskin would suggest, with the advent of steel there was no need for the buttress. Steel buildings provided their own support, an internal support. If you look at the last example above and focus on the center, what would be the nave of the church, you can see what would become the skyscraper.

Such would simply be the evolution of design and engineering if it were not for the revival of Gothic design in the 19th century. During Ruskin's lifetime, churches were built in the Gothic style, neo-Gothic, and they had all the elements of tracery and light and side chapels and cruciform pattern, the bell towers, campanile, and so on and so on. Only, they didn't have need for buttresses. The neo-Gothic cathedral supported their enormous roofs and spires internally with steel. And it was this "trick" which Ruskin deemed false. The use of steel in a building was not false. It was the idea, or better yet the claim, that this was a Gothic building, when in essence it was an imitation of one.

Two examples of this in America are the Cathedral in Newark, New Jersey, and the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. Both buildings embody all the elements of the Gothic style, both are grand and awe inspiring, and both utilize steel to create the primary support for the church. Any buttressing or exterior support is decorative, meant to imitate, but not to provide any real function.



Another great example in New Jersey is the campus of Princeton University. Near the end of the 19th century, primarily with the donations of the Rockefellers, the campus of Princeton was transformed into a medieval village. Spires, watchtowers, parapets for archers. All of which are lovely and convey a sense of history and the weight of antiquity. Which again is beautiful to look at, but, as Ruskin would claim, this is false.

The Cathedral of Chartres, considered a great example of Gothic architecture, was constructed between 1134-1260. The Cathedral of Newark was constructed between 1899-1954. The first was an innovation; the second was an imitation.

While there is nothing inherently wrong or prohibited in terms of architectural imitation, there is a key principle of monumental construction which is lost in the absence of innovation. The principle can be seen in the affect. The monument for Washington in the Mall, the tallest

building at the time of its construction, had no reference to the first president, no words he spoke, no image of him, nothing in terms of ornament or embellishment; it was pure symbol. In this it could both honor him as well as inspire coming generations. Some could say the obelisk at the heart of the mall is not only an image of eternal life, but in this case, a kind of stake or boundary marker for the land. With Washington we "put down our stake." The power of the monument persists if and when we ask, is this true? What is our "stake" today? Should we be "stakeholders"? In this way what honor was owed to Washington finds a future offering.

What Ruskin railed at with the use of steel is the elimination of craft, the honesty of technique, the truth of material. What was being built with neo-Gothic style looked old, looked medieval, but it was not. The achievement of the 12th century was being mimicked. By reconstructing the past, but without the demands or daring, we trick the viewer and thus lose the light cast by lamp of truth. In the same way, if we build a monument to honor someone, but we are dishonest about the purpose or the achievement or the debt owed, we create a false light.